Stories of Hope

Reimagining Education

Edited by
Sandra Abegglen, Tom Burns,
Richard Heller, Rajan Madhok,
Fabian Neuhaus, John Sandars,
Sandra Sinfield, and Upasana Gitanjali Singh

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In loving memory of Tom Burns
who teaches us to dance with hope
and joyful practice even now.

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Biographies

Editors

Sandra Abegglen, PhD, is a Researcher in the School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape at the University of Calgary, where she explores online education and learning and teaching in the design studio. Sandra has extensive experience both as a social researcher and lecturer/ programme leader. She is the project lead for TALON, the Teaching and Learning Online Network, and Playful Hybrid Higher Education. Sandra has published widely on emancipatory learning and teaching practice, creative and playful pedagogy, and remote education. She has been awarded for her work with the Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence (CATE) 2022 by Advance HE, and the Team Teaching Award 2020 by the University of Calgary. Find her personal website at: https:// sandra-abegglen.com/

Tom Burns (**1959–2024**) was an Associate Teaching Professor in the Centre for Teaching Enhancement at London Metropolitan University, developing innovations with a special focus on praxes that ignite student curiosity, and develop power and voice. Always interested in theatre and the arts, and their role in teaching and learning, Tom developed theatre and film in unusual places, set up adventure playgrounds, events and festivals for his local community, and fed arts-based practice into his learning, teaching and assessments. Tom was a University Teaching Fellow and has received a Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence (CATE) 2022 by Advance HE. He co-authored *Teaching, Learning and Study Skills: A Guide for Tutors and Essential Study Skills: The Complete Guide to Success at University* (5th Edition, 2022), https://us.sagepub. com/en-us/nam/essential-study-skills/book278189.

Richard Heller, Emeritus Professor of Medicine, University of Newcastle, Australia and of Public Health, University of Manchester, UK, has a medical degree and doctorate from the University of London, United Kingdom. He was Professor of Clinical Epidemiology and Community Medicine at the University of Newcastle, Australia and Professor of Public Health at the University of Manchester, United Kingdom. Richard was also the founder and coordinator of the People's Open Access Education Initiative (Peoples-uni, https://www.peoples-uni.org/), which aimed to provide Public Health capacity building in developing countries at low cost, through e-learning using open-access resources on the Internet and leading to an MPH degree. He is author of *The Distributed University for Sustainable Higher Education* (2022, https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-981-16-6506-6).

Rajan Madhok is a public health doctor who worked in senior medical management positions in the NHS. Alongside his service work he took a major interest in capacity building throughout his career. He is retired and lives in North Wales, and is keen to share his own learning with others. Rajan was Chair of the Trustees of Peoples-uni—https://www.peoples-uni.org/—holds honorary academic appointments at the University of Salford, UK, and Indian Institute of Public Health, Shillong, India, is a non-executive director of Llais (https://www.llaiswales.org/dr-rajan-madhok) and a governor on the Council of Coleg Cambria. He is the author of *RaMa Reflections* (https://www.ramareflections.com/).

Fabian Neuhaus, PhD, is an Associate Professor at the University of Calgary in the School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape. His research in the urban environment focuses on the topics of habitus, type, and ornament. He has worked in Switzerland, Germany, Canada, and the UK. He is passionate about the scholarship of learning and teaching, and design pedagogy. He is the Principal Investigator for the Richard Parker Initiative and its associated projects, including NextCalgary (https://nextcalgary.ca/).

After training in hospital medicine, **John Sandars** entered the world of general practice. John was also a GP trainer, GP tutor, Macmillan GP Facilitator in Palliative Medicine, and part-time lecturer in general practice at the University of Manchester. He developed his academic

career in medical education as Associate Professor in the Leeds Institute of Medical Education, University of Leeds and was appointed Professor in Medical Education at the University of Sheffield before moving to Edge Hill University in 2016 as Professor of Medical Education. John is a Fellow of the Academy of Medical Educators and Higher Education Academy. He has received major funding for national and international projects and has over 200 peer-reviewed publications and was a Visiting Professor at the University of Pretoria, South Africa. He is an Associate Editor for *Medical Teacher* and a member of the editorial board for the *International Journal of Medical Education*. Find out more about John via: https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/person/professor-john-sandars/staff/

Sandra Sinfield is an Associate Teaching Professor in Education and Learning Development in the Centre for Teaching Enhancement at London Metropolitan University and a co-founder of the Association for Learning Development in Higher Education. Sandra is a University Teaching Fellow and has received a Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence (CATE) 2022 by Advance HE. She has co-authored *Teaching, Learning and Study Skills: A Guide for Tutors and Essential Study Skills: The Complete Guide to Success at University* (5th Edition, 2022), https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/essential-study-skills/book278189. Sandra is interested in creativity as a liberatory and holistic practice in Higher Education; she has developed theatre and film in unusual places—and inhabited SecondLife as a learning space.

Upasana Gitanjali Singh, PhD, is the Academic Leader and Associate Professor in Information Systems and Technology at UKZN and holds academic appointments in Australia and Malaysia. She is an NRF C2-rated researcher in Educational Technology, achieving this distinction on her first application. With over fifteen years of teaching experience, she specialises in IT and has a strong passion for digital teaching and learning. Her prolific research includes four edited books and over sixty scholarly outputs, with numerous international keynote addresses. She founded and chairs the digiTAL2K conference, promoting global collaboration in digital education innovation. Prof. Singh has received several awards and led UKZN's global engagements through MoUs with institutions across three continents.

Illustrator

Rachel Denbina is a student and Graduate Assistant Researcher with the School of Architecture, Planning, and Landscape at the University of Calgary. She is currently pursuing her Master of Architecture, and she has a Bachelor of Design from the Alberta University of the Arts. Rachel has been a member of multiple artist residencies and has had her zine work shown in Contemporary Calgary and the Esker Foundation. You can find more of her work at https://racheldenbina.com/.

Chapter Contributors

Earle Abrahamson, a Professor in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) and head of Anatomy at the University of Hertfordshire Medical School, UK, is recognised for his dedication to motivating students and facilitating their optimal development. He ardently advocates for broader inclusion and accessibility in Higher Education. He is a National Teaching Fellow, Principal Fellow of Advance HE, and inaugural ISSOTL fellow.

Dr Yeslam Al-Saggaf is Professor in Computing at Charles Sturt University, where he has been an academic since 2003. He is the author of *The Psychology of Phubbing* (Springer, 2022) and the successful recipient of three Australian Research Council (ARC) grants, including as the Lead Chief Investigator for one grant project. Currently, he is leading an Australian Government grant in Cyber Security. He holds a Bachelor of Engineering (with honours) in Computer and Information Engineering from Malaysia, and a Master of Information Technology and a PhD from Charles Sturt University. Al-Saggaf is interested in the security side of computing as well as the ethical, sociological, and psychological aspects of the technology.

Stephanie Aldred, now retired, worked as an education developer and had a background in arts-related language learning and teaching. For twelve years she was Education officer of the Animated Culture Exchange project, promoting internationalisation in schools and colleges in UK, Europe, and Japan through arts and language activities. A keen proponent of relational approaches to Continuing Professional

Development (CPD), she is currently working on the book *Observation for Grownups* (Vernon press), exploring the role of professional dialogue in Higher Education teacher development.

Johanna Amos, PhD, works as Outreach Manager at Student Academic Success Services, Queen's University (Canada) where she supports undergraduate and graduate students in the development of learning strategies and academic English skills. She has also taught art, textile, and fashion history at various universities in Canada and researches the material and visual culture of nineteenth-century imperial Britain, with a particular emphasis on women producers, textile labour, and acts of self-fashioning. She is co-editor (with Lisa Binkley) of *Stitching the Self: Identity and the Needle Arts* (Bloomsbury, Visual Arts, 2021). Johanna is also a committed educator with a deep interest in alternative pedagogies, anti-racist instructional approaches, and linguistic justice in Higher Education. She is a founding member of Open Art Histories, a working group committed to developing and sharing pedagogical strategies for inclusive art histories.

Mayi Arcellana-Panlilio, a Professor at the Cumming School of Medicine, University of Calgary, Canada, conducts research in Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), investigating topics like the advantages of peer mentorship and incorporating active learning to teach genetic regulation.

Dr Karen Arm is a Senior Lecturer in Learning and Teaching at Solent University in Southampton, with expertise in research-led pedagogy. As well as co-ordinating the Postgraduate Certificate in Research Methods, she leads university-wide enhancement in the inclusivity of learning, teaching, and assessment, with an emphasis on meeting the needs of students from diverse backgrounds. Her main research interests lie in the field of inclusion and equity in Higher Education, with a particular specialism in social class mobility. Karen is committed to addressing the differentials in academic experience and outcomes of university students. She is passionate about developing an institutional culture of evidence-based enhancements to learning and teaching, and heads a cross-institutional team of students working as partners in the pursuit of educational change.

Nikita Asnani (she/her—https://nikitaasnani.wixsite.com/website) is an alumnus of the University of Warwick, where she pursued her postgraduate degree in Humanitarian Engineering with Sustainability and her undergraduate degree in Economics. She is the author of the children's book, *The Girl who Loved to Talk to Her Ideas*. She has delivered several talks, workshops, and lectures, including her most-recent TEDx talk at the University of Warwick, exploring how her identity shaped her creative confidence and book-writing journey, as a brown woman and a first-time author. She is currently building her design consultancy, SikhixDesign, to decolonise design thought and processes through her background as a South-Asian Sikh woman. She has been awarded the Student Partnership Impact Award in 2023, for her role in championing robust student support networks, as well as the Masters Student of the Year 2022, awarded by FindAMasters and FindAPhD. Nikita hosts the Designing Together Diaries podcast with Inca Hide-Wright, to champion the use of 'Student Experience Focused Design' in Higher Education, and is the Student Project Officer of the Designing Together project and LinkedIn community.

Gaston Bacquet is a qualified teacher with over twenty years' experience. He has taught in Chile, Saudi Arabia, Myanmar, Japan, and the UK, with experiences ranging from elementary and high-school teaching to working in government projects and lecturing at under and postgraduate level. He is currently a lecturer at the School of Education at the University of Glasgow, where he teaches in the Education Studies and Asian Religions program. His research focuses primarily on nonviolence as a vehicle for educational change and whole-person formation, with a strong emphasis on using nonviolent philosophical and theoretical approaches in teacher preparation and classroom relations. Past research has focused on inclusion in education of minoritised groups; developing intercultural skills in educational contexts; compassion training; teacher preparation, and dialogue between different cultural traditions, with a focus on Eastern philosophy, Indigenous wisdom traditions and classical philosophy.

Catherine Bates is the Programme Manager for the BA Professional Studies degree at the University of Leeds. This is an interdisciplinary degree, run in the Lifelong Learning Centre, designed specifically

for mature students returning to education. Catherine has teaching and research interests in critical and radical pedagogies, adult education, widening participation, inclusion, student empowerment and posthumanism. She has a professional background in Dyslexia Support Work in Higher Education, and in interdisciplinary teaching in the areas of English and postcolonial literature and Canadian Studies. She has an academic background specialising in Canadian literature, autobiography, and waste, and has published in these areas. Catherine is currently undertaking two participatory research projects: on mature student strengths, and on how mature students experience academic reading.

Sophie Bessant has worked in educational and academic development roles in Higher Education for thirteen years, currently Reader and Assistant Head of the University's University Teaching Academy at Manchester Metropolitan University; before this, she worked at King's College London, the University of New South Wales, Sydney, and Keele University. Sophie's PhD and research background is in Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and Marketisation in Higher Education. Sophie is passionate about curriculum design, active learning, and digital accessibility and is involved with projects driving developments in these areas at Man Met.

Dr Laura Bissell is an Atheneum Research Fellow and Lecturer in Contemporary Performance Practice at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. Laura has co-edited/authored *Performance in a Pandemic* (Routledge, 2022), *Making Routes: Journeys in Performance 2010–2020* (Triarchy, 2021), and *Bubbles: Reflections on Becoming Mother* (Luath, 2021). She has a PhD (*The Female Body, Technology and Performance: Performing a Feminist Praxis*), a research MPhil (*The Posthuman Body in Performance*), and a first-class MA (Hons) degree in English Literature and Theatre Studies from the University of Glasgow. Laura has a Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Arts Education and is a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. Laura has been External Examiner for the MA in Contemporary Performance Practice at the University of Salford and European Theatre Arts at Rose Bruford College. Laura's poetry, creative writing, and academic writing has been published in journals and anthologies and her research interests

include: contemporary performance practices, technology, feminism, ecology, interdisciplinarity, and journeys. Laura is part of a long-term collaboration with Dr David Overend called *Making Routes*. She is currently writing a book on performance and "matrescence" and co-editing a special edition of the *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media*.

Dr Jane Booth is a Senior Lecturer in Sociology and Social Policy at University of Wolverhampton. Her research interests are coproduction, critical pedagogy, and community-facing learning in the social sciences. Jane leads several community-based modules, including the applied research option for the undergraduate Independent Project (Dissertation) module, where students work co-productively with a local voluntary, community, faith, and social enterprise sector organisation to produce a piece of research that benefits that organisation and the local community. Jane collaborates with Professor Karina Croucher (University of Bradford) on the "Dying 2 Talk" project, codesigning resources with young people to build resilience around the topic of death and dying. In her previous role (University of Bradford), she developed IMPACT: a volunteer "bank" to encourage students to volunteer in the local community. As a result, she was awarded the 2017 Teaching Excellence Award at University of Bradford.

Dr Adam Bromley is a teaching intensive lecturer in Organic Chemistry at the University of Reading. Dr Bromley initially completed an MChem degree at Loughborough University, including two research projects which investigated substitution reactions in perfluorinated heterocycles and the synthesis of methane monooxygenase analogues. He then moved to the University of Surrey where he completed a PhD in Polymer Chemistry, researching the facile synthesis of polymeric carriers for the delivery of therapeutic agents. Afterwards, he followed his passion for education, leading the teaching and development of Chemistry courses at Farnborough College of Technology. Dr Bromley continues to strive for excellence in teaching and the promotion of all scientific fields, to encourage a new generation of interdisciplinary scholars.

Alena Buis, PhD, is an Associate Dean in the Faculty of Arts at Kwantlen Polytechnic University (Surrey, Canada). Her recent publications on pedagogy include a chapter on open educational practices in *The Teaching the Ancient World Handbook* (Archaeopress, 2020), a post for *Art History Teaching Resources Weekly* (2020), and an article in the Special Issue of the *Sixteenth Century Journal* ("Teaching the Early Modern in the Era of COVID-19", 2020). Buis is also one of the founders of Open Art Histories (OAH), a SSHRC-funded collective, committed to building a generative and supportive national network for teaching Canadian art or art history in Canada and addressing pressing pedagogical challenges, including globalising art history, decolonising the discipline, and using OER/OEP to advance accessibility and inclusion.

Mâir Bull is an Academic Developer at Manchester Metropolitan University's Centre for Learning Enhancement and Educational Development (LEED). Mâir leads the Innovation Scholarship Scheme, a cutting-edge provision that enables teaching staff, and those in student-facing professional services roles, to lead our institutional approach to teaching, learning, and student support. Before moving to HE, Mâir was a Drama and English teacher for sixteen years predominately in secondary schools, however she has also taught in Initial Teacher Training, primary, SEND and in a men's prison. Mâir is the vice-chair of governors at an alternative provision for students with social, emotional and mental health needs, and is passionate about innovation, creative and experiential pedagogies.

Liz Bunting is an Educational Developer in the Academic Enhancement team at University of the Arts London, where she supports socially just experiences and outcomes for students. She has an interest in nurturing ecologies of belonging in Higher Education, through relational, compassionate, and trauma-informed education. She is a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and a recipient of an Advance HE Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence (CATE) Award, 2020.

Oliver Burney is an Educational Adviser working within the STEM Support Team at the Open University. He holds qualifications in teaching, coaching, and guidance at a distance and works with students with complex needs and barriers to learning.

Chris Cachia is a teacher, learning counsellor, and workshop facilitator focused on anti-oppressive, critical pedagogical, and experiential approaches to education. At Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU), he has taught a range of social science and sociology courses, including courses for English language learners, international students, and those who might not otherwise be able to access post-secondary education. In all of his teaching, Chris aims to honour students' lived experiences by engaging in collaborative processes of inquiry. Chris also works at TMU as a learning strategist and previously worked as an educational developer. He is a former winner of the university's Faculty of Arts Teaching Award and has been involved with a number of community-based projects that reflect his interests in youth programs, social justice, and Hip-Hop culture. Outside of teaching, Chris is an image-maker and musical artist. For more on Chris, including his teaching, music, and visual art, please visit www.chriscachiaaka.com

Dr Luke Ray Di Marco Campbell (**he/they**) is a Lecturer in Community Development in the School of Education at the University of Glasgow. A community development practitioner with roughly thirteen years practice experience, they have worked with a range of local and national organisations, primarily centring their work on anarcha-feminist practice, anti-racist initiatives, programmes for social inclusion, digital literacy for the elderly, youth anti-homelessness projects, and services supporting queer inclusion. Their research examines how individuals, community campaigns, and organisations have sought to navigate, challenge, adapt to, or oppose austerity. They teach on both Master's and Bachelor's courses on youth and adult educational policy and practice in community development. They supervise projects that relate to social inclusion, community work, hype-localised initiatives, and community organising, amongst others.

Tracy Campbell is a second-year full time mature student at the University of Leeds, studying Professional Studies at the Lifelong Learning Centre(LLC). In lieu of traditional qualifications, she secured a place on the Professional Studies degree course through the LLC's alternative entry scheme, which recognised her life and work experience. She is a partner in a successful independent residential property letting agency based in Leeds and also manages a small maintenance company. In addition to being a

qualified yoga teacher, Tracy is a single mum to three children aged thirty-three, fifteen, and fourteen. Tracy has volunteered for several charities over the years, including NSPCC Childline and a locally based organisation that provides access to sports and activities to underprivileged adults, children, and young people. In the summer of 2024, Tracy took part in the Gryphons Abroad volunteer project in Africa, and as part of her training for this, she achieved a Level 2 Certificate in Coaching (Sport and Physical Activity). For Tracy, the Professional Studies course has been instrumental in her personal and professional development, empowering her to effect change for social justice. Her final year research project is entitled: "Challenging the 'Grass Ceiling': The Lived Experiences and Career Aspirations of Black Youth Amateur Footballers in Defying Stereotypes." Tracy is due to start a Master's in Inequalities and Social Science at the University of Leeds in September, 2025.

Chandini Chugh is a dentist with a Master's in public health, and a keen interest in improving community health through public health initiatives.

Shivaani Chugh is a Counselling Psychologist specialising in working with young adults in a range of issues, such as academic and interpersonal relationships.

Dr James Connorton has long been interested in the plants that make up our environment and the important role they place. He did an undergraduate degree in biochemistry at the University of Sheffield, UK, where he undertook an extended research project investigating the way stomata (the pores in leaves) open and close to allow water, oxygen, and carbon dioxide to enter and exit. After that, he did a PhD in plant science at the University of Manchester, UK, studying the genes that allow plants to absorb and distribute minerals in their cells. He then worked at CEA Grenoble, France, for two years before joining the John Innes Centre in Norwich (UK). Here he studied mineral absorption in crops and successfully developed high iron wheat varieties to try and combat "hidden hunger" across the world. Since 2020, he has been a Lecturer in Biosciences, first at the University of Surrey and then in 2024 he moved to Manchester Metropolitan University. He teaches on both traditional degrees and degree apprenticeships and is currently also pursuing a Master's degree in Higher Education.

John Cowan is a nonagenarian and still active Professor of Engineering Education who launched and evaluated fully autonomous self-assessed learning in his subject area forty years ago—with widespread national approval throughout the Education for Capability Movement of the Royal Society of Arts. Thereafter, an incoming and authoritarian head of department expressed his disapproval by ordering the closure of the largest UK departmental resource-based learning unit of its time. Cowan moved to become Scottish Director of the UK Open University (OU), where he enjoyed full licence and effective encouragement to concentrate on enhancing the learning and learning experience of the OU students across Scotland, by promoting reflective development of core abilities.

Aashima Dabas is a paediatrician working at the prestigious Maulana Azad Medical College and Lok Nayak hospital, New Delhi. Her work interest focuses on childhood growth, bone disorders, and medical education. She is the Associate Editor of *Indian Pediatrics*, the official journal of Indian Academy of Pediatrics.

Agnese Di Domenico is a researcher interested in liberatory practices in Music Education. Interested in the field of critical pedagogy and informed by the works of Freire and Gramsci, her work is concerned with how formal music education influences critical thinking and group consciousness. Integrating social justice with critical pedagogy, she is driven by the aspiration to provide a platform for counter-hegemonic practices in compulsory music education.

Sydney Duignan is the Lead Mentor for Initial Teacher Training for United Learning, providing Continuing Professional Development (CPD), support, and guidance for teaching trainees. Her role is to quality assure the mentorship across placements and provide training opportunities for mentors across schools. Sydney and has over ten years teaching experience within secondary education specialising in Drama and Performing Arts, and previously worked within the Centre for Learning Enhancement for Educational Development team at Manchester Metropolitan University. Sydney has a passion for creative thinking and active learning within teaching and learning practice to provide learners with a meaningful experience.

Michelle Eady, a Professor in the School of Education at the University of Wollongong, Australia, and the President of ISSOTL, focuses her research on Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), Work Integrated Learning (WIL), Indigenous Studies, and current educational issues.

Dr Lee Fallin is a Lecturer in Education, working for the School of Education at the University of Hull, where he is the Programme Director for a suite of Master's in Education courses. His teaching specialises in special educational needs, inclusive education, social justice, design thinking, research methods, and digital education. Lee has published research on inclusion in Higher Education, the purpose of the academic library and on contemporary issues in learning development. His current research interests include indoor/outdoor learning spaces, artificial intelligence and geographies of place. Lee is a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, a Certified Member of the Association of Learning Technology, and a Certified Leading Practitioner with the Association of Learning Development in Higher Education (ALDinHE). Lee is also recognised as a Microsoft Innovative Educator Expert and is a Microsoft Certified Educator.

Imre Fekete (PhD) is a College Associate Professor of the Department of Pedagogy at Budapest University of Economics and Business and holds a PhD in Education (Language Pedagogy). His main research interests involve technology in education, teacher professional development, artificial intelligence (AI) literacy, and technology-mediated individualisation. He teaches study skills, (digital) media- and ICT-related courses such as virtual learning environments. He is also involved in English as a foreign language (EFL) teacher education and has been instructing language development seminars as well as ICT- and research methodology-related courses in EFL Teacher Education since 2018.

Márta Folmeg (PhD) is Deputy Dean of Education at the Faculty of Marketing and Business Communication and Senior Lecturer at the Department of Communication at Budapest University of Economics and Business (BUEB). She graduated from the Eötvös Loránd University

(ELTE—Hungary) with a degree in Linguistics and Political Science, and continued her studies in Business and Management. She received her PhD from Eötvös Loránd University in 2017 and has taught in Higher Education since 2010. She has been involved in a wide range of social science and pedagogical research, curriculum development, institutional quality development and accreditation, and the development of distance learning curricula. She is a member of the Committee on Economics, Law and Social Sciences of the Veszprém Regional Committee of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Her research interests include methodological aspects of Higher Education, innovative teaching methods for management courses, and competence and skills development. Her current research interests include methodological aspects of Higher Education, innovative teaching methods for management courses, and competence and skills development. Her current research interest is artificial intelligence literacy.

Victoria Fritz (she/her) is a Learning Specialist at the University of Guelph, Ontario, Canada. She helps to support students with all things academic, from time management and goal setting to presentations and effective academic communication. Victoria also completed her PhD in Family Relations and Human Development exploring student stories of academic failure. Her current research interests include: how students construct and experience failure, how failure is storied in individual's lives, as well as the intersection of wellbeing and academic success. Victoria is also a Registered Social Worker and has a passion for supporting and encouraging wellbeing, acceptance/tolerance of failure, and mindfulness in everyday life.

Corinne Green, a Lecturer in Academic Development at the University of South Australia, explores school-university partnerships in teacher education and engages in Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) projects.

Aidan Harvey is a researcher and popular music education practitioner. Informed by the work of Freire and Giroux, he is interested in a move away from pedagogies strictly aimed at employability, and towards course design, assessment practices and pedagogy instead suited to facilitating development of critically engaged, empowered members of society. He is also an active musician and composer.

Lisa Hatfield, an Associate Professor and Director at OHSU Teaching and Learning Center, USA, actively engages Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) inquiry, concentrating on lifelong learning and learning values in her project work.

Michael Heinrich is a Professor of Ethnopharmacology and Medicinal Plant Research (Pharmacognosy) at the University College London (UCL) School of Pharmacy (from 1999–2011, School of Pharmacy—University of London) and was until 2017 the Head of the research cluster "Biodiversity and Medicines" at the UCL School of Pharmacy. From 2017 until 2023, he served as the Joint Chair of UCL's Research Ethics Committee (with Dr L. Ang, Institute of Education, UCL). In 2022, he was appointed a Yushan Fellow at China Medical University in Taiwan, and he is the 2023 recipient of the Norman Farnsworth Award in Botanical Excellence (American Botanical Council, Austin, TX, USA). For many years the group's research has been based on a transdisciplinary and translational perspective integrating approaches from the natural and social sciences with an overall aim of tackling the fast-changing global health needs focusing on the use of plant-derived products as "medicinal plants", "health foods", or nutraceuticals, botanicals, and the like. Botany and related fields have been a core element of the team's research in México, Guatemala, and the Mediterranean China, Thailand, and other Asian countries. In the last ten years, the group's research has centred on value chains of herbal medicines in a globalised context (including their impacts on livelihood and quality of products), as well as sustainable sourcing.

Dr Katherine Herbert is Sub Dean Learning and Teaching in the Faculty of Business, Justice and Behavioural Sciences, as well as Lecturer in Blended Learning at the School of Business at Charles Sturt University (CSU). She holds a Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Southern Queensland, where her thesis explored learning and teaching professional development in Higher Education. She also holds a Master of Education (Knowledge Networks and Digital Innovation), a Bachelor of Arts in Literature, as well as a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. Katherine is actively researching in the areas of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, including capability-building and academic development. She is also involved in investigating and

observing the impact of applied educational technology to learning experiences, and partners with various research teams within CSU.

Rachel Delta Higdon is an Associate Professor in Education. Rachel researches creativity and the creative transdisciplinary themes between the arts, education, and industry. In addition to her academic role, she is a consultant working in education and business using creative methodologies.

Inca Hide-Wright (she/her—http://www.linkedin.com/in/inca-hide-wright) is a current Warwick Graduate Management Trainee, Alumni of the WIHEA (Warwick International Higher Education Academy https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/academy/) and co-lead of the WIHEA Building Belonging Project and Learning Circle. Inca's interest in community, engagement, and belonging began long before her time at Warwick University. Inca's work in this space continues to be recognised institutionally, nationally, and internationally; collaborating with fellow Higher Education institutions and charities. In recognition, Inca is the recipient of the Outstanding Student Contribution Award (2022) as well as being nominated for social inclusion award 'Belonging through Culture' (2025) and Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence (2025). Inca first learned about design thinking, as a concept and its implementation, when completing the Warwick Employability Challenge. Design thinking has stayed with Inca and has been successfully implemented in the University of Warwick Widening Participation project, Hope for the Future (https://warwick.ac.uk/study/outreach/whatweoffer/post-16-programmes/hope4thefuture/), and as a Project Officer on Designing Together, which won the Collaborative Warwick Award for Teaching Excellence (2024). Inca continues to utilise design thinking to strive towards positive change, with her current focus on the Higher Education student experience, with particular focus on building belonging.

Vikki Hill is Interim Director of Learning Enhancement and Academic Development at Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh, a Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy and a recipient of the Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence in 2020. Vikki has over twenty years' experience in education and leadership and works with

staff and students to support equitable outcomes. Her research focuses on compassionate assessment, practices, and policies to enhance social justice.

Dr Jennifer Hillman is a Senior Manager and Educational Developer in Associate Lecturer Support and Professional Development (ALSPD) at The Open University (UK), having previously worked as a Senior Manager in Student Support Services. Jenny has seventeen years' experience of teaching and supporting learning at a range of Higher Education Institutions in the UK and Europe.

Kim Holflod, PhD, is an educational design researcher focusing on playful, experimental, and relational methodologies and pedagogies in teaching, learning and educational development, speculative design and futures in Higher Education, and participation, relationality, and collaborative practices across disciplines, professions, and sectors. He holds a PhD in Higher Education playful learning, an MA in Danish Studies, and a professional Master's in ICT and Learning. He is a Postdoctoral Researcher at the Danish School for Education, Aarhus University, and an Associate Professor at University College Copenhagen, Denmark. He is currently part of the EU Horizon research and innovation action project EPIC-WE ("Empowered Participation through Ideating Cultural Worlds and Environments: Youth Imagining, Creating and Exchanging Cultural Values and Heritage through Game-Making") and the research and development project Playful Learning Praxis Research across the Danish University Colleges.

Debbie Holley is Professor of Learning Innovation in the Faculty of Health and Social Sciences at Bournemouth University. A National Teaching Fellow and a Principal Fellow of AdvanceHE, she is a passionate educator, with expertise in learning design and blended learning to motivate and engage a diverse student body. Putting the students at the heart of her practice and collaborating with staff to enhance and promote practice with underpinning creative pedagogies has seen her transform learning in formal and informal learning spaces, inside and outside the Academy. Her research interests lie in the student experience, and how it can be enhanced through digital, augmented, and immersive worlds. Debbie influences national policy through her published work, keynote

addresses, and policy articles; this work underpins departmental research activities in digital health. She is currently serving on the Association for National Teaching Fellows (ANTF) National Committee, seeking to broaden access for those seeking to gain recognition for their teaching and learning at the highest level.

Sarah Honeychurch works in Academic and Digital Development at the University of Glasgow. She has a PhD in participatory learning, which taught her about the importance of play for creativity and for authentic learning and this is where she coined the phrase "serious fun" to describe enjoyable and authentic learning experiences. She enjoys connecting with likeminded lifelong learners in online communities and collaborating in practices of digital remix with her fellow bricoleurs. Sarah and her husband live in Glasgow and are owned by two cats called Cagney and Lacey. When she is not playing around on the Internet she enjoys doodling, knitting, and playing one of her many ukuleles very badly. Her current research interests are participatory learning, lurkers, affinity networks, and bricolage. You can find how to connect with Sarah via https://about.me/sarahhoneychurch

Jess Humphreys (she/her) is the Director of the Warwick International Higher Education Academy (WIHEA—https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/academy/). WIHEA is the UK's first institutional academy for staff and students engaged in the advancement of learning and teaching excellence. WIHEA fosters inclusive partnerships and supports the education and student experience strategy, embedding innovative approaches to learning and teaching. Jess was previously the lead for the Learning Design Consultancy Unit (LDCU), bringing together colleagues from across the institution, and providing space for sharing practice and support around the design of blended learning. The impact of the LDCU work was recognised nationally with an Advance HE Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence (CATE) in 2022. As a design thinking champion within her institution, Jess has embedded design thinking methodologies within her practice, supporting colleagues with their own projects and exploring new ways to embed the student voice in design particularly around digital education. She continues to be inspired by staff and students involved in this area of work, most recently co-leading the Designing Together project (https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/academic-development/app/tel/ldcu/designingtogether/)

and community (https://www.linkedin.com/groups/12828238/).

As an educator, artist, and researcher, **Mark Ingham**'s pedagogical enquires and creative practices over the last thirty years have been entangled encounters with: images of thought and memory, rhizomatic and meta-cognitive learning theories, fuzzy narratives, and virtual and physical liminal teaching spaces. Mark's research is an adventure into relationships between autobiographical memory and photography, Deleuzian and Guattarian ideas of "becoming rhizomatic", assembling agency, nomadic thinking, active blended learning, mixed with ideas of belonging and critical pedagogies. He is a Reader in Critical and Nomadic Pedagogies, a National Teaching Fellow (2021), Co-Chair of University of the Arts London (UAL)'s Professoriate, a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy and a UAL Senior Teaching Scholar. He is the co-founder of UAL's Experimental Pedagogies Research Group (EPRG): https://eprg.arts.ac.uk/, and assembled the Nomadic Detective Agency at https://nomadicdetectiveagency.org/ and artist at: https://markingham.org/

Dr Stephanie Jury completed her PhD in History from Monash University, Melbourne, Australia, in 2016. Following her interest in metacognition and learning strategies, which she developed as a Teaching Associate, she joined the Learning Skills Advisor team at Monash shortly after graduation. During her time at Monash, she received training in executive functioning skills and writing support, and advised students in various faculties, working predominately with students in Medicine, Nursing, Health Sciences, Pharmacy, and Pharmaceutical Sciences. Concurrently, she also taught the first year Academic Preparedness courses at the Australia College of Applied Psychology, Melbourne. In 2020, Stephanie joined the University of British Columbia, Okanagan Campus (Kelowna, Canada), as their first Learning Strategist. Building the Learning Strategist services from the ground up, she has helped expand these services by introducing Thriving in Action, a resilience training program for undergraduate students. In April 2024, she joined the Department of Student Services at Brandon University (Manitoba, Canada) as their Academic Skills Specialist. Currently Stephanie's research interests are in student success, retention, and metacognition, however she still holds place for her love of medieval and Renaissance history.

Beth Karp entered into postgraduate academia as a creative practitioner in music; her academic pursuits led to new ways of thinking and approaching learning. She has developed ideas of transformative learning practices and put these into action in her own research. Beth's key areas of interest focus on facilitating spaces and people to engage in learning practices that aid freedom of growth both for practitioners and participants. Beth believes equipping people with the tools for liberatory praxis is key to the freedom of learning. She is an advocate for social justice with a specialism in trauma-informed practice and domestic abuse.

Dr Bo Kelestyn (she/her—https://www.linkedin.com/in/bozhena-kelestyn/) works as an Associate Professor and Course Director for the MSc in Management of Information Systems and Digital Innovation, at the Warwick Business School (WBS). Prior to this role, Bo worked in multiple Departments at Warwick, including leading on the early embedding of the Education Strategy across all thirty-five academic Departments, and becoming the youngest Director of Student Experience at Warwick. As a design thinking academic and practitioner, Bo has designed and led several award-winning interdisciplinary modules on design thinking, innovation, and entrepreneurship, and was the lead design thinking tutor for *The Guardian* Masterclass. Bo is the creator of the Warwick Secret Challenge, a problem-solving workshop with elements of design thinking, which has become a key methodology to tackle innovation challenges at Warwick through authentic student-staff co-creation. Based on this methodology, Bo also created Challenge X, and co-created the Warwick Employability Challenge and the Warwick Sustainability Challenge. Bo hosts the Student Experience by Design podcast (https://creators.spotify.com/pod/profile/sxbydesign/) to champion the use of design thinking in Higher Education, and is the co-lead of the Designing Together project (https://www.designing-together.org/) and LinkedIn community (https://www.linkedin.com/groups/12828238/).

Mark Kershaw is an Educational Adviser working in the STEM Student Support Team at the Open University. Mark has thirty-five years' experience delivering advice and guidance in educational settings—including twelve years with the Open University.

Nayiri Keshishi is a Senior Lecturer in Social Sciences at the University of Surrey. She specialises in education with a focus on legal studies, complemented by expertise in professional and academic skills development. Her research explores effective teaching methodologies in legal education and strategies to enhance student engagement and success, aiming to equip learners with the critical skills necessary for both academic and professional growth.

Leigh Kilpert is Head of Education and Student Experience, in the Faculty of Population Health Sciences, at University College London. She has worked in Higher Education for more than twenty years and across a variety of functions—as lecturer, education developer, administrator, and manager. Her work focuses on implementing simpler and more efficient processes, managing change, developing strategic objectives, and refining policy. She is passionate about creating development opportunities for staff and ensuring the wellbeing of students in Higher Education. She is a strong advocate for the recognition of the value of professional service staff working in Higher Education, especially those in "third spaces".

Ingeborg van Knippenberg became a lecturer in Learning and Teaching Enhancement after starting her academic life with a PhD and postdoctoral work in a STEM subject. She is a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy and Programme Leader for the Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education. Her work in staff development aimed at enhancing education is inspired by people like Karen Gravett, Jan McArthur, and Jesse Stommel and their ideas of social justice in Higher Education, pedagogies of care and mattering, and "ungrading". Her research interests include authentic assessment, teacher identity in academics.

Rita Koris (PhD) is an Associate Professor at the Department of Human Resources (HR) Development at Budapest University of Economics and Business in Hungary (BUEB), where she teaches courses in business and management. Her research interests lie primarily in innovative teaching practices of business education, internationalisation of Higher Education (HE), transversal skills development, and teachers' academic development. She has been involved in several virtual exchange/COIL

projects in HE for more than fifteen years. She has given presentations and held workshops in Hungary and abroad on internationalisation practices and virtual online collaboration in HE. She was involved in the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange Project as a co-trainer, helping university educators in their professional development to learn how to develop and implement transnational virtual exchange projects.

Dr Laura Lee is the Learning Enhancement Project Manager in University College Cork's (UCC) Centre for the Integration of Research, Teaching, and Learning. Laura provides professional development opportunities for staff to support inclusive teaching, learning, and assessment practices across the institution. She teaches a Digital Badge in Universal Design for Learning and was Principal Investigator on the project through which the Inclusive Assessment Digital Badge was developed. More broadly, Laura spearheads initiatives aimed at enhancing Learning and Teaching throughout the institution by leading UCC's strategic utilisation of annual Learning and Teaching Enhancement funds allocated by the Higher Education Authority.

Stephen Leeder is a retired academic public health physician. He has had a career-long interest in the application of epidemiological knowledge and methods to clinical practice, health policy, and public health. He has served on multiple state and federal health-related committees and commissions. His research interests include system-wide efforts to achieve prevention and assure equity in the provision of health services for patients with serious and continuing illness, especially due to respiratory problems. He has had a deep interest in medical education and was a member of the foundation faculty in the new medical school in Newcastle, and served as Dean of the Sydney medical school when it introduced its new curriculum. He had an association with Westmead Hospital from its planning in 1972 until 2011, was Chair of Western Sydney Local Heath District Board 2010–2015 and chaired its human research ethics committee for twenty years. He is married to Kathy Esson, and they live in Sydney and Wentworth Falls. In 2024, Halstead (Black Mountain) published his book of poems, *Pilgrim Soul*.

Zak Liddell is Director of Education Services at University College London, overseeing Academic Policy, Quality and Standards, Casework, Compliance, Induction, and Student Success. Belonging to that club

of ex-Sabb Professional Service Leaders found so often in UK Higher Education, he spent a decade in a variety of "third space" roles related to student experience, support, engagement, and education in local Departments and Faculties, before joining Education Services in the central Registry team. Throughout his career, his approach has been characterised by the principles of championing student voice, working in partnership with academics, advocating for professional services, and pragmatism.

Dr Lian X. Liu is a Reader in the School of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering at University of Surrey. Dr Liu obtained her PhD from the University of Queensland in Australia and worked in Carrier Transicold in Singapore for three years after her PhD. She then moved back to the University of Queensland and spent most of her academic career in the same university, before moving to the University of Surrey. Dr Liu's research expertise is in particle technology and formulations for health applications. Her expertise in particle technology ranges from comminution (particle breakage process) to granulation process (particle size enlargement process), as well as bulk powder flow and compaction and crystallisation. Her expertise on formulations includes nano-micellar nutrient based topical formulations for anti-ageing and wound healing. She has worked with a wide range of industries such as minerals, agricultural, pharmaceutical and biotech companies.

Simone Maier is an artist, researcher, and Associate Lecturer at London Metropolitan University's School of Art, Architecture and Design and an elected National Councillor for the National Society for Education in Art & Design (NSEAD). Her interdisciplinary practice—spanning sculpture, poetry, and socially engaged pedagogy—explores how material-led processes can reimagine fine art education as inclusive, hopeful, and transformative. Her research focuses on Education for Social Justice (ESJ), curriculum development, and creative practice as a form of critical inquiry. Simone's academic writing has appeared in peer-reviewed journals, blogs, and books, including *AD Magazine* (NSEAD), where she reflects on the sketchbook as a site of self-exploration, belonging, and co-constructive learning. Simone's work—across writing, teaching, and making—challenges reductive narratives about art education and champions equity and experimentation in creative learning.

Umme Mansoory is a Learning Strategist and Sessional Instructor at Thompson Rivers University, a vocational, teaching, and research institution in British Columbia, Canada. She obtained her Bachelor of Arts from Simon Fraser University in 2017 and a Master of Education in Educational Leadership from the University of Calgary in 2020. Umme has over a decade of educational experience in museums, public libraries, children's programming, and post-secondary advising and teaching. Umme's areas of interest include equity, neurodiversity in adults, student retention, and student success. Umme is a mother to three strong-spirited boys and, when not working, Umme is an active member of her local community.

Megan McGee has had experience in primary, further, and Higher Education. Megan's research interests include learning outside of the classroom and children's risk-taking, both of which were born from her personal experience as a foreign exchange student in Denmark. She published her first research paper in 2022, titled "Preservation of Learning Outside the Primary Classroom: A Comparison of Policy and Practice in Danish udeskole (outdoor school) and English Primary Outdoor Education (OE)".

Fiona McGregor holds the position of Lecturer in Art and Design Education and inter/multidisciplinary thinking in Art and Design at the School of Education. Her role entails overseeing the delivery of Art and Design education across ITE and taking charge as course lead for PGDE Art and Design at Primary and Secondary level, as well as Undergraduate ITE. Fiona's expertise in assessing Art and Design is well-established, and she has made significant contributions to policymaking in Art and Design Education. Her dedication to improving Art and Design education, and her efforts to encourage interdisciplinary learning in schools, have made her an influential figure in the field of Art and Design education. Since 2018, Fiona has collaborated with the Royal Society of Edinburgh's education advisory committee, promoting interdisciplinary learning in schools. This initiative culminated in the inaugural Interdisciplinary Learning conference—Interdisciplinary Learning: Creative Thinking for a Complex World (RSE, January 2020)—and the subsequent advice paper for schools (RSE, February 2020).

Susannah McKee is a Senior Lecturer at London Metropolitan University, teaching on foundation year courses and within the education field. She has worked in UK Higher Education for more than fifteen years in areas including language teaching, international and access programmes, teacher education, and academic support. She is also a qualified yoga teacher. Particular interests include creative, holistic, and embodied approaches to learning.

Dr Anurag Mishra is a surgeon working as a Professor at Maulana Azad Medical College, New Delhi, and an acclaimed leader in surgical education, health systems strengthening, and humanitarian innovation. With over fifteen years of clinical and academic experience, he has mentored hundreds of young doctors through initiatives like MASHAAL, a leadership program that equips healthcare professionals to drive systemic change. Dr Mishra is the founder of GURUKOOL, an initiative promoting values-based medical education, and Innovation in Global Surgery, a global collaborative advancing equitable surgical care in low-resource settings. He is an active contributor to the Lancet Commission on Global Surgery (India Chapter) and collaborates with institutions such as RCSEd, NIHR UK, Harvard Medical School, and University of Leeds. A recipient of multiple national awards for research and social service, Dr Mishra embodies a leadership philosophy grounded in compassion, collaboration, and courage.

Zack Moir is Professor of Learning and Teaching in Music at Edinburgh Napier University, UK. Zack's research interests are in popular music in Higher Education, liberatory arts education, Higher Education assessment for social justice, improvisation as liberatory praxis and composition/improvisation pedagogies. Zack is the Lead Editor of *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Popular Music Education: Perspective and Practices* (Bloomsbury, 2019), an Editor of *The Routledge Research Companion to Popular Music Education* (Routledge, 2017), and an Editor of *Action Based Approaches in Popular Music Education* (McLemore Ave Music, 2021), and *Editor of Improvisation as Liberatory Praxis in Popular Music Education* (OUP, 2025). Zack is a Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, the Chair of the International Society for Music Education's Popular Music Special Interest Group and is on the Board of Directors of the Association for Popular Music Education. Zack

is also an active composer, musician, and multimedia artist. Recent compositions include pieces for saxophone and tape, solo cello, and a reactive generative sound art installation for the Edinburgh International Science Festival.

Dr Michelle Morgan is a national and internationally recognised Student Experience Transitions Specialist across all levels of study and is extensively published in the area. She is currently Dean of Students at the University of East London. Michelle is a Principal Fellow of the HEA, Fellow of the AUA, an elected council member of UKCGE and Student Minds Mental Health Charter Assessor. During her varied career, Michelle has been a faculty manager, lecturer, researcher, and academic manager. She describes herself as a "Third Space Integrated Student Experience Practitioner" who develops initiatives based on pragmatic and practical research. Michelle has over fifty publications and has presented over one hundred national and international conference papers (including fifty-two keynotes and thirty invited papers). She has developed a free portal for staff which provides a range of information and links for anyone interested in improving the student experience in Higher Education: www. improvingthestudentexperience.com. In 2024, Michelle was awarded the European First Year Experience Leadership Award and the SRHE Contribution to the Field Award for her work in L&T and Student Transitions. Michelle was creator and PI/Project Lead of an innovative, £2.7 million, eleven-university collaborative HEFCE grant, looking at the study expectations and attitudes of postgraduate taught (PGT) students. The project report received praise from across the sector including UKCGE, OFFA, the HEA and the Engineering Professor's Council and helped introduce the PG Loan Scheme. See http://www.improvingthestudentexperience.com/library/PG_documents/Postgraduate_Experience_Report_Final.pdf.

Dr Hilda Mulrooney (she/her) is a nutritionist and dietitian with experience in primary care, public health and Higher Education. Until December 2023, she was Associate Professor in Nutrition at Kingston University London, a member of the Network of Equality Champions and the Faculty Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity action group. Since January 2024, she is Visiting Senior Fellow at Kingston University and Reader in

Nutrition and Health at London Metropolitan University. She is a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. Her pedagogic interests include perceptions of quality in Higher Education, what constitutes the ideal university, and understanding influences on belonging among students and staff. Her interest in food led her to explore how it could be used to enhance students' and staffs' sense of belonging to the institution during the pandemic. She is currently working on community food support initiatives such as food growing, including whether and how involvement in these projects builds a sense of belonging within and between communities (in and outside of Higher Education).

Following a degree at Lancaster University in Educational Research, **Jean Mutton** (she/her) began her career in Higher Education administration and management in 1982. Over the years, Jean has managed many Registry and Faculty-based administration teams, covering the student journey from Admissions to Graduation both in the UK and working with collaborative programmes overseas. In 2007, Jean joined the Student Experience Team at the University of Derby, where she led a range of projects to enhance the student journey, with a particular focus on equality and diversity, and the international and BME student experience. In 2010, a JISC-funded project led Jean to service design and a new approach to bring improvements to the student and staff experience of enrolment and transition. Since she stepped down from her role at Derby in 2015, Jean has been working as a consultant across the sector and has worked with universities across the four nations in the UK and led sessions at many conferences on process improvement and using design to enhance the student experience. Jean is a co-founder of the Service Design in Education community (https://sdined.co.uk/) and co-editor of the ground-breaking *Transforming Higher Education With Human-Centred Design* book (https://sd4he.co.uk/). Email: muttonjean@gmail.com; LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/in/jeanmutton/

Nina Namaste, a Professor at Elon University, USA, conducts disciplinary research on race, class, gender, and sexuality identity construction in contemporary Spanish texts, with a focus on food studies. Her Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) research centres on intercultural learning.

Stephanie Newton is an Educational Adviser working in the STEM Student Support Team at the Open University (OU). She has worked across the Information, Advice and Guidance Services at the OU for ten years, now working particularly with students facing barriers to study as part of the guidance service.

Rachael O'Connor (she/her) is an Associate Professor in Legal Education, University Academic Lead for Personal Tutoring, and a Leeds Institute for Teaching Excellence Fellow at the University of Leeds. She comes from a working-class background and belongs to the first generation in her family to go to university. This contributes towards Rachael's passion for improving experiences and opportunities (now and in the future) for under-represented students and amplifying voices of under-representation. The focus of Rachael's research is developing authentic relationships through reverse mentoring both within Higher Education and beyond. She has won prizes internally and externally for this and has published papers on reverse mentoring. Rachael is a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy and Michael Beverley Innovation Fellow. As a solicitor (non-practising), Rachael is also a trustee of legal mental health charity LawCare.

Mary O'Kane was Chair of the Universities Accord Review, the largest review of Australian Higher Education in decades, released in February 2024. She is a former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Adelaide and has, since leaving that role, carried out reviews in many fields for various governments.

Siobhán O'Neill is a Research Support Officer in the Insight SFI Research Centre for Data Analytics (formerly of the Centre for the Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning) and a PhD Candidate in the School of Applied Psychology, University College Cork (UCC). She is an experienced researcher, having worked on a wide range of research projects, including curriculum and intervention design. These projects included the development and implementation of a Bystander Intervention for the prevention of sexual and relationship violence in 3rd level, an exploration of the teaching and learning opportunities afforded by makerspaces, and the co-development of an inclusive assessment course for university staff with teaching responsibilities. Her PhD work

explores daily life experiences and psychobiological wellbeing, which inform her research practices. Siobhán's current research interests include the exploration of innovative and creative approaches to teaching, learning and assessment, with a focus on Universal Design for Learning and inclusive assessment frameworks.

David Overend is a Lecturer in Interdisciplinary Studies at the University of Edinburgh. He researches interdisciplinary education, creative fieldwork and contemporary theatre and performance. As a director, David has worked for the National Theatre of Great Britain and several other theatres and has toured internationally with award-winning productions. His books include *Performance in the Field: Interdisciplinary Practice-as-Research* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), *Making Routes: Journeys in performance 2010–2020*, co-authored with Laura Bissell (Triarchy Press, 2021), and an edited collection, *Rob Drummond: Plays with Participation* (Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2021). David is currently working with Edinburgh Futures Institute as Deputy Director of the new MA (Hons) Interdisciplinary Futures.

Ágnes Pál (PhD) is an Associate Professor and the Director of International Affairs of the Faculty of International Business of Budapest University of Economics and Business (BUEB), where she teaches communication and skills development courses since 2009. Her research interests include teaching methodology and innovation, learner autonomy, and interdisciplinary collaboration. She has created and coordinated, in cooperation with her colleagues, several European strategic partnership projects in the framework of the Erasmus+ programme.

Dr Aspasia Eleni Paltoglou is a Senior Lecturer in Psychology at Manchester Metropolitan University in the UK. Her interests include exploring factors that influence creativity, and she is particularly interested in the interaction between creativity, education, and emotion. She is also keen to explore how we can create communities in online learning and teaching settings, and is considering whether mini online writing retreats and online reflexive writing workshops could contribute to this goal. Another of her interests is how to embed career learning in an effective and creative way within the curriculum for psychology

students. She is passionate about science communication, and has written for national publications such *Times Higher Education*. She is a Member of the Psychologist and Digest Editorial Advisory Committee for the British Psychological Society.

John Parkin currently works across Anglia Ruskin University on integrating employability and experiential learning. Previously, he was a Senior Lecturer Practitioner in education and the course leader of the BA Primary Education Studies degree. John also teaches on the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education programme. Prior to moving to Higher Education in 2018, John was a primary school teacher for fifteen years. He draws on his experience as primary school teacher in his Higher Education teaching. His research interests include playful approaches to learning and his doctoral research investigates the lived experiences of men completing a Primary Education Studies degree.

Like many, **Donna Peach** was born into poverty and disadvantage, where attending school was not considered a priority and educational ambitions were low. Donna was forty-four before she was awarded a degree after six years of distance learning study. More than a decade later, she has a self-funded MSc and a PhD, and has taught at the University of Salford since 2013. Thus, she recognises both personally and professionally the transformational power of education and the vitality of widening and empowering participation. She is passionate about reducing barriers to education—that activity must include the appreciation of learning in all its guises and not just those that are recognised by hierarchical measures. Her practice is based on nurturing our shared humanity as a way to dissipate manufactured constructions of power. On that basis, she started online activities that have blossomed into the PhDForum. This wonderful global community has a constant online presence and makes a difference in people's "real lives". It requires a daily commitment that Donna shares with others and brings an abundance of joy and support that ripples beyond its virtual boundaries.

Dr Phoenix Perry specialises in developing accessible machine learning tools, founds value-driven creative coding organisations, and creates games that explore our collective interconnectivity. As Reader in

Games and Creative Technologies at the University of the Arts London, Phoenix blends embodied gaming, inclusive design, and advanced machine learning in interactive systems. She holds a PhD in Computing from Goldsmiths where she focused on Disability Led Game Design. Founder of the Code Liberation Foundation, Perry has empowered over six thousand women to explore computational creativity with games. She also creates tools and open-source resources for game designers and artists, most notably InteractML. Her installations and games work have shown at museums and festivals, including the Wellcome Collection, Somerset House, A Maze, Indie Cade, and GDC.

Eileen Pollard previously worked as a Senior Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Chester and then as a Learner Developer at Manchester Metropolitan University. She has over ten years' experience teaching in Higher Education (HE) and she joined the University Teaching Academy at Manchester Met in February 2022. She has published on teaching and learning practice, including in the *THE* and *Wonkhe*, as well as in journal articles, blogs, and podcasts, and she is an Associate Editor at the *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*. One of her proudest achievements to date is her TEDx on "Teaching English Using Compassion", which has been viewed over ten thousand times on YouTube. Eileen is a Relational and Critical Pedagogue who is passionate about widening participation in and access to HE, and she is committed to the values of equity, social justice, and anti-racism becoming behaviours across campuses.

Dr Gabriella Rodolico is Senior Lecturer in Science Education (Biology) at the School of Education, has expertise in the implementation of innovative technologies such as virtual reality (VR) in Initial Teacher Education courses as well as experience of teaching in secondary school and Higher Education. Dr Rodolico led VR projects with international partners through several funding streams such as International Partnership Development Funding, British Council Going Global. She has also conducted, in collaboration with Dr Hirsu, a series of projects involving VR supported lessons and the impact on the learning and teaching experience of student teachers on the ITE programmes (see Rodolico & Hirsu, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1080/09523987.2023.2262195). Dr Rodolico has been awarded the LearnSci Teaching Innovation

Awards 2021 in collaboration with the Science team at the School of Education for the outstanding work in integrating innovative technology in ITE Science courses and her work has been presented at the "Scottish Government Academic Seminar Series—The Future Curriculum" and published on the Education Scotland website: https://education.gov.scot/improvement/research/virtual-reality-in-a-scottish-context/. She is also collaborating with Dr Hirsu on the extended reality (XR) in Education White Paper Project (see https://www.gla.ac.uk/news/headline_1040288_en.html).

Elizabeth Shakespeare is a Senior Manager (Information and Guidance) in the STEM Student Support Team at the Open University (OU). She has worked within the Information, Advice and Guidance Service at the OU since 2012, in both student-facing and managerial roles.

Akitav Sharma is an educator, researcher, and designer of critical learning systems whose work spans pedagogy, philosophy, and participatory design. With over a decade of experience in educational innovation, his practice centres on developing epistemologies and frameworks that foreground meaning-making, learner agency, and socio-cultural context. He is the creator of PLITO, a transdisciplinary grammar of engagement, and the Curriculum for Innovation (CfI), both of which have been field-tested across diverse learning environments. Akitav's work explores how education can evolve beyond standardisation— into a humane, just, and intellectually rich ecosystem that empowers learners to author their own meaning in an unequal world. His writing and designs are grounded in critical theory, narrative inquiry, and a steadfast commitment to educational equity.

Louise Sheridan has worked in Higher Education for the last twenty-five years, beginning as a Sessional Tutor while still working in the field of youth and community development. Her approach to teaching is greatly influenced by the methods that she used in her professional practice as a community educator. The theories and principles of Paulo Freire provide a solid foundation upon which she frames learning activities. Most of her students are studying Adult Learning, Community Development, and Youth Work, and are driven by the desire to tackle issues of social justice, working with communities and

not for communities. She believes it is important to equip students with knowledge, skills, and experience that enable them to engage with communities in an authentic, meaningful, and engaging way. Faced with the sudden challenge of teaching students online, Louise developed The XXXX Game to create an engaging, and fun way of learning. Louise is committed to creating learning experiences that promote love for others, and the world.

Dr Rossella Sorte is a licensed psychologist (Italian licence) with a clinical background, with a specialism in children. She is also a Lecturer in Psychology at Manchester Metropolitan University, with over five years' experience teaching neurodiversity and the representative lead for Neurodiversity on the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusivity (ED&I) committee in the School of Psychology, where she works with neurodivergent students to amplify their voices in education. Rossella has an interest in the application of the idea of multiple intelligences to learning and education and works with creative methodologies.

Geyan Surendran has an academic background in physiology and the pharmaceutical sciences, supervising MSc and BSc ethnobotany and biosciences research projects, as well as delivering, developing and auditing undergraduate biosciences university courses, as well as building more intuitive educational management systems that cater to diverse learning styles. His current research focuses on online and digital delivery of educational programmes, ethnobotany, and the use of physiologically active plants and fungi to modulate mood, attention, cognition and sleep quality. Geyan previously led the research for the non-alcoholic "functional" beverage company Beyond Alcohol in the UK and US, and is currently developing processes to add value to millet, yam and taro crops in Ghana by exploring historical farming and fermentation techniques from around the world with Asoro Africa. Prior to this, he spent five years working in topical and transdermal pharmaceutical research and has spent over twelve years as a distiller and non-alcoholic drinks formulator.

Shelini Surendran currently serves as the Associate Dean (International) and an Associate Professor at the University of Surrey, where she received the "Early Career Teacher of the Year" award in 2021. She

previously was Head of Biology at Farnborough College of Technology, where she led the programme for A-level Biology, BTEC Applied Science, and GCSE Biology for five years. Her research expertise centres on investigating the genetic relationship between vitamin B12 status and cardio-metabolic traits across diverse ethnic groups. Shelini fulfils the role of an undergraduate dissertation supervisor, overseeing seven projects exploring the impact of botanicals from Eastern Medicine on cognition. Additionally, she serves as an examiner for Master's student dissertation projects within the Food Science and Nutrition program, showcasing her commitment to guiding and advancing research in these fields.

Sean Starbuck is an Educational Adviser working within the STEM Support Team at the Open University. He has eight years' experience in supporting students across the Information, Advice, and Guidance continuum.

Marie Stephenson is a Senior Lecturer at London Metropolitan University, teaching on foundation year courses and within the education area. She has worked in UK Higher Education for twenty-five years in areas including language teaching, international and access programmes, and academic support. Current interests include inclusive, creative, and embodied approaches to teaching and learning.

Dr Nathalie Tasler is a Senior Lecturer in Academic and Digital Development at the University of Glasgow. Her background is Erziehungswissenschaften (Sciences of Education). She co-leads the University Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) Network (https://uofgsotl.blog/) and has a strong background in creative learning and teaching. Nathalie has been involved in various roles in the education sector for thirty years, initially in museums and culture education and, for the last fifteen years, predominantly in Higher Education. She is a funding editor for the open access SoTL journal (https://osotl.org/index.php/osotl/article/download/98/88) and runs an academic blog (https://nathalietasler.blog/). More details about her work history are on LinkedIn (https://www.linkedin.com/in/nathaliesheridan/)—and if you like poetry you can find some of her creative writing work here: https://writingforhealing.blog/

Hilary Thomson (BA/PGCE) is Founder of The Ministry of Imagination. Hilary has over thirty years professional experience as an actor, director, teacher, university tutor, and business trainer. She has successfully combined creativity with people development in the arts, business, and education sector and is passionate about how this combination works. Hilary is currently teaching part time on the BA Hons Drama Degree at the university of East Anglia and is working as a freelance creative practitioner in arts and education. She writes and delivers educational projects and workshops for children, young people, and adults, working in both formal and informal learning environments. Over the years she has developed a system of creative processes that unlock people's potential and take them on a journey to find their own story. By designing social and educational programmes Hilary fosters healthy people and healthy communities: "Working with the landscape in front of me, I use a creative approach to help people develop new ways of being". At the heart of Hilary's style is effective interpersonal and communication skills. "I want people to find their own identity and their own story", says Hilary.

Joshua Thorpe is a writer, learning developer, designer, artist, speaker, and radio host living in Glasgow. He works at University of Stirling and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. Thorpe is the author of *AI for Students* (https://promptlybooks.com/ai/), a comic-style book that shows how to use generative AI to think more, not less, in education.

Professor Paul A. Townsend joined the University of Stirling in November 2024 as Deputy Principal (Research and Innovation). He has extensive expertise in biomedical and health sciences, coupled with interdisciplinary innovation, and a proven track record of transformative leadership in Higher Education. After earning his PhD at the Imperial Cancer Research Fund (now CRUK) in 1997, Paul has consistently bridged the gap between industry and academia, pushing the frontiers of scientific discovery. His research in cell stress, ageing and survival mechanisms, along with his work on developing network solutions for early disease detection, exemplifies his innovative approach. His career spans institutions including the University of Southampton and the University of Manchester. Most recently, he served as Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Executive Dean at the University of Surrey's

Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences. There, he established the new Surrey School of Medicine, founded the Surrey Academic Health and Care Partnership, and co-led both the Wolfson Bioanalytics Centre of Excellence and Surrey Centre of Excellence in Ageing. Under his leadership, the Faculty secured Athena Swan Gold and Silver awards and excellent REF and NSS results. Paul has co-founded several companies and secured multi-million-pound grants from major funding bodies. His expertise encompasses drug discovery, AI applications, and advanced mass spectrometry, leading to significant breakthroughs in cancer and chronic disease biomarker identification.

Anna Troisi is a Reader in Creative Computing and Equitable Futures at the Creative Computing Institute, University of the Arts London. A Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (PFHEA) and recipient of a National Teaching Fellowship (2024), she is internationally recognised for her innovative use of Nonviolent Communication (NVC) to build more inclusive, dialogic, and compassionate teaching/learning environments. Her interdisciplinary work integrates the Social Model of Disability, co-design methodologies, and relational pedagogies to reimagine how curriculum and feedback can support justice, wellbeing, and belonging—particularly for students from marginalised and underrepresented backgrounds.

Elizabeth Veldon (they/them and she/her) is a theorist and researcher interested in the intersections of power, capitalism, art, and labour within free improvisation and installation art. They are interested in the possibilities for transformative practices that utilise Freire's educational theories and which are informed by the work of Derrida, Deleuze, and Guattari, and intersections of Queer Theory and Disability Studies. They have presented papers both within the UK (at Brighton University) internationally at the "Reimagining Musical Programming" conference at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, have taught at postgraduate level and have a chapter in press for Oxford University Press on methods of teaching free improvisation.

Colin Webb is a postgraduate researcher at Leeds Becket University, undertaking interdisciplinary PhD research into human trafficking in Bulgaria and the surrounding areas. Within his research, he considers

the environment that creates an opportunity for traffickers, be that of an of economic, political, or social nature. Investigating the selling of Bulgarian newborn babies in Greece within the disciplines, Eastern European politics, criminology, and sociology. After a career in haulage, Colin successfully completed the Professional Studies degree, specialising in sociology and social justice, before undertaking a Master's in International Human Rights at Leeds Beckett University.

Lucy Yeboa is currently undertaking a Master's in Global Security Challenges at the University of Leeds. Before this, she studied a BA in Professional Studies at the Lifelong Learning Centre. To gain access to the degree, Lucy successfully completed the Preparation for Higher Education Foundation year. Lucy has specific research interests in social justice, health, and sustainability. Her dissertation used a critical policy analysis approach to critique the UK government's healthy eating and food policies. Lucy is married and a mother of three young adults.

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Foreword

Mary O'Kane

I have spent the last year deep in the entrails of university reform, as Chair of the Universities Accord, established by the Australian Government 'to drive lasting and transformative reform in Australia's higher education system'.[1] The panel received many hundreds of submissions, which helped formulate the various iterations of our report. This, together with my own years of experience in the sector, gives me a perspective from which to view *Stories of Hope: Reimagining Education*.

With some exceptions, most of the submissions to the Universities Accord listed problems, so it is a delight to see the focus on hope in this book. The contributors are from a range of settings and levels of seniority in the education sector, and from a number of countries, but they all report innovative ideas and experience. The authors are universally enthusiastic about their work and their contributions to education.

The forty-eight chapters are divided into six sections and, as the editors make clear in their introductions, these sections arose organically from a call to offer chapters that "focus on the hope the author(s) have for a better future for education, for educational professionals, for students, and the wider education system". Some of the chapters present ideas about whole system changes and digital futures, but most focus on case studies that demonstrate practical steps that can be made to improve education on the ground. There are a number of examples of innovative curriculum changes that support creative and playful learning, and show the results of collaboration and co-creation. I was really struck by the last two sections, "Beyond the curriculum" and "Focus on the

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1   See https://www.education.gov.au/australian-universities-accord

teachers", which illustrate both that education is more than just what is in the curriculum and that caring for teachers is vital for their health and for that of the system.

The chapters showcase what is possible in education and demonstrate a positive, hopeful vision for the future. The authors hope that this book can seed collective action for change, as well as offering examples that others can apply in their practice.

It is heartening to realise that, despite the many problems facing the provision of education globally, the system is underpinned by committed educators with many ideas and much enthusiasm for teaching. This should offer great hope for the future.

Introduction:
Reimagining education

Sandra Abegglen, Tom Burns, Richard Heller,
Rajan Madhok, Fabian Neuhaus, John Sandars,
Sandra Sinfield, and Upasana Gitanjali Singh

Why hope?

There is something fundamentally "wrong" with contemporary education: students are stressed or disengaged, lecturers are disillusioned and burned out, technology is increasingly taking over human interactions, and universities are more concerned with their income, "ranking", and reputation than with the generation and transmission of knowledge—or the wellbeing of their staff and students. This situation must change, but the solution is unclear. So, as a group of educators with varying levels of experience in varied fields of education, we, the editors of this book, have come together to start a conversation that we ourselves hope could lead to positive changes and provide hope for the future. Our aim is not to rehearse the well-known problems in detail or to create a space for collective complaining and helplessness. Rather it is to promote discussion about how we can learn from the best examples of inspirational practice and imagine a new model for education, together.

We started this process with informal discussions and personal research, trying to (re)conceptualise teaching and learning in the twenty-first century, both theoretically and creatively. This is not a one-stop-shop of solutions, but rather an exploration of different perspectives

on re-imagining the art of teaching, with hope and aspiration—the little practical steps that we are all taking to bring about positive change. On the journey, some of us have asked educational professionals what they imagine the future of Higher Education (HE) to be in a playful, students-as-partners project (Abegglen, Kamal, Burns et al., 2023). We have also re-imagined a more collaborative Bloom (Abegglen, Burns, Heller et al., 2023) that moves away from pyramidical notions of teaching and learning towards collaborative engagement across the learning process. We also reflected on our own education and the people that were important in this (Madhok, 2021). What, we wondered, are other people doing?

Feeling that there is hope, and a need for shared hope, we were keen to engage with like-minded individuals, academics, and other practitioners interested in positive educational practice. We launched an open call for contributions seeking examples from a wide number of settings. We had neither a narrow nor a specific direction as to the type of interventions we were seeking; rather, we wanted to see the initiatives that are out there and the impact they are having. We wanted each submission to focus on the hope the author(s) have for a better future for education, for educational professionals, for students, and for the wider education system. We were looking for—and more importantly, found—short papers that approached education from a fundamentally human and humane perspective, offering practical examples of what can be done and achieved.

The case studies

We have subsequently identified key themes that emerged across the contributions:

- Examples of system change.
- How technology can shape the future.
- Creative curriculum design.
- Imaginative collaboration and co-creation.
- Beyond the curriculum.
- Focus on the teachers.

The book thus organically divides into sections according to these themes, with short introductions by the editorial team to each area. The examples presented offer insights and practical solutions from a range of perspectives—embracing multiple voices—focusing with many lenses on hope. Whilst most of the authors are situated in the tertiary sector, the book does not limit itself to a particular level or area of education, whether school, further or higher, formal or informal.

The chapters are open to all practitioners, disciplines, and subject areas, from established and new lecturers and teachers to those in student support positions. Nor does the book focus on any particular type of solution. So, whilst for example, some of us might be enthusiastic about technology, we are also cautious about putting faith in any single intervention without acknowledging the whole, the system and its parts. This means that we have included contributions that are critically-reflexive of themselves; papers or case studies that engage with the topic on a deeper level. In essence, the book offers a tentative ecology of hopeful practice to create a platform for shared action.

Most of the authors are from the Global North, with the largest numbers coming from the UK, although India, Latin America, Chile, and South Africa are represented, as are other parts of Europe, Canada, and Australia. We do believe that the ideas cover a wide part of the educational ecosystem—and individuals will have the ability to assess if any example is relevant to their context. Whilst we regret that there are limited contributions from many parts of the world, we believe that, together, the chapters showcase an emergent ecosystem of what is possible in education—in our practice, our institutions, and our courses—to create a positive vision for the future, and seed collective action for change.

Why read it?

We argue that the collection is "valid" and "academic" in that each submitted chapter was evaluated by the editors, and we accepted those that we all were relevant to the theme of the book. In addition to the publishers' peer review process, each chapter was internally peer reviewed by the author of another chapter, and revisions were requested based on these reviews. Unlike the often more combative peer review

process, this was open, supportive, and collaborative—sparking a vibrant exchange amongst contributors. The chapters you see are the result of this process. Each paper provides an innovative and unique vision of hope for the future of education.

So, when reading the book, you can expect examples that are current and relevant as well as innovative, whilst being accessible, practical, and motivating. We, as editors, believe in hopeful and humane scholarship as well as open-access practice. Hence the book has been created and published in this spirit. It showcases a broad range of ideas, which are written and presented from different perspectives, in different styles, and with diverse approaches. We hope this highlights a multitude of voices and offers opportunities to take action. We want you, the reader, to engage with the ideas presented to discuss, to reflect, and to take heart from each other. Most importantly we want the output to be usable, to be used, and to be further developed. So, please feel encouraged to put any of what you read here into your own practice, and to share your own stories of hope. We want (and need) exchange—and collective thought and writing highlighting action—for purposeful change.

The book is relevant for established academics as well as teachers in training—it is designed to be of interest to the concerned lecturer, educationist, or postgraduate student ready for change—as well as for informed members of the public who have interests in the future of education. We hope that Higher Education administrators might also be excited to see the innovations and creativity demonstrated in the book and be stimulated to develop settings that encourage such innovation.

To conclude

We are massively encouraged by the enthusiasm for education shown by the authors, and the range and depth of the innovations they describe. This demonstrates that there really is hope for the future of education, and we feel we can add to the discussion about the future of education by showcasing and disseminating these on-the-ground examples, the things people "do" in the in-between spaces of learning and teaching, to make education more empowering, inclusive, and creative, and also by connecting people with each other. As Olivia Laing (2020) states: "Hope is the precursor to change. Without it, no better world is possible".

Within this, we need courage: to experiment, to question, to engage, and to accept uncertainty. Playful and creative learning and teaching approaches are finding their way into HE, not as "dumbed down" teaching but to provoke the "serious business" of real, engaged, and authentic learning. This is important in these supercomplex (Abegglen, Burns, Maier et al., 2020) and otherwise hopeless times, where the present is uncertain and the future even more so. Traditional teaching and skills are no longer sufficient, if they ever were. We need methods and methodologies that enable us all, students and educators, to become more visible and to co-construct knowledge in hopeful ways. As Laing (2020) puts it:

> ...the image possesses an uncanny power. It can travel where the body can't. It migrates and strays, taking up permanent residence in the mind, revealing what—who—has been forcibly excluded from sight.

What else?

We, the editors, believe we have produced examples that could spark a new ecology of a more hopeful educational practice—something that will help achieve clarity as to the purpose of education, and teaching and learning, which seems lost in these alienated and alienating times. Education is more than a transactional exchange or an economic activity; rather it creates space for humanity, the human and the humane, as we meet personal, social, and societal needs.

If this is of interest to you, and we must assume that it is if you have read this far, then we hope you enjoy this collection, and that you are moved to tell hopeful stories of your own. Why not help us form a narrative of "how we can put right what is wrong with education", at the micro (individual—practice), meso (institutional—course, modules etc.), and macro (bigger systems—emerging ecologies of innovative practice—national and international) levels: a proto-lab of examples and ideas to re-imagine the future with hope. Each of us can do whatever is within our control, and in this regard, we hope the case studies in this book will give you some ideas. Radical hope, by which we mean "the courage and creativity to see beyond despair and imagine an alternative mode of flourishing" (Shanahan & Lear, 2023) is needed, now more than ever.

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I. EXAMPLES OF SYSTEM CHANGE

Examples of system change: Introduction

Rajan Madhok

There is a growing consensus that the current education systems globally are now broken. Fixing these will not be easy, especially given the strong stranglehold that the prevailing neo-liberal philosophy has on policymaking, businesses, and institutions. But things can change, and this is where "work-arounds" and small initiatives as described in this book give hope, and can help at least some, if not all, learners in certain contexts. These examples in turn can galvanise others to find ways to contribute within their means, creating a changing environment, and hopefully creating a snowball effect leading to a transformed system—that is certainly what I hope will happen with this book. Looking back, future generations will wonder why it took so long when it was obvious that the education system was letting people down, but then that is how change happens: slowly but surely through committed people prepared to imagine and do things differently, as the contributors to this section have done.

That is what future generations will certainly do when they read what Dick Heller and Stephen Leeder propose in their chapter: "Inverting the distribution of Higher Education: From top-down to student-led". Surely, the "users", the students, should play an active role, especially in the Higher Education sector, in how and what they should be "taught", why was this not already happening, and is it not time that we stopped paying lip-service to this idea, and made it the organising principle? Once we begin moving forward with this initial thought, things can start to align accordingly; an example is Information Technology, which can

help transform education but has not been used to "disrupt" the system. Rather, it has been seen as supporting the current methods of delivering education—it is used transactionally to perpetuate and not transform. Of course, people can, and will, take issue with many of the things that Information Technology enables, but all revolutions happen because someone "had the dream". Rather than criticise, we should explore how to refine and build on what is outlined in this chapter.

Jane Booth, in "A critical pedagogy for a critical time", supports and extends Heller and Leeder's proposal; she rails against the neo-liberal ideology whereby "...students should only 'invest in education' to gain economic benefits and 'fit' into the job market". Notions such as personal growth, reflection and citizenship have faded as education becomes a "technocratic" rather than a "moral practice that is shaped, interpreted, and negotiated by the people involved in it". Booth suggests the involvement of "the wider community by nurturing reciprocal relationships with the voluntary, community, faith, and social enterprise sectors (VCFSE)". Establishing a community hub at the university to enable this and giving students much more say in their education, she thinks, is easier in social sciences but has relevance to other branches. In setting out her proposals she has thought through the challenges, which makes this worthy of consideration, and gives us a reason for hope.

"Can we instead imagine a model of learning and teaching that allows learners and educators to thrive in academia, rather than merely to survive?" asks Sarah Honeychurch, in "Serious fun: Reimagining Higher Education from a humane perspective". Rather than using the term "resilience" with its negative connotations regarding the navigation of education journeys, she discusses learning in terms of serious fun, which she describes as follows: "Well, fairly obviously, I mean something that is serious—in the sense that learners and educators would recognise it as something that is meaningful and will contribute to learning—and something that is also enjoyable to participate in for both learners and educators". As a pragmatist, she shies away from big changes, and describes small things that can make big differences, and which can co-exist with current practices, thereby avoiding upsetting the status quo. An example in her chapter is the balance between summative and formative assessment, and where both can be better used to enable the learner to make the most of their course.

Drawing lessons from their research project at a premier medical institution in Delhi, India, Shivaani Chugh, Anurag Mishra, Aashima Dabas, and Chandini Chugh outline their approach to mentoring to make student-led learning more relevant and effective in "Fostering hope and humanity through transformative education: A call to reimagine mentorship". Their mentorship concept draws inspiration from the traditional Indian educational model, where the enduring bond between a student (Shishya) and a teacher (Guru) forms the bedrock of learning. "Through stories of hope, resilience, and growth, mentorship emerges as a cornerstone of a reimagined educational landscape that prioritises human connections, inclusivity, and choice"—a theme echoed by others in this section. Their chapter is an example of how to do it and is worthy of wider adaption. Good mentoring certainly offers hope for coping with the current drawbacks of the education system, and gives meaning to both the mentors—who are often older (and wiser) and feel less relevant in the fast-moving world these days—and the mentees—who need a safe space, away from the often competitive environment.

Stepping forward, "Creating hope through T-shaped values", by Earle Abrahamson, Nina Namaste, Corinne A. Green, Mayi Arcellana-Panlilio, Lisa Hatfield, and Michelle J. Eady, suggests a more holistic foundation for a lifelong journey (the horizontal limb of T) to complement specialised education (the vertical limb). "Knowing little about lots rather than lots about little", with the inexorable rise of specialism, is causing a problem everywhere; it is a common refrain in medicine for example, and reading their chapter makes one hopeful for change. To some extent this is what mentors could/should do, but the authors go into more detail to make it core and systematic to the education programme.

"Physician, heal thyself", a familiar saying in medicine, is very apt for educators—if teachers are not in the "right place" they cannot do their job well. Nathalie Tasler's chapter, "The human and nothing but the whole human: With head, heart, and hand", is structured around the three domains of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), and considers cutting across all the key competencies within the Education for Sustainable Development Goals: the cognitive (head), socio-emotional (heart), and behavioural (hand). Tasler shows how an educator can build these domains through

reflection. The chapter is a "How-to" guide and a workbook is available, making it a hopeful and helpful addendum to this section, especially as it builds on what others (such as Honeychurch) are advocating for.

In his experimental contribution "Becoming wildly nomadic with the Nomadic Detective Agency-Assemblage", Mark Ingham describes how play can help imagine and create the necessary new education system. He talks about a future involving an "international community of academics, educators, and practitioners [who] became the first pioneers in a movement that would eventually become known as 'Wildly Nomadic Education'". One of their initial forays involved setting up a digital, globally accessible platform. This platform was "another assemblage of cultures, ideas, and pedagogies, a rhizomatic universe where learning was unbounded, collaborative, and flexible. Each user, regardless of their origin, could contribute to, learn from, and modify this collective knowledge pool". Curiosity—which is the underlying theme here—and hence asking questions, is given legitimacy through becoming a nomad, in his Nomadic Detective Agency-Assemblage (NDA-A): "a multiplicity, a decentred, and rhizomatic, collective post-human organism that researches possible educational futures"; an endorsement and extension of the ideas proposed by Heller and Leeder above, perhaps?

Kim Holflod from Denmark picks up the theme of playfulness in "Playful Higher Education futures: Hopeful and utopian thinking in pedagogy". He introduces "hope-punk", a pop-cultural phenomenon that stands in conceptual opposition to "grim dark". This frames an attitude and a belief that encourages envisioning a better future in life, education, communities, and societies—especially timely for the education sector. Through a research project, he weaves together both hope and utopia by testing numerous object-guided playful experiments, with educators and students collaboratively constructing, modelling, and discussing shared objects. Rather than confrontation, collaboration has to be the way forward to challenge and overturn the prevailing neo-liberal model of education, and this is where playfulness can take on an important role.

As one reads these chapters, our initial sense of despondency gradually diminishes, leading to a more hopeful outlook on the possibilities for a changed and reformed education system.

1. Inverting the distribution of Higher Education:
From top-down to student-led

Richard F. Heller and Stephen Leeder

Abstract

This chapter envisions a university education system that aligns with students' evolving needs, fostering a hopeful and responsive learning environment. Currently, traditional learning structures often fail to reflect the self-directed, technology-enhanced ways in which both students and educators acquire knowledge. The chapter advocates for peer-reviewed open-access course repositories that for staff would confer academic recognition and for students would offer the opportunity of gaining microcredits from affiliated institutions. This model aims to enhance accessibility, reducing inequities tied to geographic location and course availability.

Keywords: student autonomy; online learning; open online repositories; microcredits; academic credit

Introducing hope

We offer our story of hope that university education can evolve to reflect what students *actually* want and need in terms of a hopeful and

liberatory education. At present, universities generally offer what they *think* students want and need—or what governments determine they can have—and courses are planned "top down" often to meet the needs of the university rather than the student.

Here is what we hope that in five years' time the student, the academic, and even the vice-chancellor will be saying:

The student:

"I can choose the courses for my interests and future career options. I can choose the timescale over which I take the courses. I can live and work anywhere while accessing courses."

"I live in a rural environment. Nevertheless, I can access most of my courses online and attend a regional hub when I need face-to-face tuition. This may well enable me to enrol in university, which I might otherwise not be able to afford to do."

"I appreciate the move towards a lower carbon footprint that learning online provides."

"I need to work and online learning fits with my need for flexibility."

"I can see and feel the passion with which my teachers have designed and delivered these programmes."

The international student:

"I can access high-quality and accredited educational materials while living in my home country, and do not need to leave my family and job to gain a degree which is not available to me locally. I don't need to physically attend the university all the time."

The academic:

"I am pleased to have the autonomy to control my professional activities, including course development and delivery that responds to student need, and to have a more collegial relationship with the university administration. Intrusive managerialism has gone."

"I gain credit for producing and reviewing educational materials and can expect the same respect and academic rewards for my teaching as for my research."

"I enjoy using high quality open-access educational materials in my teaching and making the material I produce available online to other academics elsewhere. Sharing knowledge via educational materials has led me into valuable research collaborations."

The vice-chancellor:

"I have been able to progressively refashion the university administration and budget to respond to student demand for courses and educational material—and to satisfy the staff hunger for creative control of their processes."

"I have reduced the size of our administration. We are replacing managerial oversight with collegial relations among academics. We are now valuing educational contributions equally with research productivity."

"My colleagues and I across the tertiary education sector have increased open access to courses for international students to reduce the burden of cost and distance they would experience if all their education required their physical presence here."

Is there really a problem?

Students speak of finding themselves in an environment where education is not valued and/or is downgraded in favour both of employability and university reputation derived from league tables based on metrics weighted towards research. They sense that many of their teachers are disaffected as a result.

The current learning environment does not reflect the way students (and their teachers) gain knowledge, which is largely self-directed and takes advantage of Information Technology (Dron, 2023). Students are voting with their feet—or rather their laptops—and social media is full of pictures of empty lecture theatres. Presumably, if students are actually

studying, they are doing so online and accessing recorded information, seeking it out from other sources, using social media, building networks, and having backstage conversations.

Fig. 1.1 The empty lecture theatre. Professor Jan Slapeta, CC BY 4.0.

Often students are exposed to a transactional competitive learning experience ostensibly designed to equip them for high-value careers, rather than beginning with their own needs and nurturing collaboration (Heller, 2022a). In consequence, many universities offer a uniform set of courses and curricula. This approach encourages institutions to compete inside and outside the classroom.

What are we proposing?

Building on the notion of the Distributed University (Heller, 2022b) we propose the establishment of repositories of open-access courses, or parts of courses, which each include competency assessments. The educational resources themselves would be created by universities, and maybe other providers, who offer microcredits based on assessment. The repositories would need to be curated, and could be hosted by university libraries, or through national or regional organisations. The educational materials would be published under a Creative Commons licence (Creative Commons, n.d.) where access is free, and the material can be re-used with attribution to the author.

Students discover and access online courses, find a mentor (either from the institution offering the courses or elsewhere), and gain microcredits based on accredited assessments. Students pick their courses and make up enough credits for an award offered by a partner university or other provider.

To allow students to create their own mix, systems of accreditation and evaluation would need to be established, beyond those offered by individual universities. There would be no set curriculum or mandated timescale, but rather the course would be shaped by what and when a student wants to learn, or what a particular role or workplace requires. Ideally there would be "mentor hubs" and students would find a mentor from a university, professional body, or employer group. New educational technologies would be used to full advantage, including the potential of artificial intelligence (AI).

Although all courses would be online, there may need to be some face-to-face experiential learning, as in the regional hubs, as suggested in the distributed university model (Heller, 2022b). Here, education is distributed largely online to where it is needed, reducing local and global inequalities in access, and emphasising local relevance in place of large, centralised campuses, with a low impact on the environment. It emphasises the distribution of trust in place of managerialism and collaboration in place of competition. Management needs are much reduced, relieving universities of those costs and academics of intrusive surveillance.

Educational materials would be subject to peer-review processes to mirror those already used for research publications. Academic credit

could then flow to those who publish or review educational resources and extend to other academic input, such as updating the work and creating new instructional materials. University metrics would include these educational credits, rebalancing the current system that rewards academics principally for their research.

Government funding would go to universities to create courses and to provide the repository infrastructure and mentoring. Students would also pay something for courses and mentoring or take out loans or gain scholarships as at present, although the fees would be much lower or could be waived for certain courses.

While this might start as a national programme, it could develop into a global open university offering free online education and accreditation for life-long, distributed learning—which could help address some of the global inequalities in access to Higher Education. In that case, it would need to be driven by the global majority to guard against risks of academic colonisation.

We see this initiative in the context of a general pivot towards online learning as suggested in the distributed university (Heller, 2022b).

Is there any support for this idea?

Opening access to research publications is an idea driven by the funders of research who deplored the results of their funding being hidden behind the paywalls of publishers (Plan S, n.d.). There is also strong support from among the academic community (Open Education Global, n.d.). A parallel initiative for publicly funded educational material, currently hidden behind university paywalls, to be made freely available has been articulated as "Plan E" (Heller, 2023a). It builds on the global Open Educational Resources movement (UNESCO, n.d.).

There are many great examples of universities sharing their educational resources through open-access routes, such as The Open University in the UK and Athabasca University in Calgary/Alberta, and starting with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, which made some of its courses available online in 2002; today, all its courses are available online (MIT OpenCourseWare, n.d.).

While open access to educational materials lies at the heart of our proposal, we are suggesting a far more radical approach that would empower the student and academic alike.

There is support for this idea in that the provision of coursework as open access to all in Australia was recommended by the Productivity Commission as a quality measure (Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2023). Several US Government agencies have mandated that educational materials produced through their funding programmes should be made freely available online (Heller, 2023a).

Other potential benefits

Industry involvement would be encouraged through its offering of experiential, practice-based learning. examples for which there is support in the literature (Loeng, 2020; Yew & Goh, 2016).

There are also institutions that claim that they are student centred—of which Western Governors University (WGU, n.d.) in the US is probably the best known. WGU market themselves as "The University of You". Education is fully online, and assessments—which can be taken at any time—are based on competences, not credit hours. The costs are much lower than those in other US universities, partly due to lack of need to offer anything other than education at a distance to their students.

Despite all the expertise and enthusiasm for, as well as successful examples of, open-access education globally, it is unevenly spread, and its adoption is hindered by factors at the institutional and individual educator levels (Irvine et al., 2021).

Will this student-led approach to accessing Higher Education work to solve the problem?

Despite the many benefits of online learning, students were reported to be keen to return to their traditional campuses after experiencing online education during the COVID-19 epidemic (Lee-Whiting & Bergeron, 2022). This is likely due to their loss of the 'fellowship' and social aspects of university life provoked by emergency online education and a reduced ability to know their lecturers and understand them as role models. This can be partly compensated through renewed uses of communication and collaboration technology, and efforts would need to be made to facilitate their availability and use. Our own experience of online education using open resources has been very positive in

relation to the sense of fellowship across the programme's students and academics (Heller, 2022b).

There would be many policy hurdles to this idea. Universities would have to transform to adopt a set of practices that are uncertain and largely untested and would require a major adaptation to the current way they organise themselves and structure careers for academic staff. There is no real way of knowing if the idea would work or solve the problems in the absence of experiment and evaluation. Hence, we hope that if anyone takes up our proposal it will be in the context of an evaluated experiment. Interim measures of success will be measured if the experiences expressed by the fictional characters at the start of this chapter can be repeated by real people in the not-too-distant future.

Conclusion

We understand the barriers to our new model for university education where the requirements of the student take precedence over the current top-down university managerial model. The advent of modern online educational technology would facilitate this transformation, and there are theories and some examples on which we can draw. Could we hope for this to be the vehicle for real reform and transformation—maybe even leading to a global approach to democratising education, driven globally without replicating previous patterns of academic colonisation? Can this give us hope for a future of university education that reflects global needs and modern ways of communicating knowledge, and provides agency for the students and academics who are the heart and soul of the Higher Education system?

Steps toward hope

- The current learning environment often does not reflect the way students (and their teachers) gain knowledge, which is largely self-directed and may make good use of IT.

- The ease of access to educational materials via IT, unbounded by the geographic setting of the students, can enable a wider reach and reduce inequity due to distance.

- Our proposal for a more distributed and inclusive education:
  - Repositories of open-access courses would be created principally by university academics, who would gain academic rewards through a peer-review system.
  - Students would choose and access online courses, guided by a mentor either from the institution offering the courses, or elsewhere, and gain microcredits based on accredited assessments. leading to an award offered by a partner university or other provider.
  - University performance metrics would include educational credits, and the current system that is weighted towards rewarding academics for their research more than educational contributions would be rebalanced.

- There are many hopeful examples that are happening now, some of which are listed in the chapter. Check also: The "Distributing learning and knowledge creation to reduce inequity" course that outlines how to build capacity for distributing knowledge to reduce inequity: https://courses. peoples-praxis.org/course/view.php?id=30.

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2. A critical pedagogy for a critical time

Jane Booth

Abstract

This chapter advocates for a community-centric university model grounded in the principles of critical pedagogy. It challenges the market-driven approach to Higher Education and questions the narrow focus on employability, instead emphasising the development of reflexive, inclusive graduates who can disrupt the status quo. The chapter highlights the importance of building reciprocal relationships between universities and the voluntary, community, faith, and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector to ensure that learning and research align with broader societal needs. Additionally, it calls for meaningful engagement with those marginalised by the neo-liberal capitalist economy, fostering dialogue to envision a more hopeful, sustainable, and socially just future. Through these efforts, the chapter promotes a transformative approach to Higher Education that prioritises equity, collaboration, and societal impact.

Keywords: wicked problems; critical pedagogy; community-based learning; community-based research; coproduction

Introduction

Globally, we face a climate crisis, which governments are unable or unwilling to address. Nationally and globally, we see the growth and entrenchment of poverty. Nationally we face a housing crisis, a broken social care system and increasing health inequalities. Neo-liberal capitalism has brought us to crisis. In terms of teaching content, particularly for social science courses, these are interesting times indeed. In terms of humanity, we have reached a tipping point.

However, there is hope. By taking a critical approach to pedagogy, and a community-centric approach to research, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) could create the conditions to disrupt the neo-liberal capitalist orthodoxy that is killing us, reclaiming education as a dialogue in which we (re)value our humanity (Freire, 1970). As this chapter will advocate, this dialogue must be inclusive, moving beyond the walls of the university, if we are to bring about social change. For education should "have a political and ethical dimension" (Wallin, 2023, p. 69), otherwise neo-liberalism will remain unchallenged, the environment will continue to degenerate, and social inequalities will persist (Booth, 2023). Knowledge is crucial to bringing about social transformation. Therefore, if academics take steps to include the knowledge of those living with a social problem, they are more likely to gain a clearer understanding of the problem and a more effective solution (Brandsen et al., 2018; Newbury-Birch, 2019), for "the questions they ask are different from the questions asked by researchers and practitioners" (Knutagård et al., 2021, p. 236).

Therefore, this chapter proposes that HEIs adopt the principles of appreciative inquiry, community-based research, and critical pedagogy as the basis of a more community-facing praxis. This community-facing "praxis" advocates that educational practitioners work in ways that are "informed, reflective, self-consciously moral and political, and oriented towards making positive educational and societal change" (Mahon et al., 2020, p. 15). This requires promoting "alternative possibilities for education" (Mahon et al., 2020, p. 17). The activities of HEIs have traditionally been dominated by the needs of "The University" (for instance, research subjects and student placements) with limited benefit to the wider community (Booth, 2021). When universities do reach out to community organisations, it is often so they can be "inserted

into large research grant bids when needed" (Parker, 2023, p. 17), enhancing academic reputation rather than reflecting the needs of that community. This perpetuates "selections of knowledge and types of discourse" that marginalise those outside of the university, limiting their "capacity [......] to develop informed and critical understanding of society's power structures and their own relation to them" (Beck, 2013, p. 182). However, it is increasingly evident that coproducing research and learning activities with the individuals and communities living with the worst aspects of neo-liberal capitalism enhances the generation of knowledge (Campbell & Vanderhoven, 2016), enriches the learning environment (Booth & Green, 2022), and increases the likelihood of societal transformation and democratic participation (Brandsen et al., 2018).

Dare we hope?

In the face of "wicked problems" (Rittel & Webber, 1973), such as the looming climate crisis and entrenched poverty, what is required is a "new approach to the conduct of research and to the decision-making based on that research" (Brown et al., 2010, p. 4), an approach that is multi-disciplinary, multi-organisational, and multi-actor. Wicked problems are complex problems that cross disciplinary, organisational, and territorial boundaries and, therefore, "cannot be addressed effectively through traditional bureaucracies" (McGuire, 2006, p. 34) and need to include the worldviews of communities and individuals living with the "ills" of capitalism.

In the neo-liberal, capitalist economy, notions of community, collectivism, and social citizenship have been marginalised; the amassing of wealth has been reframed as success; and kindness is irrelevant. However, hope lies with those living with disadvantages who often provide routine acts of kindness to neighbours, relatives, and friends: "an infrastructure of kindness" that keeps communities functioning (Hall & Smith, 2015, p. 6). This was particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, in which community and neighbourhood groups formed to provide informal welfare to respond to the crisis (Rees et al., 2022; see also Chachlani et al., 2020). Kindness, and the local knowledge that underpins it, can be transformational.

Similarly, the learning environment should expose students to the diverse voices and experiences of disadvantaged communities to prompt reflection on how different sources of knowledge might be reconciled, engaging students, teachers, and communities in a collective dialogue in the pursuit of mutually beneficial research findings. Without their voices, HEIs can (unwittingly) dehumanise the very communities they hope to benefit from the social research by recreating "relationships of power" (Kitts, 2020, p. 83). This not only relates to the economic and political power imbalances within society, but also the power imbalances embedded in university praxis, between student and academic, academic and management, and university and community. Rather than privileging the expertise of academics and managers, universities need to draw on the knowledge of local citizens, as well as the lived experience of our diverse student body, to enhance inclusivity in both learning and research environments.

By co-producing research projects and teaching activities, the knowledge generated is more likely to reflect the reality of the social world and has the potential to be both empowering and transformational for the wider community.

Community-based approaches to teaching and research challenge the power imbalance between the researched and the researcher. This requires HEIs to be more cognisant of the knowledge of the wider community by nurturing reciprocal relationships with the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise sector (VCFSE). As will be detailed below, HEIs are well placed to become "a place for collaboration" with the VCFSE sector, facilitating dialogue with the "common purpose to co-create knowledge and meaning" (Wallin, 2023, p. 65) enabling the divisive nature of neo-liberal capitalism to be challenged. HEIs have the spaces, resources, academic expertise across a range of disciplines, student hours, and the need to carry out research that has an impact on the wider community (Research England, 2022). A community-centric university that values different types of knowing is more likely to produce research findings, graduates, and citizens that do not just maintain the status quo but advocate for hopeful change.

As educators, we must challenge the neo-liberal discourse that perpetuates the hegemony of "no alternative" to capitalism, which normalises the inevitability of inequality and depletes our democracy. As

Paulo Freire (1992, p. 8) says, "we need critical hope the way a fish needs unpolluted water". But our work is cut out. News outlets uncritically reproduce the narratives of neo-liberalism—economic growth, profits, share prices—whilst reality TV, social media, and tabloids reify the super-rich and indulge in their displays of conspicuous wealth. A new critical discourse—one more reflective of the majority, that challenges the reification of the minority who receive disproportionate economic "goods" and political influence—is needed to make visible the pathology of capitalism. For Freire (1970, p. 88) "to exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it". Freire's theory of "naming", through dialogue with others, creates the conditions for the transformation of our "selves" and our perceptions of the world around us.

Moving beyond employability to reflection and resistance

The marketisation of the Higher Education sector has damaged its democratic core to the point of students becoming customers rather than producers of knowledge (Neary & Winn, 2017). What is more, a "skills-based" approach to employability, measured by a series of metrics, implies that students should only "invest in education" to gain economic benefits (Suleman, 2021) and fit into the job market (Wallin, 2023). Notions such as personal growth, reflection, and citizenship have faded as education becomes a "technocratic" rather than a "moral practice that is shaped, interpreted and negotiated by the people involved in it" (Wallin, 2023, p. 56). HE has become a corporatist exercise as opposed to an "intellectual" and inquisitorial one (Kitts, 2020). Thus, HEIs are likely to produce future practitioners that simply replicate the inequity of the capitalist system, diminishing the ability to engage learners in a more inclusive dialogue aimed at creating a sustainable and fairer society.

Reclaiming the importance of "the critical" in education

What if we, as educators, resist the idea that students are "customers" and instead position students as co-producers of knowledge with the wider community? What if we facilitate students to become reflexive,

critical, and inclusive practitioners for the future? This requires creating opportunities for students, academics, and local communities to come together to co-produce "a critical political consciousness" (Giroux, 2022, p. 181), through "pedagogical flexibility" that respects local knowledge (Johnson, 2022, p. 208). To counteract the dehumanisation embedded in the neo-liberal university, both learning and teaching need to be community-facing. For, the acquisition of knowledge "will be limited if it does not include the routine, real world experience of non-academic communities" (Booth, 2023, p. 179).

In the social sciences, students often engage with the local VCFSE sector and local citizens, through placements and guest speakers. However, the impact on student learning and the benefits to the community itself can be minimal. Therefore, interaction with local community groups must be part of an ongoing process, "established through routine dialogue rather than dominated by the needs of the university" (Booth, 2023, p. 182). Universities need to invest in their local VCFSE sector, building long-term relationships through mechanisms that are not based on individual willingness or the need for research data to fulfil research funding.

Setting up a Community Hub at the University where local VCFSE sector groups can come for support with their work, such as providing students to volunteer on a specific project, or research by students and/or academics to support a project evaluation, could kick-start that relationship. Drawing on the tenets of appreciative inquiry, the Hub could usefully reflect Juanita Brown and David Isaacs' (2005) World Café model. This model takes a collaborative and iterative approach to generating knowledge, through dialogue, creating the opportunity for the "cross-pollination of ideas" (Fouché & Light, 2011, p. 28), which, in this case, would be between academics, students, representatives from local VCFSE organisations and community members themselves. Such a café format could create the conditions for a non-hierarchical exchange of information, including the identification of social problems and the generation of possible solutions, recognising and valuing lived experience and local knowledge alongside professional and academic input. In this way, non-academic participants would be able to "move beyond being recipients of knowledge transfer to having an active role in knowledge creation" (Fouché & Light, 2011, p. 28). Appreciative inquiry

resists hierarchies in problem solving, as this often excludes the groups and individuals most likely to be impacted by "the problem". Instead, the Hub would transform "those hierarchies into knowledge-rich, relationally inclusive, self-organizing enterprises", with an "openness to change" (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010) (see Figure 2.1). This leads to what Stavros & Torres (2022, p. 23) call, "conversations worth having", which "enliven people, strengthen relationships, unleash creativity, and move organizations forward fast". This dialogic Hub would need to be embedded in the praxis of the university. Thus, rather than being a reactive part of academic life, where academics reach out to external organisations, groups and individuals to support their research, the Hub would provide the space for regular café dialogue with local VCFSE organisations to identify what research needs to be carried out, or activities co-designed, to meet local needs.

1. Set the context.

2. Create hospitable space.

3. Explore questions that matter.

4. Encourage everyone's contributions.

5. Cross-pollinate and connect diverse perspectives.

6. Listen together for patterns, insights and deeper questions.

7. Harvest and share collective discoveries

Fig. 2.1 The key design principles of the World Café. Adapted from https://theworldcafe.com/key-concepts-resources/design-principles/. Figure created by the author (2025).

However, there are barriers to the Hub. Establishing regular cafes between university personnel, VCFSE practitioners, and local residents may be difficult initially with busy VCFSE practitioners and local residents who may be distanced from the work of the university. Local practitioners and residents therefore need to be central to the co-creation of the Hub. It would require the buy-in from the top management of the university, who would need to be persuaded of the benefits of such a strategy. Therefore, it may initially have to appeal to narrow measures of

"Employability". There is the issue of time availability of practitioners, especially those who work in smaller VCFSE organisations. And, finally, there is the issue of the availability and motivation of students. These kinds of activities may be more challenging for students with additional needs or caring responsibilities or those who lack the efficacy to put themselves forward. This inclusivity is crucial, as the lived experience of more disadvantaged students could help to form "stronger emotional connections" by the university and community members working alongside each other "in a stance of empathy and receptivity" (Zhang et al., 2014, p. 16 cited in Kaukko et al., 2020, p. 52).

To enhance the participation of students, assignment criteria could be built around meeting the needs of a local community. The dissertation module is one possibility. A research project that is based on "applied" research, rather than a literature search, opens up the potential for students to have a real impact on the community. In doing so, marvellous things happen. When the student is able to work closely with an external organisation, and to co-design a community project with individuals living with disadvantage, they have the opportunity to reconcile academic knowledge with lived experience. Such projects create a space for critical dialogue, helping "to challenge traditional positions and knowledge hierarchies" (Wallin, 2023, p. 69). Not only that, but this work leaves a legacy that benefits the community, as well as enhancing the student's knowledge about social inequality, reinforcing their position as a "knowledge producer" (Neary, 2016). Such projects can also be multi-disciplinary and multi-organisational. In the module Advocacy in Action, I provided students with the opportunity to coproduce a campaign with a local VCFSE organisation. Working alongside creative writing and media students, they participated in problem-solving activities to find ways to raise awareness of, and provide services for, local residents living with mental health issues and food insecurity. This multi-disciplinary working took the students out of their disciplinary comfort zones, generating the conditions for creative dialogue between voluntary sector staff and service users, and students from different disciplinary backgrounds. Learning environments such as these are more likely to produce graduates capable of working across organisational and disciplinary boundaries in order to solve complex societal problems (Brown et al., 2010), by helping us to

"think differently about what a university can be" (Wallin, 2023, p. 67).

However, as Sanne Akkerman and Arthur Bakker (2011, p. 150) point out, interdisciplinarity requires crossing disciplinary boundaries, and the "negotiation of meaning" through conversations that are unfamiliar and challenging. However, it does not demand an abandoning of discipline-specific knowledge and practices. As Ben Kotzee (2012, p. 175) states, there is value in recognising and embracing the idea that there is "differentiatedness of expertise", rather than privileging one understanding over another. Instead, what is required is a commitment to transformation in which something new is generated in the interchange of the existing practices, precisely by virtue of their differences. What is more, a World Café approach resists any power relationship between the HEI and the local community it resides in and instead recognises the value of the knowledge and expertise offered by all "researchers" in the room.

Conclusion

In the face of neo-liberalism, humanity is struggling. The wicked problems we face globally and nationally cannot be tackled by HEIs simply reproducing skills for the workplace. To disrupt the individualistic excesses of neo-liberalism, a critical approach to knowledge generation is long overdue. To challenge the deep social, political, and economic divisions in our society, we must confront the narrative that the current economic system serves us all. Instead, we need to develop a discourse and praxis to create an economy that values "social quality", reversing "the analysis of power from macrolevel national politics to the micro-level of the workplace" (Farnsworth, 2019, p. 82). To do this, HEIs need to be community-facing, and "more permeable to different sorts of interests" (Parker, 2023, p. 13). Students can play a critical role here. By coproducing research and learning activities with the local community, we are more likely to produce critical and innovative graduates, capable of working across disciplines, organisations, and communities to access the range of knowledge that is essential for addressing these wicked problems. This is also more likely to generate a reciprocal relationship between the university and the community, where different ways of "knowing"

are shared and valued. HEIs need to resist the defence of "disciplinary excellence" as a way of excluding non-academic knowledge, untouched by "the hurly-burly of the world" (Parker, 2023, p. 29).

Critical pedagogy aims to engage students, teachers, and the community in a dialogue to counter neo-liberal narratives, moving the focus away from individualism and self-reliance, to one of social justice, community, trust, and hope, underpinned by "a moral commitment to the public good [...] and the democratizing possibilities of education" (Waldon & Schoorman, 2023, p. 7). As such, educators, particularly in social sciences, need to lead a reimagining of education in order to "dream of a different society" (Wallin, 2023, p. 57). As Lori Ungemah writes (2022, p. 87), "who created those traditions anyways? Can't we question, manipulate, break them a bit?". The university needs to reconsider "where, when and who academics are and what they do" (Parker, 2023, p. 29), so that HEIs become "complex arenas of sociocultural reproduction and resistance" (Kitts, 2020, p. 85).

It may be, as Richard Brosio (2017) argues, that capitalism and democracy are incompatible, capitalism being reliant on social inequality to generate wealth for the few, whilst democracy is based on the desire for equality and citizenship. However, there is also a hope that HEIs can be critical in creating spaces for dialogue that imagine a different relationship between the economy and society, and the economy and democracy; where the economy serves the interests of society rather than the other way around. Freire locates the human being in a matrix of hope, believing that little stories can create "the context for people to question their everyday experience in order to recognise oppression as a political injustice rather than a personal failing" (Medwith, 2018, p. 33), and that those stories need "practice in order to become historical concreteness" (Freire, 1992, p. 8). Moving the focus of university praxis away from the market and towards the community, there is the potential to produce meaningful dialogue that questions the necessity of social inequality—and it is more likely to bring about social change. However, if we frame it as fulfilling the need to engage with employers, it could (ironically) tick the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) boxes for employability. What is not to like?

Steps toward hope

- Integrate critical pedagogy into curriculum design and teaching practices to foster a more hopeful, community-oriented university culture.

- Reframe the goals of courses and programmes beyond market-driven narratives, focusing instead on developing inclusive, critically reflexive graduates who question and challenge the status quo.

- Strengthen partnerships between universities and the VCFSE sector to ensure mutual benefit in both learning and research activities.

- Ensure that academic initiatives reflect the lived realities, needs, and perspectives of wider society—particularly underserved or marginalised communities.

- Work collectively to envision and build an education system that prioritises sustainability, hope, equity, and social justice.

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3. Serious fun: Reimagining Higher Education from a humane perspective

Sarah Honeychurch

Abstract

This chapter explores the idea that resilience in education is distinct from grit, emphasising that learning and teaching in Higher Education should be an enjoyable and engaging adventure. It advocates for the concept of "serious fun" in teaching and learning, where assessment serves as a tool for growth rather than a barrier. The Patchwork Text model is highlighted as an effective and supportive approach to assessment, fostering deeper student engagement. Ultimately, the chapter argues that even small changes in learning and teaching practices can significantly enhance experiences for both educators and learners—and create hope.

Keywords: resilience; serious fun; authentic assessment; authentic learning; intrinsic learning

Introducing serious fun

From the military school of life.—What does not kill me makes me stronger (Nietzsche, 2003, p. 33.).

How can we prepare our learners to cope with the trials and tribulations of modern life? And how do we ensure that we, and our colleagues, are in a fit state to support our learners? There is a school of thought that suggests that success in academia is a matter of the survival of the fittest. But does it need to be like that? Can we instead imagine a model of learning and teaching that allows learners and educators to thrive in academia, rather than merely to survive? Is teaching ourselves and our learners how to be resilient the answer? Well, maybe—but it will depend on what we mean by resilience.

Sometimes resilience is characterised as grit, which we might understand as the ability to grin and bear it despite all the pain and torment. When I think of this type of resilience, I am reminded of the Black Knight in the Monty Python film *The Holy Grail*, who refuses to accept that he has lost the fight despite having lost all of his limbs and his body (Gilliam & Jones, 1975). This is an extreme example of resilience—and I think that there is a type of educator who believes that because they went through such experiences, so must the modern generation of students. "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger", people often say, missing out the beginning of Nietzsche's aphorism. However, context matters. If we want to train soldiers, we might want to toughen them up, and we might see them as expendable cannon fodder. But what about in Higher Education (HE)? Is a military school of life a reality that we want for ourselves and for our learners? Do we want to burden students with learning experiences that leave them traumatised? Do we need to over-assess them so that they have no time to breathe and notice what they are learning? Must we overload our staff so that they feel burned out? This is not why we decided to be educators—it is not how we envisaged teaching and learning.

So how do we bring the passion, joy, and excitement of teaching and learning back into HE? We might not be able to sweep away all the atrocities that neo-liberalism has inflicted on academia, but we can introduce some moments of joy to nourish staff and students and to help them find resilience (not grit) to navigate HE. And, furthermore, we can make these interventions meaningful, authentic, and useful to those who participate.

A comment that gave me pause a long time ago, and that still comes to mind now, was that if universities were going to have a sink or swim

attitude to student success, then the least they could do was to ensure that there were life belts available. But how much better would it be if we didn't wait until our learners were in danger of sinking before we provided them with a lifeline?

Luckily, we can do this while holding onto the concept of resilience because there's another, more positive, meaning of the term. *The Chambers Dictionary* (n.d.) gives the following meaning of resilience: an object being "able to return quickly to its original shape or position after being bent, twisted, stretched, etc." and to be "elastic". And it is this ability to bounce back that I would like to explore. I am going to suggest that resilience is best characterised as an attitude to be developed rather than a character trait that some have, and others don't. And I'm further going to suggest that it's one that is better to develop in the company of others, because nothing happens in a vacuum.

So how do we help leaners to develop a resilient attitude which will help them not merely to survive HE, but to thrive? Well, in an ideal world we'd have plenty of time to spend nurturing our students and cheerleading them through to a successful graduation. But in the current reality of our overworked lives, what can we do to help? I think that doing a few small things can make a big difference—to us and to our learners, and can help us to develop a positive, resilient, attitude to life in academia. What I am going to suggest is not radical, and it doesn't require a huge amount of work to set up or support.

The first thing I want to suggest is that language matters. If we talk about students needing lifelines, we make it sound as if it is a matter of life or death—of a struggle with uncontrollable elements. And then that's how students will view it, and how we'll come to view it. But what about if we change the language to talk about learning as a series of interesting and exciting challenges/games/adventures that students can complete with support from us? This is a small change—a mere change in words—but I think that can help to make a big difference to all of us. It's much easier to believe that you can bounce back from an adventure than it is to think that you need to recover from a struggle.

However, I also think that it is important not to seem to trivialise the academic experiences of learners and educators in HE—especially when neo-liberal politicians already talk about some degrees as being "Mickey Mouse" subjects (Morrison, 2023). We need to ensure that

the importance of all academic learning is recognised. A phrase that I coined during my PhD thesis (Honeychurch, 2021) to describe how a group of connected learners learn with and from each other as they play with digital media was *serious fun*.

So, what do I mean by serious fun? Well, fairly obviously, I mean something that is serious—in the sense that learners and educators would recognise it as something that is meaningful and will contribute to learning—and something that is also enjoyable to participate in for both learners and educators. We need to distinguish between something that is merely enjoyable, and something that also has the potential to contribute to deep learning. John Stuart Mill (1991) talks about the difference between higher and lower pleasures, and this distinction is useful here. While playing pushpin (his example of a lower pleasure) might give pleasure at the time, this pleasure is transitory, and it will not lead to deep learning. Reading poetry (his example of a higher pleasure), or indeed reading Mill himself, can lead to deep learning, but it might not always be enjoyable. Reading Mill in the right setting, though, can be both serious and fun, and the trick is to create spaces and opportunities where that might happen. This all makes it sound very instrumental—but it need not be. The idea is for learners to want to engage in learning for its own sake because it is enjoyable. And one thing, in particular, is a huge barrier to learners enjoying their learning—and that's the stress caused by high-stakes, summative assessments when they lack proper support. It's hard for learners to relax enough to enjoy themselves when the threat of an unknown, possibly bad, grade hangs over their heads. And it is also hard for students to see the point of spending time on assignments that are not assessed when they are worried about those that are assessed.

In order to create a space for serious fun, then, another thing I think we need to do is to stop talking about summative versus formative assessment, because this way of talking often leads learners to assume that the former is important, and even necessary, while the latter is trivial and optional—whereas, as we know, this is just not true. Maybe there is a place for assessment that is merely summative (for example, quizzes to check that that students know necessary facts and how to do certain things), but apart from that surely all assessment should be formative in that it helps learners to learn? The next thing to do is to separate

the "summative" aspect needed for accreditation from the process of creating and submitting meaningful work and getting and giving feedback on it. A model that we might use here, though not the only one, is Patchwork Text (Akister et al., 2003). Here we can ask learners to submit pieces of work which can be graded, but it will only be later on that learners will need to submit them formally for adjudication and entry into official paperwork.

One example that I often mention when talking about this, because it us one of the best I have ever encountered, is DS106 (n.d.). One component of this is an assignment bank of activities categorised by varying levels of difficulty (from 1 star for easy to 5 for complicated), and into different types of activity (for example, audio or visual). The way this course works will vary depending on who is running it, so here I share my vision for how it could be used.

Learners are directed to the assignment bank and given a number of stars for their submission to add up to. They then complete the activities they choose (receiving assistance to learn any necessary digital skills) and submit them along with a reflective blog post. Their classmates (and even their tutor) will then comment to give feedback on each activity, and there is then time and space for revisions to be made. Getting things "wrong" in this scenario is not viewed as failure, and learners can afford to experiment and take risks because there is time and space to make revisions in light of feedback. Later in the course they will choose a selection of their creations that they are happy with (again to a specified number of stars) and resubmit these for formal grading. We can also think of ways of further destressing this process by making the grading even more transparent (for another version of this, see Honeychurch, 2023).

I think that the model of learning and assessment that I have outlined above is much more authentic, in a rich meaning of that term, than a model where learners submit their assignments for "anonymous" grading at the end of a course and receive feedback on that assignment; such feedback is also usually worthless at this stage as learners have already moved on to the next set of modules. Learners will be less likely to be stressed, as the grading is more transparent. Educators will not be hit with huge piles of assessments to make in short periods of time so they will find the process of grading assessments to be less stressful—

and even enjoyable. In addition, both learners and educators can enjoy the process of teaching and learning—they can teach and learn despite the necessary evils of summative assessment.

In this chapter so far, I have not suggested huge changes, but focused on proposing minor adjustments that individual educators can make. As Kant teaches us, ought implies can (Duignan, n.d.)—and so it is essential that any changes I recommend are within the capacity of those to whom I am making the suggestions. However, I am going to end with a more utopian checklist for HE. If I could wave a magic wand, then I would ensure that:

- Education is free (properly funded with non-repayable student grants).

- Teaching is highly regarded (on a par with research, or even more important).

- Education is an end in itself, not training for a neo-liberal state.

- Learning is authentic (in all senses of the term).

- Where classes are large, so are teaching teams.

- Assessment is transparent, and "similarity software" is never needed.

As individuals, we might not know how to change our educational institutions, or we might think that we don't have the power to effect meaningful change, but if we all work together, then maybe we can start to push back against the devastation that neo-liberalism is inflicting on academics and academia. Injecting moments of serious fun might not be a panacea, but it should help us and our learners to develop an attitude of resilience.

Steps towards hope

- Learning and teaching in Higher Education should be an enjoyable adventure.

- Teaching and learning can be serious fun—and our hopeful task.

- Assessment should help students to learn.

- Patchwork Text is a good model for supportive assessment—DS106 is offered as a model and a resource: https:// ds106.us/.

- Small changes to learning and teaching can make a big difference to learners—and educators.

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4. Fostering hope and humanity through transformative education: A call to reimagine mentorship

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Abstract

This chapter explores the experiences, perspectives, and challenges of both mentors and mentees in research mentorship. Based on a qualitative study at a leading medical institute in New Delhi, it examines the transformative potential of mentoring and its role in reshaping education, with hope. Participants highlighted the significance of reciprocal trust and respect in fostering effective mentorship relationships. Grounded in principles of inclusivity, choice, and shared growth, the study offers a pathway to enhancing mentorship as a meaningful and impactful—and hopeful—educational practice.

Keywords: mentor; mentee; medical education; research; mentoring; educational innovation

Introduction

The concept of mentorship has gained prominence as a powerful tool for personal and professional development, fostering a reciprocal

relationship between mentors and mentees. Defined as a guided process where experienced mentors facilitate the growth and exploration of younger—or less experienced—individuals, mentorship transcends conventional education by nurturing ideas, learning, and personal development (Chopin, 2002). This chapter reflects upon an innovative research endeavour conducted at Maulana Azad Medical College, a prestigious medical institute in New Delhi, underscoring the significance of a human-centred approach to education. By embracing mentorship, the chapter seeks to inspire a transformation in the educational narrative that prioritises hope, humanity, and holistic growth.

Stories of hope in mentorship

The mentor–mentee relationship serves as an embodiment of hope, where experienced mentors empower mentees to navigate their academic and personal journeys. This symbiotic connection transcends conventional pedagogical methods, enabling mentees to shape the trajectory of their learning while mentors guide and inspire them (Heeneman & de Grave, 2019; Kalbfleisch, 2002; Kalbfleisch & Davies, 1991). The research study conducted at the medical institute in New Delhi unveils narratives of hope and resilience, portraying mentorship as a catalyst for positive change. As mentors share their wisdom and experiences, they illuminate a path of growth for mentees, instilling a sense of optimism that transcends traditional boundaries.

A human-centric approach to education

At the core of reimagining education as a practice of hope lies a human-centric perspective that places the individual at the heart of the learning process. The mentor–mentee relationship epitomises this philosophy by fostering a supportive and empathetic environment. In contrast to conventional top-down education, mentorship recognises the unique strengths and needs of each mentee, empowering them to co-create their educational journey (Kalbfleisch, 2002). By prioritising human connections, trust, and mutual respect, mentorship embodies the essence of a humane education that nurtures not only intellectual growth but also emotional and social development.

Embracing inclusivity and choice

The explorative qualitative research study, which involved focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs), echoes the pressing need for inclusivity within mentorship programmes, transcending demographic considerations. The impact of age and gender on the mentor–mentee dynamic unveils the importance of embracing diversity and dismantling barriers that hinder effective communication and growth (Monarrez et al., 2020). A reimagined educational landscape is one that values and celebrates individual differences, recognising that mentorship flourishes when founded on a bedrock of inclusivity. Additionally, the study highlights the significance of choice-based approaches, advocating an educational framework that respects the autonomy of mentees in shaping their learning experiences (Sorkness et al., 2017). This choice-driven paradigm fosters a genuine passion for learning, rooted in personal interests and aspirations.

Tales of transformation in mentorship

The research initiative conducted at the medical institute illustrates the transformative potential of mentorship, particularly in the context of research endeavours. The informal mentorship programme, initiated during the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, exemplifies the adaptability and resilience inherent in human learning (Morales et al., 2017). Mentees engaged in collaborative online sessions, learning the basics of research methodology while mentors shared their expertise and guidance. Through this collaborative process, mentees not only acquired research skills but also embarked on a journey of self-discovery, evolving into lifelong learners with a newfound outlook.

Towards a reimagined educational landscape

As the mentorship narratives unfold, a vision for reimagined education emerges. The study's findings underscore the need for structured mentorship programmes that provide a supportive framework for both mentors and mentees (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). This structured approach, while nurturing meaningful connections, offers avenues

for formalised guidance and feedback, promoting consistent growth. However, the research participants caution against imposing a rigid structure, advocating a balance that maintains the authenticity and spontaneity of mentorship relationships (Straus et al., 2013). Choice-based workshops within undergraduate curricula are proposed as a means to introduce students to the principles of research and mentorship, allowing them to engage in a dynamic and interactive learning process.

Themes	Mentees views	Mentors' views
Role expectations	• Maintain a healthy personal and professional relationship. • Help the mentee grow and achieve their desired goals.	• Facilitating goal setting. • Provides guidance in achieving goals. • Acts as a role model.
Characteristics of the relationship	• Patience, motivation, and a humble attitude. • Age gap creates communication barriers.	• Honesty, real curiosity, focus, commitment to the goal, discipline, perseverance. • Age and gender cause a difference.
Barriers	• Cultural hierarchies. • Lack of structure. • Uncertainty about who should initiate relationship.	• Shortage of designated time and commitment to the relationship. • Feedback and uncertainty on the part of mentees. • Lack of formal structure.
Addressing the Barriers	• Trainings for mentors and mentees. • Informal gatherings once in a while.	• Icebreaking activities. • Informal meetings and interactions.

Table 4.1 Themes from focus group discussions and key informant interviews with mentees and mentors

Mentorship themes and educational innovation: Nurturing human connections and transformative learning

The insights derived from the focus group discussions and interviews involving both mentors and mentees reveal profound themes within the mentorship dynamic. Mentees express their aspirations for mentors to cultivate a balanced personal and professional relationship that fosters growth and goal achievement. In contrast, mentors emphasise their roles in steering mentees towards effective goal setting, serving as role models, and fostering virtues such as integrity, curiosity, and determination. Essential qualities for the mentor–mentee bond, including patience, motivation, and humility, emerge from mentors, while mentees stress the significance of mentors imparting expertise and wisdom.

Moreover, these dialogues uncover obstacles to successful mentorship, encompassing cultural hierarchies, age disparities, gender variances, and the absence of a formalised framework. Mentors identify constraints in terms of time availability and the uncertain outlook of mentees, whereas the latter pinpoint challenges in establishing a rapport due to the absence of structured introductions. Proposals to enhance mentorship programmes emerge from these discussions, including training sessions for mentors and mentees and periodic informal gatherings to fortify the mentor–mentee connection.

From an innovative perspective, the mentorship concept draws inspiration from the traditional Indian educational model, where the enduring bond between a student and a teacher (Guru) forms the bedrock of learning. The Guru–Shishya relation is long-term, often lifelong, and the Guru continuously shapes the mentee towards their life-purpose. The mentoring is not restricted to academic knowledge or professional skills and often encompasses life skills—social, cultural, and spiritual. Reflecting this ethos, mentorship in undergraduate medical studies mirrors the Guru–Shishya (mentor–mentee) relationship, with mentors guiding students through the rigours of medical training, fostering personal maturation, and cultivating research-oriented competencies. The mentor–mentee pairing, founded on mutual selection, is underpinned by a monitoring team, ensuring accountability and seamless interactions.

The operationalisation of this pioneering approach involves student cohorts overseen by faculty members with specialised insights into student research activities. The framework underscores personalised learning, tailoring the pace and content to suit the distinct needs of each mentor–mentee duo. A monitoring team comprising students and faculty supervises the allocation and functioning of mentor–mentee pairs, nurturing harmonious interactions.

Outcome evaluation centres on assessing accomplishments, constraints, and future trajectories for both mentors and mentees at each semester's culmination. Benchmarks span the initiation or completion of research projects, manuscript preparation and submission, in-service training in research methodologies, and potential roles in medical research. This model introduces an element of self-sufficiency, with senior mentees adopting roles as peer mentors, fostering a sense of ownership and evolution within the student community.

Reimagining education: Embracing the essence of mentorship

The thematic insights from the mentor-mentee discussions unveil a tapestry rich in mentorship nuances within the educational landscape. Mentors, leveraging their wisdom and experience, empower mentees not solely to define objectives, but to actualise them. Conversely, mentees' expectations of the mentorship transcend didacticism, encompassing emotional and personal dimensions of growth. The mentoring needs to be towards all-round personality development, where the mentor works on multiple dimensions of the student. For example, the mentor may help the mentee in their studies and skills training and may also expose them to research or humanitarian service or help them explore their hobbies.

These themes illuminate the path towards addressing barriers that hinder effective mentorship, particularly cultural hierarchies and the dearth of structured frameworks. The call for mentor and mentee training sessions underscores the commitment to enhancing guidance quality, while informal gatherings serve as catalysts for authentic relationship building that transcends mere formalities.

Innovation breathes fresh life into education, harmonising tradition with contemporary requisites. The timeless tradition of the Guru fostering the student finds resonance in the mentor–mentee relationship. This model champions a holistic educational approach, encapsulating personal evolution, skills acquisition, and research acumen. The collective efforts of students and faculty, guided by a monitoring team, safeguard the mentorship's role as a cornerstone of enrichment and engagement.

As this innovative paradigm takes root, its implementation through student cohorts and faculty oversight underscores the participatory nature of learning. The adaptability of pacing and content accommodates diverse learning styles, while the monitoring team ensures the authenticity and efficacy of the mentor–mentee dynamic.

Outcome assessment transcends mere metrics, delving into the comprehensive influence of mentorship. From research endeavours to manuscript drafting, each milestone signifies a stride towards comprehensive development. The model's focus on forthcoming roles in medical research underscores the mentorship's enduring influence, extending beyond the immediate learning environment.

In conclusion, the evolution of education mandates a firm embrace of mentorship's essence, nurturing connections that surpass conventional learning boundaries. The outlined themes and innovations underscore mentorship's power to transform, redefining education as a collaborative voyage rooted in human bonds and growth. By amalgamating tradition with innovation, mentorship emerges as a guiding light steering the educational panorama towards a hopeful era marked by enriched learning, empowered evolution, and enduring optimism.

Implementation

Creating a robust mentorship programme within institutions is crucial for fostering growth and development. Following the guidance of the World Health Organization's Multimodal Strategy for System Improvement, several recommendations emerge to establish an effective mentorship framework.

Firstly, clear guidelines should be formulated to define the roles and responsibilities of mentors and mentees. This clarity ensures that

both parties understand their obligations, enhancing accountability and facilitating a productive mentorship relationship. Also, a steering committee to oversee the whole process of mentoring and to troubleshoot any issues must be put in place.

Secondly, mentorship should be integrated into the institutional culture and recognised as a cornerstone of professional development. Incorporating mentorship within the institution's policies and practices elevates its significance, encouraging widespread participation and commitment. Regular workshops for both mentors and mentees, and also both together, should become a part of the academic and social calendar.

Regular training and professional development for mentors are pivotal to ensuring their effectiveness. Workshops and seminars can equip mentors with the necessary skills to provide guidance, constructive feedback, and support, enhancing the mentorship experience for mentees.

Moreover, mentorship programmes should emphasise diversity and inclusion. Ensuring a diverse pool of mentors can cater to the diverse needs and backgrounds of mentees, fostering a more enriching learning experience. Inclusivity guarantees that all individuals, regardless of gender, ethnicity, or other characteristics, have access to valuable mentorship opportunities.

Build it:
-- Formal structure for mentorship.
-- Steering committee to guide the mentorship program.

Teach it:
-- Integration of mentoring with regular curriculum.
-- Regular workshops for mentors and mentees as part of curriculum.

Check it:
-- Regular feedbacks from both mentees and mentors.
-- Grievance cell to address any grievance of the mentorship.

Sell it:
-- Recognition for work related to mentorship.
-- Disseminate information about mentorship program.

Live it:
-- Centralized mentor-mentee matching platform.
-- Mentorship to feature in directive principles of the institution.

Fig. 4.1 Mentorship programme (image created by the authors), CC BY-NC 4.0.

Furthermore, feedback mechanisms should be established to gauge the progress and effectiveness of the mentorship programme. Regular assessments and evaluations allow for continuous improvement and adaptation, ensuring the programme remains responsive to the evolving needs of participants.

Institutional support and resources are vital to the success of mentorship initiatives. Adequate funding, time allocation, and administrative backing demonstrate the institution's commitment to nurturing mentorship, encouraging faculty and staff to engage more actively.

Lastly, the mentorship programme should be well-publicised and accessible to all potential participants. Transparent communication about the programme's benefits, processes, and opportunities encourages enthusiastic involvement and widens its reach.

Incorporating these recommendations into the establishment of a mentorship programme within institutions aligns with the WHO Multimodal Strategy for System Improvement. By fostering a culture of mentorship that is inclusive, well-supported, and guided by clear guidelines, institutions can create an environment conducive to growth, learning, and the overall betterment of their members.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the research study conducted at the medical institute in New Delhi illuminates the transformative potential of mentorship in education. Through stories of hope, resilience, and growth, mentorship emerges as a cornerstone of a reimagined educational landscape that prioritises human connections, inclusivity, and choice. The narratives of mentors and mentees echo a call to action, urging educational institutions to embrace a human-centric approach that fosters empathy, collaboration, and holistic growth. As we embark on this journey of educational transformation, let us heed the lessons of mentorship and embrace a future where hope and humanity guide the path to a brighter, more compassionate, and enriched educational experience.

Regular training and professional development for mentors are pivotal to ensuring their effectiveness. Workshops and seminars can equip mentors with the necessary skills to provide guidance, constructive feedback, and support, enhancing the mentorship experience for mentees.

Steps toward hope

- Design mentorship programs that respect individual needs, preferences, and diverse learning styles.

- Cultivate mentor–mentee relationships grounded in mutual respect and trust to enhance the effectiveness of research mentorship.

- Provide regular, structured development opportunities for both mentors and mentees to build confidence, agency, and shared understanding.

- Position mentorship as a mutual journey of learning and development, benefitting both mentors and mentees.

- Embrace mentorship as a dynamic process that can reshape academic culture and contribute to a more hopeful, inclusive university environment.

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5. Creating hope through T-shaped values

Earle Abrahamson, Nina Namaste, Corinne A. Green, Mayi Arcellana-Panlilio, Lisa Hatfield, and Michelle J. Eady

Abstract

This chapter explores the concept of a "T-shaped community" in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), advocating for an intentional shift towards student-centred education in Higher Education. It argues that fostering learner ownership and problem-solving mindsets is essential for preparing students not only academically but also for life beyond university. Inspired by strong collegial support, the authors outline key values for embracing a more humanistic approach to teaching and learning, including context, valuing diverse experiences, an ethic of care, student collaboration, and research integration. Ultimately, the chapter envisions a hopeful and transformative future for Higher Education that transcends disciplinary and institutional boundaries.

Keywords: T-shaped students; values; hope; Higher Education; Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL)

Introduction

Education is constantly evolving and ever-changing, never more so than during and since the global pandemic. Moving from face-to-face, to online, to hybrid applications, and back again, the role of educators in this dynamic landscape extends far beyond the confines of traditional teaching.

At the heart of this evolving educational philosophy lies the recognition of the ever-changing needs and aspirations of learners. Our work involves thinking about the T-shaped student, a concept that highlights the integration of deep discipline-specific knowledge (the vertical stroke in the "T") and essential non-academic life skills (the horizontal bar), such as problem-solving, communication, and global citizenship (Eady et al., 2021). Influencing the T-shaped student is the equally important T-shaped educator, who not only possesses expertise in their subject area but also embodies the broader set of skills necessary to foster critical thinking, teamwork, and adaptability in students, creating a learning environment that nurtures both academic and personal growth (Eady et al., 2021). The T-shaped educator is not solely a teacher but integrates the principles of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) into their practice. SoTL involves a systematic and evidence-based inquiry into teaching and learning practices, aiming to improve student learning outcomes and enhance the overall effectiveness of educational approaches (Trigwell, 2013). By incorporating SoTL principles, the T-shaped educator ensures that their pedagogical decisions are grounded in research, leading to a continuous improvement in their teaching methods (Eady et al., 2021). Embracing context as a foundational element, these hopeful educators leverage their roles in various settings to drive positive change in learning and teaching practices. Their aim is to challenge conventions and celebrate diversity, creating inclusive spaces where students from different contexts and cultures can learn with and from one another.

Central to the T-shaped educator's approach is a profound appreciation for the experiences and perspectives that each student brings to the learning environment. By valuing and integrating students' diverse stories, educators actively question whose narratives are being represented. In doing so, they promote a critical approach

to education that fosters inclusivity and equity (Cook-Sather et al., 2021). The T-shaped educator operates with an ethic of care, viewing students not merely as recipients of knowledge but as individuals on a transformative journey of empowerment and social responsibility. These educators transcend disciplinary boundaries, imparting not only subject matter content but also metacognitive skills, critical thinking abilities, and global awareness (Eady et al., 2021). By nurturing a student-centred ecosystem of learning, they provide fertile ground for students to explore, question, and grow.

This chapter delves into the core principles of the T-shaped educator, shedding light on how these educators prioritise students' wellbeing, incorporate diverse perspectives, and integrate research with teaching. Through an exploration of their values, the cultivation of hope, and their dedication to inclusivity, the T-shaped educator emerges as a beacon of positive change, empowering students to become lifelong learners and contributors to a brighter and more interconnected future.

We, an international, interdisciplinary group of researchers, share our interpretations and reflections of how we embody the core principles of the T-shaped educator.

Context (reflection by Earle)

Context is not only central to the T-shaped educator's values but equally to the principles of SoTL as elucidated by Peter Felten (2013). Accordingly, SoTL inquiry is grounded in context, and it is this context that defines, differentiates, and determines future questions and methodologies. For me personally, context matters as I work in different roles, academic environments, and communities of practice. My current role—as a learning and teaching specialist in a large widening participation UK university—enables me to observe and influence learning and teaching practice across contexts and cultures. One of the greatest challenges for SoTL and the T-shaped educator is to consider how context provides a platform for challenging conventions and embracing diversity.

Pat Hutchings and Lee Shulman (1999) imply in their description of SoTL as an act of "going meta" that the lens of SoTL operates in a theoretical context. Their taxonomy of SoTL inquiries has become a touchstone for the field, organising the work of SoTL by the questions

it asks: "what works" questions "seeking evidence about the relative effectiveness of different approaches"; "what is" questions "describing what it looks like"; and "visions of the possible" questions framing learning experiences in new or different ways to change or enhance practice (Hutchings & Shulman, 1999, p. 13). This taxonomy of questions is central to T-shaped education in that it connects the challenges and principles of doing SoTL in context. T-shaped educators seek not to differentiate but rather to diversify how they impact colleagues, students, and stakeholders from different contexts, communities, and cultures by creating an inclusive environment for learning with and from one another.

Valuing peoples' experiences and perspectives (reflection by Lisa)

The T-shaped educator centres learners' previous experiences and knowledge, seeing these as valuable contributions to current learning. In addition to asking, "What do my students need to know?" the T-shaped educator also asks, "What experiences and thus perspectives do my students bring to our context, and how can that contribute to our current conversation?" When we integrate students' stories and view them as assets, we are actively questioning whose stories are being told. This promotes a critical approach to our work, which promotes inclusivity.

A Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Anti-racist (DEIA) frame needs to permeate all that we do. Wondering first what assumptions, and thus, perspectives, people bring to the learning situation, which have been moulded by their experiences, creates a basis for such a frame. This is where I start when working with faculty as the director of the Teaching and Learning Center at Oregon Health & Science University, an academic health centre in the Pacific Northwest, United States.

Once I learn about these perspectives, we then can talk about what resources may be available and scaffolded to meet their goals. For example, our centre's larger umbrella unit houses FREE (Foster Respectful and Equitable Education, n.d.), which partners closely with schools and programmes to provide a variety of workshops and training for inclusive teaching. Our centre is co-hosting a monthly book club this year to discuss *Reframing Assessment to Center Equity: Theories,*

Models, and Practices (Henning et al., 2022). This is grounding our work not only with classroom assessment but also with annual programme assessment, which is needed for institutional accreditation. Lastly, we are proud of our digital Accessibility Resource Center (2023), which provides faculty with directions for creating a digitally inclusive environment. Digitally accessible documents and environments have been especially foregrounded since we all went remote in 2020, though certainly this has always been needed. Rather than a reactive approach to digital accessibility, we promote the principles of Universal Design for Learning (CAST, 2023).

These and other resources are valuable; however, they are not nearly as meaningful unless we first pause and ask where our learner is and how their experiences can inform and be informed by them.

Ethic of care (reflection by Nina)

T-shaped educators focus on "educating for empowerment, emancipation, and social responsibility" (Kreber, 2005, p. 402), which necessitates transformative-based teaching and a deep ethic of care. We transcend disciplinary boundaries and teach transferrable skills and competencies—metacognitive skills, deep critical thinking skills, and global learning, to name a few. We attend to the holistic development of learners, and leverage evidence-based, effective pedagogies to allow them to apply and integrate their learning, in and out of the classroom. We view and approach our students as "humans in development", and therefore the process of learning and growing is paramount.

For me, an encompassing ethic of care towards my students is always rooted in a profound acknowledgement and gratitude of the utter privilege that it is to guide and witness learners' development. I am shaping future travellers on the journey of life-long learning, which is a joy, but I also recognise the great responsibility inherent in such a privilege. If I am truly to educate for empowerment, emancipation, and social responsibility then I must effectively foster and structure deep, transformative learning opportunities. To do so, I treat each one of my courses as full immersion into an ecosystem of learning that simultaneously challenges and supports learners.

If my students are to engage with difference, grapple with ideas that challenge their beliefs, understand underlying causes, question the status quo, elucidate their own and cultural value systems, view their role in the success of the whole (group), and build bridges with others, then the classroom experience must be truly student-centred. At the heart of this ecosystem is constructing a polyvocal, democratic community where knowledge, skills, and competencies are co-created and practised in an environment that fosters curiosity and intellectual risk-taking.

Collaborative learning projects build a sense of responsibility towards one's own and others' learning. Constant critical reflective writing enables students to explore the influence of identity on their own (and others') learning processes. Close reading and detailed observations build attention skills, while student-led discussion activities build leadership skills. Integrative learning portfolios and non-traditional grading practices allow students to provide evidence-based explanations of their growth. All this is a demanding task each and every day—while I provide the boundaries on the map, so to speak, I don't dictate the paths students take, which requires me to relinquish control, be fully present, and provide formative feedback to constantly push students' learning further. It is worth it because the ecosystem of immersive, holistic, collective learning helps build the transferable skills necessary for students to live engaged, relationship-rich, growth- and change-oriented lives. By immersing myself in the "messiness" and challenge of non-linear paths so that students become their best selves, I, too, fuel the process of my own growth, as a pedagogue and person.

Students as contributors: Co-learning and reciprocal learning (reflection by Mayi)

The T-shaped educator recognises the essential role played by students as partners in their own learning, acting as collaborators with their instructor and their peers in understanding the material to be able to apply newly gleaned meaning in novel situations. Designing one's course to incorporate group work provides a learning environment that fosters the collaborative construction of knowledge.

Incorporating group work can promote authentic learning as it provides tasks and environments that simulate how learning is used and applied in the real world. Since 2011, I have been involved in the mentorship and supervision of students on the University of Calgary iGEM (international Genetically Engineered Machines) team. Over a ten-month period, undergraduate students from faculties across campus work together to develop and execute a project that addresses a real-world problem using the tools and approaches of synthetic biology. The students then present their project in competition against teams from around the world.

To support these multi-disciplinary teams, I've developed courses to address their needs: to learn the subject matter content of synthetic biology and their applications in different contexts (constituting the vertical bar of the T-shaped learner), and to learn vital skills of communication, collaboration, and leadership (the horizontal bar). The participation of students as co-creators and co-developers has always been an underlying design principle for these courses, where students from previous years return to mentor and teach the new team. Thus, these "returners" develop and deliver lectures, design learning activities and assignments, and even give feedback on student work. Through a process of critical reflection, we assess and reassess how we offer these courses, gaining insights not only from our own observations, but also from the students' reflections.

Research as integral, not extra (reflection by Corinne)

A T-shaped SoTL educator takes a researcher mentality to their teaching, thinking critically about the "big" questions such as "the larger curriculum goals and purposes of college and university undergraduate education… What students learn, and why" (Kreber, 2005, p. 402). These educators refuse to perpetuate what John Warner (2020, p. 207) calls "teaching 'folklore', the practices handed down instructor to instructor … doing what had been done unto me, no matter whether I thought it was effective". Instead, they draw upon others' SoTL findings and consider how these can be translated into their context and combined with their own observations to enable evidence-based decisions.

In my previous role as a teacher educator (at an Australian university), I explored some of these big questions and teaching folklore in my own practices through SoTL research projects. For example, in one of the teacher education courses that Michelle and I taught, we noticed that students were not interacting with the online materials provided and that attendance for the in-person weekly lectures was low. Working with colleagues with expertise in learning analytics and educational design, we restructured the course around fortnightly online modules consisting of slow-release hurdle tasks requiring students to interact with readings, short video lectures, and quizzes. By exploring the academic literature on using learning analytics to inform learning design and analysing data from our student cohorts, we used SoTL research to enhance the teaching and learning experiences for our students (Eady et al., 2022).

My current role as an academic developer (at a different Australian university) has provided new opportunities to come alongside educators from across the university and help them to see the possibilities for integrating "research and teaching [with] both viewed as activities where individuals and groups negotiate meanings, building knowledge within a social context" (Brew, 2012, p. 109). My task in this space is frequently to be a critical friend, prompting educators with questions like those asked by Dan Bernstein and Randy Bass (2005, p. 39): "How did they know that their students were learning? Did the students' learning promise to last? What did teachers really know about the processes of their students' learning?". Exploring these questions with curiosity is an exciting invitation for educators to research their own teaching and strive to be intentional with their teaching practices.

Conclusion

The concept of the T-shaped educator represents a hopeful and powerful paradigm shift, embodying a holistic approach that transcends traditional pedagogy. Throughout this chapter, we have explored the key principles and values that define the T-shaped educator and their transformative impact on the learning landscape. As an agent of change, the T-shaped educator embraces this reality, acknowledging the importance of adapting to diverse contexts and student populations. Central to the ethos of the T-shaped educator is a genuine appreciation for the rich tapestry of experiences and perspectives that students bring to their educational journey.

This means that at the core of the T-shaped educator's approach

lies an unwavering ethic of care. Recognising students as "humans in development", these educators prioritise the holistic growth and empowerment of their learners. By transcending disciplinary boundaries and imparting transferable skills, such as critical thinking, metacognition, and global awareness, they equip students with the tools they need to thrive in an ever-changing world. Recognising and fostering students as partners in their education, involved in the co-creation of curricula and even delivery, emphasises the importance of agency in one's formation.

Furthermore, the T-shaped educator integrates research and teaching, viewing both as interconnected pursuits that enrich and inform one another. By adopting evidence-based practices and continuously refining their teaching methods, these educators demonstrate a commitment to lifelong learning and a dedication to providing the best educational experience for their students.

As we reflect on the profound impact of T-shaped educators, we recognise the vital role they play in shaping the future of Higher Education. By instilling values, nurturing hope, and fostering inclusivity, they inspire students to become active contributors to a more interconnected, compassionate and hopeful world. It is through their unwavering dedication that the T-shaped educator enriches the lives of countless learners, leaving an indelible mark on the landscape of Higher Education and the future of our society. T-shaped educators' guidance moves us closer to a future where education is a powerful force driving positive change, empowerment, and hope.

Steps toward hope

- Encourage interdisciplinary collaboration and holistic student development—promote a T-shaped education community.

- Shift towards a more humanistic and humane perspective in Higher Education.

- Balance academic preparation with life skills development.

- Create opportunities for students to take ownership of their learning.

- Embrace curiosity about what you, and your learners, are doing and explore why.

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6. The human and nothing but the whole human:
With head, heart, and hand

Nathalie Tasler

Abstract

This chapter emphasises the central role of both educators and learners in the educational process, highlighting that teaching is deeply context dependent. It argues that educators require as much care and support as their students, as both are engaged in ongoing identity negotiations through learning and teaching. The concept of unconditional positive (self)-regard is proposed as a valuable framework for fostering a supportive and empathetic environment in Higher Education. By integrating this concept, educators can create a nurturing space that encourages growth, self-reflection, and mutual respect, ultimately enriching the learning experience for all involved.

Keywords: Higher Education; teaching; wellbeing; coaching; unconditional positive regard

Introduction

I am a senior lecturer in academic and digital development (also known as faculty or learning development), so my students are also my

colleagues and peers. During the last years, it seemed as if my focus of teaching in the Postgraduate Certificate and Master's in Academic Practice went more and more towards supporting students to make it through the process rather than students having the headspace for playful experimentation, which initiated my writing of this chapter.

I propose that pedagogies of hope, for a more humane future of Higher Education, entail that we need to work on our own development as educators, to embark on the journey towards unconditional positive self-regard. This in turn will have positive impact on how we interact with, and support, our learners (Wilkins, 2000).

This chapter's structure is based on the three domains the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) considers as cutting across all the key competencies they propose within Education for Sustainable Development: the cognitive (head), socio-emotional (heart), and behavioural domains (hand) (UNESCO, 2017). Each section explores themes that are directly affecting us as educators in Higher Education. Followed by prompts, the chapter is a self-coaching guide offering incentives for reflections (Denkanstöße) aiming to help you establish a post-pandemic equilibrium. While I am working in the UK context, this is very likely to ring true for colleagues in other countries.

Head—cognitive foundations

> Learning is part of human existence and takes place always and everywhere (trans. from Goll, 2021, p. 168).

Numerous authors (e.g., Dougall et al., 2021; Hadjisolomou et al., 2022; Imad, 2021; Khattar et al., 2020) have been addressing the increased stressors experienced during the last years in Higher Education both for students (Maguire & Cameron, 2021) and staff (Imad, 2021). Liz Morrish (2019), focusing on the UK, and Angel Urbina-Garcia (2020), exploring English language publications, demonstrated that the state of play with regard to poor mental health of faculty already preceded the impact of the pandemic, showing increasing cases of mental health issues. While colleagues in Hungary didn't find a significant decrease in mental health in faculty through the pandemic, they still saw a need "to raise teachers' psychological wellbeing by more efficient mobilisation of

their internal resources" (Sipeki et al., 2022, p. 8). This recommendation constitutes a good segue into the chapter.

Experientially the need for psychological wellbeing has become more immediate across my networks, although a systematic analysis is still required. Mays Imad (2021), exploring the issues from the faculty development perspective, points out that faculty members likely not only experience traumatic stress directly but also secondary traumatic stress through their students. They elaborate as follows:

> Our work during this time of burnout and existential anxiety is necessarily emotional. In our society in general, and in higher education in particular, we often view emotions as the antithesis of reason. Yet the role of emotions in the human experience, including learning and healing, is indispensable (Damasio, 2000) (Imad, 2021, p. 13).

One argument that resonates strongly is that the nature of university work is never finished and constantly evolves and moves. Mike Thomas (2019) stresses that:

> It has always been like this, but that incessant drive should be for real improvement and not artificial measures which compromise the mental wellbeing of colleagues (Thomas, 2019 in Morrish, 2019, p. 5).

I think part of this incessant drive sits not just within institutional structures but is as much an integral part of our professional identities (Macfarlane, 2016; Kalfa et al., 2018; Warren, 2018). Deliberately becoming aware of these mechanisms in which we perpetuate structures over agency of our work might be a useful practice for a more balanced future.

I have been pondering lately how to find our equilibrium again. Our pre-pandemic workloads not only increased due to ever-growing student numbers (Morrish, 2019), but also in terms of other aspects of workload such as pastoral care (Imad, 2021).

Additionally, much of the online presence from lockdown remains, even as we return to in-classroom teaching. So, the workload has increased due to maintaining both the pre-pandemic physical presence and the pandemic digital presence. How have many of us had time to reflect on which areas of physical presence and which areas of digital presence are the most effective to keep and which ones we should let go of, during the last years of reactive firefighting?

This is your official space to think about this. Even if you just take five minutes to write down a few bullet points in response to any of these prompts, it's a valuable start.

Points for reflection

- Where am I at, right now?
  - What are my concerns? What are my joys?
  - What can I let go? What should I keep?
  - Who has my corner?
- What do I have control of? For instance:
  - How I interact with my learners.
  - How I plan my teaching.
  - Who I work on projects with.
- Can I sit with the idea that there is no such thing as catching up?
  - How does this feel?
  - How can I work with this concept?

Now that we have had some time to think about where we are, we can begin exploring where we want to go.

Hand—what is it you do?

In many UK Higher Education institutions, providing evidence of the impact of our teaching practice is an integral part of career development and progression, and is often also a component of the overall assessment of an institution (for example, through initiatives like the Teaching Excellence Framework). Proving the impact of our teaching remains difficult, and additionally collecting the evidence and writing about teaching often falls behind the immediate demands of day-to-day teaching (Martin et al., 2021; Negretti et al., 2022).

Does the following sentence sound familiar?

I only need a day or half a day to sit down and work on this.

And does the subsequent, longed-for day or half-day then end up looking something like: working through an email backlog, having an inquiry come in that needs a response, being stuck getting my head around where I stopped last time and where I should pick up again, meeting a colleague I have meant to catch up with for months, and eventually not being able to focus on writing?

This is where I would like to propose the idea of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), one of the engagements by which we evidence our teaching practice and its impact, as (daily) practice (Cuthbert et al., 2021) to you. Often, SoTL is approached in a pragmatic circle of:

1. run teaching intervention,

2. collect data about it,

3. analyse,

4. publish,

5. move on.

While there is nothing inherently wrong with approaching SoTL as a research process (Tasler, 2022), there is also more to SoTL than that. Some colleagues offer the helpful perspective of either "being SoTL" or "becoming SoTL" (reach out to Dr Anne Tierney[1] or Dr Sarah Honeychurch[2] for further discussion) as this reflects the dimension of SoTL as not only reflexive practice but as intentional practice. In this framework, the focus is not on squeezing in a research-style project, but on embedding the evidence of our teaching practice and its impact as an integral part of being an educator.

So, what does this mean?

I present the following proposition: SoTL is an act of self-care. Now let's get the cynical part out of the way first: if you are in a teaching-focused role, then it is very likely in many of the English-speaking countries that SoTL is part of your career progression evidence. That is one aspect. The other aspect is that teaching is highly contextual and personal, and it

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1   See https://www.linkedin.com/in/anne-tierney-67756317/
2   See https://www.linkedin.com/in/sarah-honeychurch/

is identity negotiation; building in regular (if not daily) reflections on our teaching practice aides us to develop our tacit knowledge, makes us more confident as educators, and contributes to building this body of evidence we need for promotion or fellowship applications. In other words, SoTL becomes self-care.

How does this sound?

- I am scrolling through social media of my choice (Mastodon or Threads) where I follow a whole host of other educators, learned societies, or associations, and I come across an article or resource that informs my thinking about teaching. I keep a note of it.

- I have a chat with a colleague and one thing leads to another and we bounce ideas about a teaching dilemma; I take notes of the date, time, colleague's name and the idea that emerged from this conversation.

- I read a scholarly publication, or research, on teaching and learning and it informs my thinking. I keep a record of this.

- Something happens during a lecture, lab, workshop, or seminar. Either I notice something interesting, something challenging, or something joyful. I take note of this.

All of this is building a body of evidence of our teaching practice and the influences that inform our decision making.

Can you still remember when you first began including memes in your teaching resources? I do, because I engage in SoTL as practice and share my "working out loud" pieces (Tasler, 2012). Use any tool that works for you: a note-taking app, a simple text document, spreadsheet, database, or RSS collator. But be deliberate (see further Garfield, 2018, on the "working out loud" movement).

The next step is critical engagement with these resources. Maybe one event in your classroom was so significant you want to publish a thought or ideas paper, or a blog post. For example, I had a very positive experience with an ad hoc improvisation and simply shared it (Tasler, 2023). That is engaging in scholarship, as part of the overall SoTL process. While this is not evidence of the impact of your teaching practice, it is evidence of your practice, which is a core part for most

fellowship applications (Kern et al., 2015). Additionally, when sharing these reflections openly, there will be colleagues picking them up and trying them out themselves, and letting you know about it, which then turns into evidence of impact (Kim et al., 2021; Martinovic et al., 2022).

The more evidence you collect, the easier it will be to eventually write a peer-reviewed publication. Consider thinking about writing as a form of inquiry (Healey et al., 2020; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). You will never have a blank page to start from again. Additionally, even the brief notes, thoughts, and ideas you keep will help you develop your writing voice for SoTL, which can be very challenging for colleagues from non-cognate disciplines. A good starting point is to explore how your own experiences are reflected in publications about learning and teaching in Higher Education. Have others experienced similar things? Would a thought or ideas paper and publication help you formulate this more clearly and establish a need for a project in which you collect data to answer questions?

When we set out on our career-long, life-wide quest of self-emergence as educators (teachers), reflexive practice is an integral part of teaching—and of being SoTL. And keeping notes, evidencing this journey, is an act of self-care as it ultimately feeds into our process of becoming SoTL.

We established our current position in the previous section. Now, by considering SoTL as practice, we can reflect on where we want to go.

Points for reflection

Pragmatic points for reflection:

- What is my next goal/dream?
- Where is my wiggle room to engage in daily practice?
- How do I prioritise?
- What would happen if I were to engage in regular SoTL practice?
- What would happen if I didn't?

Value points for reflection:

- What are my values?

- Are they my own, or are they external values?

- Whose expectation am I fulfilling here?

- How do they relate to my work?

- Can they inform which projects to keep and which ones to let go off?

- Set yourself timeframes within which to review your values and goals.

Hopefully by now we have established, at least to some degree, our starting position and future objectives; now comes the most difficult part—accepting that we deserve the good stuff.

Heart—unconditional positive (self)-regard

Teaching is about you. The main factor influencing your students' learning is you as the educator and how you relate to your learners. Teaching as identity negotiation embodies complex dimensions of human experience. Michalinos Zembylas (2007) captures this by proposing an extension of the concepts of pedagogical content knowledge and emotional knowledge traditionally held by teachers (educators). He introduces the concept of knowledge ecology, which involves multiple agents, such as learners and places (see also Tasler & Dale, 2021), and that centres on the interaction between teachers and learners. The knowledge ecology is defined as:

> a system consisting of many sources and forms of knowledge in a symbiotic relationship: content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, curriculum knowledge, knowledge of learners, emotional knowledge, knowledge of educational values and goals and so on (Zembylas, 2007, p. 356).

One could argue that a condition for self-acceptance is that of self-understanding, which Geert Kelchterman (2009, p. 261) defines as an ongoing process of integrating experiences and their impact into the negotiation of self-identity. The author argues that the "'self' pervades all aspects of teaching" (Kelchterman, 2009, p. 263) and thus is an integral part of a teacher's interpretative framework, and therefore part of SoTL.

Kelchterman (2009, p. 257) proposes the following statement to abstract: "Who I am in how I teach is the message". This links well to Sylvana Dietel's (2013) viewpoint that education aimed at self-observation and self-reflection creates a deeper understanding of our students—while also helping us appreciate and understand how our own projections may shape how we interpret the student's resistance to learning. According to Dietel (2013), this skill can reduce unnecessary stress in teaching situations by allowing us to differentiate between our inner life and outside influences. Jerold D. Bozarth's (1998) view supports this idea, explaining that understanding where we might project on to the other (learner, colleague) does help us to keep meeting others with unconditional positive regard, recognising our shared humanity. According to Jerold D Bozarth (1998), meeting the other with "unconditional positive regard" enables them to access their self-actualisation.

What is unconditional positive regard?

It doesn't mean we have to like everyone! Liking is based on shared values and ideas. Unconditional positive regard is about meeting the other with unconditional respect and the knowledge of our shared humanity (Bernard, 2013; Wilkins, 2000). This means we accept our emotional responses towards another person as a reflection of our selves and recognise that everyone can only act according to their current ability and skills. And while we may not be keen on what is brought to us, and need to set boundaries, we still respect and care for the other as a human being. For instance, we might get a harshly formulated email from a colleague, and recognise that this does not reflect the colleague as a person, but their current state of mind, such as being stressed etc. So, do we respond in kind, or do we respond kindly?

The other aspect enabling us to meet our learners with unconditional positive regard, is to extend this to ourselves and exercise unconditional positive self-regard. I know, I waited until the end for the most challenging aspect of these deliberations! We ought to not judge ourselves based on the performative tenets of our academic roles, but value ourselves merely for being. Albert Ellis (2013) argued that, since no one is perfect, it would be impractical to solely base our self-worth on how we performed in our roles. Instead, we should recognise the inherent value of our life.

And this is why unconditional positive (self)-regard is so important. From promotion criteria to key performance indicators (KPIs), our professional development is a performative measure. However, our identities are complex and often intrinsically linked to our work (Bennett et al., 2016)—we see ourselves as scientists, scholars, teachers, educators, researchers, and more. The performative aspects we need to evidence can seem to stand in contradiction to our values. Meeting our selves, as well as our learners and colleagues, with unconditional positive regard creates space within the performative structures for shared humanity.

Points for reflection

- Has a student interaction ever challenged you?

- Have you ever spent days pondering over student feedback you got for your course evaluation?

- What do you think were the actual drivers for that feedback or interaction?[3]

  ○ What are the conditions of worth[4] in your work environment?

- How do your values match with these conditions?

- How could you exercise unconditional positive self-regard?

Steps toward hope

- The educator needs as much care as the learner—with the human and humanity taking centre stage in education as hopeful practice.

- Unconditional positive (self)-regard is a useful concept to foster in Higher Education teaching—and can be deepened by reflective and reflexive practice that also facilitates meaningful entry into SoTL.

- Download an open-access copy of the Scholar's Career Reflection Workbook here to aid reflection and build positive (self)-regard: https://doi.org/10.25416/NTR.24542482

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3   For an easy first venture into exploring judgement biases, see Silva, 2024.
4   See Joseph, 2014.

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7. Becoming wildly nomadic with the Nomadic Detective Agency-Assemblage

Mark Ingham

Abstract

This experimental "unessay" explores the concept of becoming wildly nomadic as a lens for envisioning hopeful futures in creative Higher Education. Structured as a play, each "act" is inspired by a different plateau from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's 1980 book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. The narrative employs the fictional Nomadic Detective Agency-Assemblage (NDA-A) as a creative device to navigate the philosophical ideas within *A Thousand Plateaus* and to rethink and reimagine education more hopefully. Through its experimental form, this work aims to evoke joyful and just approaches to developing new educational practices, policies, and pedagogies for the universities of the future. By emphasising collective action and envisioning transformative possibilities, it seeks to inspire ways to collaboratively build a more just and equitable educational landscape for all.

Keywords: assemblage; rhizomatic; agency; detective; joyful; education; encounters

Prologues

In this experimental chapter, or perhaps it should be called an experimental "unessay" (Walden, 2022), my aim is to bring to life the Nomadic Detective Agency-Assemblage[1] (NDA-A). This is a multiplicity, a decentred, and rhizomatic, collective post-human organism that researches possible educational futures. The NDA-A, in all its collective forms (it is an "it" and a "they"), takes its starting points, or lines of flight, from the works of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (D&G) and especially their jointly constructed book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (2005), ATP for short. I set the NDA-A off on its adventure by asking it to look at the concept of *becoming wildly nomadic* (bwn) as a possible way of navigating their journey. Each act and scene starts from a reading of one of the plateaus within the construction of *A Thousand Plateaus*.

The NDA-A's initial foraging will be unsteady and stuttering, and at times blundering. These are not hindrances or negatives. I see their post-human senses being opened and becoming with the world, as positive ways of *joyfully encountering* (Spinoza, 2017; Thanem & Wallenberg, 2015) and exploring educational futures. With this in mind, I have asked the NDA-A, in this instance, to write down their thoughts in the form of fictional crime stories. For me, this chimes with Deleuze and Guattari's thinking about writing about theoretical subjects in different genres (Borg, 2015). This is to help take a fresh view on concepts that are under scrutiny and create new ones that enable, in this case, students-yet-to-come to have a more hopeful and enjoyable creative future.

This unessay will start with three fictional crime stories that serve as introductions to the Nomadic Detective Agency-Assemblage. It was given the idea of *becoming wildly nomadic* (bwn) in education as a means of transcending traditional boundaries and embracing exploration, adaptability, and resistance. This idea involves moving away from fixed notions of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment and embracing a fluid and flexible approach to learning.

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1   "An assemblage is a whole that is formed from the interconnectivity and flows between constituent parts—a socio-spatial cluster of interconnections wherein the identities and functions of both parts and wholes emerge from the flows between them" (Dovey, 2013, p. 131).

Characters: The Nomadic Detective Agency-Assemblage: Before they reformed in their present state (having existed in many forms before, being Orlandoesque and Dr Whoish) they absorbed plateau "2. 1914: One or Several Wolves?", from *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, pp. 26–38). They understood that "There are only multiplicities of multiplicities forming a single *assemblage*, operating in the same *assemblage*: packs in masses and masses in packs" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 34). And "To be fully a part of the crowd and at the same time completely outside it, removed from it: to be on the edge, to take a walk like Virginia Woolf…" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 29). They were forever becoming multiple, being nomadic, and amongst other personas, fictional detectives, philosophers, educational thinkers, post-humanists and artists. As the NDA-A were a rhizomatic collective of thinkers, investigators, and visionaries, their purpose was not to solve mysteries in the conventional sense; rather they embarked on a quest to envision possible futures of education.

Act 1. One of Several. The first stirrings of the Nomadic Detective Agency-Assemblage

They thought they would start their investigations with a cliched idea of the "academy" and work from there to see if they could find other more experimental and radical concepts of what it could be. Their mandate was expansive, reaching beyond traditional "creative" domains such as art and design to embrace all subjects that harboured potential for creative or critical thought.

Scene 1: Becoming "2. 1914: One or Several Wolves?" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, pp. 26–38).

They thought, "It seemed like a nice neighbourhood to have bad habits in" (Chandler, 1939, p. 7).

On first inspection they found that in certain quarters the narrow alleyways of academia bustled with a pedagogical frenzy. The looming towers of ivory, glass, and mortar housed not just educators and students, but also ideas—some venerable, others revolutionary, all fervently quarrelling for space and prominence. It was in this world, teeming with creative vitality and intellectual strife, that the Nomadic Detective Agency-Assemblage (NDA-A) had been born. An organisation destined

to chart new paths of scholastic exploration. They knew at once they were not alone. They found that there were many like them, some in disguise and some in plain view, who wanted to challenge the status quo, and create new ways of thinking collaboratively about education and the pedagogies that helped make it function imaginatively. As they wrote their first jumbled notes, the first lines of novels by Marlon James and Oyinkan Braithwaite rang out in their heads. "*Listen*. Dead people never stop talking" (James, 2014, p. 1), and there was one voice that haunted them the most, Ayoola's. She had summoned them with these words: "Korede, I killed him" (Braithwaite, 2018, p. 1). She told them she had left a Body without Organs (BwO) (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, pp. 149–166) for them to find. They realised the gravity of the task, but this only pulled them further towards concepts they were excited to explore.

It was a dark and stormy night when the investigators at the NDA-A received an intriguing message. The academic volume, *Stories of Hope: Reimagining Education*, was seeking short papers that approached education from a human perspective, and to reimagine education. As a post-human organisation this piqued their curiosity. They had long observed the shortcomings of parts of traditional education systems. The invitation sought practical solutions, insights, and examples from a range of perspectives, including complexity theory and for them hopefully nomadic thinking. They sensed an opportunity to bring joy and justice to the educational landscape.

Scene 2: Becoming "6. November 28, 1947: How Do You Make Yourself a Body Without Organs?" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, pp. 149–166).

As they wanted to be a non-hierarchical collective, they thought the idea of a Body without Organs (BwO) would help them become even more rhizomatically collaborative. This, they thought, would help them find radically hopeful and joyful solutions to the stagnation they felt creative education found itself in at present. Through their initial investigations they came to understand that "The body without organs is not a dead body but a living body all the more alive and teeming once it has blown apart the organism and its organisation" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2015, p. 28).

After this first Deleuzoguattarian[2] encounter, the NDA-A aspired to be "rhizomatic thinkers"—interconnected, non-hierarchical, and averse to the rigidity of traditional structures. They saw themselves as a post-human organisation/organism and tried to function as a BwO (Deleuze & Guattari, 2015, pp. 149–166). The NDA-A's modus operandi was steeped in the intriguing narrative of a crime fiction tale. An unlikely pairing, perhaps, but one that served the agency/assemblage's cause in more ways than one. They hummed passages from ATP in order to understand their own existence and to keep them from falling into the traps that hierarchies often encouraged. "It is not a question of experiencing desire as an internal lack, nor of delaying pleasure in order to produce a kind of externalizable surplus value, but instead of constituting an intensive body without organs ..." (Deleuze & Guattari, 2015, p. 157).

In their initial days, the NDA-A's explorations were hesitant and clumsy. They stumbled and faltered, stuttering like an infant taking their first steps. However, they did not view these initial fumblings as setbacks. They were instead signs of progress, evidence of senses being awakened and minds aligning with the world. These were the growing pains of *becoming wildly nomadic*, on their journey towards un/re/learning conventional wisdom, breaking down intellectual barriers and embracing a boundless pedagogical horizon. They were slowly becoming rhizomatic (Deleuze & Guattari, 2015, pp. 3–25).

Scene 3: Becoming "8. 1874: Three Novellas, or 'What Happened?'" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2015, pp. 192–195).

As they had been asked, the NDA-A's investigations were to be written in different genres. In this, their first exploration was written in the form of a crime story—a thrilling caper with high stakes and unpredictable outcomes. The crime, however, was not a physical transgression but an intellectual one—the homogenisation of educational futures. The victims were the students-yet-to-come, shackled to outmoded, commodified systems of learning. The detectives were the nomadic agents, seeking clues in the labyrinthine world of education to piece together an innovative and liberating future.

Each detective member of the Agency-Assemblage brought their own experiences to the mission, using a diverse set of detective skills.

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2   Relating to, or characteristic of the works of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.

The artist viewed the world for affects (Spinoza, 2017), the post-human-philosopher questioned its underlying assumptions (Deleuze, 1994, pp. 129–167), the radical educators brought understandings of pedagogical needs, the imaginative policymakers politicised (Fisher, 2009), the scientists experimented (Barad, 2007), and the technologist theorists (Haraway, 2017) explored how new tools could revolutionise learning. Their narrative-rich methodology resonated with Deleuze and Guattari's genre-defying philosophy. It provided a fresh lens through which to view and understand the challenges and possibilities of education. It also served as an entangled engagement tool, making the concept accessible and intriguing to a wider audience.

Act 2. Becoming Nomadic: In pursuit of hopeful and joyful educational transformations.

In their collective educational experiences and explorations, the NDA-A saw that the rigid structures of the educational landscape had become striated and over-determined. They saw certain education institutions as bastions of knowledge, yet they were also fortresses, governed by fixed rules and prescriptive frameworks (Kuang, 2022). As a small band of visionary educators, they dreamed of a paradigm shift, a truly borderless landscape, an educational Nomadology. They continued to be inspired by the concept of a "rhizome" from the thinking of Deleuze and Guattari (2015, pp. 23–25). It pointed towards a system where ideas and learning could grow organically, without a strict hierarchical order, just like the subterranean stem of a plant. They took the advice that, "The rhizome is altogether different, a map and not a tracing. Make a map, not a tracing. The orchid does not reproduce the tracing of the wasp; it forms a map with the wasp, in a rhizome. What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005, p. 12)

It had all started with a whisper, an undercurrent of discontent that grew into a rising wave of change. These visionaries found each other across oceans and continents, connected by the common thread of wanting to dismantle the constraints of neoliberal educational systems. This international community of academics, educators, and practitioners became the first pioneers in a movement that would eventually become known as "Wildly Nomadic Education". One of their initial forays

involved setting up a digital, globally accessible platform. This platform was another assemblage of cultures, ideas, and pedagogies, a rhizomatic universe where learning was unbounded, collaborative, and flexible. Each user, regardless of their origin, could contribute to, learn from, and modify this collective knowledge pool. One entangled tendril of this platform was called the Experimental Pedagogies Research Group (EPRG, 2023).

They continued to cultivate an ethos of "becoming", a key principle in Nomadology.[3] They envisioned learners as not merely absorbing information but continuously evolving, becoming; with every new idea encountered, every new connection made. The idea was to break away from static identities and embrace a fluid, constantly adapting self, much like nomads journeying through uncharted territories. These educational nomads also encouraged the application of learned concepts to real-world problems, emphasising learning's transformative potential. They sought not just to impart knowledge but to instil a deep sense of responsibility and purpose, urging their learners to apply their understanding for collective societal benefit.

This was not a smooth process, and the pioneers faced numerous hurdles—from resistance within traditional educational structures to the digital divide that threatened to exclude marginalised communities. But the nomads pressed on, guided by their vision of a more hopeful, joyful, and transformative education. *becoming wildly nomadic* marked a profound departure from the confines of traditional education. By adopting a rhizomatic model, it put into practice the principle of multiplicity—that learning, and knowledge are not linear or hierarchical but a complex, interconnecting web. By embracing the ethos of "becoming", it affirmed that education should be a continuous journey of transformation and growth.

The NDA-A continued to delve into the world of rhizomatic thinking (Mackness, 2014), a maze of interconnected elements that could influence the educational ecosystem. They recognised that education was not a simple puzzle to solve but a complex web of relationships, interactions, and feedback loops. They had found that rhizomatic educational theory (Cromier, 2008; Roy, 2003) offered a lens to view education, one that

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3   "A bricolage of ideas uprooted from anthropology, aesthetics, history, and military strategy, Nomadology…" (see https://mitpress.mit.edu/9780936756097/nomadology/).

embraced the dynamic and evolving nature of learning. They realised that by understanding the interconnectedness of various factors, they could begin to unravel the mysteries of education thinking.

Their collective aim was to make education not just a vessel for knowledge but an engine of hope, joy, and transformation. They envisioned a system devoid of the prescriptive "root-tree" model, where knowledge flows vertically from the top to the bottom. Instead, they advocated a "rhizomatic" model, where learning occurs in multiple, non-hierarchical directions, allowing for growth, adaptation, and dynamism in knowledge acquisition and creation (Bayley, 2018; Beck, 2017; Fendler, 2013).

Epilogue: Becoming "3. 10,000 B.C.: The Geology of Morals (Who Does the Earth Think It Is?)" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2015, pp. 39–74).

Becoming wildly nomadic was the first major undertaking of the NDA-A. Its narrative was not just about the birth of a new agency but also the genesis of a new approach towards envisioning educational futures. The NDA-A set out not merely to discover these futures; they wanted to create them, crafting an innovative tapestry of learning woven from threads of creativity, critical thinking, and philosophy and political innovation. In its stuttering and blundering, the NDA-A tried to become wildly nomadic. It was challenging the educational status quo, asking difficult questions, and embracing uncertainty. As the detectives ventured into the unknown, they remained optimistic and joyful, relishing the thrill of discovery and the promise of a hopeful, enjoyable, creative future for the students-yet-to-come. Their tale was one of daring adventure, intellectual exploration, and above all, a radical, thrilling reimagining of education's potential. "The new configuration of expression and content conditions not only the organism's power to reproduce but also its power to deterritorialize or accelerate deterritorialization" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2015, p. 59).

Becoming wildly nomadic in education and educational research offers a vision for the future of learning that embraces complexity, nomadic thinking, and collective action. The wildly nomadic approach emphasises interdisciplinary learning, experimental engagement, judicious use of technology, and global perspectives. It invites educators, practitioners, and policymakers to come together, challenge existing paradigms, and seed collective action for change. Through these endeavours, they concluded, we can shape a positive and transformative future for education.

Steps toward hope

- Adopt a "wildly nomadic" approach to explore and envision hopeful futures for creative Higher Education, encouraging flexibility, adaptability, and a readiness to move beyond traditional academic boundaries.

- Consider using unconventional forms and formats, such as plays or performative acts, to present educational ideas and foster deeper engagement. Drawing inspiration from works like *A Thousand Plateaus* by Deleuze and Guattari (2015) can provide fresh perspectives on learning and teaching.

- Utilise imaginative constructs, such as the fictional Nomadic Detective Agency-Assemblage (NDA-A), to facilitate exploration of complex theoretical ideas and inspire innovative educational practices.

- Develop practices, policies, and pedagogies that promote joy in learning environments, to reshape current practices and work towards a more positive and hopeful educational future.

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8. Playful Higher Education futures: Hopeful and utopian thinking in pedagogy

Kim Holflod

Abstract

This chapter explores the concept of playful Higher Education as a space infused with hopeful and utopian voices that resist prevailing trends of efficiency, performativity, and individualisation. Through a thematic analysis of playful voices, it envisions alternative futures for Higher Education that prioritise communality and relationality. Drawing on insights from a three-year, design-based research project involving playful learning experiments and interventions in interprofessional contexts, the chapter highlights how playful education can act as an imaginative utopia, promoting a hopeful pedagogy. Ultimately, it argues that embracing playfulness in Higher Education is both a hopeful and utopian endeavour, offering a meaningful path toward transforming and improving the educational system.

Keywords: playfulness; Higher Education; hope; utopia; pedagogy

Prologue: Framing playful higher education

In recent years, playful approaches to learning and pedagogy have emerged in Higher Education research and practice. Drawing on play characteristics, playful Higher Education emphasises imagination, wonder and joy while harnessing elements from, for example, creative, experimental, aesthetic, and relational pedagogies. The growing interest in playful Higher Education comes to light through numerous recent scholarly books and articles (Boysen et al., 2022; James & Nerantzi, 2019; Jensen et al., 2021; Whitton & Moseley, 2019) and impactful research programmes (e.g., the nationwide Playful Learning Program in Denmark involving all six Danish university colleges). In this chapter, I initially consider the state of playful Higher Education and the problems it seeks to solve. From here, I explore why there is a current need for alternative ways of imagining Higher Education and, thus, its future(s). I furthermore strive to frame and discuss playful Higher Education as deeply connected to and permeated by both hopeful and utopian voices that rebel against the contemporary educational tendencies and requirements of effectivity, performativity, and individualisation (Ball, 2003; Jensen et al., 2021; Nørgård et al., 2017). Through a thematic examination of *voices* of hope and utopia in playful Higher Education, the chapter presents concepts and reflections aimed at envisioning what Higher Education could become in a *probable* or even *preferable* future (Dunne & Raby, 2013), with educators and learners engaging in Higher Education inspired by voices of playfulness, hope, and utopia (Holflod, 2022b; Nørgård, 2021). In this chapter, the concept of *voices* plays a significant role in understanding and reflecting on playful Higher Education. Drawing on dialogic communication theory (Holflod, 2022c), I approach voices as themes, discourses, ideologies, or perspectives, rather than simply utterances—or the concrete acts of speaking. Discussing playful voices of hope and utopia, hence focuses on the multiplicity, entanglements, and interplays of diverse voices that influence each other, and how they might be paradoxical and tensional in today's Higher Education landscape (Holflod, 2022b).

Playful Higher Education generally relates to pedagogical themes and learning approaches drawing from creative learning, innovative

learning, experimenting and joyful approaches, relational and affective spaces, and active, embodied participation (Boysen et al., 2022; Holflod, 2022a; Jensen et al., 2021). It extends from a realisation that at present Higher Education is riddled with individuality, performativity, metric-driven thinking, and marketisation—or what is often attributed to the neo-liberal university (Nørgård, 2021). This is discussed, for example, in relation to poor (academic) wellbeing or stressful educational processes that lead to a soulful struggle that changes both individuals and collectives, teachers and students, in education, and not only what they do but also who they are (Ball, 2003, p. 215). Approaching Higher Education playfully is, however, more light-hearted and intrinsically hopeful. It opposes those tendencies in Higher Education by dreaming of alternative, desirable educational futures. As such, it also envisions Higher Education utopias of what might be achievable, probable, preferable, or even preposterous.

Voice 1: Playful voices of hope

In a relatively recent research article, I examined how collaborative playful learning in Higher Education is, at its core, a hopeful pedagogy drawing on both constructionist and imaginative and pretend-based approaches to learning to dwell on future practices and play with anticipations and potential outcomes (Holflod, 2022b, p. 81). Educational researcher Rikke Toft Nørgård argues for the term "hope-punk" to address the inherent hopeful aspirations within Higher Education pedagogy, focusing on radical transformations towards preferable futures (Nørgård, 2022). Hope-punk is a pop-cultural phenomenon, conceptually opposing "grim dark", and outlines an attitude and belief aimed at imagining better futures in life, education, communities, and societies. It accentuates rebellious strategies of hope, but it is impermanent and something to continuously fight for (Nørgård, 2021; Ramos, 2020). Consequently, playful Higher Education might be conceptualised as pedagogical hope-punk, as continuous whimsical journeys towards desirable educational futures of creativity, experimentation, and relationality that resist the contemporary tendencies in a Higher Education of performativity and individuality (Holflod, 2024) but still aim to enable students to

develop into empowered and knowing professionals who are able to meet the societal demands of the future (Jørgensen et al., 2022).

From 2020 to 2023, I participated in a research project on collaborative playful learning as part of the extensive Playful Learning Programme in Denmark. The project was methodologically guided by design-based research (Barab & Squire, 2004; McKenney & Reeves, 2019), and I co-designed playful learning interventions on interdisciplinary and interprofessional collaboration with educators from different Higher Education programmes. We shared and discussed themes, considerations, and perspectives on Higher Education playful learning—and thus also the interplay of multiple voices present in playful Higher Education (Holflod, 2022b). A common and shared educator perspective emphasised the participants, primarily students, as playfellows (Nørgård, 2021) or as participating in communities of play (Thorsted, 2016), potentialising novel ways of relating to each other and imagining different educational futures of communality and relationality. From a practical point of view, this might be facilitated through object-mediated activities where the participants collectively create and share constructions symbolising hopeful futures that evoke not only disciplinary insights but also affective and experiential knowledge, and enable new interpersonal connections and communality (Holflod, 2023b). Accordingly, Julie Borup Jensen et al. (2021, p. 15) propose that "the culture of play is related to the hopes of dreams for the future, where other ways in which educational practices can work and take place align with ideas of sustainable lives", with the culture of play emphasising not only learning and knowledge but also human flourishing and a sense of belonging in Higher Education as a response to the increasingly individualised and goal-driven educational present.

Voice 2: Playful voices of utopia

The previous brief exploration of playful voices of hope implied that hope connects to utopian desire and longing; a deeply felt hope for other and better futures. In Higher Education, educational philosopher Ronald Barnett (2022) argues that utopias must be feasible and thus achievable, and not only "dreamable". This perspective on "educational

real utopias", a preexisting concept in utopia discourse, is, however, contested, as it might lack the holistic, critical, and imaginative potential of utopian thinking and doing within pedagogy and education (Levitas, 2013; Webb, 2016), with Darren Webb (2016) criticising the real utopias of domesticating utopian imagination. Working towards holistic and imaginative utopias is connected to what British sociologist Ruth Levitas (2013, p. xii) addresses as an underlying desire to be "otherwise", that the most common objections to utopia lie in animosities towards making the world otherwise (Levitas, 2013, p. 7), and that "utopia is the expression of the desire for a better way of being or of living, and as such is braided through human culture".

Research on playful Higher Education discusses the utopian elements of playful learning as problematic (Knudsen & Rasmussen, 2023), empowering (Holflod, 2023b), and feasible (Nørgård, 2021) in educational and pedagogical environments. It accentuates a continuous longing and desire to think and do education *otherwise,* while problematising the current educational practices. Nørgård (2021) argues that while the playful university is still a utopia, current developments and practices reveal that it is reachable and provides opportunities for rethinking what education might become. A recent article on playful learning designs with students from teacher and social education in Denmark shows its feasibility and potential for novel learning and socialisation through the students' shared imagination and tangible constructions (Lyager, 2021). When collectively modelling and visualising utopian institutions (i.e., schools or kindergartens) through diverse materials such as paper, feathers, balloons, glue, and building blocks, the students articulated that their playful and aesthetic processes led to greater conceptual, theoretical, and embodied understanding. This highlights a diversity of ways of knowing, playing with creativity, aesthetics, and arts, to be explored within Higher Education when transitioning from primarily discursive language to symbolic communication, i.e., shifting from verbal communication to collective aesthetic and artful expressions in classroom learning activities (Holflod, 2023b)—and that it might both aid in formal learning and education and become a path towards imagining desirable utopias in Higher Education.

Designing for "otherwise" futures within playful Higher Education pedagogy

The playful learning research programme aims to design playful experiments in Higher Education through, for instance, constructionist, embodied, sensory, and atmospheric approaches to pedagogy, drawing from diverse playful voices, pedagogies, and methods such as creative learning, arts-based methods, aesthetic learning processes, and open-ended learning design (Boysen et al., 2022; Holflod, 2022a; Jensen at al., 2021; Jørgensen et al., 2022). In my research project, I tested numerous object-guided playful experiments with educators and students collaboratively constructing, modelling, and discussing shared objects. It drew theoretical inspiration from object-mediated communication, evocative objects, and boundary objects (Holflod, 2023b)—and was further guided by design ideologies of speculative design (Dunne & Raby, 2013), which strongly relates to tangible activities in pedagogy to examine and construct imaginable and desirable futures collectively. From a practical perspective, this was operationalised through learning activities such as "wonder spaces", "moodboards", and "play design futures". They share similar approaches by drawing on play theory, aesthetic learning processes, and co-creation of evocative objects (Holflod, 2023b). I initially discuss the "play design futures" activity in the following parts: a collective design activity developed as part of my doctoral research on voices of playful learning (Holflod, 2023a), where educators rapidly create tentative playful learning experiments. Afterwards, I discuss the activity of "wonder spaces".

The "play design futures" activity uses a set of cards categorised into "Future" (i.e., probable or preferable near or distant future), "Context" (e.g., a laboratory, an open learning space, or an ordinary classroom setting) and (playful) "Voices" (e.g., creativity, experimental, relationality, affectivity, imagination, or pretend). Educators are invited to develop a tentative learning design by contemplating a future scenario where a playful design experiment can be tested, including its context and conditions, and its voice—or, in other words, a playful theme and perspective. When the educators have developed a tentative design, the second part of the design activity is initiated: empathy mapping. In empathy mapping, you imagine what the participant might experience,

feel, think, do, and say in a given context—a future playful learning experiment in this setting. The insights created from this part are finally used to redesign and further develop the playful experiment. By designing for or visualising preferable, probable, and tangible pedagogical futures and shifting the perspective from the educator to the student, the designing educator anticipates and emphasises the future participants' academic and embodied experiences of the activity. While I developed and used specific materials in these activities, they can be readily adopted using available materials and spaces in other contexts. The design activity is largely based on utopian thinking in approaching educational futures by externalising the participants' imagination and desires to transform current pedagogical and educational practices.

The learning design of "wonder spaces" shares similar approaches and anticipations, focusing on constructing and visualising a problem of today and a futuristic or utopian solution through various materials. In this activity, the participants communicate an interpretation of today and a vision of tomorrow to contemplate and imagine a preferable future in Higher Education. They are encouraged to collectively dream wildly, and during this process, they generally find that playful collaboration through both verbal and symbolic communication helps to establish new forms of relationality, communality, and ways of knowing.

Through playful methods, the activities' attempts to examine and encourage "otherwise" and desirable futures in Higher Education materialised as tangible learning designs aimed at the educators' own practices or material visualisations of potential futures. Drawing on the experiences and insights from multiple design experiments and interventions in the research project, and in relation to the contemporary scholarly voices of playful learning in Higher Education, playful Higher Education is not only significantly connected to hopeful pedagogies and utopian visions—it is also imaginable and possible.

Epilogue: Hope, utopia, punk, pedagogy

Working between playful pedagogies and utopian Higher Education is both meaningful and challenging, and it has several implications for Higher Education development and practice. Playful learning in Higher Education is not only hopeful in the sense that it can potentialise

alternative visions and practices; it is also inherently tensional and paradoxical, with the whimsical, open-ended, and processual elements of play clashing with the traditional educational structures and intents (Holflod, 2022b). Playful Higher Education strives towards different educational realities, towards desirable futures that are both possible and imaginative utopias. As such, it resembles the educational and pedagogical movement of hope-punk that accentuates rebellious hopefulness towards creating better Higher Education futures of relationality, joyfulness, communality, and playfulness. In this chapter, I have attempted to make a case for adopting playful approaches to Higher Education as relevant methods and practices of pedagogy, with the aim of advancing towards potentially desirable educational futures and utopias.

The chapter began by highlighting a general problem in today's Higher Education—that is, the culture of individuality and performativity. While this chapter does not address the underlying structures of Higher Education, doing so is essential for developing, implementing, or experimenting with playful pedagogies. As expressed in diverse research publications, a culture of time (Jensen et al., 2021), individuality (Koernes & Francis, 2020), performativity (Holflod, 2024), marketisation (Jørgensen et al., 2022; Nørgård, 2021), and educational legitimacy (James, 2019) permeates Higher Education, challenging and disrupting the implementation of playful pedagogies. What might be needed, and perhaps potentiated by these difficulties, is new stories of hope and utopia in Higher Education that dare to imagine alternative realities and futures—stories that emphasise togetherness, relationality, and playfulness, to contrast and counter the tendencies and challenges of today's Higher Education institutions.

Steps toward hope

- Integrate playful and imaginative approaches in Higher Education to challenge current trends of effectiveness, performativity, and individualisation.
- Integrate hopeful, forward-thinking pedagogical strategies to inspire educators and learners to envision and strive for equitable and compassionate educational futures.

- Develop learning communities that emphasise shared experiences, collaboration, and interpersonal connections to enhance collective educational outcomes.

- Promote alternative futures—of togetherness, relationality, and playfulness.

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II. HOW TECHNOLOGY CAN SHAPE THE FUTURE

How technology can shape the future: Introduction

Upasana Gitanjali Singh

This section brings together a set of chapters that explore how emerging digital technologies and collaborative practices are reshaping the landscape of Higher Education. At the heart of these contributions is a shared commitment to reimagining education as more immersive, inclusive, and human-centred—even as digital tools grow more powerful and pervasive.

Gabriella Rodolico and Fiona McGregor open the section by investigating the emotional and pedagogical potential of virtual reality (VR) and expressive art in teacher education. Their study offers a powerful reminder that technology can deepen—not dilute—human experience. By enabling educators to explore natural environments virtually and express their responses artistically, the project challenges conventional modes of learning and underscores the value of affective engagement in educational settings. The practical insights drawn from both pre-service and in-service teachers point to how VR, when paired with creative modalities, can support emotional literacy and professional growth.

This theme of co-creation continues in Johanna Amos and Alena Buis's *CanadARThistories*, an open-access digital course that rethinks Canadian art history through a collaborative, decolonial lens. Their work illustrates how technology can support inclusive, interdisciplinary pedagogy by enabling students and educators to jointly shape knowledge production. The course's digital infrastructure allows for a flexible, thematic design focused on land, identity, and knowledge

traditions, offering a compelling model for transforming the humanities through digital openness and participatory design.

Shifting from course design to community formation, Donna Peach's chapter on the *PhDForum* presents a quiet but powerful example of how digital spaces can offer genuine social and emotional support for postgraduate researchers. Originally conceived as a virtual study room, the forum has evolved into a dynamic global community, especially valuable in fields marked by isolation. Peach's narrative highlights the quiet resilience of digital care networks and affirms that virtual connection can provide the stability and solidarity needed to sustain academic wellbeing.

Finally, in their exploration of educational guidance for distance learners, Oliver Burney and colleagues foreground the enduring role of human connection in an increasingly automated world. Drawing on telephone-based support practices at the Open University, the authors argue that—even amidst advances in artificial intelligence—meaningful conversations remain essential to educational success. Their work challenges us to consider how educational institutions might balance efficiency with empathy, ensuring that technological innovation does not eclipse the personal dimensions of learning.

Together, these chapters demonstrate that digital innovation in education need not come at the expense of humanity. On the contrary, they show how thoughtful integration of technology—with an emphasis on collaboration, creativity, and care—can cultivate learning environments that are more emotionally resonant, socially connected, and intellectually inclusive.

What emerges is a nuanced and hopeful vision of higher education's future: one in which digital tools enhance rather than replace human relationships, and where innovation is driven not solely by efficiency, but by a commitment to emotional engagement, shared authorship, and social justice. These chapters remind us that the future of education is not only about what technologies we use, but how—and with whom— we use them.

9. The emotional impact of nature seen through the lenses of virtual reality (VR) and revealed through the power of expressive art

Gabriella Rodolico and Fiona McGregor

Abstract

This chapter explores the integration of Virtual Reality (VR) technology, expressive art, and nature exploration to enrich educational experiences and enhance education. The VR-ART project aimed to foster a deeper connection to nature by using VR to evoke emotions and visual art to facilitate the exploration and expression of those feelings. The project's outcomes were transformed into pedagogical artifacts for Pre-Service Teachers (PSTs), offering practical examples and opportunities for reflective practice. These resources serve as exemplars of innovative teaching approaches, highlighting the potential of combining technology, art, and nature to create meaningful learning experiences and foster hope.

Keywords: virtual reality; education; expressive art; emotions; nature; teachers

Introduction

In the rapidly evolving landscape of education, innovative technologies have the potential to revolutionise students' learning experience and change the outlook on education. This chapter discusses the potential benefits of Virtual Reality (VR) in eco-centric education, the challenges associated with its implementation, and the role of expressive art as a medium for reconnection with reality through the expression of one's own emotions. Ultimately, the aim is to inspire a deeper connection to nature and foster a more empathetic and environmentally conscious generation of learners that can move forward with hope.

VR in education

VR is an immersive, multisensory, three-dimensional (3-D) experience (Gigante, 1993) created with software that replicates the real world (Sherman & Craig, 2019). Within the context of education, emerging evidence has demonstrated that VR-supported lessons can enhance positive emotions and engagement when compared to more traditional tools, such as reading from textbooks (Allcoat & von Mühlenen, 2018).

According to Riva et al. (2019), VR could support our brain in generating embodied simulations. It is known that our brain can create mental images of 3-D objects, and by interacting with and rotating these objects, they become visually and motorically embodied in our minds, stimulating cognitive processes and learning (Jang et al., 2010). With the advancement of new technologies, VR programs for education now enable users to interact directly in a 3-D environment, triggering embodiment and cognitive processes through situated learning (Schott & Marshall, 2018; Hamilton et al., 2021), experiential learning (Jantjies et al., 2018), and various other pedagogical experiences beyond time and classroom constraints.

However, it is necessary to consider that technology-mediated teaching and learning, such as VR-supported lessons, could pose real risks to an individual's physical, cognitive, and psychosocial development. Careful consideration of health and safety, along with limited usage time, is crucial, especially in young adults (Nichols, & Patel, 2002). Further barriers to reaping VR benefits in a learning environment

could be linked to educators' self-efficacy and confidence (Cooper et al., 2019). Implementing VR-supported lessons and providing student teachers specifically Pre-Service Teachers (PSTs), with opportunities for reflection could be particularly effective in enhancing PSTs' self-confidence (Rodolico & Ding, 2021) and capacity for experimentation and change.

The emotional impact of nature

It is well known that contact with nature can be beneficial to mood, overall health, and even to executive cognitive tasks that demand directed attention processes (Stenfors et al., 2019). Connection to nature, empathy, and cognitive processes could be particularly important for student teachers, not only for their learning experience but also for their teaching careers (Zeyer & Dillon, 2019). By linking empathy with eco-centric values, education could become a potential vehicle for transformation towards a society based on ecological principles (Lithoxoidou et al., 2017)—a hopeful education. Initial Teacher Education (ITE) could play a significant role in supporting the successful practice of Education for Sustainable Development in schools by fostering a connection to nature in their courses (Anđić & Šuperina, 2021).

Virtual reality and the connection to nature

While outdoor learning is widely studied as an effective pedagogy for developing contact with nature (Pirchio et al., 2021), there are times when travel restrictions, such as financial barriers and, more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic, could make it difficult or even impossible for some learners to experience a wide range of different environments. This could affect not only their connectedness to nature but also the way they react to a crisis such as a pandemic (Haasova et al., 2020). In a classroom setting where walls represent a barrier, VR could serve as a medium to promote situated experiential eco-centric education (Schott & Marshall, 2018), increasing opportunities for "out of the classroom" learning. VR could support experiential and emotional aspects, impacting two out of the five elements required to reconnect with nature: material, experiential, cognitive, emotional, and philosophical. It acts as a

bridge between internal and external factors, pushing forward the idea that reconnecting people with nature can function as a treatment for the global environmental crisis (Ives et al., 2018). Ultimately, when the Intended Learning Outcomes are based on a reconnection with nature, it is also necessary to reconnect with reality and the inner self. Art-based methods have shown great potential in unveiling nuances of human–nature connectedness that go beyond words due to their capability of tapping into emotions and embodied experiences (Muhr, 2020), allowing for a profound understanding, and learning through embodied cognition.

Expressive art as a medium for emotional expression

Expressive art, particularly visual art, offers a powerful medium for individuals to analyse and express their emotions (Dubal et al., 2014). When combined with VR experiences of nature, expressive art can help individuals explore and convey their emotional responses to the natural world. Through various art forms, individuals can tap into their emotions and embodied experiences, fostering a deeper understanding of themselves and the environment.

Visual art as responsive narrative

The use of visual coding as a narrative is a powerful, often cathartic means of conveying an intrinsic non-verbal emotional response to extrinsic stimuli. We interact emotionally and psychologically with the "visual frequencies" or "elements"—essentially, the colours, lines, angles, patterns, forms, shapes, textures, and spaces that collectively comprise our natural and built environment, the world. We may respond in various ways—consciously and subconsciously—to different permutations of visual elements; their aesthetic/emotional impact may differ based on our knowledge and experiences in our lives or first-time experiences (Eisner, 1997). Artmaking becomes a fundamental form of symbolic analysis, problem-solving, communication and expression, and means of connectedness - the cultivation of "multiple ways of seeing, and multiple dialogues in a world where nothing stays the same" (Greene, 1995, p. 16). When we create a drawing or compose a painting

in response to a given point of reference, whether internal or external to oneself, the positioning of the "self" in a composition can offer insights into one's sense of identity and perceived agency within their personal environment and the wider world (Hadiprawiro, 2019).

In-Service Teachers' practical experience

To explore the integration of VR, expressive art, and nature exploration in education, a case study was conducted with In-Service Teachers (IST). The study consisted of two phases: a pilot stage and an intervention in schools.

During the pilot stage, participants were asked to work in pairs:

1. Exploratory phase: During the initial phase of the project, participants were afforded the opportunity to familiarise themselves with immersive VR through supported tours focusing on natural landscapes, enabling them to immerse themselves in lifelike environments and VR exploration of nature. They were asked to use ClassVR headsets to explore ten VR scenarios, ranging from under the sea, to a forest setting and more. The first 10 minutes were needed to familiarise themselves with the equipment and to go through the safety rules. Then they undertook 20 minutes of VR exploration with regular breaks (every 5 minutes for children from 5 to 12 years old and 7–10 minutes for 13 years old and above)

2. Emotion Expression: Expression of emotion through art-based medium. Participants were provided with painting, colours, crayons and other art-based equipment including seeded paper and recycled paper. IST educators were paired together. Within each pair, one participant would immerse themselves in a nature-focused VR experience. Subsequently, employing the strategies and insights previously discussed, they would articulate and describe the emotional landscape elicited by the virtual environment to their partner. In response, their partner would translate these emotional impressions into a visual representation, reflecting their personal interpretation of the feelings conveyed (Fig. 9.1a and 9.1b).

Fig. 9.1a Left, VR scenario obtained via ClassVR, www.classvr.com).
Right, teachers expressing and drawing each other's emotion (Mrs Anne
McColloch (headset), Miss Ciara Kinsella (painting)).

Fig. 9.1b Teachers expressing and drawing each other's emotion (photo by authors).

3. This dynamic was then reciprocated, with the roles being
   swapped between the educators. An example of the artwork
   is shown and explained in Fig. 9.2.

The emotions felt in VR expressed by these educators were subsequently
documented in their feedback. Examples of such feedback were: "I
didn't' know how tall the trees could be"; "I feel the cold"; "the fire was
scary", and "it makes one wish to go there". Notably, these educators
centred their descriptions not on the objective aspects of the virtual
environments they explored, but rather on the emotional responses

evoked by those environments.

4.

Fig. 9.2 Artwork by an In-Service Teacher (Mrs Pauline Egan).

environments they explored, but rather on the emotional responses evoked by those environments.

Following this pilot experiential phase, IST participants were provided with the opportunity to engage in dialogues with accomplished artists, such as Pieter van der Houwen. This interaction was intended to further enhance their competence in employing expressive arts methodologies. This reflective stage was substantially enriched by the exchange of insights and techniques encompassing expressive art strategies (as contributed by the artists) and pedagogical approaches (as shared by the educators). This collaborative exploration empowered the participants to harness the potential of expressive arts to deconstruct and articulate their emotional experiences. Pieter van der Houwen has worked on several projects involving participatory photography and he led this step of the workshop, captivating the teachers with his descriptions.

Peter's comments:

Participatory photography offers a unique opportunity to investigate and document communities and social environments. The subject basically becomes the photographer. This dual role provides a very personal and intimate approach which is able to create a link between the pupils (photographers) and the topics focus of this workshop. In return this can enhance their understanding creating a unique connection between learning and personal life.

It has often been used as a pedagogical tool creating a more in-depth understanding of one's own surroundings.

It can be influential in the processing of trauma and coming to terms with loss. This is beyond doubt; however, what is very interesting is that through participatory photography we, as the viewers, gain access to relatively unknown environments and a deep level of evaluation of impact that goes beyond simple words.

Participatory photography could also be referred to as civilian journalism. The professional photographer is no longer our proxy documenting the world we occupy but an "amateur" picturing their understanding of the world. This has also produced a strong new visual vernacular, one that is no longer determined by technical capability but relies much more on immediate intimacy.

In summary, the pilot stage of the project facilitated the engagement of IST with VR-enhanced natural landscapes, prompting them to delve into their emotional responses. In the final stage, IST were provided with VR and art-based equipment with the aim of embedding this authentic experience in their own classrooms.

Teachers' feedback

Teacher 1: "I was very surprised at how tricky it actually is to connect with your emotions and get out of a rigid and concrete way of thinking—this was quite enlightening!"

Teacher 2: "Allowing each teacher to genuinely explore the emotions evoked by the use of VR, and respond in a completely unconstrained way, ensured that the course was deeply meaningful to each individual."

Teacher 3: "For many pupils, their experience of nature is limited. VR use certainly opens a new channel through which 'nature' can be made real to them. On a more advanced level, VR makes real to children the places that otherwise they would be very unlikely to visit. Personally,

experiencing VR stirred up emotions that inspired me to engage with the suggestion of responding through expressive art."

A study by Kalvaitis and Monhardt (2012) explores the relationship between children and nature, and how art can be used to convey and explore this relationship. Children between the ages of 6–11 were asked to draw from their imagination, portraying themselves in an outdoor environment and then creating art to express their experience. The study found that all of the children demonstrated a positive relationship with, attitude to, and concern for, the natural world. While this approach is effective in conveying children's relationships with nature, it is important to note that it is the child's own reality that can be altered at will.

In contrast, when it comes to immersive VR, the point of reference is not intrinsic to the child and is a perpetually changing environment that cannot be stilled for sustained close observation. This raises ethical concerns about exposing young people to potentially traumatic sensory experiences.

However, if one considers John Dewey's view of the child as an organism living in and interacting with the environment (Dewey, 1925) encountering challenging environmental conditions is necessary in order for intelligent action to go forward and through which the problematic situation could be resolved (Eisner, 1997). Thus, they become truly wide awake and connected.

Creating pedagogical artifacts for Pre-Service Teachers

The project's outcomes, including reflections, artworks, and pedagogical artifacts, were used to generate resources that have been embedded in the ITE courses to enhance the learning experience of PSTs in primary and secondary education. By observing and engaging with the learning experiences of In-Service Teachers, PSTs could develop their understanding of environmental issues, emotional engagement, and expression.

Resource 1: Digital storytelling artifact (https://figshare.com/ s/9caab7bcb2000c9344ac)

Resource 2: A virtual tour with the project's outcomes (https://doi. org/10.25416/NTR.16689208.v3)

Conclusions and recommendations

To bring this vision to life, teacher education institutions can take gradual and reflective steps to incorporate VR and expressive arts into their pedagogical practices. This includes exploring suitable VR tools, designing art-based activities that support emotional expression, engaging in relevant professional development, and fostering spaces for reflective dialogue. Crucially, effective collaboration among educators, researchers, and technology developers is essential to overcoming implementation challenges and ensuring the pedagogical integrity of these innovations.

Over the course of this study, the use of VR-generated immersive learning promoted a wide range of participant responses, communicated through artmaking as both a narrative and a medium of verbal and non-verbal dialogue. By blending immersive technologies with creative and environmental exploration, participants engaged with nature-based scenarios in ways not possible within the limitations of a conventional classroom. Instead of being passive observers, reading about deforestation or watching a documentary, they became emotionally and sensorily immersed, enabling them to offer more informed critical perspectives on environmental issues.

Artmaking in this context goes beyond representation. It becomes a multisensory, emotionally driven process where students express what cannot be captured through conventional dialogue alone. Rather than simply painting an image of the rainforest, they render how it feels to stand within it from experiencing and observing it in VR to embody emotional and ecological awareness using colour, line, and forms. This shift from observing and experiencing to embodying and feeling helps students to develop emotional and ethical awareness which in return could enable them to engage not only intellectually, but empathically and responsibly with the issues they encounter (Greene, 1995). In conclusion, the thoughtful integration of VR, expressive arts, and ecological themes in teacher education can provide opportunities to create emotionally resonant learning experiences. These experiences not only could potentially cultivate empathy and environmental consciousness but also empower students as critical thinkers and future agents of change. Future research might explore how such practices can be scaled, adapted across cultural contexts, and embedded within teacher training frameworks to support sustainable educational reform.

Steps toward hope

- Leverage VR technology to create immersive educational experiences that foster emotional connections to nature and enhance learning, integrating these experiences into educational practices.

- Encourage the explicit expression of emotions through visual art as a complementary tool to deepen connections with nature in educational contexts and develop and share pedagogical artifacts for further discussion and celebration.

- Provide PSTs with exemplars and opportunities for reflection and discussion of practice that demonstrate the integration of VR, art, and nature exploration in meaningful and reflective ways.

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10. CanadARThistories: Collaboratively designing an open-access course

Johanna Amos and Alena Buis

Abstract

This chapter outlines the development of CanadARThistories, an open-access undergraduate course on Canadian art history, highlighting its innovative approach compared to traditional art history survey courses. It details how digital and communication technologies facilitated collaboration among the course team, enabling a shared labour model and the integration of diverse perspectives. The chapter reflects on the benefits and challenges of collaborative course design for educators, including enhanced creativity and workload distribution. It also explores the advantages of an open-access, collaboratively designed course for student learners, promoting accessibility and diverse viewpoints. Ultimately, the chapter proposes collaboratively designed courses as a powerful model for reimagining humanities education, fostering inclusivity, and enriching both the teaching and the learning experience. In essence, it offers a vision of education that is not only equitable but also collaborative, forward-thinking, and profoundly human-centred.

Keywords: collaboration; open educational resources; art history; Canadian art; digital technologies

Introduction

In 2021, Open Art Histories, a collective of art history, visual and material culture, and museum studies educators based in Canada, collaboratively created an open-access undergraduate course on Canadian art history.[1] Built in Pressbooks, a digital open book platform, CanadARThistories weaves together text, images, video, audio, and H5P objects, to examine the visual and material cultures of the land we now call Canada across twelve thematically organised modules.[2] The modules of the course are further supplemented by a series of short object essays written by scholars and curators from a variety of research backgrounds, which examine single artistic works in the context of their production, use, or circulation. Supported by a generous grant from eCampus Ontario, and with additional funding from Queen's University Library, the University of Lethbridge, and snəẃeyəɬ leləm' | Langara College, CanadARThistories forms part of Open Art Histories' commitment to developing pedagogical tools and resources—including open educational resources (OERs), lesson plans and syllabi, assessments, learning strategies, and in-class activities—which support arts-based educators and instructors as they work to create inclusive classrooms situated in accessible and decolonial methodologies. In this chapter, we consider how digital and communications technologies enabled us to create CanadARThistories collaboratively and explore the benefits this process offered us as course designers and educators. We also consider how collaboratively constructing the course allowed us to challenge traditional perspectives on the Canadian art survey and reflect on how the result benefits learners engaging with the material. We suggest that collaborative processes present a model for reimagining humanities education.

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1   Open Art Histories is Johanna Amos (Queen's University), Alena Buis (Kwantlen Polytechnic University), Elizabeth Anne Cavaliere (OCAD University), Jennifer Kennedy (Queen's University), Sarah E. K. Smith (Western University), and Devon Smither (University of Lethbridge). See https://openarthistories.ca/

2   See https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/canadarthistories/

Canadian art history courses

Historically, introductory courses in Canadian art history have, like the Western art historical tradition in which they are rooted, privileged a particular chronological narrative of Canadian art. Dennis Reid's *A concise history of Canadian painting* (1973), one of the staple textbooks of the field since the 1970s, for instance, begins in the seventeenth century with painters who depicted scenes from New France and British North America and follows a series of Western artistic movements: realism, expressionism, and abstraction. In their preference for painting and events post-European settlement and colonisation, textbooks like Reid's and the courses built upon them often omit an extensive history of Indigenous material practices and, given the white, male-centric histories of artistic production in the European tradition more generally, tend to inadequately capture the contributions of craftspeople and women, as well as other historically underrepresented populations.[3]

In designing CanadARThistories, we sought to move beyond this linear, Euro-centric narrative. In modules focused on representations of the land and people; encounters between groups, individuals, and communities; collective ways of working; and traditions of knowledge, we consider historical and contemporary works—paintings, photographs, clothing, architecture, prints and drawings, beadwork, installations, and sculpture—made by Indigenous, settler, and newcomer artists and makers. For instance, the module "Portraiture" examines representations such as those in Toronto-based artist and activist Syrus Marcus Ware's *Activist Portrait Series* (2015) or the work of self-described Urban-Iroquois photographer Jeff Thomas vis-à-vis a longer history, while "Knowing" considers different approaches to visualising knowledge–from sixteenth and seventeenth-century colonial maps to the beadwork-inspired paintings of contemporary Michif artist Christi Belcourt. Together, these works create a more inclusive and forward-looking history of art in Canada, and, as an OER, the course itself can be adapted as new research and narratives emerge.

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3 Other classic texts in this vein include J. Russell Harper's *Painting in Canada: A History* (1966) and Maria Tippett's *By a Lady: Celebrating Three Centuries of Art by Canadian Women* (1992), which, although it focuses on women's work, upholds the Eurocentric and fine art foci of the Canadian canon.
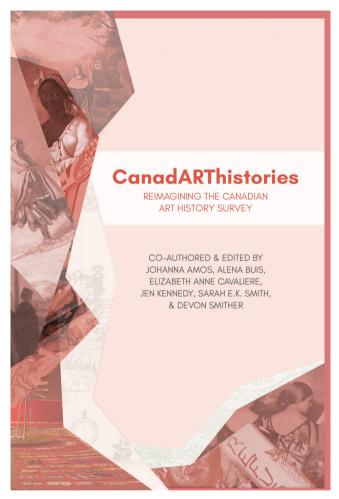
Fig. 10.1 Fenton Isaacs, Pressbooks cover for CanadARThistories, 2022, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

A digital, collaborative approach to create an alternative

In order to write this alternative narrative of Canadian art history, and to fulfil the timeline of our eCampus grant, our collective of six scholars determined that we would build the course collaboratively. While this seems obvious to us now, we wonder if we would have come to this conclusion had we attempted to create this course even three years

earlier. The process of developing the course was enabled by our new facility with digital tools and technologies, learned through teaching during the first waves of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Using Zoom, a video conferencing platform, enabled us, scattered as we are across Canada's vast geography, to meet regularly and to hash out the themes for the course and brainstorm potential works for inclusion, as well as meet with instructional designers in the Arts and Science Online unit at Queen's University.[4] Collaborative documents, such as Google Docs and Google Sheets, further allowed us to coordinate our efforts asynchronously, as we played with the sequencing of the thematic modules, determined assessments and learning objectives, and drafted the module content.[5] Some modules were written collaboratively over a series of Zoom meetings, while others were primarily tackled by an individual, but with elements drawn from the research expertise of other members of our team.

For the accompanying object story essays, we reached out to scholars of Canadian and Indigenous art and invited them to submit proposals for a short entry on one object from their research that they felt was essential to telling the story of art in Canada. To date, we have collected approximately twenty-five essays from established scholars as well as graduate students conducting exciting new research, and the selection of objects attests to the varied nature of artistic production and interests—everything from an Inuit-made parka to a Vancouver Terry Fox memorial, and from an Impressionist painting to Alberta's World Famous Gopher Hole Museum.[6] These essays are linked to thematic sections of the course as further examples of analysis, but also serve as examples for students, who write their own object essay as the final assessment. The iterative nature of the Pressbooks platform means that instructors can adapt their own version of the OER for their course and include their students' essays as new entries in a digital publication, creating an opportunity for sustainable and authentic assessment.

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4   See https://zoom.us/
5   See https://workspace.google.com/intl/en_ca/.
6   Some of these object essays have also been shared with Smarthistory, the largest digital art history resource in the world, through an active partnership, furthering their reach and use, and weaving art objects produced in Canada into larger global art historical narratives. See https://smarthistory.org/.

Lessons learnt

Working collaboratively enabled us to share the responsibilities and challenges more commonly associated with building OERs (Downes, 2007) and, in particular, one that is rich in visual content. For instance, in our research for developing CanadARThistories, we noted that there are few digital textbooks or OERs for teaching art history—especially when compared with disciplines such as physics or writing composition. We quickly learned that part of the issue is obtaining the rights to use a range of images, particularly when a resource like ours carries a Creative Commons licence.[7] In Canada, copyright lasts the lifetime of the artist plus fifty years, after which point the work enters the public domain. However, even images of works in the public domain can be difficult to access—some museums and collections employ exclusive licensing and photography policies. In addition, permission to use contemporary works must be sought from the artist or their estate, and sometimes the collection that holds the work—or it must meet the threshold for fair dealing.[8] Sourcing and licensing images for each module was a daunting task, and we were fortunate to be supported in this work by a copyright specialist at Queen's Library and a student research assistant, but this process was also made less overwhelming because we were able to share the labour. Similarly, the labour required to sustain an active digital project, including maintaining hyperlinks and incorporating new submissions into the object stories section of the OER, was shared. This was beneficial for our group in terms of time management and productivity, but also because it meant increased capacity building across our membership; we all developed our existing expertise and learned new skills in publishing, copyright, and digital technologies.

More crucially, however, sharing the labour of the course design allowed us to develop a course that is durable in terms of content. Two of our collective are scholars of Canadian art and have regularly taught Canadian survey courses; however, all of us have routinely included

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7   CanadARThistories is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution Noncommercial Share Alike 4.0 license (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0). See https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/

8   Fair dealing permits limited use of copyright material for specific purposes, including education and criticism. See https://copyright.uwo.ca/fair_dealing_analysis/index.html.

Canadian content, or what is affectionately known as "CanCon", in our teaching. Working together encouraged us to teach one another and advocate for our research interests and ensured that the temptation to fall into a traditional chronological narrative was challenged—something that is particularly important when we recall that students are not working against the narratives that were so passionately instilled in us when we were undergraduates. When we felt the "need" to include a particular work, our colleagues would ask why. While this sometimes meant it took us longer to reach a consensus around the selection of works for a particular module, it also ensured a greater awareness of varied perspectives and the representation of a range of works across multiple media and from different moments, cultures, and geographies. Moreover, as an OER, the course is infinitely malleable. In teaching CanadARThistories, each of us can adapt elements to better suit a specific course or group of students, and each engagement with the course offers an opportunity for peer review and revision. As such, we hope educators beyond Open Art Histories will build upon our labour, whether they are new instructors, established teachers looking to vary their content or approach, or those tasked with teaching CanCon for the first time.

Concluding thoughts on CanadARThistories—and OERs

While initially regarded with some scepticism by educators and institutions, open educational resources now occupy an established position in the Higher Education landscape. In 2019, the Recommendation on Open Educational Resources (OERs), which called upon governments, institutions, educators, and publishers to support and promote the development of and access to OERs, was adopted by UNESCO, linking OERs to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, including those focused on eliminating inequities in education and ensuring the accessibility of quality information to the general public (UNESCO, n.d.; UNESCO, 2022). Like other OERs, CanadARThistories aims to meet these goals. The course is open access and free to use (for anyone with an internet connection), saving students the cost of an expensive and soon-to-be dated textbook—or, alternatively, from

working through a course without learning materials they cannot afford. Students can navigate the course at their own pace; if they miss a concept or an important idea, they can revisit it, or review a module as many times as they feel necessary. CanadARThistories further gives students multiple modalities through which to access the course content. They can read, study images, listen to audio clips, watch videos, respond to reflective prompts in writing, or follow linked resources to learn more about a concept, work, or event. By pairing these resources with the thematic rather than chronological organisation of the course, CanadARThistories moves away from linear ideas of storytelling and art historical narratives as bound by progress. Instead, by providing guided interruptions, we emphasise learning as a process and an exploration.

As we worked through the global pandemic, we learned about a fantastic array of technological tools that were created or could be repurposed for education. While we missed the classroom and seeing our students react to works of art in real time, we also marvelled at what technology could offer us in terms of accessibility, inclusion, and collaborative learning. We thought about what we might keep if and when we returned to in-person learning. And, writing this essay in 2023, we watch with cautious optimism for the possibilities that generative artificial intelligence tools will offer our students. However, as we learned through the process of creating an OER, technology is only really useful when it supports solid pedagogy and the learning goals we have for our classrooms.

At Open Art Histories, we, like many curators and art historians, believe that narratives of art history must change if our discipline is to have relevance for new learners and scholars (Barringer, 2020; Clark, 2019; Grant & Price, 2020; Hamlin, 2019; Kilroy-Ewbank, n.d.). However, we also believe that inclusive, decolonial, and globally engaged courses cannot be created by shifting content alone. Pedagogical approaches must also be reimagined, and perhaps, as we suggest here, the way we design and develop courses. A collaborative approach to course design, supported by collaborative technologies and implemented through an open-access platform that allows for continued, iterative collaboration, shares the burden of course development, necessarily integrates multiple perspectives, and strengthens the relationship between

research expertise and teaching. While it could be argued that an OER in flux is destabilising for students, done with care, we suggest that it allows students to see a place for themselves as co-collaborators and shapers of narratives in our discipline. Moreover, by taking a thematic and contextual approach to Canadian art history, bridging multiple perspectives and ways of looking, and by thinking about how art animates debates around social justice, climate change, misinformation, and reconciliation, we hope we have created a course that is relevant to who our students will become—inspired, thoughtful, engaged citizens with tools to interpret the visual and material world.[9]

Steps toward hope

- Use digital and communication technologies to collaboratively design open-access courses like CanadARThistories, ensuring the integration of diverse perspectives and shared labour among educators.

- Highlight the value of open-access courses for students, offering accessible, innovative, and inclusive learning opportunities.

- Promote collaboratively designed courses as a model for reimagining and improving humanities education—and use the course content itself to embody hope.

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11. PhDForum: An online quiet study room providing a public space that nurtures the personal experience of being part of a global community

Donna Peach

Abstract

This chapter explores the significance of collaborative power dynamics in academia, emphasising the alignment of words and actions to foster genuine solidarity within the neo-liberal educational landscape. It advocates for creating spaces, particular for students—in this case PhD students—that nurture collective support and challenge the competitive, individualistic norms prevalent in Higher Education. The chapter critically reflects on the ethical implications of research practices, including respecting the right not to be researched, and highlights the need to prioritise agency and autonomy. By acknowledging the strength of relationships and resisting narratives of doubt, this work calls for a more compassionate and equitable academic culture that values trust, reciprocity, and shared growth—for hope.

Keywords: being human; community; collaboration; doctoral; online

The PhDForum began as an inclusive Twitter community I founded in 2012. While curating that Twitter feed, I was saddened by postgraduate researchers expressing their poor mental wellbeing but undecided about how I could assist. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent shift to the use of online rooms provided an opportunity to extend the support I could offer this doctoral community.

In June 2020, I used the platform GoTo Meeting, as it had, in my view, the best security, to launch a quiet online study room. Underpinning the room are deep-rooted values designed to counter neo-liberal capitalism and its intrusion upon the way we perceive ourselves and others. As such, the room is free to use and open twenty-four hours every day.[1] Over the last three years, a community has emerged that is rich in relational strength, a factor too often dimmed by the noise of those who drive the neo-liberal narrative.

To aid accessibility, the code to enter the room is available to new users through an Eventbrite link, which is listed on the PhDForum's webpage.[2] The code never changes, allowing users to enter and leave the room at will. The room is a quiet study space, and users are asked to keep their microphones turned off, but they can choose to have their cameras on or off. There is a chat box, and most who began using the room used the chat feature to make connections with one another by discussing their writing challenges and sharing their writing goals. I keep the room active on my computer, but the link does require refreshing, and over time, a group of amazing individuals have volunteered to help keep the room open. Those acts of kindness enabled me to sleep and go to work without being anxious that the room would shut.

During lockdown, I was working at home and thus able to deliver scheduled writing sessions in the room every Wednesday and Saturday. I would turn my microphone on to provide oral announcements to schedule breaks and offer support. Gradually, with encouragement, other people in the room also began to deliver interjections. People loved to hear each other's voices, and these announcements began to include other ways in which those in the room shared experiences. On occasion, people would play the guitar, and for some time, one person would treat the room once a day to "bunny cam". If you were in the room at those

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1   See https://thephdforum.com/study-room
2   See https://www.thephdforum.com/

times, you would see a computer screen full of smiling faces watching someone's pet rabbit eat a lettuce leaf.

Those using the room began to find other ways to connect and support each other by using Google Docs to share information and organise the room announcements. Some began to work in groups and use Forest App,[3] a popular mobile phone app that aids concentration by sharing the responsibility to grow a virtual tree. A year after the room had launched, those virtual plants had been converted into real trees planted worldwide in the name of our community. Other numerous acts of kindness have since occurred, including sponsorship for people who are homeless and those impacted by war.

Some relationships that developed in the room have gone beyond its virtual boundaries, with friendships blossoming and groups arranging to meet up. Over time, people have completed their doctorates, and they keep using the room. Post-doctorate, many will face precarious employment, requiring them to travel to different cities and countries, which can increase their sense of isolation. A remarkable interaction occurred when someone in the room was relocating to another country to begin work at a university. That person was greeted by a surprise welcome party of room members who met her at the airport and settled her into her new city. They then arranged a lunch in a room member's home, and the rest of the room was invited to join online. It was a surreal experience to observe the impact that one human action can have. We have had a wedding and attended multiple vivas (when observers are permitted), and generally, we support the ups and downs of each other's lives.

Post-lockdown, as we returned to campus, I wondered if the need for the room would diminish. That question was answered as people began to appear in the room when on campus. Social isolation measures were still in place at that time, and people who were on campus could be seen (with their cameras on) wearing face masks. I realised that even when students are on campus, there is something intrinsically isolating about doctoral study, especially for subjects such as the humanities, which are rarely lab-based. That loneliness is also evident away from study, and some people stayed in their rooms while they packed boxes to move

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3   See https://www.forestapp.cc/

house and even while they fell asleep (with their cameras off).

The PhDForum is a community built on trust (Mezgar, 2006), initially founded on my belief in people who were strangers to study together in a shared space without formal moderators. I also reflected on the confidence I had in myself to respond adequately to any issues that arose (Peach, 2021). As with any human interaction, miscommunication and upset can occur between people. On the rare occasion that this has occurred, members of the room have successfully reached out to one another or to me for support with reconciliation. Although the room is always open and new people join frequently, those using the room experience it as a private space that they wish to be protected. As such, over time, we have learned that the community does not want snapshots of the room to be shared on social media or wish to be the subjects of research.

The room is a co-constructed space in which all attendees have contributed to the development of a meaningful online community, which has helped transform our social reality as postgraduate researchers (Reicher et al., 2005). It exists in a world where, for many decades, Higher Education has been restructured by neo-liberalism, and students are increasingly viewed as customers and commodities (Traykov & Timcke, 2012). Learning is often driven by economic gain, with the customer experience of the student being the public-facing marker of the value of their experience (Lujan & DiCarlo, 2023). Many current doctoral students were born into neo-liberal societies and have no alternative experience. They are children of the technological age, which can lead to increased social isolation and constant monitoring of their movements and interactions. There is an increased expectation of presenteeism and performance, leading postgraduate researchers to hide for fear of being stigmatised (Berry et al., 2021).

I have written about my experience of the room, as I do here. Additionally, I have been interviewed about the room[4] and delivered keynote presentations to doctoral schools in England and Northern Ireland. The community appears to accept these activities, which helps explain the principles and values by which the room was established and is sustained.

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4   See The Digest. (2020). PhD hacks: Dr Donna Peach & the PhDForum journey [video]. *YouTube*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C_UfZx4nLdo

I have resisted praise from members of the room for its success; each one of us makes the community what it is, and those who use the room provide far more human sustenance to each other than I do. However, my humble actions do make a difference, and should the room continue for decades, I might have to make provision for it upon my death. The post-neo-liberal world is likely to look very different by then, but people's need for connection will remain constant.

Steps toward hope

- Ensure consistency between stated values and actual practices to foster authentic solidarity in academic settings.

- Design and maintain environments—especially for PhD students—that encourage collaboration and collective support over competition.

- Actively resist the individualistic and competitive culture of neo-liberal Higher Education by promoting shared success and mutual aid.

- Respect students' and participants' right to choose how they engage, including the right not to be researched.

- Reevaluate research practices to ensure they uphold dignity, consent, and the well-being of all involved.

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12. "The art of conversation": Educational guidance practitioners and support for distance-learning students

Oliver Burney, Jennifer Hillman,
Mark Kershaw, Stephanie Newton,
Elizabeth Shakespeare, and Sean Starbuck

Abstract

This chapter addresses the critical issue of connection in Higher Education in the post-pandemic era. While hybrid learning, virtual campuses, and remote teaching have expanded educational access, they have also, paradoxically, contributed to feelings of disconnection among students and staff. As universities begin to explore the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in guidance services, questions remain about how technology can enhance—rather than replace—human connection. This piece draws on a dialogue session with Educational Advisers at the Open University (UK) who provide telephone-based guidance to distance-learning students in STEM. Through collective reflection on guidance practices and engagement with relevant literature, the chapter offers insights into the art of telephone-based guidance conversations, highlighting the enduring value of human connection in educational support, to create a pedagogy of hope.

Introduction

The Open University (OU) is one of the largest providers of distance-learning Higher Education (HE). More than 2 million students have studied with the OU over the last fifty years, and the university has a current body of approximately 5000 tutors. The institution also has a long history of providing telephone educational guidance to students; traditionally this took place within the faculties and more recently it moved to teams of Educational Advisers situated in each of the four Student Recruitment and Support Centres (George, 1983; Tait, 1998; Hilliam et al., 2021). Educational Advisers work within the Information, Advice, and Guidance (IAG) continuum of support, as part of a wider student support team for students and enquirers. In our organisation, guidance is defined as follows:

> The process of helping enquirers and students with more complex needs to explore issues that may present a barrier to successful study. Practitioners will encourage enquirers and students to assess appropriate options and make decisions that are in their best interests and will facilitate learning and progression (The Open University, 2022).

The institutional IAG framework helps to differentiate advice from guidance, which is, ideally, impartial rather than directive. A large part of the Educational Adviser role is to help students navigate their options in relation to teaching, learning, and assessment processes and policies; this necessitates referrals and liaison with other specialist teams. In their guidance practice with students, Educational Advisers work primarily by telephone—either reactively via an inbound telephone service or via a pre-arranged outbound telephone appointment. Interactions may be a one-off discussion, or part of a continuous dialogue with repeated contact over a prolonged period. The service is accredited by Matrix (UK IAG Quality Standard) whose definition of guidance is supporting "the specific needs of the individual", which may involve either "a session or series of sessions between an individual and a skilled and trained advisor" (Matrix, 2021).

In the wider international context of HE, guidance takes varying forms. One survey of practice across fifteen EU member states conducted over two decades ago found that guidance was traditionally being used to support student degree/module choice at the pre-entry and induction stage, but—at the time—careers guidance was "the fastest-growing area" (Watts & Esbroeck, 2000, p. 17). A more recent piece compared guidance practice in Denmark and China. In Denmark, guidance included both counselling and career planning, whereas in China a typology of three main forms was found, encompassing employability, careers, and mental health (Zhang, 2016). The importance of guidance in supporting student success is well documented (Sewart, 1993). A study at Università Roma Tre found causal links between the provision of guidance and academic achievement (Biasi et al., 2018). There is a strong consensus in the literature that, however they operate, guidance services support students' agency to consider their options and empower decision making—especially when they encounter study and personal setbacks (Colas-Bravo et al., 2016; Määttä & Uusiautti, 2018). Other pieces have demonstrated the role of guidance in supporting HE students from underrepresented backgrounds to move into graduate career pathways (Cullen, 2013, cited in Hooley, 2014, p. 38). Common to most guidance service models is, perhaps, something akin to Freire's (1994) *Pedagogy of Hope* (and later bell hooks, 2003), where the focus is enabling individuals to pursue their goals (Zhang, 2016)—or, in Danish, *vejledning* (leading someone on their way).

The provision of guidance in our setting at the OU certainly aligns with this. As a distance-learning provider without prerequisite qualifications from students or "entry grades", the OU student body is diverse with many students being from what are often considered "non-traditional" backgrounds. For example, across May and June 2023, the average age of students engaging with the guidance service in the Faculty of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) was thirty-seven years old. Our data analysis has found that in the same period, 70% of the students we supported had a declared disability, 47% had mental health needs, and 45% were living in areas in the bottom two quintiles of the index of multiple deprivation. Here, then, we aim to share and shed light on the principles of telephone guidance in our unique context.

What follows in the next section of this chapter is a conversation convened over video conference among four practitioners and two supporting managers from the guidance service in STEM. Our focus was to consider the principles of guidance practice in the context of distance learning, in the broadest sense. The ensuing discussion has been transcribed and lightly edited, with the objective of providing readers with a picture of our conversation as it happened organically.

Educational advisers in conversation

Principles of telephone guidance

Elizabeth Shakespeare: As a guidance practitioner, what have you found to be the most important principles of guidance when supporting distance-learning students over the telephone?

Sean Starbuck: The most important thing is creating the space. At a campus university, that might be a separate corner of a room, or an office. Over the telephone it is setting out our stall that we are here to spend time with someone and, of course, that is part of the contract that we create with them about the time we have and how we can use it.

Mark Kershaw: I agree with Sean about the creation of space; it's about creating the right environment for a guidance conversation to take place. Alongside that, for me, is trying to break down the thought of any power relationship that might be assumed within our conversation, or between a student and the university. Through language, we create a space in which students feel comfortable in talking about their situation, their aspirations, their problems, their needs, etcetera, and feeling it is a collaborative space.

Stephanie Newton: Like Mark, I think we try as far as we can to set ourselves apart from the university and that we do not represent a particular agenda. It's trying to give that unbiased approach to helping them feel comfortable and open-up in guidance conversations.

Sean Starbuck: If we imagined this visually, we would be walking side by side with the student.

Oliver Burney: I agree. One of the principles we use and try to convey is: *I believe in your potential*. I'm here to help you to express yourself, get somewhere and get to some actions. You're accepting of the whole person and welcome them even with their issues or problems. With distance-learning students, you realise they're sitting in their house. You're trying to make that more present, that moment, they're in their house, doing whatever they're doing. You can hear the dog barking. You notice those things because it's important to it being a real experience, where students bring their whole selves, rather than something transactional between two people.

Holistic guidance at a distance

Elizabeth Shakespeare: The reality of our work is that students are in their home situation and surrounded by their things, or at work, or some other personal context. How does that shape your guidance practice? Working over the telephone, how do you ensure you consider this student holistically in the context of their wider environment and lives?

Mark Kershaw: Using something like the helicopter approach where using language you travel through the layers of perception up to a point where you get to that sense of *this is my motivation. This will. This is why I'm here*. Using both visualisation and metaphor are colourful ways of exploring ideas over the telephone.

Oliver Burney: That's one of the challenges with telephone guidance is making it memorable.

Stephanie Newton: The telephone can be less inhibiting for some students – more so than video call even—in that they feel a bit more anonymous. However, it makes it a very different experience for us because we can't see the person in front of us, so we can't pick up on those visual clues about how they might be feeling. We have to do a lot more listening and questioning than you might have to do in person.

Mark Kershaw: On this note, I just want to share an anecdote about that from a personal perspective. I popped into my local pub a few weeks ago and they were having a Motown event. I went in there and it was like

I'd walked into a bar in Alabama. The pub went silent, and I felt I was being looked at. That's the thing about the phone, I find my race becomes irrelevant and it makes me feel more confident that I don't feel I'm being judged. Perhaps it is the same for students. That any visible characteristic that they feel might be a barrier to connection or communication is not.

Oliver Burney: That's anonymity, isn't it? Which is disinhibiting, I think.

Emancipatory guidance practice and its challenges

Jennifer Hillman: One principle we haven't discussed is the extent to which guidance should or could be empowering students. Almost a decade ago, the case was made for the need to develop new, more "emancipatory" approaches to guidance in the careers sector (Hooley, 2015). What do you consider to be the relationship between educational guidance in HE/adult learning, and social justice?

Sean Starbuck: This is something that I've tried to integrate into my day-to-day practice. We have to be conscious of our mindset and suspend judgement. Students can present in a way that it feels that that they're facing an uphill battle or there's very little progress or there's the conditions in which they're working within, which are making things very difficult for them to succeed or to inch towards their goals. Many students haven't had the opportunity to reflect; guiding them to see where their strengths are in other parts of their lives and how they apply to study, you're almost building that wall from scratch, brick by brick.

Mark Kershaw: I'm conscious of the creation of this whole industry of self-help and housing all the possibility of change within the individual as opposed to society. I think much of my work tends to be around the individual and trying to help the individual to develop, adapt and change. But I know there are all sorts of structural impediments to success, and all my conversations with the students aren't going to change those. I remember in the 1980s in careers guidance, there was some dismissal of the structural barriers to career progression (Roberts, 1977). Obviously, things have changed but I feel I am still working at an individual level. Currently I am acknowledging that there are barriers and collaborating with the student to show that there are ways that we can perhaps navigate the way through together. I need to think about

how I challenge those structural impediments and how guidance can help to breakdown some of those barriers.

Sean Starbuck: I think sometimes our role as a default can feel too neutral. Not that I want to take a directive approach as my default, but a student's path is going to be easier to navigate if they don't have lots of social structural factors working against them. By offering the same approach for every student, that's an inequality in itself, isn't it?

Stephanie Newton: I'm reflecting on what you were saying about not necessarily treating everyone the same. We might sometimes think of our role as helping empower students to become more independent learners and help them find ways to do things themselves. But, like Sean says, I think we do sometimes need to advocate for students. It's also imperative that we are having these wider conversations to find out what is actually a barrier for an individual and not making assumptions based on what we think we know.

Oliver Burney: I see this issue of social justice and guidance as potentially unlocking us as a resource, where we as practitioners are ignited by the justice of the situation, I suppose. I think that this is only in its infancy in terms of my own practice. But education is one of the places where that social justice happens; it bubbles away and then eventually it grows, doesn't it? We should be thinking of our students as driving change. If we're supporting students to stay on course, they're investing in their future. And we are part of the optimism of investing in their future.

Sean Starbuck: I also think guidance has a unique role in that because we've all had those conversations with students where you realise this is the first time they have allowed themselves to vocalise something. That's a radical thing because society doesn't tend to give people that space. That's not what's seen as worthwhile or productive because it's intangible. It's often immeasurable. But the things that students can tell us after a conversation with us, you can see the growth.

Elizabeth Shakespeare: This is something that they take with them in the way that they face the world, and the way they think about themselves in the world. That's one of the most precious things that we can do for them. That does make me feel hopeful.

Some (hopeful) principles for remote educational guidance

Like all good guidance conversations, our discussion was the *starting* (not *end*) point for designing action and reflection. The excerpt above captures our thoughts – in the moment—about our telephone guidance service for a largely "non-traditional" student demographic. If we were to visually distil the conversation above and capture the elements of what we seek to do as practitioners, it might look something like Figure 12.1 below. As a set of guidance principles, it is neither comprehensive nor complete, but it is rooted in our shared values about the role guidance plays in a more hopeful educational experience at university.

Dissolving the power imbalance / sense of hierarchy

Unveiling opportunity and options

Creating a sense of time and space

Enabling the realisation of strengths

Suspending judgement / assumption
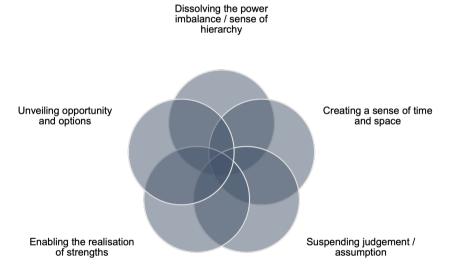
Fig. 12.1 A visual representation of our live reflections "in conversation" (image by authors, CC BY-NC 4.0).

Cutting across our conversation was the sense that guidance practice has often been about helping individuals to navigate structural or societal systems that do not work well for them rather than addressing the macro issues. However, we began to explore the place of a low-tech or "old-tech" telephone conversation in this (Simpson, 2000).

Our discussion began with us thinking aloud about the experiential aspects of guidance. In our remote work, we necessarily enter the

student's home or work environment and (albeit via the telephone line) wider life. We shared the experience of connecting with distance-learners to create a memorable interaction where the student is never "passive" (Gendron, 2001, p. 77) and where guidance "connects meaningfully to the wider experience and life of the individuals who participate in it" (Hooley, 2014, p. 57). We played with the idea that there is something profoundly disinhibiting about telephone conversations for both students and staff, observing the equalising impact of the telephone—where sharing things like ethnicity, or social-economic setting become a choice, not a default. Here our anecdotal commentary is tentatively supported by usage data: in May 2023, for example, we found a higher proportion of STEM students from racially minoritised backgrounds accessed guidance support through telephone contact than by email—a difference of 8% points. Other studies have found examples of student preference for telephone contact with tutors (Croft et al., 2010).

We reflected on the way the telephone requires us to interact *differently* than we might do in person in order to be able to convey our fundamental belief in the strengths and abilities of the student. We addressed how we each navigate the tension between a necessarily broad "helicopter" approach (Arthy, 1999) allowing us to see and "unpick" wider and deeper issues being raised, with the requirement to be boundaried and structured. As others have noted, "effective use of the telephone requires, and therefore encourages, discipline [...] The lack of access to visual cues can be compensated by greater attention to aural cues" (Watts & Dent, 2002, p. 4).

Like other practitioners who have thought about the application of a pedagogy of hope outside of formal classroom teaching, we have started to see the place of the telephone guidance conversation in "unveiling opportunities for hope, no matter what the obstacles may be" (Freire, 2004, pp. 2–3, cited in Van Hove et al, 2012, p. 46). Our musings concluded with some thoughts about whether there is a place for a less neutral model of guidance where practice is about challenging—rather than navigating—the structural "obstacles" themselves. Here, our guiding principles or model for telephone guidance would also include the emancipatory power of advocacy as a feedback loop to the institution.

Broadly speaking, we recognise that in the remit of our roles, guidance has a functional role: unlocking an open and inclusive education for students and ensuring their academic success. Ultimately, however, "in conversation" we collectively began to see guidance as an end unto itself in supporting the realisation of strengths and developing lifelong critical and reflexive skills in our students. What we hope to have foregrounded in sharing our reflections is the simple power and implicit hopefulness of the guidance conversation.

Steps toward hope

- Prioritise fostering genuine human connections in hybrid and remote learning environments to counteract the disconnection amplified by virtual campuses and social media.

- Explore the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in guidance services as a tool to enhance, rather than replace, empathetic and human-centred support.

- Leverage human-based guidance conversations to provide continued personalised support tailored to students' academic and personal needs.

- Encourage collective reflection and collaboration among Educational Advisers to refine guidance practices and share effective strategies.

- Engage with literature on guidance services to inform best practices and continually improve support systems in Higher Education.

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III. CREATIVE CURRICULUM DESIGN

Creative curriculum design: Introduction

Tom Burns, Sandra Sinfield, and

Sandra Abegglen

This section focuses on pedagogy and curriculum development in a challenging, twenty-first-century Higher Education context that values competition, efficiency, and the market. These works highlight the value and purpose of education and especially the risk worth taking in education to change current approaches. As Gert Biesta (2013) states, "real" education always involves a "risk" because education is not about filling a bucket but lighting a fire. In this "brave", re-imagined education, students are not seen as objects, educators are not seen as knowledge holders, and the curriculum is not seen as something to pass through and tick off. Rather, pedagogy is framed as valuable practice, a means to promote teaching and learning that matters.

The chapters included in this section do not provide manuals on how to do things (although they do include very practical advice on how to implement change), but inspirational "lived" and "lively" accounts on how to instil hope, how to surface hope—and how to be and become hopeful in your educational practices. The effect is energising, recognising agency and yourself as an actor with agency, in diverse contexts. It is about reclaiming ownership, finding voice, celebrating students and their becoming—and it is about hope.

Thus, this section is more than a section about the curriculum: it is real and imagined hope beyond the normalised monetised and transactional discourse that is the narrative of education in these dark, "supercomplex" (Abegglen et al., 2020), and neo-liberal times. In these chapters people

dare to imagine and be different. They illuminate what makes education educational, that is, the value in maintaining the complexity and risks involved in a hopeful education. As Biesta (2009, p. 35) puts it:

> Instead of simply making a case for effective education, we always need to ask "effective for what?"—and given that what might be effective for one particular situation or one group of students but not necessarily in another situation or for other groups of students, we also always need to ask "effective for whom?"

The section opens with a chapter, "Hope Street: Reimagining learning journeys" by Laura Bissell and David Overend, that meanders with the authors along "Hope Street" in Glasgow and Mexico, re-discovering the joy of small things, valorising the everyday, and reimagining education as a journey or journeys of hope. This is provocatively followed by a chapter, "The other F word: Re-storying student failure in Canadian Higher Education" by Victoria A. Fritz, that celebrates and embraces failure to help students embrace risk. In a similar vein, "Armed love': A case study in cultivating a pedagogy of hope", by Christopher J. Cachia, reveals the power of sharing personal accounts of anxiety and loss. Continuing the focus on empathy, the next chapter, "The XXX Game: A character-based tool for learning" by Louise Sheridan, reveals the power of role-playing games where students become empowered to enter the risky space of idea exploration in theatrical ways. We move on to "Reimagining the sage–guide dichotomy: A life-long learner's story of teaching and learning in Higher Education", where Katherine Herbert and Yeslam Al-Saggaf explore the sage-on-the-stage/guide-on-the-side conundrum provoked by the author's metaphor of the player-conductor. Here the tutor creates a model assignment and invites the students to critique and develop it, and in the process, to find their own strength and agency. "Playing with learning: Adopting a playful approach to Higher Education learning and teaching" offers an auto-ethnographic account of moving from a didactic mode of teaching that was "boring" for students—and more so for the lecturer himself—to a more joyous and playful approach. As a novice "pracademic", John Parkin recovers his agency as a primary teacher turned university lecturer when he embraces traditional "toys" for learning. In the next chapter, "Making plants cool again: Re-introducing botany as a beacon of hope and innovation in our educational systems", Geyan Surendran, James Connorton, Adam

Bromley, Lian X. Liu, Paul Townsend, Michael Heinrich, and Shelini Surendran offer a passionate plea for the re-centring of Botany in Biology and Science courses to re-highlight the value that such education can bring to all of us. "Putting theory into (proposed) action: The significance of campaign planning as an assessment task" by Luke Ray Di Marco Campbell offers a model of authentic assessment where students are invited to put together campaign proposals that harness their lived and professional experiences in an effort to change their worlds and those of others. "Freedom to learn: Developing autonomous critical learners through self-assessment in Higher Education" by Agnese Di Domenico, Aidan Harvey, Beth Karp, Elizabeth Veldon, Ingeborg van Knippenberg, John Cowan, and Zack Moir offers a passionate argument for autonomy, meta-cognition and self-assessment as a way to reclaim and re-humanise education—which leads beautifully into the concluding chapter, where, in "Hope in an art school", Simone Maier weaves a fascinating flaneur's journey through her recent experiences as a university art lecturer, frustrated by the greyness of Higher Education and constant rejection, exhilarated by her postgraduate studies, and finding her joy and voice working with her students.

Key learnings

1. Hope as a critical pedagogical praxis

Hope here is not a naïve optimism or an abstract ideal. It is positioned as a grounded, intentional, and relational practice—one that is enacted through curriculum design, storytelling, risk-taking, and creative engagement. Whether it is in re-enchanting the everyday, confronting institutional norms, or engaging students in world-making acts, hope becomes a strategy of resistance and renewal.

2. Reclaiming agency and voice

Across the section, there is a powerful call to restore voice and agency to both educators and students. The chapters challenge transactional models of education by demonstrating how co-creation, dialogue, and trust can shape more meaningful pedagogical encounters. In doing

so, they foreground practices that empower learners and educators to speak, act, and transform their educational realities.

3. Embracing risk, failure, and uncertainty

Risk is reframed not as something to be avoided but as a condition of real learning. The contributors illustrate how stepping into vulnerability— by sharing personal narratives, experimenting with unfamiliar methods, or reframing failure as learning—opens up possibilities for connection, insight, and growth. These acts of courage become central to rehumanising education.

4. Reimagining roles and relationships

Traditional binaries—such as expert/novice, teacher/student, sage/ guide—are disrupted. New relational dynamics emerge through metaphors like player-conductor, and through practices of collaboration and co-learning. These relational reconfigurations shift authority from control to care, and from instruction to invitation, cultivating spaces of mutual transformation.

5. Pedagogical embodiment and creativity

The chapters bring attention to embodied, affective, and sensory forms of knowing. Through performance, play, poetry, plant life, and art, pedagogical practices are reconnected with joy, emotion, and imagination. These creative modalities are not tangential but integral to resisting reductive educational paradigms and revitalising the curriculum.

6. Disruption as a space for possibility

Rather than viewing disruption—whether biographical, institutional, or systemic—as purely negative, these chapters show how it can be a starting point for critical reflection and pedagogical innovation. Moments of fracture are repurposed into openings for dialogue, community, and new futures.

In their totality, these chapters offer a powerful rejoinder to neoliberal education. They show that curriculum is not merely a sequence of content to be delivered, but a site of struggle, care, and possibility. This is curriculum as becoming, as connection, as critique—and above all, as hope enacted.

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13. Hope Street:
Reimagining learning journeys

Laura Bissell and David Overend

Abstract

This chapter explores an artistic exchange project between Glasgow and Mexico City that unfolded during COP26, the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference. Situated within the framework of creative mobilities, the chapter examines how journeys—both physical and digital—can be reimagined as sites of learning, transformation, and hope. Drawing on the concept of learning journeys, it investigates how participatory and community-based experiences generate meaningful encounters and new ways of knowing. Through co-authored reflections, the chapter emphasises the experimental and generative potential of such exchanges, proposing them as hopeful responses to global challenges like the climate crisis. Ultimately, it argues for the value of creative adventures as a means of opening up alternative pathways for education, collaboration, and sustainable futures.

Keywords: climate; creative adventure; mobilities; performance; revaluing; walking art

Introduction: It begins and ends in hope

We are going on a journey now, for this place, but also for other places.

On this walk, you are invited to look, to listen, and to pause.

You are invited to reflect on the precarity of this place, of everywhere right now.

You are invited to hope.[1]

On 11th November 2021, we took a walk down Hope Street in Glasgow and returned along Paseo de la Reforma in Mexico City. At the same time, over 5000 miles away, several other walkers took the same journey in reverse, walking through their own city and returning imaginatively through another. Both routes set off from and returned to a gold-painted shipping container, which was converted into a small studio space with a live connection for conversation and exchange. The project invited learners and educators in both cities to collaborate in response to global climate concerns at the time of COP26, the 26th United Nations Climate Change conference, which was held at the Scottish Event Campus in Glasgow. Against the backdrop of large-scale political diplomacy, policy and protest, this small-scale journey offered a model of hope for precarious times. It brought together participants from across continents, time zones and cultures, asking how we might travel together through troubled places towards better futures.

In our collaborative work for over a decade with our art-research collective Making Routes, we have convened a network and online resource for researchers and artists who are "on the move", exploring journeys within their creative practice (Bissell & Overend, 2021). In this time, we have engaged in various forms of artistic research, conducted "performance fieldwork" (Overend, 2023), and been on many creative adventures, to use Brian Massumi's phrase (2018). Building on this work, the *Hope Street Walk* (*HSW*) was programmed by Shared Studios' Climate Portals at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.[2] Part of a global network of portals including others in Iraq, Palestine, Rwanda, and Uganda, the portals offer a model for learning in the context of dispersed networks of artistic practice. In creating the walks, we collaborated with sound artist Matthew Whiteside and worked in dialogue with Mexican curator Ciela Herce. Our contribution to this collaboration was a new text that took the form of an audio walk through Glasgow. This involved

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1   Text from *Hope Street Walk* by Laura Bissell and David Overend.
2   The Climate Portals festival was led by the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland alongside three creative partners: Shared Studios, Scottish Ballet, and Harrison Parrott. The festival connected with global partners in Bamako, Erbil, Gaza, Nakivale, Mexico City, and Kigali.

two alternating recorded voices set against an urban soundtrack, which showcased the contemporary city through shifts between historical detail, poetic reflection, and ecological context.

Fig. 13.1 The gold-painted shipping container outside The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in Glasgow where the Climate Portals festival took place (image by Ingrid Mur, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0).

In this short chapter, we reflect on *HSW* as a hopeful journey. The processes of transformation and development experienced in educational, participatory and community contexts are frequently referred to as "learning journeys". This co-authored piece takes that term literally, asking how physical and digital journeys in specific locations might bring about meaningful and hopeful change. For Sara Ahmed (2016, pp. 46–47), "hope is an investment that the paths we follow will get us somewhere". This sentiment can be considered as we embark on a new learning journey: the hope is that we will begin at one point of understanding (A) and arrive somewhere different (B) with new insights, experiences and knowledge, gathered along the way. Emma Sharp and her co-authors (Sharp et al., 2021, p. 367) argue that agency leads to hope and that by providing learners with opportunities to be active citizens, they can be empowered by the understanding that "there is not one way to learn, think or do". This approach encourages an experiential engagement with environmental

"wicked" problems such as climate change, in which learners can travel with the problem at their own pace, building an understanding of their relationship to crises and precarity and finding their own agency within challenging environments.

The concept of a "pedagogy of hope" was coined by Paulo Freire (1992) to advocate a liberating, decolonised educational system. Freire (1992, p. 8) claimed that "there is no change without dreams, as there is no dream without hope". The connection of hope to change is important. We are also influenced by bell hooks (2003), who further developed these ideas in *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, arguing for democratic and inclusive education in the classroom and beyond. Within the context of *HSW*, a pedagogy of hope recognises and responds to the immediate environment including the conditions of crises and precarity that we encounter, aiming to cultivate imaginative capabilities and paving the way towards unknown possible futures (Lopez, 2022).

Fig. 13.2 A participant undertakes the *Hope Street Walk* in Glasgow on 11th November 2021 (image by Ingrid Mur, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0).

In the lead up to the Climate Portals festival, the impact of the pandemic was palpable; Mexico City was in lockdown, disrupting our collaboration. The process was not smooth, but like with any journey, we

learned along the way and we were able to share the work on the evening before the final day of the COP26 conference. *HSW* attempted to evoke a sense of the specific streets of the two cities while also acknowledging that these sites themselves are microcosms of the wider issues facing humanity. As one of Scotland's most polluted streets, Hope Street was a symbol for human impact, abandonment, climate change, and precarity. As an approach to learning, the project placed small scale local detail against the large scale "hyperobjects" of climate, economy, and deep time (Morton, 2013). This relationship between situated experience and overwhelming planetary phenomena was a key concern of this project. This encouraged a critical and imaginative engagement with the urban environment that made connections across scale and then facilitated a cross-continental exchange that established a global context for hopeful journeys. The walk enacted a conceptual shift from the tangible and observable features of the route to the issues being addressed at COP26, suggesting that seeds of change could be found between the cracks.

Creative adventures

The buddleia, the butterfly bush, growing out of windows and along ledges, silhouetted on the skyline, whisper of hope.

The pigeons nestled in loft spaces, biding their time, murmur of hope.

The grasses poking through pavements, seeking the sunlight, hum of hope.

The seabirds hovering high above the urban landscape, shriek of hope.[3]

To emphasise the artistic, experimental and generative qualities of this journey, we refer to "creative adventures" that have the potential to open up new pathways of discovery and understanding. Massumi (2018, p. 99) uses this phrase to argue for a continual process of moving on, of relocating value from fixed states to a "self-driving processual turnover". Informed by this project of revaluation, *HSW* asks where we place value and, in the context of decarbonisation, how journeys can be reframed and reimagined for their positive and progressive potential.

As a model for "poor pedagogy" (Masschelein, 2010), *HSW* heads

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3   Text from *Hope Street Walk* by Laura Bissell and David Overend.

out into the streets, directing the gaze to the cracks in the parapets where hardy flora grow. This approach aligns with Cal Flyn's (2022, p. 323) *Islands of Abandonment*, which rejects the various doomsday scenarios for our planet:

> I cannot accept their conclusions. To do so is to abandon hope, to accept the inevitability of a fallen world, a ruinous future. And yet everywhere I have looked, everywhere I have been—places bent and broken, despoiled and desolate, polluted and poisoned—I have found new life springing from the wreckage of the old, life all the stronger and more valuable for its resilience.

It is significant that Flyn observes signs of hope between the cracks, requiring a sensibility to the immediate environment and an ability to look closely at the detail of ostensibly ruinous places. This attention to tiny details and an approach to careful, detailed observation characterised both the Glasgow and Mexico City walks.

The audio walks of the two sites vary considerably, with a sunny daytime Mexico City contrasted with a dark, rainy evening in Glasgow. Nevertheless, some parallels and convergences, as well as differences and departures, emerge through the spoken texts.

Fig. 13.3 A participant of *Hope Street Walk* passes a bus stop advertising the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) (image by Ingrid Mur, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0).

"Glasgow" derives from the Gaelic phrase for "Dear Green Place"; however, there is little green in the grid-like streets of the city, with occasional wildflowers that have self-seeded and taken root on buildings or that poke through gaps in the pavement. In contrast, the audio walk to and around Chapultepec Park, Mexico City's biggest park (which is "huge, even bigger than Central Park"), notes that "it has been raining a lot, it is green, which makes it even more beautiful". The Mexico City guide walks along the major thoroughfare leading up to the park gates, while the Glasgow audio draws attention to the little lanes leading off Hope Street, which are described as "the spaces in between, the city's crevices, its wrinkles". These differing scales, of wide, open avenues and alleyways squeezed between buildings offer contrasting insights into the architectures and geographies of these specific city locations. Both audio experiences refer to the smells and presence of food outlets: in Mexico City there are parlours selling junk food, Mexican souvenirs, ice cream; and in Glasgow, the restaurants and takeaways tell the stories of "migration, globalisation, fast food and convenience food and lunchbreaks and unrecyclable coffee cups that will end up in landfill".

This abundance of detail that characterises these concurrent walks has an established precedent in both walking art and education research. Walking promises "a corporeal brushing with the 'real' and 'immediate' (as well as 'ever-shifting')" aspects of its site (Whybrow, 2005, p. 19). The approach recalls Walter Benjamin's "revalorisation of the everyday and insignificant" (Beaver, 2006, p. 81) in which revaluation of apparently insignificant details represents a way of engaging with the world that recognises the importance of individual material relationships. In *HSW*, walking is a method of revaluation, in which the city is reframed and recast as a site for hopeful exploration in the context of unprecedented climate change. The suggestion is that we need to adventure creatively in order to locate and interpret the signs of hope that line our streets and circle overhead.

Towards a hopeful pedagogy

We are close now, under the bridge, underneath the arches.

Pause before you cross Argyle Street. Look back up Hope Street, the path you have just walked.

Hope Street is a microcosm: Pollution, abandonment, climate change, precarity.

"And yet, everywhere I have looked…"[4]

Walking two cities simultaneously places the small scale in broader geo-political and environmental contexts. The walks therefore operate through a displacement of the walker from the academy into the city outside (Masschelein, 2010). The position of the shipping container outside a Higher Education institution emphasised this approach, which literally invited the Glasgow participants to leave the safety and warmth of the building to take a walk through the city. This journey then moves into a mode of imaginative revalorisation—looking again with creativity and hope—through what Massumi (2018, p. 99) refers to as the "processual turnover", emphasised through the performance of the audio walk. Next, the outward walk is transposed across continents when walkers retrace their steps and attend to another place as they are invited to make connections and comparisons between the cities. Finally, the conversation that takes place in the shared studio (in this case outside the entrance to a Higher Education institution) enacts a return to a place of learning, in which reflection, consolidation, and integration might take place.

Fig. 13.4 The participants of the Glasgow and Mexico City walks meet in the Shared Studio climate portal (image by Ingrid Mur, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0).

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4   Text from *Hope Street Walk* by Laura Bissell and David Overend.

Walking down Hope Street takes us further than might be assumed…

Walk down Hope Street,

And perhaps Hope Street can take us elsewhere.[5]

HSW was a journey down one street in Glasgow that invited imaginings of other people and places. It encouraged the "art of noticing" (Lowenhaupt Tsing, 2015) and sought a recognition of what can be read as global in the local. It sought to draw attention to one microcosm in an attempt to acknowledge a wider ecology of connections and experiences. Our intention is to develop this enquiry about the positive and progressive potential of journeys within artistic educational contexts. Like Ahmed (2016, pp. 46–47), we believe that "hope is an investment that the paths we follow will get us somewhere". By mapping the creative potential of journeys onto "learning journeys" in the form of designed curricula, we intend to evaluate the ways in which "creative adventures" can open up new routes, discoveries and knowledges. This is our hope.

Steps towards hope

- Consider setting up artistic exchange projects between institutions and cities to foster creative mobilities. Emphasise the experimental and generative potential of these exchanges as hopeful responses to global challenges like the climate crisis.

- Advocate for "creative adventures" to open up alternative pathways for education, collaboration, and sustainable futures.

- Reimagine physical and digital journeys as sites of learning, transformation, and hope.

- Harness participatory and community-based experiences to generate meaningful encounters and new ways of knowing.

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5   Text from *Hope Street Walk* by Laura Bissell and David Overend.

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14. The other F word:
Re-storying student failure in
Canadian Higher Education

Victoria A. Fritz

Abstract

Academic failure is a complex yet common experience, often framed in research through models of prediction and prevention. However, these approaches frequently overlook the lived realities and voices of students themselves. This chapter offers a personal essay that foregrounds the student perspective, drawing on the author's experiences as both a learner and a Learning Specialist. Integrating insights from the author's doctoral research, the chapter reflects on the emotional, social, and academic dimensions of failure. It argues that while failure is often difficult to talk about, it holds critical value for understanding learning, resilience, and growth. By bringing personal narrative into dialogue with academic inquiry, the chapter invites a more compassionate and human-centred approach to addressing failure in Higher Education.

Keywords: failure; academic failure; conversation; community; personal essay

Introduction

This is a personal essay, and I chose to write in this style for several reasons. First, according to a foundational theory in learning (Bandura, 1986), humans learn through observing others and through shared experiences; it is my hope that you can learn from my experiences. Second, it is through our experiences and our informal theorising about these experiences that we begin to develop and formalise theory (Love, 2012). The application of theory in practice is important, and the role of informal theory is often overlooked (Love, 2012). As a scholar-practitioner, I am sharing this story to encourage you to reflect on your own experiences in your practices and to develop your own informal theories of life, learning, and failure. I am also a Social Worker by education and trade and maintain my status as a Registered Social Worker in Ontario, Canada. Though I don't practice social work directly in my job as a Learning Specialist, I engage in continuous professional learning related to therapeutic practices that lend a particular lens to my work. Finally, I write this for the students who don't always see themselves represented in research, those who have failed and those who have yet to fail.

An opening

Let's begin with a brief imagination activity. Take a few moments and imagine the following scenario:

> You're finishing off your semester at a local university. You really liked most of your courses, but there was one that sticks in your mind. You tried really hard during the class, but the content didn't seem to stay. You didn't really understand the material, but you didn't know what questions to ask your Teaching Assistants, let alone your Prof! You passed your tests, but just barely, and you are really worried about your final grade in the course. You tried to answer most of the questions on your final exam, but there were a few you didn't know. Ok, maybe more than a few. You really don't know if you passed the course—it could go either way.
>
> Fast forward a few days, your marks are starting to show up on your online account. You did pretty well in the courses you liked, but there it is...the failing grade. The failure on your transcript that has become real, now that you see it in writing...

I'm drawn to failure, perhaps because of the winding route that I took as a student, and the one I continue to take in my career in academia. The goal here is to open up a conversation about failure through sharing my experiences as a student and a Learning Specialist—and sharing the stories that have been gifted to me from students I've had the pleasure of working with. I hope to leave you, the reader, feeling empowered to share your own failures in whatever way feels right for you. I hope to encourage you to be the one to open up conversations about failure in your lives.

My journey

I started my journey with failure at the same place that most students do: undergrad. Admittedly, I was that high-achieving high school graduate, who didn't work hard to get good grades, never really got a bad grade,[1] and continued believing that I could do well with little to no effort. Then, I experienced my first failure in a calculus course during my second year of university. I earned a passing grade on the first midterm (60%), but I didn't care about the content and didn't attend many classes. On the final exam, I knew maybe 10 of the 40 questions, guessed the rest, and knew I was going to fail. I was not surprised to receive a failing grade of 0.[2] That resides on my transcript. As you are reading this, you might be seeing your own experiences reflected in mine, or perhaps those of your friends, your family members, or your children.

In my current job. I am incredibly lucky to work as a Learning Specialist at the university where I did my Master's degree, and I am currently doing my PhD. My main role is supporting students in their academic struggles, so, largely meeting one-to-one with students, from first years through to PhDs, providing guidance in time management, test-taking, studying, posters, and presentations. I have been in this role for over eight years, and I have met with students from many different disciplines (naturals sciences, social sciences, arts and humanities,

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1   Except for my English courses, because I really didn't care about those.
2   I went to a university that had a 0–12 grading system, so anything under a 50% appears as a 0! This makes for a great laugh when I share this grade with students in workshops, only later telling them this was me, and they say "how did this person submit literally nothing in the entire course?!"

business, and others) and from many different areas of the world. I've met with students of many ages, from those straight out of high school to those working on a second career.

Failure comes up more often than I'd ever have expected. I've had students share their stories of failing a course when we were talking about presentation skills. I've had students ask if it's ok that they share that they've failed a course and talk about what happened so that we can help them get back on track. I've had students tell me how afraid of failing they are, and how much distress it is causing them. I've had students tell me that they haven't told anyone about their failures before me, because they didn't know who they could tell. After many years of hearing these stories, I knew that something in the way we approached Higher Education needed to change and that these stories of failure needed to be shared.

Current steps

I started my PhD in 2019. The idea started as a joke when I approached my current advisor and said, "I should be Dr. Failure because I fail so much at things" and she said "actually, given what you have told me about your experiences working with students, you should go to the literature to see if it is worth studying". After a year of coursework, my Qualifying Exams, and slogging through a proposal, I landed on a narrative inquiry of students' experiences of academic failure. I interviewed twelve unique students, all of whom failed at least one course in their undergraduate studies. I am currently working through my analysis—and beginning to make sense of my data. The quotes I share in this manuscript are from my wonderful interviewees, who shared their failure stories with me.

Much of the literature on academic failure focuses on the prediction and prevention of failure; further, the research is often done from an institutional perspective, trying to determine how we can stop students from failing before it even happens. Though this might be helpful information, as someone who works directly in supporting students, I was shocked by the limited amount of research on what students were actually experiencing. The studies from the student perspective that I was able to find (for example see Ajjawi et al., 2019; 2020; 2021—some lovely articles about students' experiences with persistence through

failure) inspired me to explore the topic of failure in the same way; to raise students' voices and share their experiences, knowing that failure was a common experience.

On several occasions during my interviews, students exclaimed that they were "so happy that someone was researching failure because it was so important"[3] and so common. Throughout my interviews, I was shocked at how open students were in sharing their stories with me, providing more detail than I ever could have hoped for[4] including the good, bad, and neutral parts of their failure experiences. Yet, I feel it essential to address the stigma that remains in talking about failure, as echoed by one of my participants: "It's not something that I want to share with a lot of people and I didn't..."

The importance of failure

It might first be helpful to explore why students in general might be hesitant to publicly talk about failure before I suggest some ways in which we can begin to open the conversation. I encourage you to spend a moment thinking about the ways that failure was discussed for you in your own life: was it something to be shared widely, or was it something that, like most of us, was hidden away and experienced individually?

Failure is often positioned as the opposite of success (Cincinnato et al., 2020; Dante, Petrucci, et al., 2013; Forsyth et al., 2008; Najimi et al., 2013) and in a competitive realm such as academia, where students are fighting for scholarships, research positions, and other opportunities, it makes sense that they wouldn't want to share anything that could make them seem like less of a success. Students often hold some belief about what a good student is and does, something I have encountered in my work with students and that is echoed in focus groups with students and faculty in a paper by Deanna L. Fassett and John T. Warren (2004); being a failure doesn't fit with being an ideal student.

Failure is also emotional and evokes a feeling of vulnerability,[5]

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3   I am amalgamating multiple students' opinions here for brevity.
4   And leaving me with what I feel like is infinite data to work through...
5   If Brené Brown's success in exploring shame and vulnerability in a mainstream way has taught us anything, it's that we need some support in being vulnerable and sharing our shame!

which can also be a difficult feeling to grapple with and not one that we want to share broadly. It is shameful to fail and thus something we should avoid. Yet, despite this negativity, the consensus around the need to talk about failure re-emerged when I asked interviewees "what institutions can do to help support students through failure" because failure is not always a negative event and can in fact be an event that students can derive meaning from (Edwards & Ashkanasy, 2018; Rong et al., 2020):

> It's just like, yeah, nice to like know that like there's other people that you can like, share your experience with … So like having other students to talk about and like that are willing to share their experience too. It's just nice that like, it's just like comfort knowing you're not alone and there's other people like there with you that have been through that.

What can be done

As educators we can open these conversations around failure:

> …things like resources like that but I think also like opening up an environment where they maybe not preach failure but they make it umm that it's ok if students are struggling. I feel like there's a lot of like "talking the talk" but no "walking the walk" if that makes sense.

Naturally, humans are social creatures and we compare ourselves to others. Hearing that other people have gone through similar experiences makes us feel like less of a "failure" ourselves:

> It's like I wanna say like validating but… like it's not something that you have to hide and like be embarrassed of like ohh I failed this course like I'm dumb like I'm stupid.

Not only does sharing these stories help students to understand their experiences as being valid and normal, but they may also learn strategies to deal with their experience. I believe that this effect is particularly powerful when those of us in positions of power share our own experiences of failure to help our students feel less alone. Indeed, this occurred during one of my interviews when the student and I were talking about what would be helpful for students in navigating their failures:

> Every professor and grad student I admire like went through like not a route that's conventional, like even you mentioned that you've had experience with failure and you're like, doing your PhD now. So it gives me hope.

For the past several years, I have been offering workshops to students on how to manage their experiences with academic failure. Importantly, I share my own failure experiences, again relying heavily on Bandura's position that we learn from others and others' experiences; and I encourage students to share theirs. After a few awkward moments of silence, one brave student always volunteers. And then another, and another. Making a safe space for students to share their failure stories is difficult, but I have found it effective to encourage the sharing of failure.

Potential strategies

I will now share some strategies that have been of benefit to me to open conversations around failure. First, sharing my own experiences has been a helpful starting point, so I encourage you to do so, if you feel comfortable. The second strategy is explicitly reminding students that you are not judging their experiences. Third, allowing students to share a range of experiences has also been useful, for example by letting students know that they can share a small failure such as tripping while they were walking to class, or a big one such as not getting a scholarship. I will sometimes follow up on a student's disclosure and ask if there are others in the audience who have had that same failure, to further normalise the experience and show how common it actually is. Not surprisingly, verbally validating students' experiences and emotions (for example by reiterating how difficult the situation must have been for them) makes a big difference as does thanking the students for contributing. Whether you plan to engage a large group in discussing failure, or start with a one-to-one chat, I hope that these strategies can be helpful in opening the conversation.

Conclusion: A hopeful failure

Through my work with failure, I have had glimpses of what academia could be: not a place where students are afraid to fail and even more afraid to talk about it, but a place where students can experience failure and be happy to share their stories with others. A place where students can make mistakes and grow to be their whole selves, learning that failure is ok, and experiencing every day with a sense of hope. Higher Education is more than learning about courses and content. Higher Education is about learning who we are as people, and it is all of us who can help make this happen for our students. With this final quote, I hope that you will feel inspired to open the conversation around failure, to be left curious about failure and how it might not always be a bad thing, to be reminded of the growth that can happen for our students beyond the classroom, and to remain open to the possibilities of what university could be:

> …there's no certain way to define failure. It's so relative, that's different for all of us. What failure is and failure means, that became my takeaway going to university.

Steps toward hope

- Demystify academic failure and its role in successful learning.
- Open dialogue about academic failure to highlight its commonality and usefulness.
- Incorporate the student perspective into the debate on academic failure.
- Use personal experiences and professional insights to foster curiosity, reflection, and growth.

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15. "Armed love": A case study in cultivating a pedagogy of hope

Chris Cachia

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about a profound and collective sense of loss, disproportionately affecting marginalised communities and amplifying existing mental health struggles. As an educator living with obsessive-compulsive disorder, the author experienced the pandemic's psychological toll firsthand and chose to share this personal reality with his students. This chapter reflects on that moment of disclosure as a pedagogical act—one rooted in critical reflection, vulnerability, and what Freire terms "armed love". By disrupting the traditional social order of the classroom, the pandemic created space for deeper, more human engagement. Introducing "biographical disruption" as a reflective tool, the author invited students to explore their own experiences and confront issues of mental health, wellness, and social inequality. The outcome was transformational: students reported feeling seen, empowered, and inspired to take ownership of their stories. Many developed projects grounded in personal and collective healing, reimagining education as a space for empathy, agency, and hope.

Keywords: anti-oppressive education; biographical disruption; community-based learning; critical pedagogy; Paulo Freire; bell hooks

My COVID story

As we hit record, I felt terribly unsure.

Roughly four months into the COVID-19 pandemic, folks were increasingly dealing with loss: economic (such as the loss of employment), social (such as the loss of communication), and physical (such as the loss of loved ones); along with such loss comes grief, and yet the pandemic, owing to public safety measures, "disrupted usual experiences of grief … that are common reactions after a loss" (Wallace et al., 2020, p. 70). As a sociologist, I understood that, while the COVID-19 virus does not discriminate, social systems do. Given, for instance, who is less likely to have a home in which to quarantine and more likely to live in close quarters, who is less likely to have employment that allows for remote work and more likely to occupy front-line/service sector jobs, and who is less likely to have access to adequate health care and more likely to face dire health challenges, the marginalised were disproportionately impacted.

As an educator, I understood that students were struggling. International students encountered precarious situations and were unsure if they should travel, those students living in unsafe and unstable conditions were desperate to escape abuse and make rent payments, and the overwhelming majority reported feeling anxious and isolated. As someone who lives with anxiety and obsessive-compulsive disorder, I understood how debilitating it can be to live in fear, including over the potential for harming oneself and others. As a person who strives to integrate sociological insights with a concern for education and hope for liberation, I understood that cultivating authenticity and open dialogue begets community and the raising of critical consciousness.

In turn, when my co-teacher, Alan Sears, and I began recording our initial podcast for a first-year course on "Pandemic Learning", it was with an understanding of loss, systemic barriers, and fear in that I remained unsure of how much to disclose to students and listeners. While self-disclosure is an effective instructional practice, it is governed by various dimensions including concerns with appropriateness and depth (Jebbour & Mouaid, 2019). We began by introducing ourselves, and discussed why we thought the course—focused on social scientific inquiry—would be particularly useful to students, and related issues:

how the politics of knowledge and inequality had been highlighted by the pandemic; how the history of knowledge is one of contesting ideas; how a considerable feature of public trust in experts remains under-examined. We also discussed two main features of the course: 1) critical reflection based on the DEAL framework[1] proposed by Sarah Ash and Patti Clayton (2009); and 2) the completion of team projects involving students' creation of podcasts on their learning through (social scientific investigations of) the pandemic. In this context, characterised by inquiry, critical reflection, and concerns with knowledge production, I shared the moment I first realised the pandemic was going to pose a significant mental health challenge to my life:

> In telling this story to family and friends, I've come to think of it as a three-act play, and I'm going to start with the second act because I think it's the most visceral. To preface, one thing I've noticed about my experience with quarantine is that time seems much different now, and my guess is that some of the disorientation around time has contributed to heightened anxiety. All of this said, I'm not exactly sure when I had the moment I'll describe, but I think it was at the end of April—which for me, and I know for you, Alan, coincides with the end of the Winter term. I had this moment, sitting at my desk in my basement, with piles of paper all around me, marking on my desktop, a spreadsheet on my laptop, emails on my iPad, my wife consoling our children upstairs who were crying, my hands stinging from washing and sanitising them so much, my fingernails bleeding from biting them so much, my mind racing thinking about the health of different people in my life, and then noticing I was counting every letter in the feedback I was writing to students or else thinking I'd somehow be responsible for those students or my family getting sick—I had this moment where I felt as if the walls were closing in and there was enormous pressure on my chest and I was going to pass out. For years, I've had similar moments, though

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1   Simply put, the DEAL format involves the following three elements: Documentation, Examination, and the Articulation of Learning. 1) Documentation: wherein one objectively and richly describes a specific incident or a set of artefacts. 2) Examination: wherein one analyses the events documented in the reflection's first part by applying key concepts; here, we urged students to locate and incorporate a found source into their reflections to assist in framing and analysing the events that were documented. 3) Articulation of Learning: wherein one discusses what they have learned through their documentation, examination, and the critical reflective process. Ash and Clayton (2009) note that post-secondary students are not often given the intentional opportunity to reflect on and claim what they have learned, even though this opportunity is invaluable in the learning process.

not always as overwhelming, but it's only recently that I've learned to recognise these as anxiety attacks.

All of this brings me back to my first act: five years ago, I was diagnosed with obsessive-compulsive and other anxiety disorders. Of course, as sociologists, we might discuss the social construction of these diagnoses, but I will say that having an explanation for what I've experienced throughout my life has given me hope. This isn't so much I-like-to-put-my-books-in-alphabetical-order kind of stuff but more I-get-stuck-in-ritualistic-loops-for-hours-and-need-to-sleep kind of stuff. At times, my struggles have been debilitating. I've locked myself away for days, demolished parts of my home looking for electrical problems, and sat up all night watching my children sleep to make sure they're safe. Eventually, I came to a point where I was exhausted and wanted to be healthier for myself and my family, especially because I knew we had another child on the way and I wanted to give them the best life possible. All of this prompted me to finally seek support—including intense work doing cognitive behavioural therapy. I tell this story not to be self-congratulatory, but because of how common it is. I've begun talking about my challenges with students because I've witnessed many struggle with mental health issues and know how difficult it is, especially for those without my privilege, to navigate the mental health system.

The third act involves me becoming more reflective about these challenges. The stigma and struggle are real, but along with public policy and funding, awareness and discussion can go a long way. The pandemic has highlighted how anxiety affects our wellbeing, and there's an interesting correlation between the excessive cleaning in which folks might be engaged and the stereotype of the person with OCD who fears contamination. A psychologist at McMaster University, Dr. Karen Rowa, has discussed how she hopes the pandemic can reduce the stigma against OCD, and I want to share a news article[2] in which she was quoted. Dr. Rowa talks about how individuals who struggle with OCD often have rituals involving an excessive amount of cleanliness. For some, she notes "they may have taken the recommendations for isolation and quarantine to an extreme, so … they feel like they don't even want to go out anymore or touch anything". Yet, while the pandemic has challenged those living with OCD, Dr. Rowa discusses how some of her clients have found it comforting to see others struggling in ways that people with OCD struggle. She says, "I've had a number of my clients tell me they feel a small relief that other people in the general population now have to go through significant behaviours they normally have to go through. In some ways, hopefully, this is reducing the stigma and helping people

2   See Lopez-Martinez (2020).

understand what it might feel like to have OCD or significant anxiety". So, since the moment I've described, there've been days I thought, "I've got this, no problem", and days when it all seemed utterly impossible, but I've tried to take better care of myself, which means knowing my limits, practising open communication with loved ones, and doing some of the exercises that are very difficult but helped a lot when I was in therapy. I tell this story because I hope it helps others, in some small way.[3]

I immediately felt relief in having shared my reflection, especially when Alan responded:

I really appreciate your honesty. I think it's part of the way we provide community. Unfortunately, post-secondary learning doesn't often involve human engagement. Professors tend to present themselves as knowledge but not people, so I'm very grateful.

Theoretical context: Critical pedagogy, community, and biographical disruption

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire (2011) posits transformative education as composed of two parts: 1) the development of critical consciousness; and 2) the acting upon such consciousness to take constructive action. Focused on anti-oppression and critical pedagogy, my courses interrogate societal power structures/institutions, including the university. This work, while fundamental to the advancement of consciousness, is emotionally taxing; many of the social inequities and oppressive ideologies examined are directly experienced by students in their everyday lives. Still, though it would be easy to turn to despair, we choose hope. Students, therefore, utilise consciousness in their lives and communities outside the classroom to effect change. My self-reflection was shared to progressively disclose; as Freire (1994, p. 7) writes in *Pedagogy of Hope*, "the educational practice of a progressive option will never be anything but an adventure in unveiling". Hope is figured here as an ontological imperative for solidarity with the oppressed, who require "an 'armed' love" (Freire, 2005, p. 74). Upon sharing, I aspired for my story to not only increase critical consciousness concerning the subject of

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3   This discussion has been edited for clarity and length; a full excerpt of this portion of the podcast is available at urbanorganic (2020).

wellness, but to encourage critical discussion. Freire (2011, p. 91) writes that, "founding itself upon love, humility, and faith, dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialogues is the logical consequence". My aim to cultivate mutual trust grew from my desire for students to take constructive action armed with both hope and love.

Certainly, given the pandemic's necessitation of remote learning and the related loss of social interaction, I was particularly concerned with issues of community. bell hooks (2003, p. 13), in *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, described her "burning out" within a large institution, where she "began to feel as though [she] was entering a prison, a closed-down space where, no matter how hard [she] tried, it was difficult to create a positive context for learning". Prison metaphors seem especially apt to describe experiences of quarantine,[4] which makes the need for communal spaces paramount. With the familiar social order of the classroom disrupted, there existed an opposing break: an opening for administrations to further neo-liberalise the university, but also the freedom and opportunity for educators and students to engage in more innovative practices. Freire (1997, p. 46) contends, "the neoliberal point of view reinforces a pseudoneutrality of the educational practice, reducing it to the transfer of informational content to the learners". I was cognisant of working against such a neo-liberal transference of informational content and yearned, within the historical moment of the pandemic, for what hooks (2003, p. 22) describes as "teaching and learning in the direction of justice, peace, and love, of creating and maintaining . . . community".

One novel manner to engage was to implement "biographical disruption" as an anchor for critical reflection. A term first coined by Michael Bury (1982) to describe chronic illness as a fundamental rupture of everyday life, biographical disruption focuses on how illness disturbs expectations that individuals hold for the future and their sense of self-worth. Utilising this notion of disruption to conceptualise the pandemic and shifts to remote learning, we extended Bury's ideas

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4   Of course, quarantine experiences largely depend on one's health, privilege (or lack thereof), and safety; also, I do not mean to overly equate carceral systems with (a shift to) remote learning, but rather to offer a vivid image of the isolation that quarantine entails.

to frame these experiences as social/historical disruptions, interrogating how they impacted communities and the function of societal power structures. Given the personal nature of biographical disruption, this anchor fostered deeper and more meaningful reflection, interaction, and community.[5]

Lessons in hope and (armed) love

Upon sharing our first podcast, I received numerous messages of thanks from students and an influx of requests to meet individually. As well, students shared their own stories on the course's discussion boards and in our meetings. In all such forms, students described their losses and challenges, and the struggles that consumed their lives. None of these stories were surprising, but they were all told in a much more affecting and honest manner than had previously been recounted to me. This is a representative message from a student:

> I want to first say thank you, professor, for sharing your story with us! It takes a lot of courage to speak as openly as you have. Sharing your own experience helps to defy the stigma and creates a safe place for students to be vulnerable without judgment or fear. I was very nervous about beginning university, but the podcasts and discussions have already helped me to feel more at ease and excited to learn. You have modelled how there is no shame in asking for support. I wish I had learned this lesson sooner, but I'm grateful to have learned it now.[6]

The impact of my story also seemed to be lasting; the quality of the critical reflections submitted was outstanding and many students commented—whether in the reflections themselves or in discussing their writing—on my disclosure as a model and inspiration. Indeed, many of those with whom my story resonated chose to produce podcasts on issues of mental health and social inequality. Such projects addressed the loss of milestones, various impacts of the pandemic on people from diverse communities, how to cope with isolation, ways to create community remotely, and a myriad of issues relevant to biographical disruption. Moreover, students not only learned to assess and implement research

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5   For more on biographical disruption as an anchor for critical reflection, please see Cachia (2023).

6   This quotation, anonymously attributed, is shared with permission.

(and address how expertise may be defined) but also came to think of themselves as experts of their own lives. Armed with a sense they had much to contribute, their creative scholarship was a testament to thoughtful engagement.

hooks (2003, p. 19) writes of being a "beloved" teacher with students grateful to her "for believing in them, for educating them for the practice of freedom, for urging them to be critical thinkers able to make responsible choices". I, too, feel beloved. Students have been ever grateful as they report feeling, for the first time in their lives, seen and heard. Even amidst the pandemic, because of our work, they expressed hope for their future education and life outside the classroom. This was a lesson in armed love: "the fighting love of those convinced of the right and the duty to fight, to denounce, and to announce" (Freire, 2005, p. 74). In *Teaching to Transgress*, hooks (1994, p. 195) asserts that, through love, "the classroom becomes a dynamic place where transformations in social relations are concretely actualized". Evidenced by our collective struggle against deep-seated loss, inequality, and fear, I am fortunate to have helped nurture the creation and maintenance of a transformative community shared by and with students.

Steps toward hope

- Do not be afraid to share personal experiences to encourage students to engage in critical reflection and collective learning.

- Implement "biographical disruption" as a pedagogical tool to inspire students to bring themselves into the classroom and create projects drawing on their lived experiences.

- Promote the concept of "armed love" to help students see themselves as experts of their own experiences, fostering a sense of being seen and heard.

- Encourage students to express hope for their future and life beyond the classroom.

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16. The XXXX game: A character-based tool for learning

Louise Sheridan

Abstract

This chapter explores a dynamic teaching method that uses performance-based role-play to deepen participants' understanding of complex concepts within their field of study. Central to this approach is the XXXX Game, an immersive activity in which participants embody assigned characters aligned with a particular topic. Inspired by Yuli Rahmawati and colleagues' (2021) ethical dilemma story pedagogy (EDSP), the method provides minimal character detail, encouraging learners to interpret and perform their roles through a constructivist lens. By engaging in this embodied and imaginative exercise, students are invited to confront assumptions, challenge misconceptions, and gain deeper insight into the experiences and perspectives of others. The chapter reflects on the transformative potential of this approach to foster empathy, critical thinking, and reflective practice, suggesting that such performative pedagogy can profoundly enrich the learning experience.

Keywords: constructivist pedagogy; ethical dilemma learning; student empowerment; critical pedagogy; theatre of the oppressed

Introduction

The simple premise of this chapter is that understanding others creates optimism and hope for a better future. In *Hope for the Flowers*, Trina Paulus (2000) refers to a more meaningful life based on an authentic understanding of those around us. She asks, "how can [you] step on someone [you've] just talked to?" (Paulus, 2000, p. 31). For Paulus, taking the time to know others generates an opportunity to bring positive change. The XXXX Game[1] provides a creative and participatory means to engage with others and rehearse for real-life situations. It was developed in response to the sudden shift to online teaching at the onset of the global pandemic in 2020 (Svihus, 2023). Initially intended as a short-term solution until in-person teaching could resume, the aim was to provide an engaging and participatory experience for students to replicate active learning. What transpired is an approach that can be used in multiple sites of teaching, either online or in person, for a range of topics.

The chapter begins with a brief summary of what is involved in the XXXX Game, which is followed by a description of some of the theoretical influences that shaped its development, such as Freire (2018) and Rahmawati and colleagues (2021). The chapter then outlines key considerations for educators using this approach, such as the need to set clear guidelines for the game and the importance of provoking deep discussion on topics that could be contentious. Finally, it examines how participants have, or may, experience the game as liberating, challenging or empowering.

The XXXX game

The activity can be used in multiple settings, for example, in school, further, or higher education. It can be used to teach a variety of topics, from sociology to housing studies. The activity takes the format of a role-playing game in which students play various characters, informed by their own perceptions, and discuss a range of scenarios connected to

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1   See   https://figshare.com/articles/media/The_XXXX_Game_Constructivist_
    Pedagogy_for_Higher_Education_pptx_mp4/19326065/1 for a recording on how to
    adapt, set up, and implement the XXXX Game in your teaching context.

the topic under investigation, for example, homelessness, social inequity, or the age of consent. The game enables students to discuss a range of themes with less personal jeopardy; thus, it promotes active discussion skills and enables students to develop skills in building arguments.

Participants empathetically put themselves in someone else's shoes as they discuss related themes, reimagining themselves—and the topic—together. The game combines short lecture inputs on the chosen topic, with topic-related scenarios that participants discuss. Participants are invited to take part in the game as a character that relates to the topic. The invite begins with the question: "Do you accept this challenge?", which also helps to create a dramatic—and exciting—atmosphere. It is important that the characters are somewhat familiar to the participants, so they can supply some "back story". They can play the character in whatever way they choose, creating their own interpretation of the persona, imagining potential responses to the scenario prompt. More introverted participants may simply participate as a de facto version of themselves—others may embrace a more rounded alternative persona or character, but there is no pressure to be a perfect actor; rather, the aim is to imagine different responses. This can be a stimulating and liberating experience for both those who have a penchant for acting, as they can fully transform, changing their mannerisms, attitude or even their accent, as well for those who are ordinarily quiet in a group setting.

The game begins with a short lecture on the topic, before participants are presented with a topic-related scenario. Participants are then asked to consider the ideas/concepts/theories in relation to their chosen persona or character. The game works online, or in person, with participants randomly allocated to smaller groups to discuss the scenarios presented as their chosen characters. One key to the success of the game is that participants do not reveal their character until the end of the game, even when the teacher asks for feedback from the discussions. Further detail on the role of the teacher, as well as what participants might experience, is included at a later point in the chapter. What follows is a brief insight into the theoretical influences that helped to shape this game, which has the potential to create hope and optimism.

Shaping the game

Paulo Freire's theories (2000, 2018) and principles for practice (1996) are inherent in my thinking and my approach to education. To counter "banking education", in which participants are seen as empty vessels, Freire (2000) developed an approach to education that asks people to question that which is taken-for-granted. He proposed that learners are active in the process, re-constructing knowledge; authentic dialogue is necessary. He noted, "dialogue is the opportunity available to me to open up to the thinking of others, and thereby not wither away in isolation" (Freire, 2018, p. 119). The opportunity for participants to deepen their understanding of others was essential in the design of the XXXX Game.

Rahmawati and colleagues' (2021) ethical dilemma story pedagogy (EDSP) reflects another element of the game—that participants imagine themselves as different characters. EDSP "uses carefully constructed stories to engage students cognitively and emotionally in contemplating how to resolve commonplace ethical dilemmas" (Rahmawati et al., 2021, p. 452). Enabling participants to rehearse for real-life encounters and situations builds their confidence and creates optimism for more hopeful futures. Horkheimer (1972, p. 245) asserts that 'the world and subjectivity in all its forms have developed with the life processes of society'. The potential to gain an understanding of different viewpoints seeds hope. This also reflects Freire's (2018, p. 81) assertion that "our making and remaking of ourselves in the process of making history... [t]here is no change without dream, as there is no dream without hope". Educators must create spaces in which learners can wrestle with complex ideas and, in doing so, they enable learners to build tolerance and an understanding of others. Educators play a crucial role in helping learners to navigate unfamiliar terrain.

Leading the game: The teacher's role

As in all educational experiences, the teacher plays a crucial role. In the XXXX Game, the teacher can enhance the learning experience by playing a highly active role in the proceedings. It is important that educators are aware that they can make, or break, the experience. Therefore, the teacher's enthusiasm for playing the game should be obvious to

participants. bell hooks (2009, p. 40) came to realise "the ways [her] presence [was] as much a teaching tool as the work because it embodies the practices of engaged pedagogy". One of Freire's (1996, p. 127) seven educational principles,[2] "the importance of pedagogical space", is highly relevant. The teacher should create the right atmosphere for the learning experience. In his vision of transformative education "care for the space is necessary to connect with the frame of mind needed for the exercise of curiosity" (Freire, 1996, p. 122). The XXXX Game provides the opportunity for participants to be inquisitive about other people's perspectives on situations related to their field of study. In the process, participants must get a sense that the teacher is fully committed to playing the game as this encourages them to perform with gusto. As an active critical pedagogue, the teacher provokes a meaningful discussion in response to feedback from the topic-related scenarios; active listening is a must. Feedback from discussions might reveal preconceptions, misconceptions, or bias. Acting in character, participants may say things that do not represent true feelings; it all depends on how they defined their character. From the safety of their character, they may even say things they would never, ordinarily, say aloud. All of this provides the basis for critical discussion, or dialogue (Freire, 2000), which leads to a deeper understanding of others.

Playing the game: The participants' experience[3]

Based on the assumption that beliefs are socially constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1996) and therefore change over time, the XXXX Game enables participants to re-evaluate, re-affirm, or change their perspectives on topics and situations that relate to their field of study. Participants are invited to take part in the spirit of openness. Having been asked, "Do you accept the challenge?", they have the freedom to decide upon the traits, disposition, and ideological position of their character. They should feel free to play their character in any way they

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2   For an exploration of Freire's seven pedagogical principles in relation to Youth Participation Practice, see Sheridan (2018).

3   It is important to note that this section is based on reflection and anecdotal evidence; empirical research on participants' experience of the XXXX Game has not yet been conducted.

choose. This would be difficult if the characters were unfamiliar, as was the case when the game was used in Finland.[4] When they start the game, they are unaware of who the other characters are, and unaware of the characters that their peers are playing. The game enables participants to consider scenarios that relate to their field of study from multiple viewpoints. With the guidance of the teacher, they rehearse for real-life situations, gaining critical insights that deepen their understanding of the world. The XXXX Game provides new knowledge through the short lecture inputs. However, the topic related scenarios provide the opportunity for emotional engagement. This reflects Augusto Boal's (1993) suggestion that role-play offers a way to enable participants to discuss lived realities and situations from the "safety" of a character. Feedback from those who have participated in the XXXX Game confirms that it is an engaging, creative, and fun way to learn about a topic, with one participant describing the experience as liberating. An illustrative example is the adaptation of the XXXX Game into the "Academia Game", tailored for use by colleagues within a university setting. With characters including students, a Dean of Learning and Teaching, and Lecturers, the participants discussed a fictional proposal by "their" university to introduce artificial intelligence (AI) as a key feature of teaching and assessment. The room was filled with lively debate, enabling people to understand different perspectives on a potentially divisive proposal. A liberating educational experience is certainly a strong foundation upon which to instil hope.

Conclusion

The XXXX Game started off as a short-term solution to re-create a participatory learning experience for online teaching, but it became apparent that it was so much more. It is a flexible tool for teaching that can be used for many topics, or fields of study. It can be used for in-person and online teaching and can easily be adapted for different audiences. The teacher plays a crucial role in creating a conducive and safe space for learning and creates opportunities for participants to critically engage in dialogue that relates to real-world situations. Participants gain the

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4   For the Finnish example, see Kylmäkoski & Sheridan (2023).

chance to learn about new topics but, more importantly, deepen their understanding of others. In a world in which injustice exists, education must create opportunities for people to build trusting and tolerant relationships. From these, hope for a better future will grow.

Steps toward hope

- Implement performance-based role-play to deepen understanding of complex concepts within various fields of study.

- Utilise immersive activities, such as The XXXX Game, where participants embody assigned characters to interpret and perform roles, and learn through empathy and co-construction.

- Engage students in embodied and imaginative exercises to confront assumptions, challenge misconceptions, and gain deeper insights into diverse experiences and perspectives.

- Recognise the transformative potential of performance-based role-play to profoundly enrich the learning experience.

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17. Reimagining the sage–guide dichotomy: A life-long learner's story of teaching and learning in Higher Education

Katherine Herbert and Yeslam Al-Saggaf

Abstract

This case study uses an autoethnographic approach to explore the impact of combining the traditional "sage on the stage" and the "guide on the side" teaching models into something that would more effectively support the intentional development of students' skills. The chapter reflects on the experience of a computing educator who transitioned from orchestrating learning like a conductor to engaging as a player-conductor within the classroom ensemble. By co-creating the assessment task with students—starting with a draft and then collaboratively refining it—the educator fostered a more inclusive and participatory learning environment. Embracing curiosity and vulnerability, the course became a space where teacher–student interactions were reimagined, enabling students to be seen and treated as active agents in their own learning. This approach opened the door to more meaningful, dynamic, and hopeful educational relationships.

Keywords: collaboration; teacher-student interactions; authentic learning; teaching and learning; vulnerability

Introduction

Several studies on teaching and learning have reported on the benefits and challenges of the "sage-on-the-stage" and the "guide-on-the-side" teaching approaches in Higher Education (Fischer & Hänze, 2019; Koch et al., 2020; Shipton, 2015). Often, this research has championed one approach over the other. While studies have argued that these two approaches are distinct and separate (Fischer & Hänze, 2019), this chapter discusses how merging these two approaches provided the lecturer of a computing subject, the second author of this case study, with a way to guide his students. In doing so, he learned collaboratively with his students while the students acquired knowledge, not only for the mastery of the assessment task, but also for the inherent process of learning itself.

The context and methodology

The chapter, through an autoethnographic account, focuses on the experiences of Yeslam Al-Saggaf, who taught a "System Analysis and Design" course after several years away from teaching the subject. Autoethnography is a type of ethnography in which one researches one's personal experience, not to simply bring the self to the foreground but rather to explore a more meaningful interaction within the context or locale of the experience that shapes the acquisition of knowledge (Reed-Danahay et al., 2020). Intertwined with the autoethnographic account, the learning activities are described, highlighting the teacher–student interactions and experiences, and how Yeslam, as the lecturer, seized opportunities to collaborate and co-create with his students. This chapter then turns to the reflections of both authors who reviewed the student results and feedback after the course was delivered. The double reflection captures how in the process of seizing these opportunities to collaborate and learn alongside students, genuine hope emerged.

Sage–guide dichotomy

Central to this chapter and its reflective autobiographical approach is the sage–guide dichotomy. A recent study by Elisabeth Fischer and Martin

Hänze (2019) provides an insight into whether choosing one approach over the other—teacher-centred (sage-on-the-stage) or student-centred (guide-on-the side)—has a more positive influence on the teaching of knowledge and skills in Higher Education. Their empirical study revealed that, while there has been strong support for implementing student-centred teaching approaches in Higher Education:

> Only if a learner is actually thinking along and elaborating new information may he or she adopt higher interest, acquire greater learning achievement, and develop academic competencies (Fischer & Hänze, 2019, p. 33).

That is, the implementation of student-centred teaching approaches alone appears not to guarantee a positive influence on students' learning experiences. Fischer and Hänze (2019) suggest that a mediation model that advocates the application of both student-centred and teacher-centred teaching approaches—a sage–guide approach—based on potential learning achievements could provide a better learning experience.

The following case study adds to this conversation not only as an observation of the positive influence a mixed approach has on students' learning journey in a computing subject, but also to reflect on the learning experience of the academic.

The story

I (Yeslam) developed and initially taught the "System Analysis and Design" course in early 2006. The goal of the course was for students to be able to gather and model user requirements using IT tools and techniques designed to provide information system solutions. Specifically, the students needed to be able to identify the problem (to be solved through the development of an information system), to define the system requirements (including modelling the requirements), and to design the system architecture. While I had originally designed hands-on activities to support the learning all those years ago, it dawned on me when I found myself teaching it again after a long break, that it would be an opportune time to "re-learn" the ways the skills and knowledge embedded in the course and its subject matter could be successfully

surfaced and transferred.

I have always imagined my class to be like an orchestra in which the students are not the audience but rather the performers making up the ensemble. While I lead the ensemble to make sure we follow the musical notation, I never stand at the podium. I always conduct the orchestra while sitting, downplaying my own instrument. My teaching and learning styles were "revealed" to me while watching an episode of Insight, an Australian Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) television panel show, about twenty years ago. During one particular episode, a panellist shared with the audience that she was happiest when she was playing her part as a violinist in the Sydney orchestra. Reflecting on her views, I realised that I too was happiest when I was working in collaboration with my students: playing alongside them.

In my experience, students approach their preparation for any subject by inspecting the subject learning outcomes, the assessment items—the assignments that assess those learning outcomes—and thereafter peruse the topics (knowledge areas) to be covered each week during the session/semester. To support this practice by students in my course, whilst still fostering a collaborative approach, I create a structured syllabus that points to relevant resources for each weekly topic including relevant reading, pre-recorded lectures, and multimedia resources.

Going back to my orchestra metaphor, in preparation to perform the musical piece, each musician (the student) is given their music sheets, and we begin by tuning our instruments and learning how each instrument contributes to the performance. Table 17.1 presents the assignment details (the musical piece) and the learning activities (musical instruments) we worked on together, as an ensemble, to prepare and support the assignment completion.

However, for this renewed iteration of the course, I decided to add an additional element to the hands-on activities. I turned my attention to the weekly webinar. It was here that I planned to inject the sage–guide element of the learning experience—I became a conductor/player and used the weekly webinars to build the skills the students would need to complete their assignments, with me co-learning with them.

Element	Assignment task	Learning activities
Scenario	Create a "Click & Collect" or "Deliver Online" store for a plant nursery business.	Create an application (app) to rate (coffee) baristas to show our appreciation.
Tasks	• Understand a problem • Gather user requirements • System design and deployment (to solve problem)	• Participate in weekly webinars • Engage with learning activities • Provide feedback, comments, and questions to lecturer
Approach	Sage-on-the-stage	Sage–guide mixed approach

Table 17.1 Sage–guide mixed approach strategy in computing subject.

The assignments across the course followed the real-world scenario of creating an online store for a plant nursery business. The scenario was outlined in the assessment tasks including questions that needed to be answered and expected documentation presentation. The weekly topics were structured to provide students with the theoretical background required to understand how to approach the assessment tasks. This is where I find students really need support, and to support this "pushing of concepts and theories", I planned to use the weekly webinars as active learning spaces (rather than simply lecturing at them). Our focus would be the first assignment, which required the students to identify a problem and develop a "real" solution. In the system-design-analysis sense, this meant the development of a System Vision Document.

First, to facilitate the course and foster collaboration, I generated an idea for a web application based on a real-world scenario: an application to rate (coffee) baristas to show our appreciation for their work. From there, I developed a scenario in which I imagined how I would use the web application, as a customer, to rate baristas. Having captured the scenario in a short video clip, this was presented to the students before the synchronous webinar in the first week.

I then invited the students to a focus group discussion to jointly brainstorm the system capabilities, framing the session as an opportunity for students to be part of the development process. During the webinar, I conducted the focus group discussion as a member of

the orchestra, asking the students, as key informants or participants, open-ended questions with intense curiosity. I took "live" notes of the students' responses, showing them how their responses mapped onto the objectives of the learning activity—and how they contributed towards the course outcomes. From their responses, we collaboratively created a draft of the System Vision Document for the Rate Barista web application as the outcome of the learning activity, which is the first assignment in this subject.

It was evident early on that structuring the learning activities around the Rate Barista web application example engaged the students because jointly "chipping in" on a relatable scenario allowed and gave space for the student voices and students profited from the consideration of each other's opinions.

Structuring their subject's assignments around a parallel scenario (see Table 17.1), it became evident that students were more invested in participating in the class learning activities because the Rate Barista tasks were clearly mapped to their assignment tasks. To analyse and design the Rate Barista system, the students and I needed to create a number of analysis and design models—in addition to the System Vision Document mentioned above. To assess the students' achievement of the subject's learning outcomes, the students needed to create, on their own, a number of analysis and design models for the plant nursery business "Click & Collect" or "Deliver Online" store, including a System Vision Document, which is achieved early on in the session. So, as the students and I collaboratively developed the analysis and design models needed for the Rate Barista web application, their continuous hands-on involvement in the development of these analysis and design models enabled them to develop the skills they needed to develop the analysis and design models needed for the plant nursery business.

Uniquely, during the middle of the session/semester, I sent out a reflection of my learning journey with my students. I first outlined what we had achieved together in each weekly webinar. I then documented my thoughts on how we got to each achievement and what I learnt from the interactions and discussions. Rather than pointing out where I thought students needed more clarity, I posed questions to which students could agree or correct me, such as: "Now that we have modelled the components of the Rate Barista system, where are the components going

to be stored? Are they going to be stored in the same server or different servers? Why would we do that?" The main focus was to demonstrate that I had indeed learnt from my interaction with them. I ended this message with an open invitation to reflect with me: "What about you? How did you go? I will put this reflection on our Discussion board in the subject online site so you can reflect on your journey too and ask any questions you may have."

This teaching strategy proved effective as evidenced by a significant improvement in the progress rate for this subject, exceptionally impressive Subject Experience Survey (SES) scores, as well as unsolicited positive feedback. A number of factors contributed to a positive and a happy learning experience: (1) Australians love coffee and for them baristas are unsung heroes so the scenario engaged the students; (2) Learning by doing, as opposed to learning by understanding what is required, gave the students an example to follow on from, transferring the skill to their assignment's task later, on their own; (3) Showing a genuine curiosity on my part by tapping into students' inherent learning skills, and letting go of ego, i.e., not worrying about being judged, and accepting a vulnerability, made the conditions conducive to a positive learning experience; and (4) Learning collaboratively with the students empowered them and made them feel valued. This, as well as the socialisation that developed from the interaction with their peers, made learning a happy moment.

Learning by example and in collaboration worked well for the students. In the anonymous SES, one student commented: "The Rate Barista Case Study—as the subject progressed it helped to bring all the concepts together"; while another added:

> I found the "Rate a Barista" ongoing activity to be extremely worthwhile and beneficial to being able to learn the subject outcomes. It gave us a real-life example of applying the various aspects to a real life, relatable scenario.

As can be seen from this unsolicited feedback, the students benefited from the adoption of a unified example upon which we progressively co-created the required artifacts that fulfilled the objectives of the subject's learning activities together.

The following comment from one student—"Having the interaction during lectures really helped to learn about the subject, being able to

discuss things and do different parts together really helped expand how I thought"—shows how students felt confident doing the subject's assignments on their own, having developed the required skills through completing the assessment tasks using a different scenario. The course's remarkable progress rate suggests, overall, that the students achieved the subject's learning outcomes.

Reimagining and letting go of ego

There are numerous benefits to conducting teaching as if conducting an orchestra of which you are also a member. Each performer plays their part in the production of the musical piece, so all performers, regardless of the instrument they play, feel valued. Likewise, in a class, the consideration of students' contributions/input/opinions can make them feel valued. The performers' sense of value is derived from their knowledge that the part they play is critical to the success of the musical piece. In a similar vein, developing the solutions to the learning activities in collaboration with the students encourages them to invest in their own learning. Moreover, in a musical performance the player-conductor and the musicians follow the musical notation together—and together create the piece—in contrast to the conductor, who stands at the podium to lead the musical ensemble. To adopt this model, it is important that the lecturer makes a start at the solutions to the learning activities, not simply pushing out knowledge, but creating the space where together, tutor and students co-create the finished piece. The lecturer plays and harmonises with the students. The message is a simple one: "I am like you, doing my part too"; thus, leading by example.

   This story is about how structured and scripted learning activities intertwined with collaborative teacher-student interactions and experiences provided opportunities to co-create learning with students. Sharing our hope to collaborate with students, we became learners alongside them. This can be achieved with genuine curiosity and acceptance that an individual's perception of the world is unique and both teacher and learner can co-create a learning journey that is beneficial to both.

Steps toward hope

- Transition from a directive role to a collaborative one, engaging actively with students in learning activities.

- Involve students in the creation and refinement of assessment tasks to value their input and foster ownership.

- Approach teaching with genuine curiosity and openness to create a space for innovative teacher–student interactions.

- Recognise and support students as active participants in their learning journey to develop meaningful and hopeful interactions.

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18. Playing with learning: Adopting a playful approach to Higher Education learning and teaching

John Parkin

Abstract

Becoming a university lecturer is an evolving journey marked by ongoing reflection and the continual development of practice. This chapter explores how playful approaches to teaching and learning in Higher Education can enhance the joy of both teaching and learning, while simultaneously supporting the development of students' skills and knowledge. By fostering a safe and engaging environment, playfulness benefits not only students but also lecturers, encouraging experimentation and growth. The chapter argues that for playful pedagogy to flourish, university lecturers must be granted the agency and institutional support to explore innovative teaching practices that enrich learning experiences and strengthen educational outcomes.

Keywords: playful learning; Lego Serious Play®; Playmobil pro®

Introduction

During my transition from primary school teacher to senior lecturer practitioner in Higher Education, I began to experiment with different approaches to teaching and learning. I found that using a playful approach helped me connect my new reality teaching adults to my previous "existence" as a teacher of young children. I found a playful approach to teaching not only helped with this connection, but I also gained a greater level of satisfaction. Using playful approaches brought a sense of joy for me at least, and hopefully for the students I taught. Playful approaches to learning for children have a well-established history (see Papert, 1980; Piaget, 1999)—and there is growing evidence demonstrating the benefits of play in Higher Education in terms of conceptual understanding, creativity, multi-disciplinary learning, and engagement (Rice, 2009). Nicola Whitton (2018) goes on to explain how playful tools, toys, puzzles, and games, along with playful techniques, such as making and role-play, can be utilised.

To help write this chapter, I reflected on my first five years of university teaching from September 2018 to July 2022. I harnessed an autoethnographic approach, hand-writing a reflective journal at the end of that period, considering critical incidents and experiences that had shaped my journey. My reflections explored my beginnings as a lecturer and playful practice from my earlier primary teaching career. I considered how I used Lego® and Playmobil pro® to support student learning and enhance my own personal teaching journey.

Personal reflections: Vignettes

In my first vignette, I explored my first year of teaching in Higher Education. Like the findings of Pete Boyd and Kim Harris (2010), I found that during my first year of teaching in a university, I "felt in the dark" about the material, language, and teaching approaches required. It was a bigger change from teaching in a primary school than I had been expecting. I was appointed as a senior lecturer practitioner, meaning I had to couple my academic skills as a university lecturer and my professional skills as a primary school teacher in my teaching. I was a pracademic (Posner, 2009)—but I was unsure how to be and do this:

I remember my first lecture well. It was a traditional lecture theatre with rows of seats facing the front. Students were huddled together in the middle and I was looking up towards them. I had spent ages preparing, making notes on what to say and with a few questions thrown into the mix. I started working my way through the PowerPoint explaining each point. I would stop every slide or so to ask a question. As the lecture progressed, the students were looking increasingly bored. The way I was lecturing—I won't call it teaching—was an imitation of how I had learnt at university. I became bored of the way I was teaching (lecturing), and so did the students. By the end of the first year of my lecturing, I realised I needed to change how I was teaching.

In this second vignette, I considered how I started using playful activities in my teaching. As a lecturer in education, I felt an important aspect of my role as a pracademic was modelling to students in lectures good practice in the primary classroom (Loughran & Berry, 2005). Through this modelling of the play found in an early years classroom, I saw that students enjoyed and could learn through a playful approach. I understood that learning through play for young children had an established evidence basis (for example, Piaget, 1999; Papert, 1980). From my own experience of primary school teaching, learning through play could be "hard fun" (Papert, 2002) whereby children could learn new things, and collaborate and devise solutions. I wondered if a playful approach in Higher Education could work, as I felt, in the words of Alison James (2019, p. 18), "play makes us better at the complex, challenging, horizon-stretching work that a university needs to do". My experiences of a playful approach are outlined below.

Before I became a lecturer in education, I had been an early years teacher for a number of years. As a result, I wanted to bring this sense of play to my teaching. This was to show students how children learnt in an early years classroom, but also to make my teaching more interesting. For a seminar introducing the early years curriculum, I put on a bubble machine and asked students in groups to think of all the different areas of learning they could teach using the machine. Students worked well together. Their laughter didn't prevent learning but seemed to help it. Then, the pandemic arrived. We were all learning and teaching online. As the bubble machine had always been a great way of introducing the early years curriculum to students, I decided to use the bubble machine anyway. However, I wondered if it would work with me at home putting on a bubble machine with students watching via TEAMS from home. I sat there with bubbles going all over my laptop and students were

typing how they could use a bubble machine with younger children. This unusual introduction to early childhood education stuck with the students (and with me). Several of them came up to me after the graduation to reminisce about the session.

In the penultimate, third vignette, I reflected on using aspects of Lego Serious Play® in my teaching. Again, as a primary school teacher I had used Lego in my teaching with young children to create representations of the world, collaborate and generally support learning. And it was fun! Coming back to Lego Serious Play in this different setting, with adult learners, I thought it had potential. Although Lego Serious Play was originally developed for managers to develop business strategies and let them "describe what they already knew in a new way, and to collaboratively develop new insights" (Roos & Victor, 2018, p. 335), it could also be applied to Higher Education teaching. When exploring teaching and learning, Sean McCusker (2014, p. 29) notes that "the richness is not so much in the LEGO bricks but in what they represent". Furthermore, owing to the playful nature of Lego Serious Play, social hierarchies are reduced and all participants are empowered to share their knowledge and opinions (McCusker, 2020). The third vignette below outlines my early use of Lego Serious Play and my takeaways from using a playful approach with my students.

> I have always included play in my teaching. This is something I used in my practice without knowing it had a special name in Higher Education— playful learning. I noticed a colleague had a huge box of Lego he was using in his outreach work and in computing lectures. I had heard of Lego Serious Play but had never experienced it or used it in my own teaching. Seeing a colleague using the method, I thought I would give it a go in a module I was teaching and see if it was a helpful approach. The module was about social justice in education, so there were lots of difficult concepts to get our heads around. In the first seminar, I asked students to build a model of "social justice" using Lego. We had all sorts of models and some really rich conversations about how we all viewed social justice. It went well. I decided to use the same type of activity in the next seminar: build a model of "inclusion" and discuss the concept. It went well again. For the third week, I thought I should leave the activity. Although I enjoyed the activity, I thought the students would have had enough of the Lego and "want to do proper learning". That day, I arrived in the seminar room without my usual box of bricks. "John, where's your Lego?" They had really liked using Lego and said it helped them discuss

and understand concepts. After that, I brought Lego to each weekly session for the module.

My fourth and final vignette explored how Playmobil pro can be used as a playful tool too. Playmobil pro has similarities to Lego Serious Play as both use children's construction toys to support adults in learning and making representations of concepts and bring joy into the classroom. I used Playmobil pro in my teaching to help students understand concepts related to sustainability education (Parkin, 2023). Furthermore, by creating representations of the world using Playmobil pro, students can explore issues in a safe environment, minimising the risks associated with failure (Heljakka, 2023). However, students need "a state of mind or an attitude" to learn in this way (Whitton & Moseley, 2019, p. 14)— and having introduced them to playful methods before certainly helped ease them into this new activity.

> I was really enjoying using more playful approaches in my teaching. I attended the Playful Learning Conference for the first time in July 2022 and participated in a session led by Karl McCormack about Playmobil pro. I thought this playful resource was a great addition to the method and tools I was already using. Like in Lego Serious Play there were lots of Playmobil figures and accessories for participants to use. I wanted to give it a go in my own teaching. I received funding from my university to purchase some Playmobil pro kits to use. The students enjoyed using the new learning resource. One activity particularly stood out. In a seminar about how students felt about difficult conversations and their experiences, one student made a Playmobil representation of when they had to have a difficult conversation with parents. She picked a small Playmobil child, drew a sad face on the child and put a key in her hand. She explained that she felt like "a child" when having a difficult conversation with a parent. She also selected a key to show how situations like this made her feel like she was "locked up". The Playmobil helped her open up her emotions and feelings. She felt comfortable sharing very personal experiences and thoughts—and the playful approach taken played an important part in this.

In conclusion

As I reflected on my experiences of becoming a senior lecturer "primary practitioner" in education, I surfaced and realised the journey that I had embarked on with the students I teach. When I first started working in

the university, I thought I needed to "lecture" like the lecturers who had taught me. I found this imitation to be unsatisfying personally and professionally—and so did my students. I began to explore different approaches and found that a playful approach to learning brought me hope that I could teach adults in a way that worked and which I enjoyed. Perhaps I found more courage and inspiration to try a more unconventional approach to teaching because I had been a primary school teacher. I had rich positive experiences to draw upon that most university lecturers would not have access to. If universities want to promote more inclusive—and also more successful—teaching and learning environments, they need to support and celebrate different approaches to teaching and learning. More than one way of teaching exists, we need the time and space to play with our practice—to help our students learn—hopefully. Academics need the autonomy to teach in a way that works for them—and for the students and the subject being taught.

Steps toward hope

- Reflect regularly on teaching practices and continuously build on experiences to grow as a university lecturer.

- Incorporate playful approaches to enhance the joy of teaching and learning, while supporting the development of student skills and knowledge.

- Create a safe learning environment for both students and lecturers through playful teaching methods.

- Advocate for time, space, agency, and support to explore diverse teaching approaches.

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19. Making plants cool again: Re-introducing botany as a beacon of hope and innovation in our educational systems

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Abstract

Botany, long overshadowed in educational discourse, is fundamental to understanding life on Earth, shaping ecosystems, and sustaining human existence. Despite its critical importance, plant science has seen a marked decline in emphasis within pre-university curricula, particularly in the UK. This chapter explores the potential for a botanical renaissance in education, arguing that early and meaningful exposure to botany can inspire curiosity, innovation, and a deeper engagement with pressing global challenges. By examining current gaps, highlighting successful educational practices, and proposing future-oriented strategies, this chapter advocates for a revitalised biology curriculum - one that positions botany as a vital, dynamic, and hopeful field of study.

Keywords: botany; plant biology; education; conservation; innovation

Introduction

In an era where the natural world faces unprecedented challenges, the field of botany, often underrepresented in modern education, is poised for a significant and hopeful resurgence. While it is true that the study of plants has not always received the attention it deserves in our classrooms, a new wave of enthusiasm and recognition is beginning to take root. This shift is not just timely but essential, as our planet grapples with environmental changes and sustainability concerns.

In the diverse field of modern biology, the study of plants has often been overshadowed by subjects like genetics, human medicine, and animal behaviour. Questions such as "What's my genetic makeup?" or "How do I get sick?" resonate more with students, as they can easily relate to topics that have a direct impact on their lives.

In contrast, the world of plants, while rich in intrigue and importance, is not always viewed as relevant by the typical student demographic, particularly in industrialised societies and metropolitan areas where direct contact with diverse plant life might be limited. In fact, it is no longer possible to enrol in a traditional botany degree in the UK, and the number of students opting to study plant science is in decline (Drea, 2011).

This, however, presents an exciting educational opportunity. Inspiring the next generation of botanists is more than an academic endeavour; it's an opportunity to reconnect individuals with the natural world. By creatively linking plant biology to students' everyday experiences and the larger global challenges we face, educators can illuminate the critical role plants play in our world. This reconnection can combat apathy towards environmental issues and foster a deeper understanding of our impact on future generations. The presence, or absence, of specific types of plants gives a distinct character to each environment on Earth. Botany holds vast untapped potential to support developments in ecological sustainability, food security, medical and innovations, and inspire biomimicry in architecture and technology. Emphasising this can transform the perception of botany from a seemingly distant subject to one of immediate and vital relevance. As we bridge this gap, we open up a world where the study of plants is not just for gardeners and nature lovers, but a compelling subject for all young learners, full of possibilities for exploration and discovery.

Botany education as it stands

The diminished place of plants in curricula

At the forefront of this educational dilemma is the glaring reduction of plant content in key academic syllabuses. This is especially noticeable within the UK's pre-university qualifications, Advanced Levels (more commonly referred to as A-levels). Historically, the study of plants formed a foundational cornerstone in biological sciences. However, as curricula evolved to accommodate emerging fields in human and animal sciences, the emphasis on botany waned. Today, a student could pass through the upper levels of pre-university biology education with only a cursory understanding of only very specific aspects of plant science, missing out on the richness, complexity, and continuing relevance of the plant kingdom.

Cultivating the next generation of botany experts

A discipline cannot thrive without enthusiastic scholars pushing its boundaries. This emerging botanical turn provides a vital opportunity for change by inspiring an engaging approach to draw a new generation towards the field of botany. By increasing exposure to botany at earlier stages of education and highlighting its relevance and excitement, we can ignite a passion for this essential discipline in young minds and reintroduce a passion for plants and plant life not just into the academy but also among the broader public.

Future impacts on conservation and medicine

Botany is far more than just the study of plants; it is an exploration of ecosystems, evolution, and the intricate balance of nature. A key emerging theme is the mitigating impact of plants on climate change and its impacts. Emphasising botany in education could lead to significant advancements in conservation efforts and climate research. We need a deep understanding of plants to conserve endangered habitats and predict the ecological consequences of global changes.

Furthermore, plants - aside from being the core basis of our daily food, have always been incredibly important in the realm of medicine. Many of the

world's pharmaceuticals have their origins in plant compounds, including several cutting-edge drugs. A shortfall in botany expertise could impede the discovery of potentially life-saving medicines derived from plants. Nurturing a deep knowledge and understanding of botany is not just an academic pursuit; it is a crucial step towards maintaining food security, future medical breakthroughs and the preservation of our natural world.

Reconnecting with the natural world through botany

Whilst we currently face the challenge of a decline in botany education, which is leading to an increasing disconnect between individuals, communities, and the natural world, there is a burgeoning opportunity for positive change. This situation presents a unique chance to rekindle a sense of wonder, connection, and understanding of the ecosystems that sustain us. We are on the brink of reversing a trend where academic knowledge of botany was marginalised, leading to what has been termed "plant blindness" - a widespread inability to recognise the importance of plants, even amongst biologists, as noted by Mung Balding and Kathryn Williams (2016). By bringing botany back to the forefront of our educational and community efforts, we can combat this "plant blindness" and foster a deeper appreciation for the intricate beauty and importance of plant life. Current reflections from A-level students on their education in plant sciences reveal a keen interest in deepening their understanding of this field:

> I think we should be taught more useful knowledge such as medicinal properties or uses of plants, rather than counting daisies in a quadrant (A-level Biology student, Farnborough, UK—2023).

> I feel there wasn't enough plant biology content to satisfy anyone who wanted to study plant biology further (A-level Biology student, Guildford, UK—2023).

> Most of us struggled with the theory and the syllabus did lack information about plant pathologies (A-level Biology student, Guildford, UK—2023).

Successful integration of botany in schools

The revitalisation of botany education is a multifaceted endeavour. Across diverse educational landscapes, innovative educators and

institutions are successfully reinvigorating an interest in botany through hands-on learning experiences, interactive engagements, and community involvement. While these instances are currently more the exception than the norm, they represent a significant shift towards a more balanced and comprehensive approach to biology education.

For example, the anti-cancer drug "Paclitaxel" was initially isolated from the bark of the Pacific Yew, *Taxus brevifolia*, and its chemical structure was first published over half a century ago (Wani et al., 1971). For twenty-three years, improving the extraction of Paclitaxel relied, in part, upon key insights from botany and the cultivation of *Taxus brevifolia* (Holton et al., 1994; Nicolaou et al., 1994). This exemplifies a potential route to reintegrating botany within the sciences: updating the curriculum to align plant topics with contemporary issues such as drug discovery, antibiotic resistance, food security, engineering, ecology, and climate change.

Instead of rote-learning outdated or oversimplified metabolic pathways, students could explore how our changing climate affects these pathways' efficiency and, consequently, our ability to cultivate plants for various purposes. The story of Paclitaxel highlights the interplay between botany and chemistry, often referred to as "natural product chemistry", which is important yet unfamiliar to many students. This integration could follow the model of how cisplatin (a chemotherapy medication) is currently explored in the A-level Chemistry curricula. Linking inorganic chemistry with the biochemistry of DNA in a realistic and contemporary framework makes the subject matter more relatable— after all, nearly every individual in every society has encountered or been affected by cancer in some form. This approach also underscores the pervasive impact of these scientific concepts in our everyday lives.

Innovative approaches to botany education

While traditional methods have proven successful in integrating botany into school curricula, the rapidly changing educational landscape calls for fresh and inventive approaches. Simply resurrecting pages from archaic botany textbooks is insufficient. We need to engage a new generation of learners, aligning botany with modern interests, technologies, and societal needs. The following are some promising innovative practices.

Creating botany clubs and societies

Imagine a place where plant enthusiasts of all ages gather, a space focused on curiosity and exploration. Community gardens where people can pick their own produce are particularly relevant within certain communities. Botany clubs also facilitate curious innovators to conduct plant-based experiments and explore local ecosystems. These clubs become hubs of interdisciplinary learning, where science dances with art, literature, and even mathematics, and the spark ignited here often leads to a broader interest in science (Wells et al., 2015; Duncan et al., 2016; Crane, 2021). Such clubs would help reignite a sense of wonder, as well as immediate relevance that transcends age and culture, to provide a sense of pride in having grown something of their own from seed to table.

Lab classes and school gardens

Eschew traditional classrooms for one that feels like a living, breathing garden. Here, students roll up their sleeves and get their hands dirty, germinating seeds, watching plants grow, and even uncovering the hidden treasures within plant compounds. Beyond books and lectures, it is about hands-on discovery; isolating terpenes from herbs, learning why plants develop them, and how humans use them for perfumes, flavourings and medicines. As students delve into the intricacies of plants, they're not just learning—they are creating, envisioning a world where plants are the very foundation of innovation. Many students will be unaware of the inspiration plants have provided for modern architecture and engineering projects. For example, the hook and loop system known as Velcro bears an uncanny similarity to the seed pods of burdock plants (*Arctium spp.*) and was developed after George de Mestral was inspired by burrs sticking to his clothes on an outing. After putting them under a microscope, the hook and loop system was born. Artists also benefit from the plant world. We have been using plant-based pigments for time immemorial; colours otherwise almost impossible to replicate artificially for paints can now be made—using nanotechnology inspired by... the humble buttercup!

Modern technology has opened new doors to make botany more accessible and engaging. Schools that integrate digital tools, such

as virtual reality tours of exotic ecosystems or interactive botanical databases, can enhance learning as well as the use of electronic keys and apps to identify plants around schools and colleges.

Foraging activities and ethnobotany education

There are a staggering 300,000 edible plant species. Yet, our modern diet fixates on only a handful. Now, imagine students venturing out into the wild, their senses tuned a little more alertly to the nature around them. They're not just picking plants; they're immersing themselves in a new experience within places that they may have already visited hundreds of times. They learn to spot different species, identify their unique healing powers, and discover a newfound appreciation for flavours that were lost to history. If we allow students to unravel further, there is ethnobotany, the study of how cultures around the world have woven plants into their daily lives. Suddenly, the lessons come alive with folklore, beautiful stave churches, and willow huts. It's a journey that bridges cultures and brings the world closer together, all through the power of plants (Shannon et al., 2017).

Medicinal gardens and education in medicinal plants (pharmacognosy)

We need to embrace gardens not just as pretty patches of green, but as living illustrative textbooks of nature's pharmacy. Students can explore the medicinal and pharmacological properties of plants, understanding their role in both traditional healing practices and modern pharmaceuticals. Students can contrast Western Herbalists with Ayurvedic and Traditional Chinese medicine clinics, gaining an insight into cultural differences in treating and preventing disease. Investigating the intersection within our global history and culture cultivates a deeper, holistic interest in plants (Verde et al., 2015).

Promoting citizen science projects and global collaboration

Imagine students not just as learners, but as champions of real-world research and conservation. Citizen science projects provide meaningful opportunities for impactful contributions. They may collaborate

with global initiatives, like charities fighting deforestation, or simply partner with primary schools to promote botany education. Moreover, participating in citizen science projects can enable students to contribute to real-world research. For example, tools like TreeAlert[1] and Treezilla[2] rely on data submitted by the public. These innovative approaches foster a connection to the broader scientific community while offering a glimpse into the future of botany education.

Conclusion

The resurgence of botany in education is not a nostalgic return to a dated view of science but something timely, urgent and necessary; it reflects the essential knowledge about plants that needs to be brought forward into the twenty-first century. To integrate it effectively into education, we must seamlessly infuse botany into our curricula using a thoughtful and creative array of modern teaching methods, approaches and spaces. Collaboration among schools, universities, industry, and conservation groups is crucial, and educators need empowerment with tools and knowledge. Hands-on learning and community involvement will connect education with real-world impacts, fostering a balanced and sustainable educational landscape. Botany is not merely a subset of biology; it is a dynamic discipline influencing our lives, culture, and environment.

Resources for further exploration

To aid those interested in participating in the botanical renaissance, the following resources offer valuable starting points:

- *Educational Platforms and Networks*: Websites such as Botanical Garden Education Network (https://bgen.org.uk) provides several key resources about plants and ecosystems.

- *Citizen Science Projects*: Organisations like TreeAlert and Treezilla enable individuals to contribute to plant monitoring and conservation efforts.

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1   See https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/fthr/tree-alert/
2   See https://treezilla.org/

- *Botanical Gardens and Conservatories*: Many offer educational programmes, volunteer opportunities, and insights into global plant diversity.

- *Academic Journals and Publications*: For those seeking a deeper scholarly exploration, journals like <i>Nature Plants[3]</i> provide cutting-edge research and discussions.

Steps toward hope

- Analyse existing challenges, showcase successful practices, and propose future approaches to contribute to a reimagined Biology curriculum.

- Recognise the importance of botany for understanding life on Earth and its role in shaping environments and providing essential resources.

- Advocate for early exposure to botany to unlock its potential in addressing global challenges.

- Promote a botanical renaissance, positioning botany as a beacon of hope and innovation in educational systems and as a step towards reclaiming our environment and futures.

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20. Putting theory into (proposed) action: The significance of campaign planning as an assessment task

Luke Ray Di Marco Campbell

Abstract

This chapter investigates the use of campaign planning as an assessment strategy within a postgraduate Community Development programme in Scotland. Rooted in the principle of applying theory to practice, the assessment invites students to design a hypothetical campaign based on an issue of personal or community relevance. This approach offers students a simulated leadership experience, enabling them to engage critically with socio-political themes. By integrating academic literature with their own experiences in volunteering, placements, and activism, learners are encouraged to reflect on how theory can inform meaningful practice. The chapter evaluates the pedagogical value of the would-be-activism method and considers how it might further support students in translating these skills into their future professional lives.

Keywords: assessment; non-traditional formats; activism; social change; creative methods

Introduction: Making change

This chapter explores how we, as educators, might offer our students opportunities to demonstrate hope through presenting their own visions for social change within their academic assessments. Specifically, it explores the effectiveness of utilising "campaign planning" as an assessment method. It does so by reflecting on current practice in a postgraduate Community Development programme at the University of Glasgow (Scotland), where we have utilised this precise assessment method since 2021. Premised on students applying the theoretical content studied on the degree programme to their envisioned future activism (be that via their on-programme practice placements, paid professional work, voluntary roles, or otherwise), the remit affords learners a hypothetical leadership position from which they can connect to an issue of personal or community-wide significance in an area of interest to them. Examples have included establishing new green spaces in their own local communities, suggested means for addressing food poverty via community meals or situating pantries within existing social spaces, advocating peer-led approaches to coping with ongoing trauma or active addictions, and mechanisms for fostering increasingly democratic methods of community consultation that critically dismantle the existing tokenistic statist methods.

An experienced context

Foremost, the reader should understand the context in which this non-traditional assessment format has been enacted. Our sector is diverse, with a majority of students on our programmes classed as "non-traditional learners", which, in the University of Glasgow (2023) context, includes mature students and returning learners; those who are care-experienced, care-estranged, or carers; as well as asylum seekers and refugees. However, in contrast to many other fields of study— particularly at undergraduate level—our learners tend to come to university with extensive experience of practice. So too, our entire staff team comes from practice backgrounds, with many of us still actively involved in community work (be that delivering services, in mentor or trustee roles, or as volunteers). Furthermore, the scope of our field is

incredibly diverse and, as such, it is important to reach a level of shared understanding on the topic. As I stressed in a recent article on queer educational practice:

> [T]he professional and voluntary trajectories of our [Community Development] students are immense - encompassing youth work, adult learning, homelessness and housing, addiction-based service, language acquisition, community-based healthcare, equalities, community meal and food pantries, outdoor education, and mental health services. Yet, alongside this, histories of marginalisation and experiences of oppressions are common [amongst our students encompassing] (migration and displacement, being subjected to hate crime, poverty, and broader precarity), resulting in a diversity of situated insights, understandings, and concerns that participants bring to the classroom (Di Marco Campbell, forthcoming).

Immersive assessment

Across our institute, assessments are required to aggregate 4,000 words-worth of assessed material per 20 credits (10 ECTS[1] credits). Whether the reality of that translates exclusively to a written paper is down to the teaching team and department leadership. However, it is increasingly rare for our students' grades to stem solely from traditional academic submissions. Instead, grades are calculated based on two (or more) submissions, with the components being any combination of traditional essays (with a lower word count), collaborative presentation, posters or zines, image theatre, and—as is our topic of interest, here—campaign plans. These demand that students demonstrate their capacity to communicate in multiple formats and to a diverse range of would-be audiences.

This specific assignment forms part of the curriculum for our Empowerment and Social Change course, running in the second semester of the standard one-academic year version of the postgraduate programme. Students have, therefore, completed several courses during which they have immersed themselves in the literature and are, likely, around halfway through their programme placements. In addition, plans for their dissertations are, generally, well underway. Consequently,

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1   European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System.

applying theoretical components to practice is no longer as alien as it can seem—or once was. This assessment offers something different—permitting greater scope to envision a different kind of work than they are, necessarily, involved in at present. Therein, learners foster space for radical visions of hope for enacting the change they wish to see in their world(s).

For this task, students are encouraged to critically reflect on engagement methods, leadership styles, and planning; synthesising concepts and tools from the literature (on this and their previous courses) to envision a meaningful form of action which they could, hypothetically, enact. In addition to utilising these tools and perspectives from the literature, we recognise that their insights from volunteering, placement practice, paid employment, and activism—but also from their broader lived experience as residents and members of their various communities—are often far more attuned to the needs of those they live and/or work alongside than we necessarily are as educators. The assessment is not, therefore, concerned with whether we as markers believe the campaign would necessarily be effective—a degree of trust is afforded here—but rather whether the student can communicate that belief in a well-evidenced manner and produce a comprehensive proposal.

Agency endorsement

One of the programme's core appeals—certainly from the university's marketing perspective—is its endorsement by the standards agency for our field, the Community Learning and Development Standards Council for Scotland (CLDSC). In what follows, I demonstrate how the assessment also aligns with "professional" expectations in the field. The CLDSC (2023) describes how existing and would-be practitioners within our field "use […] a range of formal and informal methods of learning and social development with individuals and groups in their communities" to develop "programmes and activities in dialogue with communities and participants, working particularly with those excluded from participation in the decisions and processes that shape their lives."

When we recognise that similar motivations have led a majority of our students to enter the field, the distinction between those planning to

work domestically (and are, thus, likely to operate in contexts where their work may fall under the CLDSC's remit) and those aiming to practise internationally becomes less significant, as a shared drive towards social change underpins both paths. The limits of sectorally-stated values are something I have previously explored, detailing concerns that radical forms of practice, when backed by the state, risk "becoming absorbed by state-imposed remits, bureaucracy, or falling into practices that merely espouse theoretical forms of inclusion and empowerment rather than authentically embodying them" (Di Marco Campbell, 2021, p. 3). The campaign planning assessment, however, is not (yet) limited by external missions, enabling a degree of freedom in the students' creativity and ambitions.

Many voices make hope work

Our student body involves learners from the world over, with recent cohorts including Scots, English, Nigerians, Chinese, Koreans, Japanese, Irish, Hong Kongers, Greeks, Ghanaians, Lithuanians, Latvians, Portuguese, French, and German learners, all with experiences we could never hope to have of their communities (including the local tensions, joys, and opportunities—or lack of). We are looking for them to bring that knowledge to the assessment, sharing their ambitions of how meaningful social change might be achieved or, at the very least, worked towards in a grounded and evidenced manner (utilising, for example, area profiles, census data, etc.). This allows them to critically apply their understanding to an issue of significance to them; they are not necessarily limited to the settings where they currently work or volunteer, nor are they limited to writing about their placement setting. Where students identify positive or progressive campaigns elsewhere that they believe could inform or inspire action in their own spaces, this becomes their chance to envision it—to share their belief that, despite current struggles or hardship, there is hope, and they can be part of the change they wish to see.

The second iteration of the campaigns assessment (2022/23)—the first under my course leadership—saw us, students and educators, co-create a guide based on the content students wanted to include in their campaign plans. This co-creation of criteria benefitted both markers

and students. From a marker's perspective, it made our job easier in that we could tally the various components to recognise whether the submissions met the word count requirements. It also made students' lives easier as they knew what percentage of the task a social media campaign (for example, Twitter posts, drafted website layouts, or public events) constituted. The positive impact, here, is that rather than recreating the traditional hierarchy of academia whereby the educator imposes a remit on the students, instructing them on precisely what to do, the students can advise us on what they believe could work in-action. This enables their hope to survive the translation from concept to assessment. Whilst this cannot entirely address the hierarchy of the institution (it is an award-granting business, after all, and that's something we as educators need to navigate ourselves), it is, at least, partially successful in equalising that relationship where possible.

End notes: Radical visions of hope

To close out this brief contribution, let us consider how that hope has taken shape in practice—in the actions students have taken to bring their hopeful visions alive. Many have utilised social media posts, albeit within an imposed limit of ten posts of up to 25 words each. Others have generated their own annotated homepage templates for prospective websites, explaining what key information would be included under tabs such as 'About Us', 'Get Involved', and 'Donate' (with a total word count of 300 words). Students have also been brave and shared envisioned creative materials ranging from flyers and posters (150–300 words), and ideas for murals or proposed campaign videos, even where they do not necessarily possess the skills required to craft finely-tuned campaign-ready designs. Unusually, our students were able to utilise artificial intelligence (AI) tools or sketch out design iterations, with several going as far as to identify local artists, photographers, or designers within their "targeted" area, whom they would wish to work with were the campaign to actually be enacted. Such attention to detail further illustrates how engaged many students become with the project, with some even creating tightly-worked budgets (150 words) that simultaneously showcase the challenges of working in community-based practice, suggesting a level of confidence in the proposed project

that they believe would motivate others to support the action(s).

Having reflected critically on the assessment as it has existed for the last two academic sessions, this chapter examined what the campaign planning task intends to offer students. We suggest this gives voice, ownership, and agency: encouraging students to apply their abundance of skills to their future practice beyond the placements undertaken as part of the degree programme. Whilst many sectors struggle to demonstrate the connections between the academy and the field, I hope that this assessment format illustrates one approach to keeping the students' motivation and hope for a better world alive.

Steps toward hope

- Utilise campaign planning as an assessment method to enhance practical learning in postgraduate Community Development programmes.

- Provide students with simulated leadership opportunities to connect theoretical content to real-world activism and identify areas for improvement.

- Create reflective spaces for students to integrate their learning with their personal experiences and prepare them for future professional practice.

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21. Freedom to learn: Developing autonomous critical learners through self-assessment in Higher Education

Agnese Di Domenico, Aidan Harvey, Beth Karp, Elizabeth Veldon, Ingeborg van Knippenberg, John Cowan, and Zack Moir

Abstract

Rooted in the transformative pedagogies of Paulo Freire and Carl Rogers, and influenced by contemporary thinkers such as Jesse Stommel, Susan Blum, David Clark, Robert Talbert, and Jan McArthur, this chapter presents a collaborative exploration of self-assessment by a team of students and staff at Edinburgh Napier University, UK. Through shared inquiry, they examine alternative assessment practices that prioritise student metacognition, self-awareness, and learning as a self-directed, meaningful process—rather than one solely validated by institutional metrics. Drawing on their lived experiences of learning without grades, they reflect on how such approaches can foster critical thinking, autonomy, and deeper engagement. Ultimately, they argue for self-assessment as a vital component in the pursuit of a more socially just and equitable Higher Education system.

Keywords: self-assessment; autonomy; trust; metacognition; sustainability; criticality

Introduction

We are an assorted team of educators/learners,[1] brought together by concerns about the impact of grading on the educational growth of students, and a deep desire to support and promote learner autonomy by shifting the focus of educational practices towards critical thinking and metacognitive awareness. It should be noted from the outset that our primary focus is on the Higher Education sector as this is the context that we work within, at present.[2] Informed by literature in this area (Kohn, 2011; Blum, 2020; Stommel, 2023, Clark & Talbert, 2023) and our own experiences as learners and educators, we know that learning freed from the consideration of grades is much more effective and valuable than learning that prioritises traditional educator-led grading. We believe that learner-led self-evaluation[3] is pivotal to the development of sustainable autonomous learners, and that this is often inhibited by traditional teacher-led grading. Through this chapter we hope to enthuse others to re-focus their education practices on meaningful *learning*.

Our collaboration was prompted by a shared interest in literature and practices that have become increasingly prominent in the last decade and

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1   We have purposefully chosen to refer to ourselves in this way, as we are all learners and educators. Each author is/has been an educator in at least one institution and in multiple sectors. However, we are all keen to highlight that we are all also learners. In the case of this team, some of us are enrolled on doctoral programmes and, therefore, learners in an "official" sense, but we are each clear in our desire to write from our dualistic perspectives as educators and learners. Some of us may even frame this in Freirean terms (Freire, 2017: 1974; 1976) by noting that we have a desire to resolve the student/teacher contradiction in that we do not see "student" and "teacher" as opposite poles, but that we are all students and teachers at the same time (Freire, 2017).

2   That said, many of us also have current and past experience of working in primary and secondary schools and we believe that many of the critiques, suggestions, and ideas presented in this work are equally applicable to other areas of the education sector.

3   A note on terminology: in the UK, assessment refers to graded testing of students. We use the term self-assessment here to denote work that produces a grade to be recorded, and self-evaluation to mean a reasoned judgement that feeds our self-directed development.

are commonly referred to as "ungrading" (e.g., Blum, 2020). Although we are not fully committed to this term, we are attracted to many of the ideas it encompasses, while remaining respectfully critical of some of the contextual issues, implementations, and impacts of current work in this area. Importantly, we do not believe that the simple removal of grades from assessment would necessarily foster the much-needed cultural change that would reorient educators, learners, and even institutions away from a focus on "performance" and towards a sincere concern for "learning".

Our experiences as learners and educators have resulted in frustration with normative grade-centric approaches to education that rank student work—and, implicitly, the students themselves—in accordance with the idiosyncratic and varied expectations, preferences, and values of educators, and the somewhat standardised policies of the institutions in which said education takes place. We share a vision for education that goes beyond certification (Boud, 2000) and transactional relationships between learners and educators. We believe in a philosophy of education that focuses on meaningful human and social development in which learners are supported to become autonomous, self-directed, critical beings who develop sustainable learning practices. This, we know from experience, requires educators to trust and respect learners as subjects in their own development, not see them as simply passive objects in a standardised ranking process. It is our belief that educators should look to relinquish their position as arbiters of success, validators of learning, or certifiers of progress, and instead focus on fostering the development of the skills imperative for autonomous learning.

Drawing on personal experience as learners and educators, we explore approaches that we believe can contribute to a more hopeful and humane approach to education based on the humanisation of learners as autonomous individuals with agency over their own learning. We focus our attention here on three areas that are particularly pertinent to our current thinking: (1) overcoming enculturation, (2) developing mutual trust, and (3) facilitating metacognitive processes. This is our story of hope: hope for a transformative rethinking of normative practices in contemporary Higher Education (HE) towards a more meaningful, sustainable, equitable approach to assessment and learning.

Overcoming enculturation

One of the key challenges in removing grading by calling for self-evaluation is that it seems, for many, to be antithetical to normative education and assessment procedures. Students have been faced with many years of institutional enculturation, which, crudely but realistically, frames education as being typified by transmissive pedagogies, based on the delivery of knowledge from learned authority figures to passive students/pupils who occupy a societally mandated (even socially *required*) deficit position, as per the "banking method" (Freire, 2017). Formal education, particularly in contemporary HE, is increasingly teleological, with the intended telos being explicitly stated as certification and training for employment. Immediate success is signified by high performance on exams/coursework (i.e., good grades), and this is often explicitly linked to future success in the employment market, which is an extrinsic motivation to perform well in order to obtain certification rather than working to learn.

This enculturation is powerful and pervasive and so linked to a hegemonic "common-sense" that any challenge seems unnatural, perhaps even wrong, and is, for some, met with deep scepticism. Author Zack Moir (henceforth, ZM) runs a penultimate year undergraduate module in which the summative assessment is an essay, to which students are accustomed by this stage in their studies. Students are required to devise their own essay topic, which is a conscious decision made to allow them to focus on that which has interested them most during the module. The somewhat "alien" aspect of this assessment, however, is that students then determine their own evaluation (marking) criteria, which they then use to assess their own work. ZM's role as the educator is to support students in the development of their evaluation criteria and to provide copious qualitative feedback on the development of the essay throughout the term; but he entrusts his students with the actual process of "grading" while providing a great deal of support for the process through a full feedback loop (Clark & Talbert, 2023). The vast majority of students over the years have reported this to be an overwhelmingly positive (albeit challenging) experience, and valued the opportunity to engage in self-evaluation. However, one particularly illuminating piece of feedback from a student encapsulates several important issues that educators face when trying to engage students in such practices:

> The final assessment was vague and felt pointless...there was no point to this essay at all due to the fact that we were evaluating how we think our essays hold up to university standards or not when there is an actual PhD qualified lecturer, who has a much greater understanding of what is required from an assessment like this, running the module. I feel like the fact we had to create our own criteria further enhanced this feeling toward the assessment. We had to write an essay in which the criteria was created by ourselves and also assessed by ourselves to count towards our degree. In other universities, that just wouldn't fly. I didn't take the assessment seriously as I thought "he's not going to read it"...

This valuable text highlights four key issues, specifically: (1) the belief in external universal "standards" and that the purpose of university assessment is to demonstrate adherence to these, (2) the engrained belief in their own inferiority or deficit position, relative to qualified educators, (3) the idea that their judgement should not be included in considerations of their success, and (4) a trust issue that can arise when learners see such an approach to assessment as educators relinquishing their duty, or simply "outsourcing" their marking to the students.[4]

Author Beth Karp (henceforth, BK), who came back to formal education as a mature student, also points to the pervasive and powerful nature of normative conceptions of assessment in learning and education:

> The notion of attaining the highest grade at some points in my postgrad consumed my thinking patterns, to the point that I got caught in a battle of comparison and trying to unpick my own thinking and the system of comparison I was holding myself up to.

She joined an MA programme, which, she reflects, was

> ...designed to develop autonomous reflexive learners by passionate

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4   In using this feedback on self-assessment, we the authors would like to highlight how sometimes this approach can find some resistance from students due to the enculturation of a highly hierarchical system in universities. An interesting aside here is that it is common practice in many universities to outsource the marking of undergraduate student submissions, sometimes exploitatively, to doctoral candidates—i.e., people who do not yet have PhDs—meaning that the "PhD qualified lecturer" (to quote this student's phrase) is often not the assessor in any given situation. In this case, the purpose of self-assessment is not to outsource grading or relieve the responsibility of the educator, but to encourage students to develop a critical analysis of one's own work and to work towards dismantling the student–teacher contradiction (Freire, 2017).

people who knew how to facilitate freedom in learning, in growth that suited the individual. They knew how to communicate that freedom to learn in order for me to develop my thinking, approaches and understanding enough that I became passionate and intrigued in furthering an academic pursuit. I came out of that MA understanding the value I could add to the world with my own way of working, my ideas, and get more out of myself in doing so.

However, she notes that this involved a process of "unlearning in order to learn"—i.e. deprogramming some of the societally-influenced, entrenched attitudes about the purpose of education. She refers to this, somewhat emphatically, as "un-fucking your thinking … all the years of learning value systems were challenged and my brain got un-fucked", suggesting that her experience had a restorative impact on the way she thought and learned, and the ways in which she viewed education.

Mutual trust

For many learners and educators alike, trust is a key issue with which we need to contend if we have serious ambitions to normalise the types of practices we advocate for here. When discussing trust between learners and educators, and more importantly, as Jesse Stommel (2023) states, the trust that educators have in their students, there are three key ways in which the question of trust becomes pertinent in this discussion. Firstly, in the general sense, the practices we are proposing deviate so much from entrenched norms that they are seen as different, radical, experimental, or even transgressive, and thus are a source of mistrust for many. Secondly, the frequently encountered response to proposals of self-evaluation from colleagues and administrators is, "if you let them mark their own work, they'll all just give themselves really high grades". Thirdly, as alluded to in the previous section, students can feel that this is a case of educators "outsourcing" the work that they should be doing to their students to evade the laborious process of grading student work. Additionally, as some of us have experienced, fundamental mistrust can lead students to doubt the fact that their evaluations and grading will be taken seriously and not interfered with by educators.

Author Aidan Harvey (henceforth, AH) reflects with fascination

that while, on the one hand, some students see self-assessment as an easy way out, this is not in any way reflected in the feedback/marks they assign themselves at the end of the module. There is little attempt to "game the system" and indeed, students often show a good awareness of the quality of their work and processes. This awareness, and any sort of metacognition is perhaps most obvious when talking to students. AH had the opportunity to talk to each student about their work and many showed a great deal of metacognitive thought.

> I've found that building in time to talk to each student and listening to their work and thoughts goes a very long way in helping to build the mutual trust that is essential to help overcome any enculturation. Indeed, it is also the part of my teaching practice that I enjoy the most; crucially, it's also something that students have anecdotally mentioned is incredibly useful too. I also feel that building in this time to speak to them on a one-to-one basis also goes a long way to minimise any ideas of comparison and competition.

Facilitating metacognitive processes

Key to the development of learner autonomy is the promotion of metacognitive abilities. Simply put, metacognition might be defined as "thinking about thinking", but in this context, we paraphrase and prefer the deeper formulation, "learning about learning". This foregrounds the importance of learners developing an awareness and critical understanding of their thinking, themselves as active learners, and the practices and processes required to develop these faculties. This self-analytical framework is key to the development of self-reflective practices not only within and between students but also within and between teachers through the adoption of Paulo Freire's (1974, p. 42) model of teacher/students and student/teachers working together in a process of self and cultural investigation:

> A revolutionary leadership must accordingly practice co-intentional education. Teachers and students [...] co-intent on reality, are both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge. As they attain this knowledge of reality through common reflection and action, they discover themselves as its permanent re-creators.

Author John Cowan (henceforth, JC) discovered the value of evidence-based self-evaluations many years ago, when trying to facilitate the development of metacognitive processes:

> I had a notion to ask my first-year students to keep a weekly reflective learning journal, responding to a header question related to their core-skills module: "What have I learned about learning or thought about thinking which should make me more effective next week than I was last week?"
>
> Journals were handed in weekly for facilitative comment. Students initially loathed journalling. They had a similar reaction when asked to summarise their entries at the end of the first ten-week term. Many summaries were to report the writer's surprise to discover from this re-reading just how much their thinking about thinking had contributed to tangible improvements in the abilities that the course called for. I didn't tell them that this was called metacognitive development. But for myself I had learned the value of asking learners to undertake data-based self-judgements.

Our hope

What we are discussing may seem radical to some (colleagues and students alike) or problematic, but we accept this as, drawing on Freire (2017, pp. 10–11), we believe in the need to radically reimagine those practices that we regard as dehumanising and limiting the potential development of others:

> The radical does, however, have the duty, imposed by love itself, to react against the violence of those who try to silence him—of those who, in the name of freedom, kill his freedom and their own. To be radical does not imply self-flagellation. Radicals cannot passively accept a situation in which the excessive power of a few leads to the dehumanization of all.

We hope for a future in which learners—now and in generations to come—are empowered, engaged, and active in setting their own learning agenda, practice, and assessment. The human tendency to compare and rank students according to grades has been the norm for generations; understanding how a different, grade-free system could work requires a restructuring of our thinking from its roots, unlearning the norms and standardisations of our ranking systems. Our approaches join the current developments of humanising HE (e.g., Sutton, 2017) and focusing

on relational pedagogies (e.g., Gravett et al., 2021) and assessment for social justice (e.g., McArthur, 2016). We advocate working towards a new approach in HE, based on the notion of "meeting people where they are at" and facilitating learning to empower and aid growth for each individual, with learner-directed, learner-evaluated, and learner-managed practices. Replacing a system based on ranking students with one that focuses on development and growth and facilitates and supports freedom in learning requires further thought and a collective effort.

Making change happen is hard, and institutional inertia can sometimes make it feel as if there has been little, if any, progress in this area. Even colleagues interested in our ideas in principle feel daunted by the amount of work involved in making changes: daily workload pressures mean it is easier to adhere to the *status quo* rather than be daring and engage with change. Changing mindsets that have been so deeply engrained for so long involves a slow change; but as illustrated by the examples in this essay, these wheels can be set in motion. Only through a concerted attempt at critical dialogue with colleagues and students can such developments continue to gather pace—small steps will get us there. We call on educators everywhere to be bold and take steps towards a system of Higher Education that centres learning, fosters equity and support, and is grounded in trust, human connection, and relational practice.

Steps toward hope

- Promote transformative, meaningful, and socially just learning inspired by educational theorists like Paulo Freire and Carl Rogers.

- Focus on alternative assessment approaches that emphasise self-directed learning, metacognition, and understanding one's place in the world.

- Actively integrate students and their experiences into the discussion on assessment.

- Reflect on the impact of learning without grades to support the development of autonomous, critically reflective learners.

- Advocate for self-assessment as a step towards a more socially just and equitable future in Higher Education.

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22. Hope in an art school

Simone Maier

Abstract

This chapter explores the author's evolving relationship with hope in art education through a series of reflective experiences. Drawing on dialogic and written forms of inquiry, and particularly informed by the work of Sara Ahmed, hope is conceptualised as a worthwhile and necessary struggle within educational practice. Through critical reflection on a university module, the author recognises how her application of critical pedagogy risked confining learning within a repetitive loop. In response, she turns to post-critical pedagogy as a framework for cultivating more positive, hopeful, and affirming forms of art education. The chapter concludes with a visual representation, offering an alternative view on teaching and learning—a positive closure beyond the written word.

Keywords: post-critical pedagogy; art education; art school; criticality

Setting the context: A critical introduction

A few months ago, writing about hope in relation to my teaching practice struck me as a straightforward and likely enjoyable task: I'd always maintained that I found hope in both my discipline and students. However, in the weeks and months that followed, a sequence of events transpired, making it challenging.

I work within the School of Art, Architecture and Design (AAD). To commence each academic year, the AAD holds a day-long start-of-year briefing. This year, for the final session of the day, the School's Dean asked us to break into groups to discuss the feedback that had been collected in a recent staff survey about workplace satisfaction. The group I was assigned to included tenured members of staff and Associate Lecturers like me, who are on annual contracts (my contract has been renewed each year for the past seven years). It was chaired by a member of the AAD's Senior Leadership Team (SLT), who adeptly invited everyone to speak, took notes, and verbally summarised each contribution. After collecting the group's thoughts, she concluded the session by asking, perhaps rhetorically, why we continued to work in the AAD if the conditions were so unfavourable. There was a collective intake of breath. My thoughts raced as I mentally tried to frame a reply that sufficiently expressed my visceral experience of the value of being part of an art school while still acknowledging the challenges of working within a university in a marketised Higher Education context.

Over the following weeks, as the question continued to occupy my thoughts, I scoured research about art schools and creative work. I returned to Angela McRobbie's (2016) book, *Be Creative*, which focuses on the education and employment prospects of fashion graduates. One of the assertions that McRobbie makes is that creative jobs, especially those within the fashion industry, are falsely upheld as empowering workers to avoid the drudgery of routine and unfulfilling work while they actually pave the way to a post-welfare era, in which the worker is disconnected from family, kinship, and community (McRobbie, 2016). Along similar lines, Miya Tokumitsu (2014) exposed the fallacy of the "Do What You Love" (DWUL) mantra, finding that while it may sound like a harmless and precious aphorism, it is embedded in academia as a way of thinking that enables labour to be conceived of as "not something one does for compensation, but an act of self-love". Tokumitsu (2014) decries this as "the most elegant anti-worker ideology". While these and many other academics and writers have usefully examined the systemic neo-liberal problems associated with arts education and the creative industries (see Bishop, 2012; Malik, 2015; Mould, 2020; Rowles & Allen, 2016) they did not annul my experience and knowledge of the worth of teaching and the struggle for art-based knowledge in university art schools.

From student to tutor and back again

Some years ago, it was through the interest and encouragement of a course leader, who recognised my potential to support other learners, that I attained a scholarship to join the university's Postgraduate Certificate of Education LTHE course (PGCert) and qualify as a university teacher. The PGCert changed the way I conceived of education. Its tutors taught and enacted a Freirean critical pedagogy that welcomed the social, political, and psychological development of learners (Freire, 1996). Unlike any classroom I had ever experienced, theirs challenged me to examine power structures and patterns of inequality. In their classes, the tutors modelled how to listen with care, acknowledge, and learn from each other's contribution. Believing that others could find value in my embodied approach to teaching using a critical pedagogy, the tutors invited me to develop some of my PGCert research into an article that was published in our institutional journal. The publication not only validated my teaching practice but also showed that I had agency. I also changed the way I conceived of myself, which showed me that in addition to my use of traditional art media, which was mainly sculpture, I could add writing as a creative practice. I began to allow a synthesis between my practice-based research (sculptural artwork), teaching, and reflection on teaching and writing practices.

I went on to complete an MA in art education at the Institute of Education, University College London (UCL). Emboldened by my qualifications and with many years of teaching experience, I began to apply for tenured posts, the experience of which proved a stark contrast to the inspiration and hopeful encouragement that I had encountered during my PGCert. I invested considerable effort in composing written statements, devising presentations, and preparing for formal panel interviews. In the last year or so, I reached the final interview stage three times for permanent posts within university art schools. Following the most recent concise rejection email, I felt exposed and superfluous. Sinking into a reluctance to use language, I drew, working-through as yet ineffable ideas until I was able to come back to dialogue and writing.

The art critic and writer, John Berger (2016, p. 112), noted that "hopelessness leads to wordlessness". His writing frequently alludes to what is beyond itself; what is beyond language: phenomenological

human experience. My job application experiences confirmed Berger's proposition that when hope leaves, so does the ability to articulate and write. It is a paradox that it is through language, via reading and conversation, that I have recalibrated my sense of hope; lifted my sights and considered the fortitude that colleagues and mentors muster, working as they have for decades; tenaciously harnessing the energy of ire, to accelerate their efforts both within the university and through external communityship (Nerantzi et al., 2023) to publish, tweet, blog, and interact across a wide range of networks, sustaining themselves through interpersonal relationships based on language and thus retaining hope in education.

Despite the challenges imposed on state-certified art schools by successive UK governments (Muhammad, 2023), the AAD continues to bring together teachers and makers who are passionate about their disciplines. Together, we discover, discuss, and develop artistic skills and ideas.

Hope rises still

As I pull up to the campus bike park, even after nine years of entering the AAD as a student and then a teacher, I feel a sense of excitement about the unknown interactions and making that could occur that day. Often, it is in the informal places in which thoughts are voiced, ideas are tested, and solidarity is found. On a recent morning, I had an exchange with a senior colleague who sat on the panel of one of my interviews. She told me how engaging and passionate she had found my presentation. This incidental interaction, a fifteen-minute conversation, helped me to move beyond considerations of neo-liberal immiseration and subjugation, to enter the AAD's studios and workshops confident to contribute to the development of thinking, being, making, and imagining.

Some days, hope feels more alive than others. On the difficult days, solace can be found in language: dialogue with colleagues and the writing of academics such as Sara Ahmed (2017, p. 2), whose research examines the unjust conditions in UK universities and who states:

> Hope is not at the expense of struggle but animates a struggle; hope gives us a sense that there is a point to working things out, working things through. Hope does not only or always point towards the future, but carries us through when the terrain is difficult, when the path we follow makes it harder to proceed.

Staying with Ahmed's quote, I used it as the inspiration for a piece that is part of an ongoing series of expanded drawings, collectively titled "Gathering".
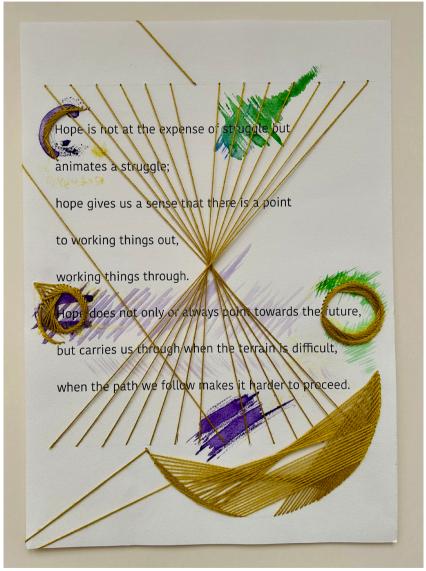

Fig. 22.1 Simone Maier, *Gathering VI*, 2023 (image by author, CC BY-NC 4.0).

The process and outcomes of making art—thinking, exploring, and imagining through materials—provide an embodied means through which we consider the complex and contentious world we inhabit. What an artist makes is often as surprising to the maker as it is to its audience; allowing the maker to access forms of non-language-based knowledge. The artist and writer Amy Sillman explains this as *"knowing differently*, articulating that act of perceiving as a way of *knowing"* [italics in original text] (Gordon, 2019, p. 110). Many of my students profess to not being "good" with language, which leads them to express themselves through their making. Language can be a difficult medium and in fact, tutors often eschew the impetus of some students to explain their work, instead wanting creative work to "speak" for itself through the visual language of drawing, collage, assemblage, photography, and so on. It is delightful to watch a student present work that is perceptively read by their peers. Such critique helps students contextualise their making, as well as validating the work as a worthwhile contribution to their cohort's emergent body of knowledge.

Discovering limitations of critical pedagogy

Observing and responding to how others interpret creative work is a learning outcome of the Critical Creative Practice (CCP) module, for which I am the module leader. I work with a team of five other tutors—a curator, an architect, a fashion designer, a furniture maker, and a photographer—to support students to develop their core creative skills as they complete short projects focused on self-reflection, resistance, teamwork, curation, installation, and interaction with artificial intelligence (AI). The projects begin an emergent journey in a sticky environment in which creative education is forged, not delivered (Orr & Shreeve 2018). Collaborative teamwork and peer-to-peer learning are explicitly discussed and supported: students are invited to consider their agency and collective knowledge production, as they develop projects that ask them to make, see, feel, speak, and imagine in new ways. After each academic year, I reflect with my CCP colleagues on our pedagogy and the module's curriculum. It was through this reflective process that I began to question my use of critical pedagogy. When I was introduced to critical pedagogy, it opened up a new way to think about the political implications of Learning, Teaching, and Assessment (LTA). But, after

using critical pedagogy on the CCP module for several years, I had a growing sense that in examining the injustices of our situation, my pedagogy was stuck in a critical loop.

Discovering post-critical pedagogy

Studying towards a Master's in art education opened a space to investigate my pedagogic concerns, picking up on what Elisabeth Ellsworth began exploring in her seminal 1989 text *Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering? Working Through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy.* Bruno Latour (2004) also signposted a challenge confronting critical pedagogy in his article "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam?". I've subsequently come to appreciate post-critical pedagogy as it offers a pedagogy that accepts education as disruptive with a "politically significant capacity, and it grants the opportunity to provoke and support political transformation, but only if it is conceived as an autonomous sphere, governed by its own proper logic" (Vlieghe & Zamojski, 2019, p. 159). A post-critical pedagogy enables me to move away from the stasis of critical pedagogy, to focus on conceiving of myself as an active agent able to reflect on and work with the ever-changing student cohorts. Post-critical pedagogy is not against critique but rather offers a way to "step outside the endless repetition of critical research in education" (Wortmann, 2020).

In 2019, Joris Vlieghe and Piotr Zamojski's published "Towards an Ontology of Teaching: Thing-centered Pedagogy, Affirmation and Love for the World", exploring post-critical pedagogy in challenging philosophical and theoretical detail. They conclude that "education is fundamentally driven by hope" (Vlieghe & Zamojski, 2019, p. 150). Kai Wortmann's (2020) appealingly concise article finds that post-critical pedagogy reflects on what is "good and valuable in education, not only as a means to change or as the desirable changed state but also to describe what is worthwhile to continue or maintain". Unlike critical pedagogy, which envisions education as a socio-political activity, post-critical pedagogy conceives of education as an activity for its own sake, returning it to an Arendtian notion of education as a possibility of newcomers beginning anew with the world (Vlieghe & Zamojski, 2019). It helps teachers to develop a language to reclaim teaching (Vlieghe & Zamojski, 2019), affirming our love for the world through drawing our attention and that of our students to the thing (i.e., the subject matter) that we care about. There is nothing more

rewarding, and hopeful, than teaching focused on an engagement with embodied making, reflecting on what has appeared, sharing our material experiments and how differently we each understand a process, concept, or outcome. Post-critical pedagogy informs how I adapt my teaching to bring about powerful heterotopic spaces as I gain insights into students' values and needs, in which I pose questions of how to speak positively and affirmatively without offering easy answers (Wortmann, 2020).

Enacting a post-critical pedagogy

One of the challenges of working in a UK university is that "time, space and latitude for cooperative work are increasingly foreclosed" (Asher, 2023, p. xxxii). Financial pressures have seen the AAD contract into a building with no staff common room and limited studio spaces. As noted above, this pushes important conversations into informal spaces—in the corridors, and in the streets and cafes surrounding the campus. Last year, the CCP module was allocated a lecture hall as it was the only available teaching space large enough to accommodate the cohort. Unfortunately, its architecture imposed a didactic approach that my colleagues and I worked against, reconfiguring the space by setting up trestle tables that offered collaborative spaces for students to develop their CCP projects.

We start the CCP module with a project that explicitly invites students to share their existing creative knowledge, skills, or interests. Tutors hand out small, twenty-sheet A6 sketchbooks and ask students to use them to express something about themselves. We refer to this first sketchbook activity as *This is Me!*. Returning the following week, we break into groups to look at the sketchbooks. Some will no longer be in a sketchbook format but will have been deconstructed into sculptures or fashion accessories, or burnt with only video evidence remaining. We then ask students to use their phones to photograph or video their *This is Me!* uploading images to a shared Padlet (a collaborative web platform).[1] Looking through these photos we discuss what documentation is successful and why, inviting students to re-photograph and re-post images to better capture their work. In this way, students learn collaboratively through making and hearing suggestions about how to improve their *This is Me!*. They also learn about

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1   See https://padlet.com/maiers11/this-is-me-2022-23-cohort-ncf64rq7yiuxg0d5

the skills and interests of their peers. In making something in or out of a sketchbook, each student contributes towards an understanding of what creative practice can be, expanding the possibilities for the cohort. The *This is Me!* project empowers us to listen, discuss, and consciously build our discourse as an affirmative enquiry so that students develop a nascent appreciation for how to contextualise their creative practice and extend their agency as part of a cohort. *This is Me!* validates our supercomplex (Abegglen et al., 2020) students for who they are and the knowledge they already possess, welcoming them into the AAD epistemic community and leaving us all with a renewed sense of hope.

Conclusion

In place of a written conclusion, I offer a visual one. Fittingly, it remains a work in progress.
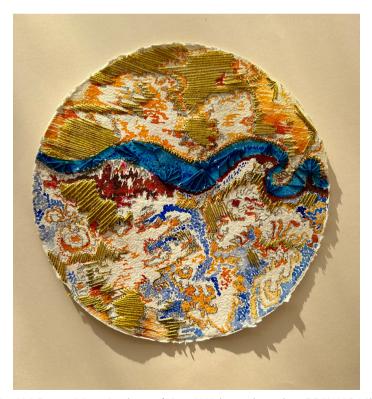
Fig. 22.2 Simone Maier, *Landscape of Hope,* 2023 (image by author, CC BY-NC 4.0).

Steps towards hope

- Conceptualise hope as a worthwhile and necessary struggle within art education practice.

- Critically assess the limitations of critical pedagogy, recogniaing its potential to confine learning within a repetitive loop.

- Consider alternatives such as post-critical pedagogy to cultivate positive, hopeful, and affirming forms of education.

- Utilise visual representations to offer alternative perspectives on teaching and learning, providing opportunities for realisations beyond written reflections.

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IV. IMAGINATIVE COLLABORATION AND CO-CREATION

Imaginative collaboration and co-creation: Introduction

Sandra Abegglen, Tom Burns, and Sandra Sinfield

As one of the author collectives included in this section states, "We are standing at a crossroads and need to shift our mindsets to create the new now". This collection of case studies on "collaboration and co-creation" underscores that there is hope, through community and co-creation. Yet, this hope is sometimes hard to find in a competitive, marketised, and isolating Higher Education environment. However, when "coming together", as a collective, more positive things are possible. The case studies included highlight the communal dialogues and practices that allow for an "educational imagination" (Eisner, 2001) to emerge: new "Communities of Practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991), new ways of seeing and doing, a new ecology of collaborative practice (Abegglen et al., 2023). Rather than falling back on the "familiar" tools and ways of thinking, the innovative models and methods presented by the authors allow us to reimagine how we can work with each other, with diverse students, and with other educational professionals to change educational practice—and the educational system.

Bringing different theories, approaches and people together allows for boundary crossing, positive transgressive behaviour (Abegglen et al., 2021a, 2021b): across teams; across disciplines; across disciplinary, institutional, and national boundaries; and across staff/student boundaries: working together with each other, as partners. Working together in academia provides an opportunity for both a recognition of the self—and others—as we strive to co-create a humane university.

Humans are social, interdependent beings and collaboration in Higher Education creates opportunities not just for "best practices" but for the emergence of new threshold concepts of academia itself (Meyer & Land, 2003), not competitive individualism but collegiality and partnership. An ecology of collaborative university practice for a hopeful social justice education.

The section begins with a centring look at how we speak with each other, teasing out how to harness non-violent communication in staff and student dialogues. This progresses to a radical exploration of how we can "better work together" to bring about change. Peer Review of Teaching (PRT) showcases how we can help each other improve our own practice and the curriculum and education *per se*. The next chapter provides an insight into a classroom practice example that adopts a form of "the community is the curriculum" approach where staff and students co-create a curriculum of hope and action (Honeychurch et al., 2016). The section closes with a chapter that focuses on the 'ground up' development of a professional development course for staff on the topic of inclusive assessment to change classroom practice and make it more welcoming.

Chapter overview

"Embracing compassion: Nonviolent communication for transformative teaching and learning in Higher Education" by Anna Troisi sets the tone for this section. The starting premise of this piece is that the traditional view of "students versus educators" needs to be transformed into a more communal opportunity to work together harmoniously. The author celebrates a holistic approach, drawing inspiration from Marshall Rosenberg's Nonviolent Communication (NVC) framework. Students and staff were coached in NVC techniques for communication and feedback, fostering authentic expression and compassionate listening. This helped transcend traditional educational boundaries, equipping participants with vital interpersonal skills. The chapter offers practical examples and serves as a guide for those seeking to centre communication and compassion in their own teaching practice.

In "*Better Together*: Towards a new organising principle and mindset for co-creation", Nikita Asnani, Inca Hide-Wright, Jess Humphreys, Bo

Kelestyn, and Jean Mutton propose *Better Together* as a non-hierarchical, slightly anarchical organising principle towards education change. In their poetic piece they implicitly critique more staid and safe innovation processes as they take us on a journey illuminating the opportunities created by this radical way of thinking through the developments we might want to make. Design thinking (DT)-led innovation processes, they argue, will allow all of us (staff and students) to move through tumultuous innovation journeys with more confidence. DT changes the innovator and their understanding of the problem, co-creating *with* and not just *for* the intended audiences.

"Peer review: No crime, no punishment" explores the barriers to transforming Science, Technology, Engineering, and, in Debbie Holley's (the author) context, medical education from a transmissive passive pedagogy to something collegiate, innovative, and humane: a curriculum that is driven by open collaboration, creativity, and exciting exchange. Peer Review of Teaching (PRT) is cited as a vehicle that in their radical case nurtured the growth of the individual as well as contributing to developing the skills, attributes, and capacities of a whole teaching team. Although PRT inherently possesses an evaluation element, it involves making value judgements about the quality of teaching practice, and this case study shows that PRT can be something positive and hopeful. The author draws on a model from the practice of medicine, the huddle, to bring humanising values and a supportive and collaborative culture even, to the often-feared peer review process. She goes on to give examples of innovative practice that were encouraged through this celebratory and positive process, outlining how a hopeful culture of learning and support can be created in the academy.

In "Co-creating networks of hope in an interdisciplinary degree for mature students the tutor" and student authors—Catherine Bates, Tracy Campbell, Colin Webb, and Lucy Yeboa—tell the stories of their radical lifelong learning course. In the process, they discover the networks of hope—explored and co-created through workshops where personal experiences are shared and juxtaposed with relevant and relatable examples from popular culture. The chapter showcases how the "outside" was brought into the classroom, exploring ontology and epistemology in intersectional, embodied, active, and empowering ways. Through political analysis, this process reveals opportunities for hope,

transforming a passive present into an active future. The classroom as a springboard for radical acts of hope—a root-level transformation of people and praxis.

"A quiet hope: Enhancing institution-wide inclusive assessment practices" by Siobhán O'Neill and Laura Lee focuses on the establishment of a professional development course for staff on the topic of inclusive assessment. To initiate authentic, embraced change, the team undertook extensive research and collected experiences and voices from staff and students on assessment, especially those at the margins of teaching and learning. Based on this, they developed a Digital Badge course for staff to enhance their understanding of inclusive assessment practice—and eventually change their classroom practice. The course harnessed concepts of Universal Design and Universal Design for Learning as an educational framework that aims to improve and optimise teaching and learning for all students. The course itself was evaluated, and based on the feedback received revised and updated, creating a hopeful cycle of changing educational teaching and learning practice to something more inclusive. This was not a top-down initiative but a positive flourishing of an interest in, and a commitment to, better outcomes for those students previously placed at the periphery of education.

The section closes with a case study outlining a ground-up staff development programme that uses playful and creative practice to collectively un-school and de-school participants and tutors alike—and reimagine education. In "The moongazers: A creative vision of Higher Education", we, Sandra Abegglen, Tom Burns, and Sandra Sinfield, the editors and authors, describe what we call a staff development programme like no other: not dry and dusty theory, although of course theory is there, but a course as a "third space", seeding collaborative encounters that provoke agentic engagement with teaching, learning, and assessment—moving beyond what is already a collective development of something different, more positive, holistic, and playful. One of the most difficult tasks is to imagine differently, and imagining education and its practices differently can be the most difficult of all. We are all inscribed with reductive educational narratives from nursery or kindergarten up to university, "schooled" and "conformed". Yet, we believe it is possible, and necessary, to take down the hostile and impenetrable towers of Higher Education, to tear down the watchtowers,

remove the gatekeepers—and welcome people in. With our practice we endeavour to build a village of learners and educators that have equal participation and an equal say in the process of making liberatory practice a reality.

Key learnings

1. Educational transformation through shared power and radical inclusion

Collaboration across roles, disciplines, and institutions helps dismantle traditional hierarchies, replacing them with relational, participatory approaches. Co-creation—with, not just for—students and staff generates a shared sense of ownership, enabling collective action and transformative learning experiences.

2. Compassionate communication helps building humane learning communities

Drawing on frameworks like Nonviolent Communication, educators and students can cultivate environments rooted in empathy, authentic dialogue, and mutual respect—creating the conditions for deep learning, trust, and social justice to flourish.

3. Unlocking new educational possibilities through creativity, play, and interdisciplinary practice

Innovative pedagogies—from poetic design thinking and embodied learning to playful staff development—disrupt the status quo, inspire imagination, and empower both educators and learners to envision and build more liberatory forms of education.

4. Grassroots initiatives can drive institutional change from the margins

Case studies demonstrate that bottom-up staff development, peer-led teaching review, and student-staff curriculum design can lead to

meaningful shifts in practice. These micro-level interventions model inclusive, hopeful approaches to reimagining assessment, curriculum, and academic culture.

Together, these learnings highlight how collaborative, compassionate, and creative approaches can reframe Higher Education as a space of possibility—where hope is not only imagined but actively practiced: together.

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23. Embracing compassion: Nonviolent communication for transformative teaching and learning in higher education

Anna Troisi

Abstract

This chapter explores how compassion can be embedded into higher education teaching and learning environments through existing methodologies such as Nonviolent Communication (NVC) and design for change. Drawing on a case study from a Creative Computing undergraduate course, it examines the use of co-inquiry and relational feedback practices to support inclusive, dialogic learning spaces. Rather than introducing new roles or responsibilities, the approach recognises compassion as a teachable and learnable skill that shapes how feedback is communicated, how belonging is cultivated, and how decisions are co-developed. By shifting from reactive fixes to proactive and co-designed strategies, the work illustrates how relational methods can support pedagogical transformation, particularly in contexts marked by marginalisation and difference.

Keywords: nonviolent communication; co-inquiry; relational pedagogy; inclusivity; design for change; compassion; social justice

Embracing compassion: Nonviolent communication for transformative teaching and learning in Higher Education

Over the years, I have come to recognise the importance of deeply caring for human interaction as a driving force, surpassing the mere pursuit of institutional key performance indicators (KPIs). This is a narrative that intertwines my passion for "Design for change" (Earley, 2023; Grabill et al., 2022), social justice, and compassion with institutional expectations, culminating in a compelling story of peace-making (Troisi, 2021).

In my role as the Course Leader for the BSc Creative Computing at the Creative Computing Institute (University of the Arts London), I have embraced an iterative co-inquiry strategy that actively involves various stakeholders in the educational process. Co-inquiry (Johnston, 2006; Dyer & Löytönen, 2011) represents a relational model for partnering with students that emphasises the importance of shared questions and fosters a strong sense of belonging (Bunting et al., 2020), underpinning the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL)[1].

I aimed to cultivate an inclusive, student-empowered curriculum. Initially, the course had only a 50% satisfaction rate, but with collective improvements, we elevated this to 90% in 2020 and sustained it at 81.8% in 2023.

During the COVID-19 pandemic's onset, my focus was on cultivating a learning space that was both flexible and inclusive, enhancing innovation, engagement, and playfulness. This period underscored the importance of connecting with students, acknowledging their diverse needs shaped by life stages, socioeconomic factors, disabilities, and marginalisation (Rosenberg, 2015). We leveraged compassionate language to better understand and meet these needs, finding it more effective than traditional communication methods.

It is a common practice to oversimplify the relationship between educators and students by assuming that students, as a collective group of learners, share a set of common expectations (Tomlinson & Imbeau,

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1   SoTL is a growing field in post-secondary education that uses systematic, deliberate, and methodological inquiry into teaching (behaviours/practices, attitudes, and values) to improve student learning (Potter & Kustra, 2011).

2023; Wormeli, 2023). Often, we refer to students with the collective term "cohort".[2]

Adopting successful practices borrowed from other Higher Education (HE) settings (e.g., actioning feedback, engaging in course committees, surveys etc.) to enhance students' engagement holds potential, but it may not always yield the desired results. For example, feedback collected by students' representatives and presented in course committee meetings may sometimes overlook the context, or the feedback may be delivered using language that could potentially elicit resistance from the Course Leader. To truly support the community and empower all of the individuals involved, it is necessary to design changes in the environment and relationships with individuals. In my work with students and staff, I shifted the perspective of teaching enhancement: rather than relying solely on ad-hoc solutions to address individual problems raised by students, I transitioned towards a holistic approach that draws inspiration from shared priorities within the teaching and learning community. The traditional view of "students versus educators" (Freire, 2020; hooks, 2014; Johnston, 2006) needed to be transformed into a more communal opportunity to work together harmoniously.

My interventions with the students were divided into three phases:

1. Forging an inclusive environment that enabled co-design, social justice, and inclusion.

2. Co-creation of a pedagogy model.

3. Implementation of the pedagogy model.

This chapter will focus on the first phase listed above: the creation of an inclusive environment.

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2   The use of the word "cohort" to refer to a student year group draws on military language. In ancient times, a cohort denoted a military unit within a Roman legion. Over time, the term transitioned into English, where it was used in translations and writings about Roman history. Gradually, "cohort" evolved to encompass any body of troops and later extended to signify any group of individuals sharing common characteristics. By employing military language to describe students in an educational context, there is a concern that it oversimplifies the relationship between students and educators, implying that they share a homogenous set of expectations. In reality, each student is a unique individual with diverse needs, experiences, and perspectives, which should be acknowledged and respected in fostering an inclusive and compassionate learning environment.

Adopting nonviolent communication in the BSc creative computing

In the initial phase, bridging the gap between defensive staff and frustrated students was challenging. To address this, I introduced both groups to Marshall Rosenberg's Nonviolent Communication (NVC) framework (Rosenberg & Chopra, 2015). Marshall Rosenberg, widely recognised as a pioneer in nonviolent conflict resolution, has dedicated forty years to the development and application of NVC, helping communities, disadvantaged groups, and individuals foster partnership, care, and empathy. NVC focuses on empathising with individual feelings and needs to identify mutually beneficial actions (Rosenberg & Eisler, 2003; Lasater & Lasater, 2022; Morin et al., 2022; Kundu, 2022).

While NVC has been extensively applied in various contexts such as restorative justice (Hopkins, 2012), primary and secondary schools (Jančič & Hus, 2019; Hooper, 2015), and nursing schools (Nosek et al., 2014; Lee & Lee, 2016) with measurable results, recorded examples of its application in HE are limited. This presented an exciting opportunity for exploration and innovation in this area.

Introduction to the students and lecturers

In approaching the implementation of NVC, I highlighted shared interests in personal growth and wellbeing. In an interactive lecture, students used a live polling platform to anonymously share thoughts and pose questions.

During the lecture, I introduced practical tools for communicating effectively and expressing requests that can be heard.

One of the tools presented was the NVC process, which involves four key components:[3]

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3   It is important to mention that the four key components are not meant to be addressed in a specific order and the practice will give space to move back and forward from one to another to explore the best way to investigate personal views and feelings and communicate with compassion. However, when I started working with the students, I helped them to follow the order indicated. I noticed that having a precise framework helped, in particular, students with learning differences to feel more confident. After practising, the students were able to detach from the specific order and make of the framework something more fluid that was also applicable to relationships outside the university environment.

1. The concrete actions/facts we observe and understand as affecting our wellbeing.

2. How we feel in relation to what we observe.

3. The needs, values, and desires that create our feelings.

4. The concrete actions we request to enrich our lives (Rosenberg & Chopra, 2015).

The essence of this process lies not in the specific words used but in the consciousness of these four components. Students used the four NVC components as guidelines to structure their feedback to lecturers. As 40% of the students involved had English as a second language, I provided printouts listing feelings and needs,[4] which not only broadened students' emotional awareness but also improved their communication skills and English language proficiency for more effective self-expression.
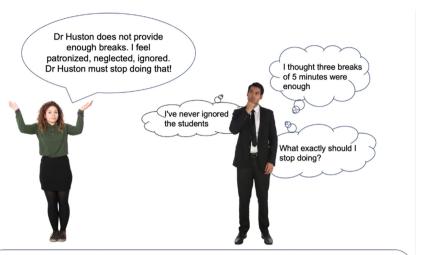
This method fostered an environment conducive to authentic expression and compassionate listening among the students, and we used the lists of feelings and needs for role play, debates, and roundtables.

To further improve the learning environment, I analysed anonymised feedback provided by students, identifying barriers to compassionate communication from educators' perspectives. Rosenberg (2015) identified certain elements of life-alienating communication, including moralistic judgments, making comparisons, denial of responsibility, and communicating desires as demands.

Alienating feedback often triggers defensive reactions from educators who may overlook the human element involved. In Figure 23.1 there is an example of feedback that presents judgemental and life-alienating components.

The word "enough" in Clara's feedback can be problematic because it lacks specificity. When she states, "Dr. Huston does not provide enough breaks", it leaves room for interpretation and does not indicate what she believes would be an adequate number of breaks. This lack of specificity could make it difficult for Dr. Huston to understand exactly what Clara is requesting or suggesting. Clara's use of the phrases "I feel patronised, neglected, ignored" does not refer to inner feelings, as they fall into the category of what are often called "faux feelings" or "pseudo-feelings". These are not genuine feelings but rather judgements or interpretations of a situation or actions; therefore they are not seen as a concrete observation.

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4   A variety of comprehensive resources detailing feelings and needs for the practice of NVC are accessible online; for our purposes, I've opted to employ the compilations found at https://groktheworld.com/

Fig. 23.1 In the vignette, there is an example of feedback given to a lecturer that contains life-alienating connotations. This feedback is not actionable and could provoke negative feelings in the lecturer as well as pushback as a response (image by author, CC BY-NC 4.0).

Following the four steps explained above, students and staff were able to present their requests and assess the likelihood of achieving a win-win solution.

Clara's example illustrates how to compassionately frame feedback for constructive dialogue (see Figure 23.2).
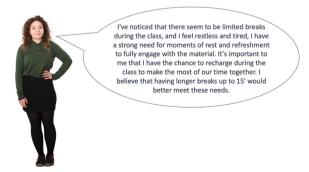
Fig. 23.2 In this example, Clara learned how to provide compassionate feedback that is actionable (image by author, CC BY-NC 4.0).

With the training provided to the students, they become able to provide compassionate feedback (Troisi, 2022, 11:45) to the lecturers. In the example of Clara, she is using the tool of starting her feedback with the words "I've noticed that". This is a neutral and non-judgemental way to introduce feedback. It suggests that Clara is making an observation rather than passing judgement or blame. This approach encourages open and constructive communication. Clara is also using feelings centred on herself. This is a key aspect of NVC and can significantly contribute to avoiding blame. When Clara expresses her own feelings (such as feeling concerned), she takes ownership of her emotions. This means she acknowledges her emotional response without attributing it to someone else's actions or intentions. By using "I" statements when expressing feelings, she avoids sounding accusatory. Clara articulates her need for moments of rest and refreshment to fully engage with the material. This focus on needs underscores what is essential for her wellbeing and effective learning. She concludes by making a clear and specific request for longer breaks of up to fifteen minutes. This request is actionable and provides a potential solution to address her needs.

In this example, by structuring her feedback in this way (observation, feelings, needs, request), Clara promotes understanding, empathy, and collaboration. Her approach encourages a productive conversation that can lead to mutually beneficial solutions, all in accordance with NVC principles.

Beyond improving the learning environment, students unexpectedly extended compassionate language to their design practices and debate styles, emphasising social justice and generative disagreement.[5]

Introduction to the lecturers and course leaders

I streamlined staff involvement by focusing on compassionate feedback techniques in meetings with lecturers and CLs, emphasising the distinction between observation and evaluation in communication.
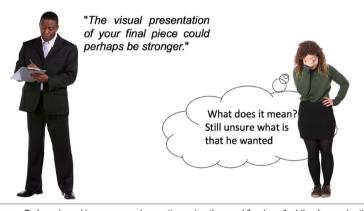
For instance, saying "you are too precise" conflates observation with evaluation, implying excessive precision from the speaker's perspective. It reflects a judgement about the person's behaviour, suggesting that they pay too much attention to detail or accuracy, which may not always

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5 The term "generative disagreement" refers to a form of disagreement that is productive, leading to growth and mutual understanding rather than conflict or stagnation.

be seen as a positive trait depending on the context.

When providing feedback on a student's work, it is essential to offer constructive evaluation without using judgemental language (Hill et al., 2023, p. 41). Issues can arise when observation and evaluation become entangled, leading to potentially unhelpful or even detrimental feedback.

In the feedback example (Figure 23.3), using the word "perhaps" introduces an element of evaluation and uncertainty. It implies a judgement that the visual presentation could be "stronger" but doesn't provide a clear, objective observation of what specifically needs improvement. A judgemental tone can detract from a purely neutral and constructive intention. When we judge, we create a disconnection between us and the students. Additionally, students may start to believe that their work should only please the lecturer, which is risky and unjust.

In this case, Dr Igwe is making a vague observation using the word "perhaps" while also evaluating the work. The adoption of the word "stronger" is also unspecific. Observation and evaluation are entangled. Clara is unsure about Dr Igwe's expectations.

Fig. 23.3 Dr Igwe's expectations are unclear and the feedback is not actionable by the student (image by author, CC BY-NC 4.0).

It is risky because students who aim to please their tutor may not develop essential decision-making skills. It is unjust because all students, especially those from underrepresented groups or marginalised backgrounds, should have the opportunity to express themselves without feeling the need to please a tutor. This approach fosters

their confidence, sense of purpose, and inclusion within the learning community.

By adhering to NVC principles and offering specific observations detached from evaluations, feedback becomes more effective and promotes empathy and cooperation in communication (see Figure 23.4).

When coaching lecturers, I also explored the importance of acknowledging our feelings while providing feedback. Sometimes, when we encounter work that shows a lack of engagement, frustration arises. This frustration can touch personal areas of confidence related to being an effective lecturer. It is essential to recognise that external factors, such as tiredness or personal issues, can also influence our feedback writing process. By acknowledging our feelings, we can approach feedback with greater empathy and understanding.
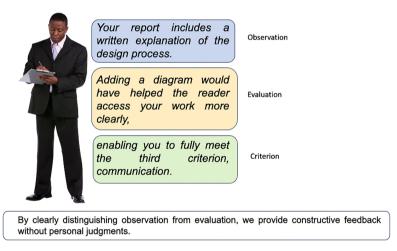
Fig. 23.4 Example of compassionate feedback presented without personal judgement (image by author, CC BY-NC 4.0).

My team suggested that we should check that our feedback is specific, neutral, and objective before being released to students. Working with lecturers, we realised that using the first person in feedback can shift the focus away from the student's work and on to the tutor's personal expectations. Therefore, we all agreed that feedback should be centred on the student's piece of work, not the lecturer's thoughts.

In our pursuit of precision, we also examined the use of specific wordings and their potential effects on students. The outcome of the work done with the lecturers and CLs is summarised in Table 23.1.

Avoid	Example	Reason
Tentative phrases	Maybe, could, perhaps, might, etc.	Can create confusion, particularly for students whose first language is not English.
Judgemental connotations	Adverbs, superlatives such as unfortunately, luckily, extremely, etc.	To promote clarity and avoid judgemental connotations which can create disconnection between the lecturer and the student, and risk shifting the focus from learning to pleasing the lecturer. This is particularly unjust for students from underrepresented or marginalised backgrounds, who may feel pressured to conform rather than express themselves freely.
Use of the first person	"I think", "I believe", "I would prefer".	Helps maintain objectivity, promotes neutrality, and keeps the focus on the student's work and learning process rather than the lecturer's personal perspective.

Table 23.1 The table shows the main outcome of the workshop I provided to the lecturers, where we analysed feedback given to the students in the previous years and provided guidelines to ourselves.

From empathy to empowerment

Students and staff, practising compassionate communication, shared a commitment to a compassionate community ethos. This led to increased confidence in formulating requests that were likely to be heard (see example in Figure 23.5).

The impact of this approach on the student community extended to various interconnected areas, including students' agency in the curriculum and assessment, engagement, inclusion, partnership, employability skills, and wellbeing.

Students were not used to acquiring communication skills as part of their learning at university and some students commented on the

importance of being able to be heard in workplaces once they graduated. It was positive to see that they could identify the potential impact of adopting non-judgemental language that would help with employability and general confidence.

Students offered positive feedback, incorporating new keywords such as "needs", "involved", "feelings", "openness", "friendly environment", and "closeness", reflecting their appreciation for staff's time management and attentiveness to "hear" them. This showed that the students had shifted their approach towards a more empathic, professional, and reflective one.
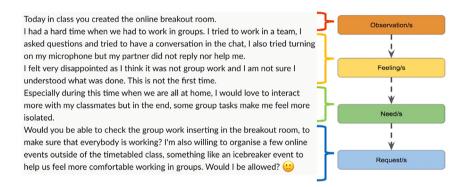
Fig. 23.5 An example of a student's feedback given to the CLs around problems in online sessions during the pandemic. The feedback is structured following the NVC communication framework (image by author, CC BY-NC 4.0).

Students became adept at evaluating the course with a professional and constructive approach. Together, we developed a model of delivery known as the "adapted flipped class", which had significant benefits for student inclusion and accessibility to learning materials. The adoption of NVC helped tailor assessments to accommodate disabled students, who felt more confident and open in sharing their thoughts and ideas; in particular, we provided students with options in terms of the format of the presentation of their work (from presentation to dialogue, to posters, etc.).

The impact on students from marginalised backgrounds across four cohorts was evident in their active participation in debates and on open days, and, most importantly, in their confidence as learners.

> "a great environment to learn how to collect feedback from peers and communicate [...]
> to find a suitable resolution. These skills are great to have when moving into the
> employment sector."
>
> "The engagement with our uni became higher each year for me because it became
> more of a friendly place than just a university."

Fig. 23.6 Students' feedback given during their studies (image by author, CC BY-NC 4.0).

Students valued this unique educational approach in a sector often seen as prioritising profit over student growth and well-being. Before concluding I would like to share a student's note of gratitude, expressing a wish for HE to embrace compassion empowering individuals to be their authentic selves (Figure 23.7).

> "Thank you for taking an active role in student progress, believing in us, encouraging us
> to be our best selves, and fostering an inclusive and accessible model of education".

Fig. 23.7 Student's feedback after graduation (image by author, CC BY-NC 4.0).

Conclusions

The integration of Nonviolent Communication (NVC) within the BSc Creative Computing course at the Creative Computing Institute has been a testament to the "design for change" philosophy, transitioning us from a conventional pedagogy to one that values empathy and inclusion, and the empowerment of our academic community. By replacing reactive measures with proactive, co-designed strategies, we have witnessed a remarkable enhancement in student experience and initiated a significant cultural transformation.

The theoretical framework of NVC has proved instrumental in transcending educational boundaries, equipping students with compassionate communication skills vital for both personal growth and professional success. This chapter is not only a reflection of a shift in educational practice but also an actionable guide for those committed to fostering environments that prioritise social justice and compassion.

The future of NVC in HE holds many opportunities for nurturing individuals who are resilient, empathetic, and conscious of the social fabric that binds us. It invites educators to see beyond the curriculum, to the heart of teaching as a conduit for creating a just and compassionate society. As I conclude, I encourage educators to consider "design for change" as a beacon in their journey towards transformative teaching and learning, setting in motion a cascade of positive change well beyond the classroom walls.

Steps toward hope

- Recognise compassion as a learnable and teachable skill that can meaningfully shape the culture of teaching and learning in higher education.

- Design inclusive, student-centred learning environments using established methodologies, such as design for change, to support co-design approaches that promote trust, mutual respect, and a shared commitment to compassionate communication across teaching, feedback, and curriculum design.

- Shift from reactive solutions to proactive, collaborative strategies that centre compassion and empower students and staff alike.

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24. *Better Together*: Towards a new organising principle and mindset for co-creation

Nikita Asnani, Inca Hide-Wright, Jess Humphreys, Bo Kelestyn, and Jean Mutton

Abstract

This chapter argues that we are at a pivotal moment requiring a fundamental shift in mindset to co-create a "new now" in education. By integrating design thinking and service design with emergent strategy, a new organising principle emerges—one grounded in collegiality, collaboration, and radical safety. It advocates for a genuinely co-creative approach: working *with*, not just *for*, students and staff. Emphasising trust in the process and the importance of inclusive, empathetic engagement, the chapter highlights how the journey of innovation and change is as transformative for the change-maker as it is for those affected by the change.

Keywords: design thinking; service design; emergent strategy; co-creation; student experience; radical safety

Introduction

Design practices, mindset, and tools offer new possibilities for capturing feedback and solving innovation challenges in Higher Education (HE). Engaging students as partners and co-creators of their experience lies at the very heart of the design ethos (Kim et al., 2023; Nerantzi et al., 2023; Bovill, 2020). In recent years, JISC (2020) has named design thinking (DT) as one of the key capabilities for an HE leader in their 2030 strategy framework. Drawn from the business and digital realms, DT is highly relevant to the complexity and uncertainty brought about by the accelerated levels of innovation and change in HE (Kelestyn & Freeman, 2021). In our context of the UK HE, the community of educators who are focused on enhancing the felt student experience stands at a crossroads. With various regulatory and external pressures such as the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF),[1] changes driven by the agenda of the Office of Students (OfS),[2] and the cost-of-living crisis, the challenges are complex and prevalent at all levels of education: micro, meso, and macro. We either fall back on the "familiar" tools and ways of thinking or collectively explore the opportunities, new language, and innovative methods of capturing feedback that can allow us to work alongside diverse students and staff to understand the felt student experience. To navigate this, we propose *Better Together*, a mindset built on co-creation and human-centred innovation methods and approaches such as DT and service design. We acknowledge the complex landscape of approaches and terminologies and intentionally do not unpack this, as this is not the focus of this story of hope. As practitioners and scholars of design thinking and service design, we use these terms, but in reality, mash up human-centred approaches that prioritise empathy, iteration, and experimentation, and mutually respectful dialogue. In the remainder of the chapter, we zoom in on and use the term "design thinking" for clarity. We invite readers to explore and discover the approach and language that works for them. Suggestions on where to get started can be found at the end of the chapter. Neither design thinking nor service design, and their application to co-creation, are entirely new, yet they

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1   See   https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/the-tef/about-the-tef/
2   See https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk

are in need of sharing and renewal. And this is what two students, two members of staff, and one external consultant, who were brought together by design in search of hope and change, have set out to do in this story of hope. In this piece, we weave our micro-meso-macro stories to present *Better Together* as an organising principle towards education that allows us all to be radically safe and to grow ourselves and lift each other as we climb towards our vision of the future.

What is *Better Together*?

In a nutshell, *Better Together* is a marriage between the principles of DT and emergent strategy.

Design thinking

We adopt the definition of DT as "…the application of design practice and its related competencies beyond the context of design for and with those without design backgrounds" (Chon & Sim, 2019, p. 189). It can also be defined as a social technology (Liedtka, 2018), a blend of tools and insights applied to a work process, helping people to counteract their biases and assumptions. Jeanne Liedtka argues that DT changes the way people engage in an innovation process. It emphasises "…engagement, dialogue, and learning" (Liedtka, 2018, p. 79), thanks to its iterative and experimental nature. Partaking in the DT-led innovation process not only allows us to move through the tumultuous innovation journey with more confidence, but it also changes the innovator, and their understanding of the problem and commitment to solving it, co-creating *with* and not just *for* the intended audiences. This mindset speaks to the increased student demand for more participatory approaches where diverse students can partake in engaged learning (Healey et al., 2014). It also thrives on diversity, which is rapidly shifting the HE landscape (Mercer-Mapstone & Bovill, 2019); in particular, cognitive diversity, which, inspired by Matthew Syed (2021), encapsulates and seeks out diversity of thinking, lived experiences and expertise, boosting the collective intelligence of a community and its capacity for problem solving and innovation. Previous applications of DT to institution-wide challenges at the University of Warwick (Kelestyn & Freeman,

2021; Reid & Kelestyn, 2022) showed evidence of success and presented further opportunities for new and exciting areas of student experience innovation and research (Dunne, 2016; Grau & Rockett, 2022).

Emergent strategy

Emergent strategy, conceptualised by adrienne maree brown (2017, p. 3), is a:

> …strategy for building complex patterns and systems of change through relatively small interactions.

In essence, it "emphasises critical connections over critical mass, building authentic relationships, listening with all the senses of the body and the mind" (brown, 2017, p. 4). It acknowledges that change and transformation, especially large, cultural, paradigm-shifting change that the education community is in need of (which we believe encompasses the change of mindset, systems and structures, capturing the micro, meso, and macro), does not happen overnight or in a linear way. Instead, it happens through a series of actions, in cycles or loops, as we converge and diverge around insights, ideas, and desired futures.

Our challenge in combining DT and emergent strategy and practising the *Better Together* mindset is to let go of rigid definitions of success and failure. This means replacing our transactional and urgency-driven thinking—especially prevalent in the post-pandemic landscape—with cycles of iteration that present opportunities to learn, provided we remain willing to question and reflect throughout the process. And as we shake off the dated organising principles and shift our way of thinking about change, we start to create and embody that change.

In this process, we must recognise that the existing structures and learnt behaviours—which shape how we create change—often work to pull us back, urging us to shrink and stay in our place. The magnitude of this push and pull will be felt differently by different members of our learning communities. So, we pay attention to tensions, doubts, gaps and silences. This is also why community is so valuable: no single person, be they staff or student, has all the answers. Every member of the community holds pieces of the solutions, no matter their status or place in the hierarchy. That is why we need to build capacity where it already

exists. That means challenging seniority and the *status quo.* In doing so, we can develop a collective capacity with the potential to transform our individual, default reactions. Embracing collective responsibility and radical safety, which refers to a feeling of having space to develop inspired ideas and reflect on one's lived experiences without fear of judgement, will help us not to get lost whenever we face a crossroad. This requires us to rely on critical and authentic connections that support our individual and collective resilience, whereby we are building our change capacity and capabilities together, whilst empowering us, collectively, to enact what we see as valuable in and to our communities.

What is especially important to note about *Better Together* is that nothing is ever truly finished. Instead, we should always prioritise empathetic dialogue that's emergent and alive to challenge students and staff to focus on what is meaningful and impactful. So, we need to be intentional in the smallest of actions. Each step, person, and voice is powerful. Each small action feeds the momentum of large-scale transformation. *Better Together* might not hold the answer to every challenge and question the sector is facing, but it is an important mental space for considering the big picture, whilst taking small, emergent steps.

How do we get to *Better Together*?

In our individual and collective efforts to disseminate design-led work, stories of success and failure from the University of Warwick and beyond, we developed an acute awareness of the need for *Better Together*. We looked across and summarised reflections on barriers to applying DT from practice sharing activities with educators (engaging over one hundred educators across six conference presentations and webinars, capturing insights using the web-based tool, Padlet) and found several key themes.

The first is changing mindset and culture. Fixed mindsets and egos hinder collaboration and openness to new methods. In extreme cases, prioritising students' perceived needs can be viewed as a hurdle. An over-reliance on data and quantitative measures limits innovation and homogenises the needs of the student community. Where students can often be seen as open there can be staff resistance, so the power

dynamics across the institution can affect project dynamics. A dated mindset drives the desire for fixed solutions, which hampers further innovation and adaptability.

Secondly, we found that there are significant challenges in trusting the DT process. It can be viewed as time-consuming and, when rushed, lead to shallow comprehension. At the same time, it can also be misinterpreted as inflexible to different timeframes, contexts, and resources, whilst also making it challenging to balance and explore multiple ideas, which is different to some of the more accepted change frameworks and tools.

Thirdly, resourcing the DT process in terms of time, energy, and financial investment can itself be a barrier. This is especially true in contexts where educators must navigate rapid change while also engaging in critical questioning, often leaving little space for pause, analysis, and reflection.

Fourthly, facilitating the DT process requires the right facilitation (and possibly even mediation) skills, the assembly of the right, diverse team, as well as creative thinking around engagement, the right tone and environment, and an effective use of appropriate outcomes-focused activities. Facilitation roles cannot exclusively be taken up by staff. Students have a lot to say and a lot to offer when it comes to holding space for collaboration.

Finally, implementing the outcomes of the "designerly" activities equally demands time, effort, and often specialised skills, tools, and software. The current rigid systems within which many institutions operate—including regulatory pressures (both disciplinary and otherwise) and the need to engage diverse stakeholders with conflicting priorities and heavy demands on their time—can prevent valuable insights and ideas from gaining traction. These challenges are compounded by difficulties securing buy-in, overcoming scepticism, and managing time constraints and project fatigue.

How are we nurturing *Better Together*?

Better Together is what we are seeing as crucial in co-creation work with students and staff in our communities. Examples of how this plays out in our work can be found in the work of Zoe Radnor and colleagues

(2014), looking at student enrolment, and of Lory Barile and Bo Kelestyn (2023), in regard to building sustainable communities.

We are still exploring the most impactful ways in which to model and facilitate authentic dialogues that change how others think and innovate, especially those new to design-led practices and *Better Together*. Through an ongoing reflective dialogue as part of co-authoring this story of hope, we captured several of the authors' individual reflective vignettes. We offer the following vignettes to reflect our growing awareness of the need for the *Better Together* approach—shaped by the change that we are currently leading, whilst creating fertile ground for future transformations.

Micro: Learning about/through DT

"My undergraduate year was the hardest year of HE … I was confused as to how I had achieved enough to get to Warwick and yet struggled so much… Turns out, my academic struggles stemmed from dyslexia and ADHD … The lockdowns and HE moving online provided me with the time and space I needed to begin to master academic writing and branch out into the HE community. Consequently, I reached for more opportunities, I dived into all that interested and challenged me … When I was introduced to DT, I felt like I was waking up to this world of excitement, this world where it was crucial for people to communicate and engage with their target audience. This element of DT particularly resonated with me because how can you truly design something useful and appropriate for others if you have not built a relationship with them."

Micro: Facilitating with/through DT

"Very often, when I read reports such as future skills of the economy, it seemed to have been written by men. There was very little focus on mutual trust, creating safety and what it means to continuously nurture a space. There was so much talk about 'acquiring' skills and so little focus on leaning into what is already present within each one of us … Belonging is knowing you can be your truest self and you would be greeted with radical kindness … There is so much I have learnt as a facilitator, honouring the masculine and the feminine as a design thinker:

- Learning to forgive and trust yourself as a design thinker
- The balance between logic and intuition as a design thinker
- Step into being fully you as a design thinker

- How to design with grace?
- Am I enough? Grappling with the feeling of too much or too less."

Meso: Leading with/through service design

"I started my career in HE as an Admin Assistant back in 1983. Although I learned a lot during this time about how the [institution] 'hung together' from a management point of view, I had very little direct connection with students. Throughout the next thirty years, however, I saw many changes, as a 'back office' person, I still had very little direct involvement with students, and the academic staff I worked with had little time for administration, most seeing it as a necessary evil, taking them away from what they really wanted to do, which was their teaching and/or research. In 2008 I was seconded on to a Student Experience Team, thrust into a team of seven, of whom two were students acting as paid interns. The talk was all about 'the felt student experience' and my eyes were opened as the mantra of 'putting the student at the heart' became a reality for me. I had gone through the usual management training focusing on project management such as Prince2 and Lean, but began to be curious about systems thinking, and this new methodology called service design. I began to explore journey mapping … what was happening on the 'ground floor'. What did I see and hear? What could I learn from what students were telling me and showing me about their experience of trying to navigate their way around the complex world of becoming and being a student? The answer was lots, and it became clear that I could not do this on my own."

Meso/macro: Empowering with/through DT

"I began my career in HE back in 2006, when I took on a role within an academic library. It was in this space that my curiosity and desire to embed the student voice in my work began to evolve … I started to explore the potential of a learner centred approach in my work and came across DT … This curiosity continued when I moved over to academic development, collaborating on a redesign of a postgraduate award in technology-enhanced learning (TEL) … DT was embedded into the course, to enable colleagues to develop learner centred approaches to their projects. This was not without its challenges, encouraging others to trust in the iterative process, and that the outcomes could also provide more questions than answers for future approaches to TEL. Finding my 'tribe' has been a key factor in how I can overcome these challenges. … Reaching out to colleagues both within my institution and beyond has

enabled me to develop my approaches, confidence and understanding of the learner centred approaches to design ... I have learnt so much from our amazing students ... [who] enabled me to step away from traditional hierarchies and embrace an emergent approach ... It has reaffirmed my belief that through collaboration, open mindedness and a willingness to rethink how we do things in education we can reimagine new futures..."

To conclude

We are cautious about positioning DT, and any other design-informed approaches to co-creation, as a one-off activity or a panacea, as it sometimes can be perceived. We have indeed fallen into this trap many times ourselves, and so in making this statement we do not seek to judge, but rather to remind ourselves and others that in using DT, we are *building to think, not thinking to build* (Brown, 2009). So, let's be prepared to be wrong, to adapt, to accept feedback as a gift. And if staff expect this of students, why is it that staff do not practise this with as much ferocity? Let us lead by example. Consider this a place for connecting with others and for developing awareness of your blind spots, which in turn will lead to you growing your innovation capacity and capability.

Better Together as a mindset and an organising principle gives us hope when thinking about and creating the "new now". At the University of Warwick and within the Service Design in Education Network, we are taking small, emergent steps, and inviting others to do the same. We choose to trust the wider community to build a new and collective way to consider how we co-create cultures of change and excellence for today and tomorrow. *Better Together* reminds us that fundamental change requires multiple small steps. With this story of hope, we invite colleagues to think about the following question:

How might my real-time actions contribute to transforming the collective micro-meso-macro future of education?

And as we are all continuously learning to create change, we must remember that we cannot be change-makers on our own (brown, 2017). We can do so much *better together*.

Next steps

To get started, we invite you to find out more about the Designing Together project[3] that inspired this chapter, and the global Service Design in Education Network.[4] You will find more hope and an opportunity to connect with fellow change makers in the ground-breaking book *Transforming Higher Education with Human-Centred Design*,[5] and in the Designing Together online community on LinkedIn.[6]

Steps toward hope

- Shift mindsets to embrace the "new now", utilising design thinking and emergent strategy to foster collegiality and collaboration.

- Bring together co-creation with radical safety, ensuring that processes are inclusive and collaborative.

- Trust the process and bring others along on the journey, avoiding assumptions about students' and staff's wants and needs.

- Recognise that the innovation and change-making process transforms the innovator/change maker.

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3   See https://www.designing-together.org/
4   See https://sdined.co.uk/
5   See https://sd4he.co.uk
6   See https://www.linkedin.com/groups/12828238/

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25. Peer review:
No crime no punishment

Debbie Holley

Abstract

This chapter critiques traditional peer-review practices in Higher Education, which can often be weaponised to position lecturers as deficient and isolate them in service of managerial agendas. In contrast, the Department of Nursing Sciences at Bournemouth University has developed a collaborative, supportive model grounded in the concept of "huddles". Drawing on this approach, the department has fostered a range of pedagogical innovations—including walking seminars, a teddy bear project for early years nursing students, drawing for learning, and Lego Serious Play®—to enhance student learning and challenge the transmissive norms of STEM education. The reimagined peer-review process promotes connection, wellbeing, and a shared sense of purpose, aligning with a broader commitment to humanising the curriculum.

Keywords: peer review; classroom; deficit models; compliance; target culture

Introduction: Complexity and compliance

In the United Kingdom (UK), institution-wide Peer Review of Teaching (PRT) was driven in part by the demands of the national Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), "to ensure that students and learners experience the highest possible quality of education" (QAA, n.d.), as they assumed responsibility for the quality of education in Higher Education Institutions. Institutions were required to evidence the provision of quality teaching, learning and assessment. The seminal work upon contemporary models of PRT comes from David Gosling's (2002) three typologies: evaluative, developmental, and collaborative. The models are nuanced, with evaluation being aligned with organisational imperatives; developmental being aligned with competence outcomes; and collaborative focusing on mutual improvement in teaching through open dialogue and self-reflection. The limitation of observations, as Gosling (2002) states, is the lack of inclusion and consideration of other factors influencing the classroom/teaching dynamic. It can also be argued that, regardless of whether a developmental or collaborative model is followed, PRT inherently possesses an evaluation element as it involves making value judgements about the quality of teaching practice (Peel, 2005, cited in Scott et al., 2017), opening the participant up to the evaluative gaze, where power and context are relegated and the performative is all-pervasive (Black, 2018)—in particular when it positions new lecturers as deficient and in need of fixing (Burns & Sinfield, 2004).

The creation of the Office for Students (OfS) from April 2018 superseded the key role of the QAA and reflected a desire by the UK Government to regulate existing and new providers in the marketplace with a common regulator. Designed to encourage the growth of a competitive market that informs student choice, to intervene when the market is failing in areas such as equal access, and to protect the interest of its consumers (students, government, and wider society), its work has been highly contested, due to the low level of student representation and its failure to collaborate with the National Union of Students (NUS), the student representation body (Boyd, 2018). This has played out through the right-wing press in the UK, which has critiqued so-called 'Mickey Mouse degrees' such as media and journalism, despite these sectors contributing £109 billion to the economy and accounting for 5.6% of total income (House of Lords Library, 2021).

At the same time, the government has been pushing a post-16 education agenda focused narrowly on skills (UK Government White Paper, 2021).

A critique of the position in which modern universities find themselves is offered by Richard Hall (2020). With oversight and metric measurement as a proxy for the value of teaching, Hall (2020, p. 5) argues that the university must be constantly vigilant, defending its governance, regulation, and funding against relentless scrutiny:

> It is dominated by strategies for public engagement, internationalisation, teaching and learning, research and sustainable development, which collapse the horizon of possibility and are limited to algorithmic solutions to insoluble, structural and systemic positions. The hopeless university is a flag bearer for a collective life that is becoming more efficiently unsustainable.

Hence, the stage is set for competing agendas within the academy. On one side are educational developers, whose work on PRT schemes is grounded in values of mutual support and improvement, and in general aligns with more collegiate and collaborative models of working. On the other is a more formal quality assurance system, where institutional drivers seek to align lecturer participation and shared practice with an "improvement" agenda tied to OfS's Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF)—including its award of "bronze/silver/gold", based on metrics and institutional narratives. These narratives are often premised on the historical injustices of an entire elitist educational system, not one of transformation and hope (Hall, 2020).

Peer review and competing cultures

> There is nothing in the world more difficult than candor, and nothing easier than flattery (Dostoevsky, 1866).

Peer review against a policy background of performance measurement and compliance has led to growing concerns that this process is being weaponised against lecturers, framing them as deficient and in need of "fixing"—and pitting them against one another in the service of management. Andrea Cornwall (2002, in Scott et al., 2017) comments on "pejorative overtones" that ensue when PRT is connected to issues of accountability and managerialism, arguing that this can undermine the perceived benefits of PRT to individuals and institutions. Deborah Peel (2005) cautions that

discomfort, stress, and anxiety, in an era where educational professional wellbeing is foregrounded, can equate to participants refusing to take part in this mandatory exercise. Many post-1992 universities (former polytechnic institutions) have mandatory systems of peer review of teaching, and the AdvanceHE review (Scott et al., 2017) identifies some limitations of schemes based around a single teaching session, where lecturers are able to self–select 'a friendly face' for their review, instead encouraging institutions to build peer review into their AdvanceHE schemes for meeting the United Kingdom Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF, 2023).

Creating a culture for learning

Our nursing curriculum at Bournemouth University is underpinned by humanising values (Todres et al., 2009) and there is a supportive and collaborative culture that is modelled and enacted in the department. There was a willingness to take part in 'Peer Reflection on Education Practice' (PREP), and an agreement with the principles underpinning the improvement of teaching and the student learning experience. However, discussions with lecturers highlighted the limitations of high-level, generic feedback generated by the central data collection system. A new approach was needed:

- that met with colleagues' aspirations of collegiality;
- that met the central requirements;
- that would build confidence to innovate in the classroom (and online); and
- that was underpinned by a more discipline-based body of evidence.

Our mental health teaching team draws upon the "huddle" literature of Suzanne Robertson-Malt and colleagues (2020), which draws upon clinical settings; small teams or "huddles" are created to support, encourage, challenge, and problem-solve in a supportive and non-judgemental space. Our new approach followed this method, as it mirrors approaches in clinical practice where the huddle has been successful in helping to promote a supportive learning environment. Here, the essential "need to know" is packaged in a format "that engages and keeps the front-line caregivers up to date with the knowledge and practices they need in order to provide high

quality, safe, compassionate care" (Robertson-Malt et al., 2020). The theme for our most recent peer observation was *Light up our students learning: Try something different.* All of our ninety-three, student-facing staff (including the Head of Department and the executive team, our clinical demonstrators, and the professoriate) were randomly allocated to a huddle; the huddle lead allocated pairs and reported back on developmental needs.

For new lecturing staff, in response to the huddle lead feedback, we ran a series of staff development sessions. These covered lesson planning, assessment setting and marking, feedback, active learning, the signature pedagogy of nursing, and theoretical approaches to learning. Our academic nurses, arriving with us from practice, are experts in their field, but not necessarily in education. All of the lecturers had access to the PowerPoint of evidence-based learning activities, collated by the author, in response to the huddle leader feedback, comprising sessions the lecturers wished to run, with support available if requested.

Extract from briefing

Dates: 1–30 November 2022

With its vast agile space, glass-fronted seminar rooms and buzzing collaborative zones, BU's new Bournemouth Gateway Building offers the perfect opportunity to reimagine learning scenarios—both inside the new walls and elsewhere on our campuses. The task for us in the Department of Nursing Sciences is to engage our students differently in this lovely new space—online or face-to-face.

1) Our PREP activities will therefore encourage us to reflect on what we are doing differently this academic year to enhance the quality and impact of what we do

2) And for those of us working with the undergraduate students our focus is on enhancing the undergraduate student experience by actively managing student expectations. So, for the teaching observation this year (PREP) we will:

- Reconvene our 'huddles' of 6–8; plan an observation date.

- Have the chocolate prizes for the winning team(s).

- Use the hashtag #stopxxxxygetting chocs'—for new staff—xxxxx always wins!

- Try something different in one class, and get a huddle colleague to observe you.

Fig. 25.1 Briefing extract (image by author, CC BY-NC 4.0).

Our resulting innovations were shared through informal briefings and a curation of our innovations was presented at our *Fusion Learning Conference* (Holley & Holland, 2023).

- Embedding writing within sessions (Abegglen et al., 2021).
- 100 ideas for active learning (Betts & Oprandi, 2022).
- Teaching large groups (Turner, 2014).
- The power of play (James & Nerantzi, 2019).
- Lego (James & Nerantzi, 2019).
- Drawing to learn: Clinical Education, Health and Social care (Ridley, 2015).
- Reading for writing: Textmapping project (http://www. textmapping.org/index.html).
- Google cardboard (Singleton & Holley, 2021).
- Walking for learning (Bälter et al., 2018).
- Teddy bears and play (Jazrawy et al., 2021).

The showcase demonstrated the potential to support student learning and transform the traditional transmissive nature of STEM teaching. Thus, instead of a primarily surveillance and audit-based annual process, we have transformed the peer review of teaching into an "assessment as learning" (Boud, 2021): it is holistic, heuristic and humane (Abegglen et al., 2020).

Conclusion

> Taking a new step, uttering a new word, is what people fear most (Dostoevsky, 1866).

The centralisation of the weaponisation of peer review against lecturers can have adverse consequences for educators and the overall education system. The literature on PRT highlights the tension between peer review, which focuses on issues of accountability and quality assurance, versus peer review as a means of fostering reflection on teaching practice with the potential opportunity to enhance teaching and learning. The TEF was explicitly introduced as a mechanism to "enhance teaching" in

universities. Julian Crockford (2020) suggests that the highly complex "black box" methodology used to calculate TEF outcomes effectively blunts its purpose as a policy lever; and argues that this creates a space in which engaged teaching practitioners can push through a more progressive approach to success.

Across the sector, Margaret Scott and colleagues (2017) report "silo working" of best practices, which are not always communicated within departments/faculties. In their recommendations, a "culture of appreciate inquiry" is required, to focus and share good observation and feedback practices and imaginative ways of working (Scott et al., 2017, pp. 39). Mindfulness to the wellbeing of each other, supportive practices and collegiality are the foundations of genuine and meaningful peer observation. Surely it is incumbent upon all in the academy to encourage our peers, support their "new steps" and allay their fears, as they "try something different" in the classroom—be it online, face-to-face, or in hybrid settings: drawing upon signature pedagogies (Shulman, 2005) for their specific discipline as an evidence base; engaging lecturers and managers with the pedagogies underpinning the best practice of peer review and how this can lead into transformational classroom practice; working with colleagues to create opportunities to innovate without penalty. Ninety-one of our ninety-three staff participated in the process, a completion rate unheard of in our institution.

This case study illustrates the possibilities of emancipatory practice, offering, instead of a primarily surveillance and audit annual process, a peer review of teaching as an "assessment as learning" (Boud, 2021): it is holistic, heuristic, and humane (Abegglen et al., 2020). Our peer-review process, rather than seeding competitive individualism, promotes bonding, belonging, and wellbeing and reflects our humanisation approach within the curriculum (Todres et al., 2009). And our students respond and step up to these active, rather than passive learning approaches.

Steps toward hope

- Avoid the pitfall of a deficit fixing approach to peer review of teaching, instead adopting a process that promotes bonding, belonging, and wellbeing and reflects a humanisation approach within the curriculum.

- Adopt a collaborative and supportive model of peer review where small teams or "huddles" are created to support, encourage, challenge, and problem-solve in a supportive and non-judgemental space.

- Positive peer review can lead to innovative practices that support student learning and transform the traditional transmissive nature of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Medical (STEM) teaching.

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26. Co-creating networks of hope in an interdisciplinary degree for mature students

Catherine Bates, Tracy Campbell, Colin Webb, and Lucy Yeboa

Abstract

This chapter, co-authored by a university programme leader and three students, explores the transformative learning that emerges within a Higher Education programme tailored for adult learners returning to education. Through collaborative reflection, the authors examine how a community of hope is cultivated via interactive teaching practices that foreground shared life experiences and co-constructed knowledge, supported by contemporary case studies and critical theory. Drawing on the radical pedagogical insights of Paulo Freire, bell hooks, and Kevin Gannon, alongside Tara Yosso's concept of aspirational capital and Sarah O'Shea's notion of "ripples of learning", the chapter conceptualises the learning environment as one rooted in radical hope and collective empowerment. Readers are invited to engage with this hopeful pedagogy and consider its potential to transform not only educational experiences but also lives and communities in profound, material ways.

Keywords: adult education; transformative pedagogies; aspirational capital; social change

Adult education, transformative pedagogies, aspirational capital, and social change

In the "Opening Words" to *Pedagogy of Hope*, Paulo Freire talks about the need for hope in the fight for social justice, but also the need for fight and activism to sustain and substantiate hope. He says:

> Without a minimum of hope, we cannot so much as start the struggle. But without the struggle, hope, as an ontological need, dissipates, loses its bearings, and turns into hopelessness. And hopelessness can become tragic despair. Hence the need for a kind of education in hope (Freire, 2004, p. 3).

This chapter contends that the formation of a responsive, sustainable community is a necessary prerequisite for this education of hope. We are a group of students and staff on the BA in Professional Studies, an interdisciplinary degree designed specifically for mature students (those over twenty-one when they start their studies), at the Lifelong Learning Centre (LLC), University of Leeds, UK. Many of our student community come from groups that are underrepresented in university settings; the degree recognises the value that students coming with different perspectives and a drive to learn can bring to the institution, and in providing the opportunity for all to return to study.

This chapter has been written collaboratively between Catherine—the degree's Programme Manager, two current students (at the time of writing)—Tracy and Lucy, and one graduate—Colin. For reasons of expediency, Catherine has taken the lead with the writing, but with the strong inspiration of emails and conversations with Tracy, Lucy, and Colin. All three tell powerful stories of hope developed from the curricular and extra-curricula community-building activities, which are an integral part of our overall pedagogical and support strategies. Professional Studies makes space to build community and hope for social change through: an alternative entry, strengths-based approach to admissions (in which we recognise the skills, knowledge, and experience mature students are bringing to their studies beyond traditional qualifications); an interactive approach to teaching, which focuses on students sharing their experience and learning from each other; and an attempt to make assessment authentic and flexible, to enable students to engage with it in ways that are meaningful to them.

We have worked together to provide three stories of hope through our collective experience of transformational education. By transformational, we refer to the way students go through a continual process of transformation through learning; and, the way students transform the degree, their tutors (me), and potentially the institution and HE more generally, through the invaluable contributions they make through sharing their experiences, stories, and knowledges.

Radically hopeful pedagogy and aspirational capital

Higher Education (HE) in the UK is an increasingly challenging, and often demoralising, place to be. Students and staff are subject to a neo-liberal ideology that sees HE as transactional and about instrumental value. The UK government have said they will "crack down on rip off degrees" that "fail to have good outcomes" (Department of Education, 2023), these being defined in relation to employment prospects. Arts and Humanities degrees (in particular) are being closed or threatened with closure across the country. Students pay high fees and have to withstand a public discourse that continually questions the value of a degree— and mature students have the extra difficulty of being invisibilised in the discourse, as government officials, journalists, and Vice Chancellors refer to "bright young things" (Jenkins, 2023; Buitendijk, 2023). As Kevin Gannon (2020) discusses, for HE educators it could be tempting to fall into a "jaded detachment", in which they become resigned to going through the motions, teaching in a didactic, cynical way. But this would become a self-fulfilling prophecy, bringing cynicism to pedagogy and teaching using the banking model (which conceptualises students as containers to be filled with knowledge—Freire, 2018), leading to a silencing of students, with no real possibility for new perspectives to be produced. To teach in a dialogic way in which tutor and students reflect and act together is to allow for the possibility of a co-produced hope through which we can collectively work to create positive change.

bell hooks, Freire, and Gannon all write about this notion of active or "radical" hope within pedagogy, which involves and is produced by action; they highlight that it is not an idealistic passive notion of waiting for a better future. Freire (2004, p. 3) insists upon the necessity of hope as a condition for continuing to participate in the struggle for truth and

justice, asserting that: "One of the tasks of the progressive educator, through a serious, correct political analysis, is to unveil opportunities for hope". Influenced by Freire, hooks (2004) advocates an engaged liberatory pedagogy which involves tutor and students learning in dialogue with each other—as a community—as a way to unveil these opportunities. Gannon (2020) argues for the radical nature of this teaching approach, outlining its transformative nature in a way that chimes with the work we do on Professional Studies. He says:

> Teaching is a radical act of hope [...] The very acts of trying to teach well, of adopting a critically reflective practice to improve our teaching and our students' learning, are radical, in that word's literal sense: they are endeavours aimed at fundamental, root-level transformation. And they are acts of hope because they imagine that process of transformation as one in which a better future takes shape out of our students' critical refusal to abide the limitations of the present (Gannon, 2020, p. 5).

Hopeful acts of change and networks of hope on Professional Studies

Professional Studies starts with a module, Exploring Diversity, in which we look together at the theoretical and material realities of our socially-constituted identities, discussing issues—as hooks (2004, p. 8) lists—of "imperialism, race, gender, and sexuality", as well as intersectionality, structural oppression, and representation. We consider research, theories and key concepts within interactive workshops in which the students and I—as the facilitator—consider and raise questions, share and interrogate our experiences and learn from each. Smaller seminars give us the opportunity to zoom in on particular cases studies (such as memoirs, documentaries, legal cases and public lectures) to further explore the theories and concepts and to compare them to our own lives. Both workshop and seminar provide opportunities for consciousness-raising and sharing—they become intimate spaces in which we learn about each other's continuing stories of identity, using concepts such as microaggressions, gender performativity, institutional racism, white privilege, unconscious bias, and social identity. Together, we apply these concepts to the struggles we face in our lives, using the case studies as a jumping off point. The learning becomes one of praxis, "reflection and

action upon the world in order to transform it" (Freire, 2018, p. 52), as together we discuss examples from our lives, which help us to think and act differently.

Lucy

Lucy was particularly affected by the discussions in the module about patriarchy, binary notions of gender, and heteronormativity. These prompted her to interrogate her family relationships and to question the embedded gender roles. She shared her experience and found connections with other women (especially mothers) in the group, who recognised the extent of the burden placed on them for domestic labour, as well as the comparative lack of respect they received in their households. Lucy emailed me at the end of the module, sharing its impact on her:

> I just wanted you to know that your lectures have been so eye-opening and also "food for thought". It has been a life-changing journey. We are having the "talks" at home and trying to instil "feminism" into the men at home (email 6.12.2021).

Lucy and I have continued to have conversations about gender relations in the home and I have learnt from her persistence and strength. This has given me hope—and made us both realise that learning and hope are intertwined and processual. As Sarah Ahmed (2017, p. 2) says, in *Living a Feminist Life*:

> Hope is not at the expense of struggle but animates a struggle; hope gives us a sense that there is a point to working things out, working things through. Hope does not only or always point toward the future, but carries us through when the terrain is difficult, when the path we follow makes it harder to proceed. Hope is behind us when we have to work for something to be possible.

Lucy's hope of the possibility for change at home animated her struggle to create change. It continues to be a struggle but it is carried through by a collective hope, which is shared with me and her course mates— together, we are generating a space and time for change. Lucy's sharing of her learning experience and the actions she has taken as a result have generated the hope in me that teaching can create change; they have given me my own "food for hope".

Tracy

Tracy's consciousness was raised on Exploring Diversity, in relation to the intersections of race and gender, in particular—and she brought in her experiences of being a parent at her young son's county football matches for us all to think through and learn from. She talked to me about the importance of learning the language of oppression in order to recognise the power relations; to then recognise what and how to fight it. Tracy shared in seminars the unjust, oppressive treatment her son's football team regularly experienced from the referee. He was abusive to the young players and then to any parents who objected. Tracy started to recognise the implicit racism in how he was treating the players from her son's team (who come from an area which has a large percentage of people of South Asian, Caribbean, and African heritage) in comparison to the teams they were playing. She also observed the sexism in the way he responded to the mothers on the sidelines, in particular. Empowered by our module discussions, she challenged him, and worked on how she could lodge a formal complaint. She used the skills she was building as a first-year student to focus her second semester literature review research on racism in county football. She used this research, as well as the concepts she had learnt through Exploring Diversity (particularly microaggressions, unconscious bias, oppression and institutional racism) to fight for the referee to be formally disciplined. Her determination eventually led to success. This is how she put it in an email to me:

> I'd like to share with you the outcome of the hearing [...] in which I reported the referee at my Son's football match. With the knowledge and education I gained this year as a mature student it gave me the confidence to make this complaint and rally support from other parents and the club. It was also the right thing to do; behaviour like this (institutional racism/inequality) in Football has a long history.

Historically, complaints by the football team against referees have not been upheld meaning that referees have never had to appear before a hearing to be made accountable for their actions.

Not only was the complaint upheld, but the referee was also found guilty, fined, and ordered to engage in an online course, and for the first time in twenty years they had a diverse panel at the hearing.

> *Thank you for your support this year, looking forward to more learning* (email 29.6.2023—NB: some words have been changed to anonymise the football team to protect the individuals concerned).

Tracy used the teaching sessions to reflect on what was happening at the football matches and to find a way to precisely articulate the injustice; this enabled her to take action. She noted that her use of conceptual language, such as unconscious bias, was what prompted the officials to listen to her. This has converted the hope Tracy brought into the degree, in the form of aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005), into her active role in materially changing her world. As Dale Jacobs (2005) highlights, hope is not about individualistic ambition, it is about the possibility of collective change and so is necessarily relational. Sarah O'Shea (2016) talks about the "ripples of learning" that flow bi-directionally between home and the HE institution for first-in-family students. Tracy's learning has rippled multi-directionally: there is the hope the referee will now learn from the experience; and the local football association has been significantly impacted by it and are changing their practice; Tracy's son now knows that education can lead to a power shift and potential change; and Tracy's tutors and course mates have now also learnt from and been inspired by this story. As well as "ripples of learning", networks of hope have been created, which work as a sort of fuel to keep us all going.

Colin

Colin, as a graduate of the Professional Studies degree, has stayed in touch and become an active member of this network of hope and an integral part of the degree experience for current students. Tracy and Colin met each other at one of our Research Conversations events, in which a staff member and a student (or graduate) shared research they had been undertaking with other staff and students from the LLC community. He discussed his current PhD research about human trafficking and his aim to be part of important social change and consciousness- raising. For this chapter, Colin has reflected on the transformative experience of the whole degree on his identity and learning; he shared his thoughts about the value of lifelong learning in building hope for mature students:

> The belief in the intrinsic value of learning and the pursuit of personal fulfilment through education establishes a strong foundation of hope for mature students. The attainment of a degree also fosters self-confidence, empowering students to embody their aspirations and break free from imposed limitations. My personal journey, transitioning from a career as a large goods vehicle driver to completing an undergraduate degree in Professional Studies, followed by a Master's qualification in Human Rights Law and Practice, and now pursuing a PhD is a testament of the boundless possibilities that await when one believes in their potential (16.07.23).

Colin reflects on the importance of being believed in—as a returning student—and of being given the opportunity to return to study. Furthermore, when he presented his research this inspired Tracy; she could see where doing the Professional Studies degree could take her, and what research could do. Colin felt empowered by his ability to have this impact on others. This mutual inspiration and empowerment are the binding agent that brings the community of hope together.

Conclusion: Bringing you into our network of hope

We conclude this chapter with the hope we can include you, our readers, within our network of hope. This is what is needed to continue the struggle for much needed change in HE. What our communal reflections have taught us is that *returning to learn* is a radical act of hope; the transformation and search for a better future is there in a mature student's decision to start a degree. This is part of the aspirational capital that Tara Yosso discusses, when critiquing and building upon the deficit nature of Bourdeusian capital. Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth Framework (2005) proposes six forms of cultural capital that students from diverse backgrounds who are underrepresented in university settings bring. Aspirational capital is an individual's ability to "maintain hope and dreams for the future" despite "real and perceived" obstacles and involves "nurturing a culture of possibility" (Yosso, 2005, p. 78). Yosso helps us to see that the pedagogy of hope necessarily involves a relational and mutually-affirming learning process, which is not uni-directional. While Gannon focuses on teaching as the act of hope, Yosso reminds us to recognise the acts of hope students bring to the

situation—by returning to study and by entering the learning situation in a transformational way with their own fresh perspectives. This is a good reminder that, as Jacobs (2005) highlights, hope is social and relational in nature, just as pedagogical spaces are places of "liberating mutuality where teacher and student together work in partnership" (hooks, 2003, p. xv). The aspirational capital from the students, together with the building of radical hope brought in by a liberatory pedagogical perspective, is ultimately what constitutes the degree in a continually transformative way.

Steps toward hope

- Foster transformative learning by building a community of hope through interactive teaching, where students and staff share life experiences and build knowledge together.

- Utilise contemporary case studies and critical theory to create a learning community with transformative impact on individuals and their lives.

- Draw on the ideas of radical hope, aspirational capital, and "ripples of learning" to conceptualise and create a supportive learning environment.

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27. A quiet hope: Enhancing institution-wide inclusive assessment practices

Siobhán O'Neill and Laura Lee[1]

Abstract

This chapter explores the multifaceted role of assessment in Higher Education—as a tool for evidencing learning, promoting student autonomy, and preparing learners for the workplace. Traditional assessment approaches often fall short of addressing the diverse needs of today's student body, particularly those from non-traditional backgrounds. In response, this chapter advocates for inclusive assessment practices that actively engage learners and provide equitable opportunities to demonstrate achievement. Drawing on staff feedback indicating a demand for professional development in this area, the authors describe the design and implementation of a Digital Badge course. This resource offers staff conceptual and practical insights into inclusive assessment, supported by discipline-specific and cross-disciplinary case studies, and hands-on tools for redesigning assessment practices. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the project's next phase—delivering the course and collecting participant

feedback—while encouraging staff to engage in scholarship of teaching and learning to evaluate the impact of their assessments on inclusive assessment principles.

Keywords: inclusive assessment; equity; flexibility; accessibility; continuing professional development; Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Introduction

Widening access and participation in Higher Education (HE) has been an increasing focus for institutions globally in recent decades (Kaye, 2021; Younger et al., 2019). Policies centred on increasing participation from under-represented groups, such as persons with disabilities, mature students, and those from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, have seen a diversification of student populations (Burke, 2020). However, it has been argued that the institutional usage of terms such as "non-traditional" can be exclusionary for those students identified as such, and practices aimed at empowering students may be having the opposite effect (Gibson et al., 2016). Additionally, many students may fall into non-traditional categories but have not received formal identification or "diagnoses" and thus are not receiving additional support to which they may be entitled. Inclusive teaching, learning, and assessment practices may offer opportunities to more fully support not only those identified as widening participation students, but all students. This chapter documents a brief history of inclusive practice at University College Cork, Ireland, with a particular focus on the development of professional development support for staff on the topic of inclusive assessment.

Inclusive practice in Higher Education

Inclusivity has become a strategic question for universities, influencing learning and teaching, research and institutional cultures (European Universities Association, 2019). Within Europe, the notion of "social dimension", a state of participative equity in HE, was first mentioned in the 2001 meeting of European Ministers in charge of HE (Prague

Communiqué), and by 2015 the Yerevan Communiqué had agreed the goal of making the HE system more inclusive and therefore widening successful participation in HE (Wulz et al., 2018). As Ellen Hazelkorn (2018) remarks, this is reflective of multiple factors in the last fifty years, including demographic growth, economic and labour market changes, globalisation, and internationalisation, which have increased the demand for HE participation. The fact that policy makers and HE Institutions are looking more to inclusive policies is not surprising given the radical increases in student numbers and the associated diverse profile of the student population (Orr & Hovdhaugen, 2014).

The launch of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006 brought the concepts of Universal Design (UD) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL), now prominent in many considerations of HE, to the fore. UDL is an educational framework that aims to improve and optimise teaching and learning for all students based on evidence-based insights into how humans learn (CAST, 2018). The Convention contained the first explicit legal proclamation of the right to inclusive education and stated that UD and UDL are key to achieving the right to education. An international surge in UDL interest occurred circa 2008, although much of the application of UDL was evidenced in primary and secondary educational settings. The application of UDL to tertiary education is a more recent phenomenon. As stated in the UNESCO Futures of Education report (2021), the pandemic shone a harsh light on global inequities, many of which are reflected in HE. As a result, there has been renewed global interest in creating inclusive educational ecosystems. This is reflected in the Irish context through the government's commitment to creating an inclusive tertiary education system that supports all learners, as detailed in the National Access Plan (Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, 2023; Higher Education Authority, 2022).

UDL at UCC

Founded in 1845, University College Cork (UCC) has 3,400 academic, research, and administrative staff, and 22,685 registered undergraduate and postgraduate students. Our student body is diverse and international, with students coming to UCC from 104 different countries

worldwide, and 23% of undergraduate students entering UCC through an alternative entry route. Alternate Entry Routes assist students who may be at a disadvantage for various reasons to enter university, and subsequently provide additional financial support for students, and academic and/or pastoral mentoring.

UCC has a long history of prioritising Teaching and Learning. In 1984, it established a Teaching and Learning Centre, the first of its kind nationally. In 2003, the Centre, now known as the Centre for the Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning (CIRTL), launched a suite of accredited programmes including a Postgraduate Certificate, Diploma, and Master's in Teaching and Learning in HE. Student diversity has been prioritised since the early days of CIRTL's work, and the accredited programmes have facilitated the application by teaching staff of pedagogical theory and frameworks to their practice, allowing them to see its benefits and challenges. Given the international focus on UDL, CIRTL placed an even greater emphasis in the accredited programmes on designing curricula to support the teaching of a diverse student population, and UDL is a cornerstone topic of both the Postgraduate Certificate and Diploma in Teaching and Learning. To date, over 1,400 staff have graduated from CIRTL's three accredited programmes and many more have participated in Continuous Professional Development (CPD) courses such as the Digital Badge micro-credential in UDL, which was launched in 2018. 52% of our current academic staff have a CIRTL qualification and thus have been explicitly taught about UDL and supported to implement the UDL principles in their teaching, learning and assessment practices.

To date, over 160 staff at UCC have taken the Digital Badge in UDL. The UDL Digital Badge prompts colleagues to think about the opportunities they afford their learners to navigate a learning environment and to express what they know. For example, some students may be able to express their knowledge orally, but not in written format. Students may also vary dramatically in their strategic and organisational abilities, influencing their assessment performance. Thus, when students are exposed to a limited range of traditional assessments (e.g., timed, end-of-semester written examinations), they may be at a disadvantage.

While colleagues who have taken the UDL Digital Badge have shown

an interest and enthusiasm for the idea of designing and implementing inclusive assessments, their feedback indicated a need for targeted support on this topic. Hence, the Inclusive Assessment initiative was born, and a targeted professional development offering for staff was developed.

Inclusive assessment

Gordon Joughin, Phillip Dawson, and David Boud (2017) provide a holistic description of the purpose of assessment in HE. Assessments have multiple functions, including providing evidence of integrated learning at course level, operating as learning tasks themselves, and facilitating the development of student autonomy and preparation for work. Joughin and colleagues (2017) state that to achieve this purpose significant changes need to be made to traditional assessments such as essays and timed end-of-semester written examinations.

Many factors may inhibit the design and delivery of inclusive assessment practices, including institutional policies and culture, common discipline-specific practices, teaching experiences, workload, knowledge of assessment pedagogy, and the recognition of efforts (or lack thereof) to enact assessment change (Macdonald & Joughin, 2009), Likewise, Amrita Kaur, Mohammad Noman, and Hasniza Nordin (2017) state that factors such as a lack of professional development training, inadequate support and resourcing, and teachers' skills, willingness, and attitude have a negative effect on the successful implementation of inclusive assessment practices.

A focus on more traditional assessment methods can have poorer assessment outcomes due to a number of factors, including a poor understanding of classroom activities or assessments that fail to provide a range of opportunities for demonstrating understanding, physical challenges with writing, difficulties with literacy, challenges with the amount of time needed to complete assignments, and othering, exclusionary accommodation practices (e.g. Healey et al., 2006; Kaur et al., 2017; Madriaga et al., 2010; Nieminen, 2022; Tai et al., 2022). According to Kaur and colleagues (2017), the achievement gap between traditional and non-traditional students can be lessened by the implementation of inclusive assessment practices.

Currently, there is a lack of a universally accepted definition of inclusive assessment, with varied definitions being in use across the literature. However, definitions comprise several common themes, including accessibility, flexibility, equity, and choice (e.g., Hockings, 2010; Kneale & Collings, 2015; Ní Bheoláin et al., 2020). For the purposes of designing the staff CPD course, we developed the following definition of inclusive assessment that drew from the definitions provided by Ann C. Orr and Sara Bachman Hammig (2009), Lisa Padden and colleagues (2019), and Judith Waterfield and Bob West (2010).

Inclusive assessment practices are those that are designed to engage all students, allowing equity of opportunity to succeed and demonstrate learning, reducing the need for individual adaptations for specific students. These practices utilise flexible methods that address barriers to the expression of knowledge and support the diversity of the student population, including students from backgrounds of socio-economic disadvantage, students with disabilities, mature students, international students, and students from many diverse backgrounds and cultures.

This definition reflects the UDL approach, emphasising the importance of designing flexible curricula and assessment approaches that cater to a diverse range of learners. Inclusive assessment is not just about evaluating students, it comprises the ongoing activities that allow students and teachers to understand student progress in term of meeting learning outcomes. The principles of inclusive assessment include:

- Making assessment accessible for all students, reducing the need for modified assessment provision.
- Scaffolding learning and assessment.
- Utilising multiple and varied methods of student performance.
- Providing opportunities for students to express their learning in different ways.
- Providing performance-improving feedback and opportunities for students to self-assess.
- Providing authentic and meaningful tasks that replicate real-world challenges.

Inclusive assessment can be incorporated into practice in small and in bigger ways. Some examples of inclusive assessment practices include:

- Offering Options: Allow students the opportunity to express their knowledge in different ways, for example writing an essay, making a video or podcast, or delivering a presentation.

- Weighting and Continuous Assessment: Consider the weighting of assessments such that students have the opportunity to build on what they learn throughout the module, and to gain feedback before engaging in an end-of-semester assessment.

Brian Irwin and Stuart Heppleston (2012) also recommend having open and honest discussions on the worth of different assessment formats, along with discussions with students about why assessment format choices are being introduced, in order to successfully introduce flexible, inclusive assessment practices.

Digital Badge development

The main aim of this work was to foster a more inclusive and human-centred assessment culture within our institution by providing staff with the skills and knowledge to implement inclusive assessment practices within their teaching, and an understanding of the benefits and importance of inclusive assessment. The target audience for the course was staff with a responsibility for designing and implementing assessment.

We implemented a phased and iterative approach to the design of the Digital Badge, allowing for the collection and implementation of feedback. An initial rapid review of the literature was undertaken to develop the theoretical grounding of the course, the results of which are included in the above sections. This was followed by an in-depth exploration of the work already underway in other HE institutions including the examination of publications (peer-reviewed and grey literature) and holding meetings with colleagues engaged in inclusive assessment development and scholarship at other Irish universities. This work resulted in the collection of practical resources and materials that could be included in the Digital Badge content.

Understanding institutional needs

Discussions were undertaken with key support staff, management, and stakeholders across the University to understand the institutional need for inclusive assessment and staff training. In addition, an in-depth review of the University's relevant strategies and policies was carried out to ensure that the Digital Badge purpose and content were in alignment with the University's strategic goals and priorities.

Understanding staff needs

Ethical approval was granted to survey staff on their understanding of inclusive assessment, current inclusive assessment practices already underway, as well as their preferences for CPD course formats. The survey was emailed to all staff, and we received 116 responses. Staff understanding of inclusive assessment was mixed, with many having limited to no understanding of the term. Staff were also asked to rate the potential barriers that would impact their implementation of inclusive assessment practices. Resources, time, and a lack of discipline-specific examples were the biggest barriers to implementation. To address these barriers, inclusive assessment case studies were collected from staff across the University to be included in the Digital Badge. To address colleagues' resource limitations, we developed two pathways for interested colleagues: they could complete the self-directed online content and a short case study documenting their learning and application of that learning to their practice to earn the Digital Badge, or they could simply audit the Digital Badge by completing the self-directed online content. The latter pathway offered greater flexibility for time-poor colleagues who might have had an interest in the topic but could not commit to completing the case study.

Understanding students' needs

Research on the teaching and assessment methods and preferences was undertaken by the Students' Union and a number of Schools during the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to the online learning environment. The findings of this research supported the need for the introduction of inclusive assessment across the institution and provided us with insights

into the challenges students face when demonstrating their learning. In particular students identified flexibility, additional continuous assessment, and clearly defined requirements and rubrics as important to allow them to demonstrate their learning (O'Neill, 2021).

Course content

The CPD Digital Badge developed comprises seven topics: Course Introduction; Inclusive Assessment; UDL; Inclusive Assessment in Practice; Academic Integrity; Navigating UCC Assessment Processes; and Resources and Next Steps. These topics introduce staff to inclusive assessment and UDL principles, discipline-specific and cross-disciplinary case studies, maintaining academic integrity, and the institutional change making policies and procedures for assessments in UCC. Staff are also introduced to the Seven Steps to Inclusive Assessment as developed by Plymouth University (2014), which are detailed in Table 27.1.

Steps to Inclusive Assessment	Key Message
1. Underpin your assessment with good assessment design principles	Constructive alignment (Biggs, 2003), clear and transparent criteria, and timely and constructive feedback should continue to be used. Assessments should benefit most learners.
2. Use a variety of assessment methods	A diverse selection of assessment methods will ensure specific students are not disadvantaged by specific forms of assessment.
3. Incorporate choice to your assessment	The choice of assessment can empower students to take responsibility for their learning and assessment choice has been shown to eliminate the need for modified assessment provision (Francis, 2008).

Steps to Inclusive Assessment	Key Message
4. Design inclusive exams	To make exams more inclusive consider scheduling; a choice of exam method; length of exam; weighting of exam; structure of exam questions; enabling students to type exams; and practice exams.
5. Consider how technology can assist	Technology has the potential to enhance assessment practices. For example, material can be made available on Canvas/VLE and tools such as e-portfolios, quizzes, and online/typed exams can be used.
6. Prepare, engage, and support students in the assessment process	Prepare students and develop their assessment literacy in the first few weeks before assessments take place. Information on criteria, marking schemes, and required standards should be given to students. Students should also be given the opportunity to rehearse and practise any new assessment methods through early assessment with smaller weightings.
7. Monitor, review, and share practice	Inclusive assessment needs to be part of a wider consideration for all assessment practice. Student involvement in programme and assessment reviews will help to monitor these practices.

Table 27.1 Seven steps to inclusive assessment (adapted from Plymouth University, 2014).

Feedback, revisions, and next steps

We engaged with staff and students across the university to supply feedback on the course content and delivery method. Staff engaged in providing feedback including teaching and learning academics, access and participation staff, disability support services staff, student skills centre staff, and academic staff across disciplines. Additionally, students from a range of disciplines, with and without non-traditional identifiers, and members of the Students' Union also provided feedback. The course underwent several revisions to ensure all feedback was accurately addressed.

The next steps in the development of this staff Digital Badge are to run the course with staff, whilst actively capturing feedback from all participants. Expression of interest forms have been sent to the staff responsible for assessing students. Feedback from this first and subsequent cohorts will be examined and adjustments to the Digital Badge course will be made to reflect this input. It is also envisaged that this course may become available for other institutions nationally. Staff will be encouraged to engage in scholarship of teaching and learning activities to empirically investigate the impact of their assessment changes based on inclusive assessment and the UDL principles.

Conclusion and recommendations

Our work has resulted in the development of a Digital Badge course, which provides staff with an understanding of inclusive assessment and UDL, provides discipline-specific and cross-disciplinary case studies of inclusive assessment in practice, and offers resources and skills development for staff to successfully introduce inclusive assessments into their teaching practice. Inclusive assessments offer opportunities for all students to develop autonomy in their learning and to express their learning in ways that are most suitable for them, reducing the need for the development of individualised adjustments and providing a human focused approach to teaching and learning.

It is recommended that institutions explore the current landscape of inclusive assessment practices amongst their staff, and the institutional, staff, and student needs in relation to the understanding

and implementation of inclusive assessment. We have undertaken this work by listening to the voices of our staff and students—building hope and a more hopeful practice from the ground up. We are committed to building on these positive developments by undertaking further research including by those engaging in inclusive assessment practice to provide empirical evidence for the benefits of placing all students at the heart of assessment.

Steps toward hope

- Implement inclusive assessment practices to engage students and provide opportunities for all, including those from non-traditional backgrounds, to demonstrate their learning effectively.

- Develop targeted professional development to enhance understanding and skills and support for staff engagement with inclusive assessment.

- Encourage engagement in scholarship of teaching and learning activities to investigate the impact of assessment and assessment changes.

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28. The moongazers: A creative vision of Higher Education

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Abstract

This chapter argues for the urgent need to embrace art and arts-based practices in Higher Education as a counter to the prevailing culture of managerialism, isolation, surveillance, despair, and burnout. It highlights how creative approaches to teaching, learning, and assessment (TLA) can meaningfully transform educational experiences by fostering active engagement, critical thinking, and student success. Far from being a peripheral concern, these practices are positioned as a vital and serious response to contemporary educational challenges—reclaiming joy, connection, and purpose in academic life.

Keywords: arts; creativity; visioning; critical hope; Higher Education

Introduction: Why vision?

Art has begun to feel not like a respite or an escape, but a formidable tool for gaining perspective on what are increasingly troubled times (Laing, 2020).

We live in a world of speed, instability, and uncertainty (Abegglen et al., 2020a; Barnett, 2000; Giroux, 2014): "'a spin-cycle of hypervigilant anxiety' ... [where] It is impossible to keep up, and far too alarming to look away" (Laing, 2020). With respect to Higher Education (HE), Richard Hall writes of the *Hopeless University* (2021) and *The Alienated Academic* (2018), mapping a terrain of managerialism, isolation, surveillance, despair, and burnout. This is also true for secondary and further education where schools and other educational institutions are constantly assessed, ranked, and set competitively against each other; where a League Table position is offered as a proxy for successful teaching, learning and assessment (TLA) practices, reinforcing transactional banking models of education. Our response is to embrace and embed creative, ludic (playful), and arts-based practice within our teaching and staff development (continuous professional development for lecturers, certificated and bespoke), and work to de-school (Illich, 1971) and un-school (Holt, 1989) our participants to create a healing and holistic educational experience for them—and to act as a critical lens through which to explore and develop their own practices with their students.

Why art-based practice?

We get used to horrible things and stop fearing them. We get used to beautiful things and stop enjoying them. We get used to people and stop experiencing them as personalities. Art is a means to make things real again (Shklovsky, 2015). Art is a place where ideas and people are made welcome. It is a zone of enchantment as well as resistance that is open—even now. As Olivia Laing (2020) argues, art is "a formidable tool for gaining perspective on what are increasingly troubled times". It can serve as an antidote to times of chaos and supercomplexity: "It can be a route to clarity, and it can be a force of resistance and repair, providing new registers, new languages in which to think" (Laing, 2020).

We do not teach "art" or "about" arts-based practice, we teach through the medium of creative play. We use arts-based pedagogy: creative and playful approaches to "make strange" (Shklovsky, 2015) taken-for-granted notions of education; to move to a place of "safe uncertainty" (Mason, 1993); to see differently. Thus, we invite our lecturers-as-

students to embrace chance, contingency, and creative inquiry, as catalysts to imagine other ways of being—and of "doing" TLA. It is in this creative in-between world where we can start to relearn—together.

In this chapter we outline how we are rebuilding the university from the ground up, by instilling hope in our colleagues through creative, collaborative, and playful TLA praxis.

Flying to the moon: Our creative practice

> ...the image possesses an uncanny power. It can travel where the body can't. It migrates and strays, taking up permanent residence in the mind, revealing what—who—has been forcibly excluded from sight (Laing, 2020).

Playful and creative TLA practices have found their way into universities and lecture halls (James & Neranzti, 2019; Nerantzi, 2016) to provoke the "serious business" of real, engaged, and authentic learning (Parr, 2014). Play gives students the freedom (Huizinga, 1949) to experiment, to question, to engage—and to accept uncertainty (Molinari, 2022). This is important in these supercomplex, lean, and mean times (Giroux, 2014) where the present is uncertain and the future even more so. For it is in play and only in playing that the individual is fiercely alive, able to use the whole personality, creatively (Winnicott, 1971). It is a medium for developing and growing, for acting in the world with hope and positivity—for doing TLA differently.

In our staff development, bespoke sessions or certificated courses, we use creative and playful practices to deepen the learning and understanding of our lecturers-as-students—and thus to increase the repertoire of creative TLA strategies that they can utilise with their students. Right from the start, we encourage our participants to engage critically, mindfully, and reflectively with our playful programmes—using them as a lens to interrogate their own ways of "doing". We "immerse" them in playful and creative learning, for them to be playful. We facilitate an opening up and an imagining of what they, their TLA, the education system and their students could be (see also McIntosh, 2007, 2010).

Lecturers enrol in these courses for continuous professional development, sometimes of their own choosing, sometimes through the

recommendation of their line managers. Participants harness collage, making, drawing, poetry, role-play, discussion, bricolage, and image-, topic- and scenario-mediated dialogue to explore education praxes and to reimagine education, curriculum, and pedagogy more inclusively and powerfully. We incorporate reflective practice (Schön, 1983) and reflective writing (Elbow, 1998) as our lecturers-as-students develop their emergent TLA practices. All our staff learners are encouraged to keep and share their own learning logs, blogs, and padlets, online platforms for sharing work. These opportunities for dialogic reflection and meta-reflection are part of the participants' professional development; through play and dialogue they take ownership of who they are, what they know, and the practical and theoretical perspectives they are encountering. This is intimately entangled with their TLA practice, which at the very least, to be humane, must become more engaging, authentic, and active in the process (Abegglen et al., 2020b).

The moondance

As staff developers we ask our participants to "bring their own context"—so that we can "tackle" with them the issues that are possibly proving problematic for their students—or aspects of their practice that they want to revitalise. Rather than encourage them to teach de-contextualised "skills", for example, we consider how to help students embrace academic reading via blackout poetry (Merrydew, 2022), textscrolls (Sinfield, 2014; also Abegglen et al., 2019) and jigsaw reading (Stapleford, 2021). We encourage the provocation of curiosity with more creative assignments—and the staff themselves then reimagine the essay as a fairy story, animation, or interpretative dance (yes, really!). We free write, blog, and create found word poetry to encourage "writing to learn" (Abegglen et al., 2021)—and provoke active enquiry via role play and multiple forms of mediated dialogue. Participants develop creative teaching sessions by folding in a ball of string, board games or chocolates and reflect on their own learning via drawing rich pictures (Open Learn, 2021) or selecting representative objects (a sort of reversed object-based-learning—see Museums and Collections, 2025) and using them to seed free flowing professional conversations (see Bakhtin, 1981; Palus & Drath, 2001).

Every year, we ask participants to create collages of themselves as academics, produce "makes" of their students, forge representations of the university itself (Reeve, 2023) and play with Lego® for university learning (Nerantzi & James, 2022). All of these creative artefacts and processes enable powerful discussions of the what, why, and how of TLA—and of how to create a humane university—and a more joyful and just world. In the process, we place a strong emphasis on developing the "self", as "knowing" oneself is a key attribute for being able to develop (Rogers, 1961) and to move on to the precarious ground of teaching— and of developing education for social justice. Each year they build more optimistic representations of HE; porous and amorphous structures with flexible and welcoming learning and teaching spaces and assessment practices that acknowledge and accommodate the people that enter: people as actors with agency. These model Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) represent open universities that allow a weaving in and out of diverse people and ideas. At the end of our collaborations, together we have creatively brought into view new visions of the teaching self, the student self, and the institutional "self"—and have explored how we might make HE a better fit for the human beings, which university is ostensibly designed to accommodate: through playful practice we have modelled a humane education (Abegglen et al., 2020b)—and a humane world.

The thing itself always escapes

> Art is a place [...] where ideas and people are made welcome. It's a zone of enchantment as well as resistance, and it's open even now (Laing, 2020).

There are many reasons to start our staff development courses in the way that we do. One is our belief in creativity as liberatory and reparative practice (Sedgwick in Laing, 2020a; Sinfield et al., 2019) coupled with our perception that typically the pre-tertiary education system with its transactional focus on League Table positions and consequent urge to "teach to the test" will have worked very successfully to eradicate the creative in most learners (see also Robinson, 2006)—and thus will have damaged their self-efficacy and sense of self. Working in a predominately widening participation HEI we see students arrive with little self-

belief and at best a fragile resilience rather than a fully-fledged, active flourishing (Younie, n.d.). "Non-traditional" students, in particular, are made to feel unwelcome or uncomfortable within HE, where a typical response is to see them as in "deficit" and to devise supplementary programmes or instruction to "fix" them (Sinfield et al., 2019). Rather than accept this reductive and "colonising" vision, we develop with our staff creative and liberatory programmes of transformation. Ludic, open, and creative activities that make transparent the forms and processes of academia and create spaces that allow "a feeling of being inducted back into hope, a restoration of faith" (Laing, 2020).

We use creative and ludic TLA practices as a way of helping our lecturers-as-students to develop alternative "ways of seeing" (Berger, 1972) the educational context(s) in which we all operate. Our practices allow the surfacing and discussing of the problematic nature of HE itself, of the systemic inequities built into the very supercomplex systems with which our staff and students have to engage. What we attempt is creative action and reflection—opportunities for our participants to, critically and with agency (Priestley et al., 2015), act and engage and thus to develop curricula and pedagogic practice that better help them and their students to become their whole empowered and empowering selves. Our staff learners acknowledge HE systems that foster unequal power and pain—but in their own practice they build opportunities for creativity, porosity, and openness: a new vision of what education could be. Their work constitutes acts of hope and of resistance.

You see the whole of the moon[1]

> Hope is the precursor to change. Without it, no better world is possible. [Art] is a feeling of being inducted back into hope, a restoration of faith (Laing, 2020).

One of the beautiful things with staff development processes like this is that there is no definitive outcome or conclusion to be reached: it is the process that becomes the change agent. We can travel step by step— with each other and with others—tracing and establishing connections

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1   This subheading is inspired by the Waterboys' song, "The Whole of the Moon" (1985).

between the different staff "makes" and artefacts, amongst ourselves, and with the wider (education) world. The result is arguably a staff development programme like no other. It does not offer dry, dusty theory—though theory is certainly present—but instead creates a "third space" (Bhabha, 2004): a site of encounter that seeds agentic engagement with TLA, and opens possibilities for moving beyond current norms. One of the most difficult tasks is to imagine differently. Imagining things differently is "risky". It threatens those that profit from the way things are—or those who just do not want to change—or see change itself as a danger. We believe it is possible—and necessary—to take down the hostile and impenetrable tower of HE, to tear down the watchtowers, remove the gatekeepers—and welcome people in. With our practice, we hope to build a village of learners and educators that have equal participation and an equal say in the process: giving voice to all participants and continually being aware of power imbalances and unconscious bias and attempting to reduce these continually through harnessing the reflexive (Beck,1994) capacities of team teaching and continuous reflection. "We all need to imagine more, and, importantly, imagine harder" (Richardson, 2023).

Taking off[2]

Creative Practices
formidable tool
provoke
authentic learning
mean times
future
epistemological shift,
educational foundations
destabilise that very unequal education system
un-school

Visualising the University
the image possesses an uncanny power.
deepen the learning

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2   Blackout Poem based on Sinfield, Burns, & Abegglen, 2023.

see and be, differently
"make strange"
a catalyst
engage critically, mindfully
"immerse"
collage, making, drawing, poetry, role play, discussion, bricolage,
   image-, topic-, and
scenario-mediated dialogue
inclusively and powerfully
own learning
meta-reflection
humane university
more optimistic
porous and amorphous
acknowledge and accommodate the people that enter.
new visions of the teaching self, the student self and the institutional
   'self'

Assessing—more creatively
Hope
Without it, no better world is possible (Laing, 2020).
We are all post-digital now
experiment and play with AI
five-minute multimodal artefact.

The thing itself always escapes?

Steps toward hope

- Recognise the urgent need for art and arts-based practices to transform approaches to teaching, learning, and assessment (TLA).

- Implement creative and playful approaches to TLA to promote active and engaged learning, enhancing student success.

- Cultivate academic hope to reclaim joy, connection, and purpose in university life.

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V. BEYOND THE CURRICULUM

Beyond the curriculum: Introduction

John Sandars

In this section, the authors present a wide variety of innovative approaches that are stories of hope and have the potential to revitalise the curriculum, with examples from both childhood education and Higher Education. These approaches from Canada, India, and the UK include conceptual thinking (what could be done), and practical experience (what has been done). The use of the term "revitalise" highlights how the curriculum, which is often constrained by political and economic agendas and policies, can be resuscitated by a deep breath of creativity. This creativity can transform not only learners to holistically flourish so that they can achieve their individual and collective potential but can also enable similar changes in the teachers. Many authors have emphasised the importance of co-creation of the curriculum between learners and teachers, with each benefitting from sharing their different perspectives and having a mutually beneficial opportunity to learn and personally develop. The overall message that is clearly made by all of the authors is that there is hope for the current education system but only if all learners and teachers can develop their individual and collective agency to feel empowered to be creative in the design and implementation of the curriculum so that innovative change can provide learning and personal development that goes beyond the current constraints of the curriculum.

The section begins with a collection of chapters that propose a call to fundamentally transform the curriculum and wider education system so that it clearly aligns with the values that are at the core of

education. In "Learning vs education: A view beyond the divide", Akitav Sharma highlights the deeply personal nature of learning and discusses the general implications for the design and implementation of the curriculum. In "Belonging through compassion: Supporting hope through the design of a website for educational development and social justice", Vikki Hill and Liz Bunting provide a compelling case for embedding compassion throughout the entire curriculum and across the wider education system, with a focus on both learners and teachers. This message is continued by Umme Mansoory in "Humanising student and instructor experiences to nurture relationships and improve engagement", with a discussion of humanising education through a process in which learners and teachers can become active collaborators in the creation of a meaningful educational experience.

A focus on the long-term impact of education and the need to have transformation at the present time is highlighted in the next collection of chapters, with proposals about supporting learners to increase their wellbeing and to holistically flourish, both as individuals and collectively. Michelle Morgan, in "The ten wellness spheres to support student and staff health and wellbeing in a modern, post-1992 university in, through, and out of the study lifecycle", discusses the importance of enabling both learners and teachers to flourish holistically. Nayiri Keshishi extends this discussion by considering how to develop a learner's inner developmental goals in "Unlocking a new generation of leaders: How universities can support students' inner development goals". This emphasis on the personal growth of learners is continued by Phoenix Perry in "The pedagogy of joy: Working with engaged presence". An essential aspect of achieving flourishment is the development of resilience, and an innovative approach through immersive games is presented by Rachel Higdon and Hilary Thomson in "'Resilience Finders': Flourishing in life through immersive game experiences".

The urgent need to recognise the diversity of learners is emphasised in the next collection of chapters. Karen Arm, in "Storying the silences of social mobility", discusses the importance of embedding social justice in the curriculum by highlighting the opportunities of increased social mobility into Higher Education and its effect on active participation in the learning environment. Stephanie Jury, in "How can you know what you don't know?: Changing the narrative around the 'successful

learner'", offers several practical recommendations for supporting the increasing diversity of learners, including applying universal design for learning to curriculum design and implementation.

Engaging the diversity of learners, with a diverse range of preferences and capacities, requires challenging the norms of Higher Education and this is discussed in several chapters. Megan McGee, in "An imperfect practice? What barriers are there to providing outdoor education opportunities for children?", discusses the importance of outdoor education and connection with nature for learning. Although childhood education has been the main focus of this approach, it appears to have potential benefits for Higher Education. In "Moving, making, and mingling: Moving towards an embodied pedagogy", Susannah McKee and Marie Stephenson highlight the embodied nature of learning and movement, providing practical suggestions regarding how this approach can be implemented. There is a similar discussion by Hilda Mulrooney in "Food for thought: Pandemic hope" on the importance of food and eating in our lives and how general learning experiences can be built around this topic.

The final chapters in the section highlight the importance of developing the agency of learners so that they can regain their power to take greater control over their learning and personal development, both as individuals and collectively. In "'It's a bit like academic me-time'; Can mini virtual writing retreats create a more hopeful, joyful, and humane Higher Education?", Aspasia Paltoglou and colleagues describe how learners increased their agency by sharing their experiences through virtual writing retreats that offered an opportunity for collaborative learning beyond the standard curriculum. Joshua Thorpe, in "The opportunity of constraint: How beating one's head against the wall can open a door", also emphasises the need for learners to collaboratively engage in writing workshops to regain their agency and voice in academic writing beyond the current constraints in Higher Education.

29. Learning vs education: A view beyond the divide

Akitav Sharma

Abstract

This chapter offers a critical examination of institutionalised education and proposes a transformative model that re-centres the personal, contextual nature of learning. It contrasts the rigid, standardised practices of traditional systems with the lived experiences of learners, revealing how socio-cultural and economic structures often reduce education to capital accumulation, thereby deepening inequality. In response, the chapter introduces the concept of a 'Curriculum for Innovation' (CfI), a learner-centred framework grounded in principles of meaning-making, knowledge construction, and autonomy. CfI reimagines curriculum design as adaptable and responsive to individual contexts, positioning educators as co-constructors of learning rather than mere content deliverers. This approach seeks to bridge the divide between education and learning, fostering more equitable, meaningful, and innovative educational experiences.

Keywords: institutionalised education; personalised learning; personalised assessments; curriculum for innovation (CfI); learner autonomy; critical thinking; socio-emotional learning; life-long learning

Introduction

Learning is personal. No matter the content, context, or format of learning, it impacts the individual learner personally and within their lived context. Education, for the context of this chapter, is a product of complex and dynamic socio-cultural interactions and the selective utility embodied within certain ideas and foci of labour (human effort). These interactions lend credence to the content that is "worthy of being taught", and thus, its inclusion within the curriculum.

Institutionalised education is a (generally) sequential process of exposure to educational activities that is offered by institutions that have any style/type of benchmark gatekeeping criteria to limit and regulate learner engagement. This education is often standardised and rarely acknowledges the deeply personal nature of learning (Apple, 1990; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bernstein, 1971; Lorde, 1984; Hill Collins, 1990).

Thus, to make sense to an individual and assist the individual in constructing a coherent and meaningful life narrative (Dewey, 1938; Freire, 1970; Vygotsky, 1978; Gilligan, 1982; Lorde, 1984), education must offer whatever is deemed "worth teaching" in a form and style that makes it "worth learning". Thus, this chapter makes the case for redefining education as an integrated process of *personally adapted* and *contextually relevant* learning experiences.

The status quo

In its prevailing form, institutionalised education serves as a matrix of opportunities. At every level of the sequential process of education, institutions offer completion certificates, and for every benchmarked milestone of achievement an "equivalent" degree is conferred. With each level of completion (elementary, high school, undergraduate, postgraduate, PhD, post-doctoral…) and proficiency (grades), a concomitant sequence of opportunities are "presented" to the learner. If one desires, one may seek a job right after elementary school or high school, contingent upon what is *offered*. However, within the "real world" outside the classroom (the same real world that informs the creation and collation of the curriculum and its goals) opportunities are not fairly offered simply on the basis of educational achievement. Moreover, educational achievement—especially within the institutionalised context—is

not solely dependent on the learner's performance.

Education and the learner are constructed and exist within a stratified world order, and as such are both guided and constrained by the "rules of the world". One of these rules is that access to opportunities is predominantly mediated by one's existing forms of capital—be they cultural, social, or material (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000; Hill Collins, 1990; hooks, 1994).

When coupled with real-world aspirations of the learners within an institutional context, levels of completion or achievement (proficiency) are often tied in with their real world impacts vis-a-vis the accumulation or possession (rarely, embodiment) of capital, whether through institutionalised credentials like degrees or diplomas or via technical training leading to information capital (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Lareau, 1987).

Thus, a stratified world offers stratified learning experiences, which, in turn, create stratified and standardised results. As a result, the socio-economic factors that should guide the educational focus often serve as the driving force behind it (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Willis, 1977; Weiler, 1991). This further separates institutionalised education from its personal impact and leads to education becoming predominantly quantitative, assessing merit or the possession of "legitimate" knowledge rather than a nuanced understanding of human potential (Tilly, 1998; Freire, 1970; Noddings, 1984).

Capital accumulation has definite and tangible merits and serves as a near irreplaceable form of incentive for continued educational engagement. However, reducing all education to just this mechanistic process undermines its holistic impact (Nussbaum, 1997; Gilligan, 1982; Spivak, 1988). Further complications within the educational processes (and oversimplification of educational outcomes as discrete capital outcomes) arise when educational practices are implemented through large-scale, centralised mechanisms. In this (current and prevalent) scenario, institutionalised education paradoxically perpetuates the social inequities it aims to mitigate, especially when it operates outside the contextual needs of learners (Apple, 1990; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004; Lorde, 1984; Hill Collins, 1990; Fine, 1991). The problem statement(s), thus, can be articulated as such.

What is worth learning? What is worth teaching? Who decides the worth?

If we look to educational experiences (especially those offered by degree granting institutions), we can conceive of education that leads beyond mere capital acquisition/possession. Education can become (for each learner) a facilitating process of assimilation and embodiment of all forms of capital, a transformative pathway for individuals to derive or construct meaning for themselves (Freire, 1970; Mezirow, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978; hooks, 1994).

A way forward: "Curriculum for Innovation" (CfI)

Institutionalised education, especially as mandated and implemented through centralised policy decisions, is often far removed from learners' lives and contexts, oversimplifies learning into measurable/standardised outcomes, reduces educational outcomes to a matter of capital acquisition, and, in almost all instances, exacerbates the social inequalities it's meant to alleviate (Apple, 1990; Bourdieu, 1986; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Freire, 1970).

This section outlines a curriculum design that is rooted in many diverse theories and bodies of human knowledge. It is a single attempt to generate a cohesive epistemological framework to offer learning experiences that are personally adaptable and contextually relevant. As such, through its demonstration, it implies that many other frameworks can be created that are relevant to any other contexts and derive from bodies of knowledge that are considered 'worthy' within those contexts.

The following epistemological framework is built upon a few axioms.

Axiom 1) Meaning is central to human life (and the narratives of selfhood).

Axiom 2) Meaning can be *constructed.*

Axiom 3) Agency is fundamental to the construction of meaning.

Axiom 4) Learning *is* Personal.

Axiom 5) Education *can be* personalised.

A few inferences that can be drawn from these axioms and previously established ideas are presented below.

Inference 1) Any process or activity that engages the individual/ a collective, especially when crafting/imbibing narratives, must be

meaningful for the actor/participants.

Inference 2) The utility/value of every lived experience can be correlated to the act of meaning. If meaning can be obtained, all engagements can be made meaningful. Through active cognition, the learner can be guided towards the acquisition/construction of a 'personal' meaning.

Inference 3) If the cognitive engagement with an activity or process can be reinforced by metacognitive inquiry and acknowledgement of a 'personal meaning', then the activity/process becomes a learning activity/process.

Inference 4) The person (and their personhood) is a fundamental *variable* within the learning-teaching process. As the person *changes* (change in one person over time/ when considering different people), so do the teaching-learning requirements.

Inference 5) Educational processes are not equivalent to learning processes until they have been *personalised* and *adapted* to the individual learner's context and lived experiences.
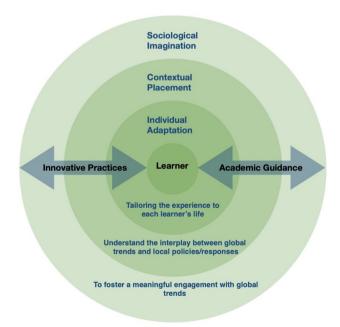
Fig. 29.1 Cfl framework (Curriculum for Innovation, image by author, 2022, CC BY-NC 4.0 (image may not be used for training machine learning or artificial intelligence systems)).

Combining all these inferences, one can design broad epistemological frameworks to model curricular designs that are personally adapted and contextually relevant. As a demonstration, one such epistemological framework (CfI) and a derived curricular design has been presented here. The CfI framework (visualised as a mind-map herein) aspires to stimulate a deeper engagement between the learner and *their* world, while also scaffolding it within the zeitgeist. The purpose is not merely to impart knowledge but to foster personally meaningful interactions that enrich students' understanding of their world and themselves. Within this framework, education transitions from being an institutionalised outcome driven process to a dynamic ecosystem where students are active constructors of knowledge (Freire, 1970; Vygotsky, 1978; Lave & Wenger, 1991).

The role of the teacher/facilitator

Educators, in this milieu, are not mere instructors but facilitators, collaborators, and co-learners, harmonising the symbiotic exchange of ideas and knowledge (Dewey, 1938; hooks, 1994; Noddings, 1984). The role evolves to providing short expert introductions to core disciplinary ideas upon which activities are designed to foster individual and collaborative learning through active participation.

Apropos, educators must be *trained* to view learning as a multifaceted personal process that encompasses individual (cognitive and metacognitive) and collective activities. Learning involves a self-structured progression through the development and deployment of self-efficacy beliefs, and as such becomes a self-directed journey. The educator, thus, can be freed from clerical assessments of learner performance, if we design assessments that are personal and introspective and aligned with each learner's unique journey and particular needs (Mezirow, 1991; Darling-Hammond, 2000).

Assessments

Learner engagement and performance can (and must) be judged. However, the standardisation of assessment outcomes as the norm is a result of logistical limitations instead of a heuristic classification/design. To judge engagement, learners can be guided through personalised

metacognitive prompts to elicit their reactions, reflections and meaning-making processes. As a standard form of assessment, contextualised individual and group "case-based learning exercises" (CBLE) can be crafted by each learner on the basis of their metacognitive responses. This two-part assessment design can offer a deeper view into individual learning processes and offer the degree of personalisation that is missing from the prevalent forms and models of assessment. (i) Personalised metacognitive prompts and (ii) CBLE based upon the learner's metacognitive responses.

To further check for proficiency for specialised disciplinary engagements, broad based, critical thinking enabled, tests can be designed and deployed for groups of students.

Content delivery/format

Anticipated Universal Acceptance (instead of retrospective fixes for improved inclusion and diversity) is inherent within the curricular design. To maximise our utilisation of all new-age technologies, the content can be offered in diverse formats and styles, ranging from texts, audiobooks, and gamified digital media to recorded/interactive lectures. The framework, thus, expands the nature and format of the educational experience, ensuring it is more reflective of learners' varied needs and personal contexts (Hill Collins, 1990; Lorde, 1984; Nussbaum, 1997).

Emphasised within this design are crucial future-ready skills: critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, digital literacy, adaptability, collaboration, contextual awareness, self-awareness, and socio-emotional learning. Technology is employed both as a learning tool and a subject to be mastered, enabling learning to extend beyond the classroom walls (Freeman et al., 2017; Prensky, 2001).

Intended learning outcomes

By anchoring the learning outcomes to real-world relevance, the curriculum can guide learners in drawing connections between education and their personal lives, thus enriching their understanding of both (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Willis, 1977; Weiler, 1991).

In order to classify these learning outcomes in the analytic traditions, we define sociological imagination, contextual engagement, innovative

practices and behaviours, and personalised academic guidance as the key segments within which the curricular knowledge is transacted.

Why sociological imagination?

In an era of accelerating change, how we perceive the world around us—our worldview—shapes not only our individual futures but also the future of our communities. With a focus on fostering deep engagement with global trends and hyper-localised/personal contexts, learners can be nudged towards the crafting of personal narratives that enable them to "make sense" of the world around them. This view, as studied in sociology as *the sociological imagination*, is a truly worthy outcome of education. If a learner can make sense of the deep socio-cultural/economic/political undercurrents that operate globally, then this outcome of the education can be assumed achieved.

This can be greatly facilitated by a steady introduction to concepts from Humanities, Social and Physical Sciences (or simply put, from all branches of human knowledge and thought). A suggestive list of topics can possibly include key economic theories and debates, such as universal basic income, social economics, and macroeconomic theories to educate learners about market theories and the interplay of capital in shaping societies.

Equally vital are ideas from social sciences like social stratification and opportunities (the interplay of capital, merit, and upward socio-economic mobility), human geography, and ideas from culture and gender studies. These can help students develop a more comprehensive understanding of the various social dynamics that impact their lives.

Sociologically informed, case-based learning exercises can offer an integrated view of methods to contextualise abstract theories within real-world scenarios, providing a bridge between academic knowledge and its practical applications.

Why contextual placement?

While understanding that some global forces and causal relationships can add a worldly meaning to learning experiences, this meaning does transfer to the learner through their uniquely specialised context. The

emphasis is on helping students identify how global trends specifically impact their lives. It also seeks to help them understand how these global trends interact with local policies and responses, ranging from the national to neighbourhood levels. For example, an ongoing geo-political conflict might be local for some learners while for others it may be a global trigger impacting fuel costs or instigating local acts of civil disobedience that might result in state-sponsored crackdowns.

This can be greatly facilitated by a steady introduction to concepts from humanities, and social and physical sciences (or simply put, from all branches of human knowledge and thought). Specifically, policy analysis as a way to understand governance and control is crucial. Students can explore how global trends impact local policies that shape the larger socio-economic context of their lives. Moreover, if institutionalised education is to accommodate the learner's needs, it must also accommodate the leaner's understanding of the process itself. Hence, a bird's eye view of institutional education, focusing on its structure, goals, and socio-cultural influences is necessitated. This will further assist learners in understanding the dynamics of capital returns of institutionalised education.

The final necessary exposure is that of the process of cognition itself, especially how it is impacted by the ecological systems within which the learner exists. This entails recognising cognitive development as an active process, to which end the curriculum incorporates the study of proximal processes and explores how various forms of capital possession affect learning outcomes.

Why individual adaptation?

While the learner can be *guided* towards making sense of the world, and their unique placement within their neighbourhoods/localities, they have to be sufficiently empowered and skilled to craft their selfhood (self-authorship). This can be achieved by offering directed metacognitive prompts to assess their personal values (virtues), behavioural trends, and degree of capital possession and embodiment. These exercises help generate a comprehensive learner profile, providing insights into each student's unique learning needs. With these insights, each learner can develop self-efficacy beliefs and engage meaningfully with learning (and life).

Why learn innovative practices and behaviours?

The corpus of human knowledge has grown and fragmented into many disciplines over the last five millennia. As such it is practically impossible for any one individual to possess all of what humans have uncovered/invented/ learnt. However, a broad reading of history coupled with topics from sociology, psychology, and organisational management can offer learners an opportunity to understand and personalise "innovation". This involves promoting social innovations, technological advancements, and collaborative engagements among students. Students are also encouraged to create their own case studies, offering practical applications for theoretical learning.

Alongside learner exposure, the curriculum also promotes institutional innovative practices that can foster individual innovation. These include building a learning organisation, fostering teacher professional development (for the educators and facilitators), and creating a fearless organisation that encourages out-of-the-box thinking.

Why personalised academic guidance?

Once the learner begins the personal process of meaning-making ("assessed" through metacognitive prompts and CBLE design), they can be guided towards the process of "best-fit" decision-making. This process is the penultimate step of educational achievement. With frequent and scaffolded (including metacognitive) exposure to activities across spectrums of research and development, policy analysis and action, entrepreneurial ventures, organisational management, or higher education routes, learners can be assisted in making best-fit choices for themselves.

Education is greater than the sum of its parts!

If the process of learning is transacted effectively, then one can reason that the one true product of the process will be a love of, fascination with, and excitement about (or the very least an absence of aversion to) learning. If this outcome can be achieved then the educational processes won't have failed the learner. The curriculum outlined above

builds on the importance of continuous learning by offering avenues for a personally adapted and contextually relevant assessment of skills/values/behaviours/capital.

Conclusion

To encapsulate, the Curriculum for Innovation embodies a holistic, student-focused philosophy of education, a dedication to diversity and personal evolution. By offering a diverse, adaptable curriculum that fosters deep personal engagement with complex, interconnected global trends, this educational model aims to prepare students for a future characterised by continuous change. It goes beyond academic knowledge, focusing on the development of innovative behaviours, adaptability, and individualised guidance, creating lifelong learners capable of navigating the complexities of the modern world.

Author's remarks

The ideas presented are not just "thought experiments". Over the last four years, segments of the curricular design have been implemented for learners aged 5–27 years, pursuing a wildly wide variety of disciplines and learning outcomes. They were all successful in achieving *their* desired learning outcomes, even though none of those outcomes were causally chased. They consistently scored in the top 10% of their respective institutional cohorts, and learnt to manage their expectations and engagement through autonomous meaningful engagement with the content matter, demonstrating the sprouting of self-efficacy beliefs. This classroom programme was highly resource intensive, and fundamentally impossible for one facilitator to manage with class sizes exceeding ten learners. A case could be made for increased facilitators per class, but effective CBLE management necessitated fragmenting the whole into smaller learning groups of ten to twelve learners each for every facilitator present.

However, recent events (the development of open-source LLMs and generative AI tools) have made it possible to replicate and concurrently deploy this epistemological/curricular model to a much larger learner base, tailored to each context, culture, or linguistic paradigm. All the

tools necessary for such an ambitious project are available, although disjointed as "tech products". It is a matter of adapting/repurposing them to facilitate learning and augment general human intelligence (especially before we unleash artificial intelligence upon ourselves) by fostering learner autonomy and self-efficacy beliefs. The development of this specialised "learning companion" is underway.

Steps toward hope

- Evaluate current educational paradigms to identify gaps between learning and education.

- Implement personalised teaching methods that cater to individual learning styles.

- Develop strategies to address socio-cultural and economic influences on education.

- Shift to a Curriculum for Innovation (CfI) that offers personalised, contextually relevant learning experiences.

- Encourage educators to act as facilitators of knowledge construction rather than focusing solely on content delivery and assessment.

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30. Belonging through compassion: Supporting hope through the design of a website for educational development and social justice

Vikki Hill and Liz Bunting

Abstract

This chapter advocates for a more compassionate approach to Higher Education as a pathway to achieving social justice. Central to this vision is the cultivation of belonging through relational learning communities that honour interconnectedness, shared humanity, and equitable power dynamics. Through a case study of a digital educational development platform, the authors demonstrate how compassionately designed, co-produced, dialogic, and person-centred resources can support more inclusive and humane pedagogies. They outline practical strategies for embedding an ecology of compassion within institutions and highlight the necessity of systemic, institutional commitment to challenge inequitable policies and practices in Higher Education.

Keywords: compassion; belonging; social justice; pedagogy; Higher Education; policy

Introduction

We are Liz Bunting and Vikki Hill, and we have been working in collaboration as educational developers since 2019 to foster a sense of belonging in Higher Education through compassionate pedagogies, policies, and practices (Bunting & Hill, 2021). We work alongside Higher Education colleagues to co-produce teaching and learning strategies and policies to support students to feel valued, respected, included, and that they matter (Strayhorn, 2019). In our praxis, we have been increasingly aware of the need for compassion for all of us working and learning in Higher Education and recognise that our interconnected experiences contribute to a wider ecology of hope, belonging, and social justice (Braidotti, 2022).
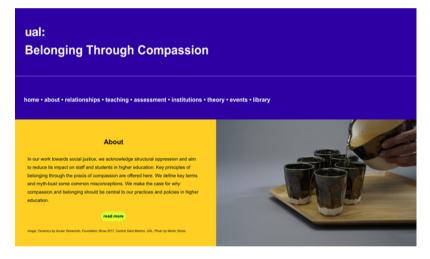
Fig. 30.1 Screen grab of website *Belonging Through Compassion,* https://belongingthroughcompassion.myblog.arts.ac.uk/ (Ceramics by Asuka-Yamamoto, Foundation Show 2017, Central Saint Martins, UAL. Photo by Martin Slivka; reproduced with permission, CC BY-NC 4.0).

We take compassion as our guiding principle—of reducing distress and harm—(Gilbert, 2017) and have developed a website[1] to bring together different contributions that have helped to guide, shape and challenge our collective thinking about compassionate education for belonging (Figure 30.1). We aim to foster institutional support and a commitment from policy makers and senior leadership to effect structural and cultural change, and to create racially just environments for students

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1   See *Belonging Through Compassion*, https://belongingthroughcompassion.myblog.arts.ac.uk/

and staff. In our case study, we present the development of our website as a catalyst for change and transformation through dialogic, polyvocal, and arts-based approaches.

Context of hope

In Autumn 2021, we secured funding from a University of the Arts London (UAL) seed-fund that focused on educational enhancement for social justice. Our research project aimed to meet several institutional enhancement goals. It drew upon and accelerated our previous academic enhancement work on fostering belonging through compassionate pedagogies (Hill, Bunting, & Arboine, 2020), responding to evidence of student un-belonging from a range of sources across UAL. Comments and experiences captured across a range of spaces—NSS/USS open comments, @UALTruths, Decolonising The Arts Curriculum Zine (Jethnani et al., 2018; Jethnani et al., 2020), and UAL Student Voices—all spoke to student feelings of isolation, loneliness, not "fitting in", being an outsider, and being stereotyped. The project furthermore supported UAL's institutional commitment to advancing the goals outlined in its anti-racist plan (UAL, 2021), while enhancing student wellbeing by developing more compassionate learning cultures. The project is informed by strong evidence of the role of belonging in student success (Strayhorn, 2019; Thomas, 2017) and the increasing use of the concept in addressing ethnicity awarding differentials that persist in Higher Education between white students and students of colour (NUS/UUK, 2019; UUK 2022. In our educational development work with staff and students, we witnessed a gap between the rhetoric of belonging and institutional realities (Thomas, 2019). This prompted further thinking about how we conceive of belonging through compassion within the whole institution.

Our ambition was to create an open-access digital resource that could be an interactive space to host a range of multi-media resources. We aimed to position race equity work as everyone's responsibility—academics and senior leaders—coming together as a collective to effect structural and cultural change. Our vision was to create racially just environments for students and staff by creating and curating content in collaboration with colleagues. Influenced by Mays Imad

(2021), we sought to impart hope and cultivate hopefulness for a more compassionate Higher Education sector as a political act against injustice. Not naive hope (Freire, 1994) but hope in the face of struggles amid the backdrop of increasingly challenging teaching environments and student circumstances. As Simone de Beauvoir writes (cited by Lorde 1988, p. 115), "It is in the recognition of the genuine conditions of our lives that we gain the strength to act and our motivation for change".

Imagining compassionate futures in higher education

The importance of compassion as a relational pedagogy of care in teaching and learning responds to an urgent demand for compassionate policies and practices (Barnacle & Dall'Alba, 2017; Noddings, 2005; Gilbert, 2017; Waddington, 2021). To help us imagine what compassionate education might look and feel like, here we offer our perspectives on compassion and how it connects to creating a sense of belonging for students and staff. Compassion has been defined in various ways across many disciplines from psychology and organisational studies to philosophy (Gilbert, 2017; Worline & Dutton, 2017; Nussbaum, 1996) and there is an agreement that it is "the noticing of social or physical distress to others and the commitment to reduce or prevent that distress" (Gilbert, 2017, p. 189). Compassion is a relational process; an action rather than an expression of related emotions such as kindness, pity, or empathy. Hooria Jazaieri (2018, p. 24) presents compassion as a complex entanglement of "an affective state, an intention and motivation", which can contribute to collaborative and cooperative behaviours.

Compassion recognises the trauma that frames educational experiences of staff and students (Thompson & Carello, 2021) (noticing), alleviates its effects (enacting), and becomes active in the prevention of harm (reducing). Preventing harm involves challenging conversations and disrupting the status quo. It requires an ongoing process of challenging normative power structures and inequitable systems that can be oppressive and damaging. We recognise that no singular action will accomplish this change, and our understanding of needs will be continuously evolving. We understand compassion to be both tender and fierce (Neff, 2021a). To achieve social justice we need

both aspects. As Kristin Neff states, "as we advocate for change, it's essential that fierceness and tenderness be balanced. If we're too tender without taking enough fierce action, we may become complacent. But if our fierceness is not tempered with tenderness, we may become hostile and aggressive, undermining compassion" (Neff, 2021b, para. 4).

Compassion needs to be embedded within the ecology of the institution to enable compassionate practices to flourish. Compassion cannot exist in a vacuum; it is a collective act and cyclic in nature. It must be received by and enacted upon by everyone within our educational communities (Hill et al., 2023). At the heart of compassionate pedagogies, policies and practices that nurture belonging is building loving relationships in our learning communities (Gravett & Winstone, 2020; Bunting et al., 2024). This calls for approaches that make space for our inter-connectedness, recognise our shared humanity, and redistribute power to enable everyone to be fully human and welcome our authentic selves (Othering & Belonging Institute, 2019).

Shaping our site to empower hope

As we began our journey to create a site, we held the principle of collaboration as central to its development. To learn together with and from our colleagues as a community, we employed collaborative strategies to promote the inclusion of diverse voices and perspectives, living and breathing our ethos of belonging. This included holding semi-structured interviews with nine colleagues across UAL with specialisms in educational development, digital learning, and multimedia resources, to garner learnings from their experiences (Figure 30.2). We would like to thank our colleagues for generously sharing their time and expertise with us, and without whom this work would have taken a very different direction: Dr Natasha Bonnelame, Dr Neil Currant, Katharine Dwyer, Jorge Freire, Gemma Riggs, Chris Rowell, Dr Duna Sabri, Dr Emily Salines, and Santanu Vasant.

Our conversations and practice sharing helped us to generate case studies that led to the development of core principles and values that permeated the design of our site. These were: dialogic and polyvocal, person-centred, and compassionately designed.

Fig. 30.2 Screen grab of interview notes on collaborative Miro board, https://miro.com/ (image by author, Vikki Hill, CC BY-NC 4.0).

Dialogic and polyvocal

We wanted to provide a diversity of voices as a critical pedagogic approach to decentre authority (Stommel, 2014) and support staff in examining and challenging dominant pedagogical beliefs and practices. This polyvocality is designed to prompt individual reflection about how belonging relates to their contexts, identify potential barriers and emerging issues, and guide ideas for changes to both individual and collective practices. In a study for her doctoral research, Vikki had demonstrated that the use of podcasts in an academic development context supported teaching staff to develop and apply compassionate pedagogies (Hill, 2022). We found that "podcasts provide a polyvocal dialogue, which continues beyond the podcast itself as listeners explore

the relationships and construct their own meaning for their teaching and learning practice" (Bunting & Hill 2021, p. 146). This led us to draw upon a variety of resources from a broad range of authors offering differing perspectives.

Fig. 30.3 Screen grab of podcast, "Belonging in Online Learning Environments", *Interrogating Spaces* (31 July 2020), https://interrogatingspaces.buzzsprout. com/683798/episodes/4795271-belonging-in-online-learning-environments

Person-centred

Supporting hope through educational development involves empowering personal agency and envisioning possibilities (McGowan & Felten, 2021). We aimed to maintain a balance between theoretical and practical resources to consider the needs of individuals who were accessing the site. We aimed for a holistic approach to create cultures of compassion, to empower mutual responsibility and to promote reflection at different levels of the institution, be that leadership teams, professional services or academics. Different roles might require different resources. For example, compassion might mean empowering students to have more choice and voice in their learning for an academic colleague, but for leadership colleagues, it may mean reducing assessment load or writing a compassionate policy. We wanted to invite individuals to enact compassion in a way that was authentic to them, to generate a diversity of approaches that offered a richness in attending to different needs. We supported this by showcasing compassionate pedagogies that colleagues were adopting both within and beyond the institution, drawing upon open-source publications and resources (Figure 30.4).

Fig. 30.4 Screen grab of Teaching page, *Belonging Through Compassion,* https://
belongingthroughcompassion.myblog.arts.ac.uk/teaching/

Compassionately designed

The tone and design of the text and image were important as they signal a welcoming digital space that creates a sense of belonging. We intentionally avoided formal academic language, preferring our own authentic, conversational voices to offer a sense of presence and connection.

Modelling compassionate approaches requires being affirmative of our own limits and boundaries of what we can do (Braidotti, 2022). We emphasise that nurturing belonging is not about doing more, but rather about doing things *differently.* The contributions on the site speak to making "small social justice transformations" (Tate, 2019) anchored in *how* we design learning experiences and environments. We encourage the practice of radical self-compassion and invite colleagues to respect what they need when using the resource. As educational developers, we are mindful of how our academic colleagues are experiencing workload time pressures and emotional and physical exhaustion as we navigate an increasingly complex and anxious world. We endeavoured to provide bite-sized content and designed the site navigation to be intuitive and easily accessible to reduce cognitive load (Sweller, 2011).

Designing ecologies of hope and compassion

We designed the site so that the content supported holistic cultures of compassion across institutions. We start with an about page where we define key principles of belonging through the praxis of compassion and

myth-bust some common misconceptions. As belonging is social and relational, relationality connects all the sections of the site. We position relationships as a place to unfold transformative paths by exploring the principles of trust, care, respect, and self-compassion.

The pages on teaching, assessment, and institutions offer a space for deeper reflection on overlapping practices across domains and disciplines to trace connections and construct new knowledges of compassion. Within the teaching page, we embed compassionate pedagogies into mainstream academic activity and curriculum design by curating examples from students and colleagues that offer practical guidance. As assessment is a powerful driver to create cultures of belonging within learning and teaching, we propose compassionate assessment as a way to address issues of social justice and consider the impact of assessment policies and practices in reducing harm. We offer guidance and consider how wider institutional policies, processes and systems can bring about positive change and how institutional leaders can create cultures of belonging and compassion by developing the infrastructure to nurture it. We recognise that colleagues have different needs and interests, so we interconnect theoretical perspectives across disciplines and boundaries and explore how compassionate pedagogies, Indigenous knowledges, trauma-informed practice, posthumanism, and pedagogies of care inform belonging.

Developing a more joyful and hopeful education

The site was launched in January 2023 and we have been using the platform in our respective roles as educational developers to start conversations both within our institutions and externally across the educational sector.

We use the resource in a variety of ways. We have found that when we share it in workshops and listening events we recommend or offer an introduction about a particular page (i.e., Relationships, Teaching, or Assessment). This encourages participants to find resources helpful to their own educational context and the challenges they and their colleagues are facing. For a more focused session, we identify a specific podcast, such as *Compassionate Feedback* and accompanying prompt

question sheet,[2] and the whole session is designed around this. We create space for practice sharing—whether this is individual use of a platform like Padlet, or through discussion with a team, school, or division. By familiarising colleagues with the website, they can access it for drop-ins when needed or explore the themes in more depth when time allows. The website is used for academic enhancement by individuals, teams and leadership to add concrete and practical activities to action plans, assessment design and curriculum planning.

We have found it nourishing to be able to share and gather feedback from colleagues so that we can understand how our work can have purpose. At UAL, the work on the site "has ignited a critical discourse around the purpose and design of assessment that has had a direct impact in advancing inclusive fair assessment" (Head of Assessment and Quality at UAL, project feedback). Through re-thinking normative practices and assumptions, colleagues have designed policies and guidance to nurture safety for students and staff. Externally, we have run workshops and Teaching and Learning Away Days and presented at conferences to urgently respond to times of crisis.

We return to our utopian vision of socially just, compassionate education. Whilst a future of compassionate Higher Education is slow and may never be fully achievable, we also do not believe that it is binary or requires perfection. We draw on Rosi Braidotti's (2019, p. 136) definitions of affirmative ethics as the "pursuit of affirmative values and relations" as we collaboratively enact compassion and hope of transformation. We are reminded by Eduardo Galeano that the purpose of utopia is to keep on walking.

Steps toward hope

- Advocate for a compassionate Higher Education system to create belonging and achieve social justice.

- Emphasise the importance of an institutional approach to support initiatives that help embed ecologies of compassion and foster equitable pedagogies, policies, and practices.

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2   See "Assessment: Compassionate feedback prompts", *Belonging through Compassion*, https://belongingthroughcompassion.myblog.arts.ac.uk/assessment/

- Harness relational pedagogy and actively foster relationships in learning communities to develop inter-connectedness, recognise shared humanity, and redistribute power.

- Support staff development with the co-production of person-centred, dialogic, and polyvocal resources that embody compassionate design.

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31. Humanising student and instructor experiences to nurture relationships and improve engagement

Umme Mansoory

Abstract

This chapter explores the impact of integrating authentic mental health check-ins into classroom practice as a means of humanising the learning environment. By openly sharing personal emotional states at the start of sessions, the instructor challenged traditional power dynamics and helped normalise the everyday struggles experienced by both educators and students. Initially met with surprise, this approach fostered trust and encouraged students to adopt similar language to advocate for their needs. The chapter argues that such candour not only deepens student–instructor relationships but also enhances student engagement, wellbeing, and academic performance through the creation of a more compassionate and responsive learning space.

Keywords: authenticity; positive learning environment; engagement; post-secondary institution; students

I remember my first semester of university so clearly. I was a bright-eyed, eager student ready to tackle the world and its many problems. I looked up at my instructors thinking they were the keepers of education—ever so knowledgeable and wise. I was also taught to believe they were all accomplished individuals, experts in their fields, and leading wonderfully extravagant lives. One spring morning of 2012, I was in my instructor's office asking questions about my assignments when she handed her credit card to her teaching assistant and told him to buy coffees for her other teaching and research assistants. It was a glamorous gesture that I was in awe of. I mistakenly believed that university professors make a lot of money, and that they all have PhDs, engage in research, and travel the world in pursuit of knowledge. I saw my instructors through rose-coloured glasses.

Fast forward thirteen years and I am now an instructor at a university. I smile back at my naïve impression of what university instructors' lives were really like. I see the struggles my colleagues and fellow faculty members face. I see the tears behind delayed research projects, and the difficulty of balancing career and family and trying to make financial ends meet. University instructors, just like everyone else, lead wonderfully complicated and messy lives. I started the previous academic year trying to create a persona of myself that would earn the respect and admiration of my students. I wanted my students to think I had my life together and career in order, and therefore I was qualified to teach my subject and command respect in the classroom. It worked for the first semester, I think. But something had changed by the winter semester.

I was struggling with my mental health. I had taken a sharp turn downhill on a path of burnout. I was not well and was in need of support. But I had my class to teach. And so, I showed up to every lecture with a brave face and powered through three-hour classes even though I felt as though my life was falling apart. By the third week of classes, I could not do it anymore. I could not keep up with the act. It became harder for me to mask my mental health challenges.

I showed up to class one day and started the class with a check-in on how I was feeling. I told the students, "I am not well. I have ADHD, have started a new medication which has increased my anxiety, and I do not sleep." The looks on my students' faces were utter shock. I

started to do this every class. I would begin by telling the class how I felt in that precise moment. Most days I was burnt out, overwhelmed, anxious, and exhausted. It was my desire to be completely truthful with my students. I began to see a shift in their reactions. Many began to echo similar feelings and experiences. Some students shared very hard realities of their lives. Some students simply nodded in agreement. The most beautiful thing I began witnessing was students adopting the language I used to describe my mental health and communicate it back to me. One student emailed me to say she knew we had an assignment due, but she was "burnt out" and could not complete it on time. She explained how she had overcommitted to several responsibilities such as projects, work, and school-related activities, and that she had never experienced this kind of burnout before. Because of her honesty, I granted her an extension. Another student emailed me to say she had "crippling anxiety" about presenting her project to the entire class and asked if I would consider accepting the assignment presented solely to me. I allowed it. Another student asked me if she could leave class half-way through because she was not feeling well and wanted to prioritise rest. Another student candidly shared his spouse's health concerns and his worries with me after I disclosed that I was coming to class directly after picking my husband up from surgery. Another student told me he had no idea that instructors also struggled with the same things he experienced. The normalisation of the challenges we all experience in our lives became an important part of my teaching philosophy. If I could show students that human experience is a natural part of all our lives, then maybe I could teach my students a crucial lesson on compassion and empathy.

What I did not expect to see was the stark increase in engagement—not only with me and the course material, but the comradery I was witnessing in class. In a matter of two weeks, I began to see how students focused more during class after our check-in. They raised their hands more frequently, laughed at my jokes, asked questions, and overall participated far more than my previous semester's class had. I also noticed that students were taking the time to get to know each other on a personal level. Instead of just being classmates, they began talking to each other about what was going on in their lives. One student would bring cookies and candy to share with her peers, saying "maybe this

will make you feel better". The atmosphere in class felt collegial and inviting. It was unlike anything I had ever experienced in the classroom.

It got me thinking about authenticity in education and leadership. Could a simple check-in really have the power to improve engagement and learning? Jim Knight (2022, p. 78) states that "good questions give power to the person who is asked the question" and they "signal that *I think you have something worth saying, and I want to hear your opinion*". I believe the mere question of "how are you doing in this moment today?" empowered my students to not only reflect on their current state, but also feel that I cared enough to know about it and support them. I distinctively remember the evening class of March 15, 2023. I asked my students how they were doing and many of them were not well. It was the time of the semester when projects, papers, exams, and labs all come crushing down at once. We made it through half of the class, and I could read the atmosphere in the room. My students were not thriving that day. I dismissed the class an hour-and-a-half earlier. I received many thanks from students who were grateful for the recognition that they needed a break. I do not believe I did anything special. All I did was validate how they were feeling and provided a simple accommodation to support them.

Traditionally speaking, university classrooms are thought of as large campuses, perhaps concrete walls, and cold, heartless buildings. At least, that was my understanding and experience of my undergraduate studies. I was one of four hundred students in large lectures. My instructor did not know my name. I was fortunate if my teaching assistant knew my name. I now work at a mid-sized university where class sizes average forty students. It takes some time, but I do eventually learn every student's name. This helps in creating a space where relationships can be nurtured and students can feel like a person and not just a student number.

Shayna Rusticus and colleagues (2022, p. 161) state that the post-secondary learning environment "comprises the psychological, social, cultural, and physical setting in which learning occurs and in which experiences and expectations are co-created among its participants". They assert that students and educators "engage in this environment and the learning process as they navigate through their personal motivations and emotions and various interpersonal interactions" (Rusticus et al.,

2022, p. 161). This resonates with me because of the emphasis on co-creating the classroom environment, which is highly shaped by the personal experiences we bring to the space. In that regard, student–teacher and student–peer interpersonal interactions become important when we think about fostering a positive learning environment.

A positive learning environment is a setting in which students and educators "experience a safe, healthy, [and] caring environment which fosters respect and high expectations, maximizes potential, and motivates interest and enthusiasm" (Law Insider, n.d.). What is interesting to note is that positive learning environments "have been correlated with outcomes such as increased satisfaction and motivation, higher academic performance, [and] emotional well-being" (Rusticus et al., 2022, p. 162). I experienced this first-hand. The safe space our class had co-created resulted in better engagement from students in class and an overall higher final grade average. By nurturing a safe and authentic learning environment, I noted that students demonstrated a commitment to the class and to their learning experience.

Instructors, by virtue of being teachers and guides, are the leaders of a classroom. *Authenticity* is a term that is used frequently in discussions about leadership. I had never made the connection between authentic leadership and the classroom. Patrick Duignan (2004) beautifully combines these concepts. He states:

> Authentic education and learning, like authentic leadership, is a moral activity because it engages students in a deeper understanding of the nature and purpose of their lives and in determining how they can best contribute to the greater good of the community and society. Authentic learning is not just about taking new knowledge and skills for oneself but is more about giving of one's unique humanity to others and to the community. It involves making a difference in the lives of all those we touch (Duignan, 2004, p. 2).

What I love about this is the idea of giving one's unique humanity to make a difference in the lives of those we touch. I had not set out to increase class engagement and overall final grade average. All I wanted to do was touch the lives of my students; to show them the human side of me and validate the human side of them. Ignacio Lopez (2017, p. 1) argues that "creating successful and equitable learning environments for our students means committing to the fact that every learner has

a compelling life story worth getting to know". What is even more important is that "our role as teachers is to help students uncover, for themselves, how personal identities and learning habits developed outside of school might inform their success in the classroom" (Lopez, 2017, p. 1).

I witnessed this myself, specifically with the student who disclosed her burnout. Because she was equipped, from our class check-ins, with the language she needed to label her emotional state, she was able to identify the various overcommitments she had. I believe I made our class a safe space to discuss our emotional state without a fear of judgement and, as a result, she was able to request an extension on her assignment truthfully. I valued her honesty and commitment to her studies. I would rather students take the time they need to complete work with excellence and truly engage with the course material than to submit work that is not thoughtful but submitted by the deadline. Or, the student who requested to present only in front of me due to her public speaking anxiety: she presented amazingly! I believe I was able to assess her work in an equitable manner, which validated her mental health and did not gaslight or shame her for her anxiety. Ultimately, I value the process of learning more than I do the work produced.

The challenge, though, comes when educators experience empathic burnout. I have worked in several helping roles in education and can attest to this truth. Philips (2020, pp. 89–90) states that "the risk of emotional burnout through 'feeling' pupils' pain, may mean that teachers are more vulnerable to emotional fatigue, if they were more empathic than average". Amy Philips (2020, p. 93) further suggests that "considering these threats to teacher wellbeing, 'insulation' against the costs of high empathy, could be introduced to reduce risks". *Insulating* educators against empathetic burnout could include specific training, good supervision, and intervention throughout an educator's career (Philips, 2020, p. 93). Personally, understanding my boundaries has helped me in reducing my emotional fatigue. I would be interested to learn more about how specific safeguards could support educators in balancing the need for empathy in the classroom and self-preservation.

I did not know what to expect when I took the risk of being vulnerable in front of my students and talking about my mental health. Looking back, I am proud of the environment of candour that we co-

created. Not only did it serve as a truthful space where we could feel safe in being our authentic selves, but it also engaged my students with the course material, learning, and one another. Although I am going into the next semester in a better mental health state than I was six months ago, I will carry this practice with me as part of my teaching philosophy. I may be feeling better, but I know there will be days when I will be exhausted or days when I feel low, and it is important for me to normalise those experiences for my students. More important, though, will be normalising *their* experiences and communicating to them that I believe what they are going through is valid and I am here to support them.

Steps toward hope

- Consider starting classes with an authentic check-in to normalise the recognition of the life experiences of both instructors and students.

- In the check-in, also share your personal feelings, whether you feel great or are experiencing challenges like anxiety, sickness, sadness, or exhaustion.

- Encourage students to adopt this approach and communicate their own needs for support.

- Generally, foster an environment of candour to humanise experiences and transform relationships between instructors and students.

- Observe the impact: usually students become more engaged and perform better in a candid, supportive environment.

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32. The ten wellness spheres to support student and staff health and wellbeing in a modern, post-1992 university in, through, and outside of the study lifecycle

Michelle Morgan

Abstract

This case study explores the pivotal role of wellness in achieving health, wellbeing, and success in life. Wellness is broadly understood as being in good physical and mental health, but its relationship with other factors such as poverty adds layers of complexity. Poverty, often defined by a lack of finances, directly impacts health, yet the interplay between wellness and poverty extends beyond financial constraints. The study presents the wellness spheres, providing clear definitions for each to enhance student wellbeing and success. It underscores the importance of supporting wellness throughout the study lifecycle, encompassing academic and non-academic contexts. By reimagining education through this lens, the case study aims to foster hope and promote a holistic approach to wellbeing.

Keywords: wellness; lifecycle; community; poverty; resources

Introduction

We know that effectively supporting our students make the transition to university-level study is critical in laying the foundation for success, whether at undergraduate, postgraduate taught, or postgraduate research level (Morgan, 2011; 2013; 2021; Morgan & Direito, 2016). Providing a solid foundation creates a good launchpad for their ongoing study, and just as we support students, we need to support staff. Aligned with this is the increasing recognition of the importance of the mental health and wellbeing of students and staff in Higher Education. In recent years, this has been exacerbated by poverty due to the COVID-19 pandemic and cost of living crises between 2020 and 2024. Poverty is defined as when "a person's resources are not sufficient to meet their minimum needs" (Goulden & D'Arcy, 2014).

Through my work as a University Mental Health Charter (UMHC) Assessor, I started looking at my transitions model, which articulates the different stages through the study journey that I created eighteen years ago in more detail, through the lens of wellness and poverty. This story of hope brings together wellness, transitions, and recognition of the impact of different environments on students and staff in Higher Education. It provides a model of support to help create wellness awareness amongst students, staff and graduates to enable them to maximise their potential and contribute to society. Through the university as a collective and the individual embracing the ten wellness spheres, we can help create a multicultural community of equality, inclusion and diversity, respectfulness, and kindness.

This story will:

- Explain what wellness spheres are and provide a definition for each of the wellness spheres adopted in this model.

- Provide a rationale for why the model has been developed to support all transitions in, through and outside of the study lifecycle.

- Provide a definition of poverty and the resources needed to effectively engage in wellness.

What are the ten wellness spheres?

Wellness spheres (also known as dimensions) are an established concept and are used in business, industry, health, and education. They are designed to improve the wellbeing of the individual and society. The number of spheres can range from five to ten. The common spheres incorporated into most models include emotional, environmental, financial, and physical. They can also include spiritual and intellectual. In creating this model, I used my student experience transitions model, which I will talk about later, along with my extensive research from pre-entry academic surveys to identify the key areas I saw students and staff engage in where wellness could be affected. Table 32.1 lists each sphere and provides a definition.

Type of wellness	What is it?
Community and networks	Community wellbeing is being part of and contributing to a healthy, safe, and inspiring environment where individuals respect themselves and interact respectfully with people in and outside of the university, thus enabling everyone to flourish and fulfil their potential.
Cultural and spiritual	Cultural wellness is about respecting and appreciating differences between people with different backgrounds, lifestyles, genders, ethnicities, abilities, and ages, understanding the university environment and community, and building positive cultural relationships.
Digital	Digital wellness is about understanding the impact of technology and digital services on one's mental, physical, and emotional health, understanding how to stay safe and well using it, and how to find a healthy balance.
Emotional	Emotional wellness is about being aware of and accepting of the wide range of feelings one experiences, the ability to cope with stress in a healthy way, managing feelings effectively, the capability to adjust to change, and the ability to enjoy life.

Type of wellness	What is it?
Environmental	Environmental wellness is about having respect for and an awareness of our surroundings, caring for our environment, being aware of risks in various settings and recognising the need to keep a healthy personal environment.
Financial	Financial wellness is about learning how to manage money and establishing a personal budget, setting realistic goals and living within your means, not getting into credit card debt and about thinking long term and saving for the future.
Physical	Physical wellness is about being active, eating well and having balanced nutrition, feeling safe and secure, and getting adequate sleep.
Residential	Residential wellness is about keeping one's living space clean and tidy, safe and secure. It also includes achieving a healthy study/life balance, creating an effective study/workspace and creating a living environment free from anti-social behaviour.
Social	Social wellness is about establishing meaningful and healthy relationships, communicating effectively with others, and creating and being a part of a support system, creating networks with classmates, academics, and employers (current and future).
Study and career	Study and career wellness is about setting challenging and healthy academic and career goals, seeking resources to help make decisions and succeed, continuously striving to learn and improve skills, being open-minded to new life experiences and career paths, using your voice to improve your experience and creating a positive and healthy study and life balance.

Table 32.1 Ten wellness spheres.

The rationale for the ten wellness spheres in, through, and outside of the study lifecycle

Using my knowledge and experience gained through my various roles in my Higher Education career, which have ranged from administrator, to lecturer, to learning, teaching, and student experience coordinator, and to researcher, I created my student experience transitions model to provide an integrated whole university framework for universities to identify and coordinate activities across the study journey for students and staff (see Figure 32.1).

I created the model in the early 2000s, at a time when it was common for universities to focus only on "inducting" new students in the first couple of weeks of the course. I recognised that every level of study has different rules of engagement and different pressure points impacting on mental health and this needed to be articulated to all those participating in Higher Education, whether a student or member of staff.

The model comprises key transition stages through the study journey: first contact and admissions; pre-arrival; arrival and orientation; induction to study; reorientation and reinduction; and outduction). It also entails core interlinking themes (curriculum and assessment, pedagogy, support, finance and employment); and activities to inform and support the student experience (support of learning and teaching processes, staff training, student evaluation and feedback, and academic student support). The stages, themes and activities contribute to raising and managing student aspirations and expectations, and social and academic integration and belonging. All are key in enabling students to succeed.

All students need to progress through these six stages regardless of the level of study they enter. This is particularly important for students entering directly into the second or final year of a first degree. Throughout each transition stage, information, advice and guidance should be provided in a targeted and timely manner in order to not overload students and create stress and anxiety.
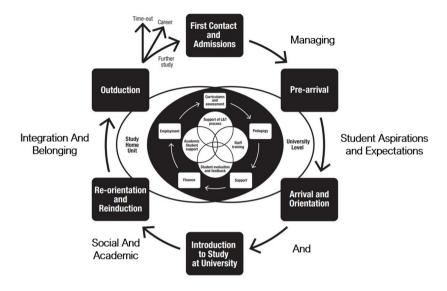
Fig. 32.1 Student experience transitions model (image by author; from Morgan, 2013, p. 61).

The key stages are:

First contact and admissions

This is where the management of applicant aspirations and expectations of university starts with the provision of clear and honest information.

Pre-arrival

This is the stage when new students get ready to come to university, and institutions should have a basic understanding of the backgrounds and support requirements of their new students.

Arrival and course orientation

Arrival and course orientation is the period when students arrive on campus, start to navigate their way around an institution, and settle into university life (up to three weeks). During the course orientation, students are introduced to their course with an 'Induction to study'

starting soon afterwards (see next stage).

Induction to study

The induction to study stage is where students start to lay the foundations for successful study in their course by equipping themselves with the relevant study and research skills for the level of study they have entered. This stage takes place over the first term/semester, enabling students to undertake an "academic" cycle, so they understand what is required of them and how the learning processes work.

Reorientation and reinduction

Reorientation for returners covers information on what is academically expected of them in the coming year, where they can reflect on the skills they acquired the year before, and identify what they need to build on and develop in order to succeed in their new level of study. Reinduction takes place over a longer period and introduces returning students to new skills to help them actively engage in the learning and assessment processes.

Outduction

Just as students are inducted into study when they enter Higher Education, they also need advice and support on how to make the transition out of it so they can effectively adapt to life post study. This activity should start at the end of the penultimate year of study but proactively be undertaken in the final year.

Typical pressure points

Importantly, the key stages also have typical pressure points that can impact on the confidence and wellbeing of students (Morgan, 2021). These cut across the ten wellness spheres.

Pre-arrival

- Unsure what to expect at this level of study
- Knowing what questions to ask

- Worrying about not fitting in
- Finding accommodation and cost issues
- Sorting out financial issues such as loans and fees
- Undertaking pre-enrolment

Arrival and orientation

- Learning how to study in HE at a specific level
- Learning how to live with strangers
- Coping with independence
- Transition issues such as personal, finance, and balancing workloads
- "Wobble week"; when students start to question whether this level of study is right for them
- First assessment and formal feedback
- Placement activity for courses
- Coming back after the December break
- Exams and results
- Dealing with illness or family illness bereavement (non or COVID-19 related)

Induction and reinduction to study

- Reduction in structured learning and scaffolding
- Increase in independent learning and group assessment
- Mid-term blues especially for level five as it is a long year
- End of year exhaustion
- Coping with workload and assessment that "counts"
- University life being different to expectations
- Relationships with fellow students and staff
- Anxiety about alternative assessments and the impact on marks

- Impact on placement availability
- Feeling of the course being poor value for money
- Balancing work and study

Preparing to leave—completion or withdrawal

- Worried about results
- Worried about sense of failure if didn't get the result expected or withdrew early
- Sense of loss
- Issues of moving from a structured, safe place to the unknown
- Loss of direction
- Challenges with the employment market
- Family expectations that a university degree will lead to improved chances
- Uncertainty about how employers will view their degree

Reducing poverty across the study lifecycle and wellness spheres

Having identified the wellness spheres across the study lifecycle, it is essential to identify the barriers in accessing them. When we discuss "poverty" in Higher Education, financial poverty is often the focus together with its impact on other areas such as accommodation, food and social activities. As Abraham Maslow argues, these are fundamental physiological and safety needs (Maslow, 1943).

However, "poverty" can be experienced in many more areas that contribute to one's health and wellbeing. Returning to the definition of poverty from the Joseph Rowntree Trust, cited at the outset of this chapter—poverty is when "a person's resources are not sufficient to meet their minimum needs" (Goulden & D'Arcy, 2014) —we find that there are many different definitions of what constitutes a "resource".

When creating the wellness model, I used Ed Foster's aspects of the engagement model (see Figure 32.2) (Foster, 2023). He argues

that for students and staff to effectively engage in the study lifecycle, the resources they need are: knowledge and understanding; skills and abilities; motivation and self-belief, and personal capacity. These are all affected by peer influences. The aim of university is to equip learners with these resources whilst being mindful of the different resources with which they may enter.

Knowledge and understanding   Skills and abilities

Peer influence

Motivation and self belief   Personal capacity
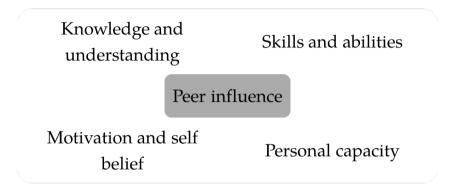
Fig. 32.2 Aspects of engagement (diagram by author, based on terms by Ed Foster, 2023).

For an individual to achieve all-round mental health and wellbeing, it is important for individuals to develop these resources across the wellness spheres in, through and outside of their university study.

Poverty within these spheres can occur for a range of reasons including not having the resources highlighted above due to background and life experiences, which are important for individuals to navigate the wellness spheres successfully. Additionally, poverty can occur due to not having easy access to information, guidance and support, and not knowing what to expect at university.

Providing quick and easy access to information via a one stop site to build resources

In universities, we produce a lot of useful information, support and advice. However, as there is so much, it can often feel siloed and overwhelming and thus hard to access. So, a core aim at my university after developing the ten spheres of wellness was to use the model to

enable students and staff to access and engage with the key information, advice, and support available in one place by creating a practical and interactive one-stop-shop navigation page for the wellness spheres. It had to be accessible via different sources such as a laptop, notebook or mobile, and for those with learning differences.

Working with students and colleagues from across the institution (University of East London), we collated the key information, advice and support for each wellness sphere from which all information and advice could be accessed. Two sites were created, one for students which contained information that staff could also access when providing student support, and another for staff which brought together employment related information.

The wellness landing site contains a brief explanation of the importance of the ten wellness spheres, and an explanation of how to navigate the dedicated pages through clicking on each wellness sphere link. When a specific link is clicked on, the user is taken to a dedicated page for that wellness sphere.

For each wellness sphere, the following information is provided:

- A brief written definition of the wellness sphere and why it is important.

- For the student version, a one-minute video by a student explaining the importance of the wellness sphere to the student along with subtitles.

- Top tips on how to achieve the specific wellness.

- All the links to the relevant university and external sites.

The wellness spheres are designed to be engaging and accessible, and provide the individual with knowledge and understanding, skills, and abilities, motivation and self-belief, personal capacity and peer influence across all the spheres.

This model was part of our University Mental Health Charter submission, awarded in late 2022 by Students Minds and the spheres have also been mapped to the UMHC Themes. This wellness model is incorporated into all our pre-arrival and course welcome university events for new students, and reorientation and outduction activities for returners, to remind students of what they need to consider in the

upcoming year in order to stay well, fit and healthy. Since its introduction, the student and staff versions have been heavily utilised by students and staff. Ongoing feedback via our Health Gain and Wellness Committee is helping refine and evolve these resources.

Conclusion

If we can explain clearly what wellness is and what the benefits are, and provide accessible information, it is easier to encourage students and colleagues to engage with it. By improving the wellness of our university community we can create a more humane learning environment, equip students and staff with desirable employability resources and support their health and wellbeing.

Steps towards hope

- Highlight the importance of supporting wellness throughout the study lifecycle, including in, through, and outside of academic contexts.

- Consider the "wellness spheres" to clarify the concept of wellness in terms of physical and mental health.

- Link understanding about wellness to other issues and difficulties experienced by students to grasp broader impacts on study and provide the necessary resources to engage in wellness.

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33. Unlocking a new generation of leaders: How universities can support students' inner development goals

Nayiri Keshishi

Abstract

This chapter explores how universities can advance the Inner Development Goals (IDGs) to support the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda. Originating as a response to the SDGs' call for inner human development, the IDG framework outlines five dimensions and twenty-three core capabilities—including self-awareness, intercultural competence, and creativity—vital for fostering human flourishing and enabling systemic change. As key drivers of societal transformation, universities have a unique opportunity to cultivate these skills through integrative curricula, inclusive learning environments, service-learning, global engagement, and wellbeing initiatives. By embedding the IDGs into Higher Education, institutions can empower students to become ethical, reflective, and action-oriented leaders equipped to create lasting social impact.

Keywords: development; framework; qualities; skills; society; sustainability

Introduction

In today's rapidly changing global landscape, the need for effective leadership has become vital. Leaders must possess not only technical expertise but also a diverse set of essential skills and capabilities, including self-awareness, critical thinking, empathy, communication, intercultural competence, and creativity (Jordan, 2021). Recognising the significance of these qualities, universities play a vital role in supporting students' holistic development. One framework that aligns seamlessly with this objective is the Inner Development Goals (IDGs) framework.

Universities are recognised as key stakeholders in driving societal transformation and are tasked with contributing to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda (Zhou et al., 2020 Kioupi & Voulvoulis, 2020; Serafini et al., 2022). The United Nations (UN) itself has emphasised the importance of equipping all learners with the knowledge and skills necessary for sustainable development (Crespo et al., 2017). However, this extends beyond mere conceptual understanding to encompass the capacities required for individuals to become catalysts for systemic change.

The IDG framework reflects the values, attitudes, and behaviours necessary for creating a positive impact (Bartlett et al., 2020). It represents a comprehensive set of skills and attributes that are essential for individuals and organisations to effectively address the complex societal challenges outlined in the UN Agenda 2030 and the seventeen SDGs. The framework provides a valuable starting point for assessing both personal and collective proficiencies, as well as how institutions can facilitate the necessary personal growth for sustainable development.

By prioritising the development of these skills and qualities, universities can foster personal and professional growth in students, nurturing future leaders who actively engage with the SDGs. This approach will not only benefit individuals but also contribute to the advancement of communities and society as a whole, leading to positive social impact (Stålne & Greca, 2022).

This chapter aims to explore how universities can effectively utilise the IDG framework to support a new generation of leaders, promoting a more hopeful and humane approach to education.

Understanding the Inner Development Goals framework

This initiative stems from the recognition of a flaw in our collective actions to establish a sustainable global society. Whilst we have extensive knowledge about the conditions, causes, and potential solutions to issues such as climate change, poverty, and public health, progress towards the United Nations' Agenda 2030 goals has been slow (Jordan, 2021). Arguably, there has been a lack of focus on fostering the necessary abilities, qualities, and skills among individuals, groups, and organisations that are pivotal in realising these visions.

When confronting complex tasks, such as the SDGs, conventional education and learning alone are insufficient. A wide range of cognitive, emotional, and other qualities are required, as demonstrated in various research fields, such as adult learning, development, and strategic leadership (Stålne & Greca, 2022).

In essence, the IDGs aim to identify, promote, and support the growth of relevant abilities, skills, and qualities for inner development. By providing a comprehensible framework that describes these skills and qualities, the project seeks to mobilise broader engagement and encourage relevant target groups (Jordan, 2021). This aims to significantly increase their investments in developing these vital attributes, thereby enhancing their capacity to address global challenges.

The initial phase of the framework, conducted in 2020–21, determined the skills necessary to address the contemporary challenges we face. It involved two surveys, in which over 1,000 individuals participated. The surveys aimed to identify the skills needed for sustainability, inner development, and leadership, which were common interests among all participants. Considerable attention was paid to ensuring a broad representation of participants across diverse sectors, including politics, NGOs, businesses, researchers, and individuals (Jordan, 2021).

Following the surveys, a co-creative process led by Jordan (2021) was initiated to categorise the twenty-three skills and qualities identified. This process involved the collaboration of prominent institutions, organisations, and individuals such as IKEA, Spotify, the EU Erasmus+ programme, and academics from Harvard. Together, they grouped the skills into five dimensions, synthesising the collective wisdom and expertise of participants. The current IDG framework is set out in Table 33.1.

Being—Relationship to Self	Thinking—Cognitive Skills	Relating—Caring for Others and the World	Collaborating—Social Skills	Acting—Enabling Change
Inner Compass	Critical Thinking	Appreciation	Communication Skills	Courage
Integrity and Authenticity	Complexity Awareness	Connectedness	Co-creation Skills	Creativity
Openness and Learning Mindset	Perspective Skills	Humility	Inclusive Mindset and Intercultural Competence	Optimism
Self-awareness	Sense-making	Empathy and Compassion	Trust	Perseverance
Presence	Long-term Orientation and Visioning		Mobilisation Skills	

Table 33.1 The IDG framework (Inner Development Goals, 2023)

The skills and qualities mentioned in Table 33.1 have undergone multiple revisions in collaboration with practitioners and researchers to ensure their accuracy. However, the more detailed descriptions, presented below in Table 33.2, are the author's own interpretations and have not undergone the same level of scrutiny (Jordan, 2021). It is also recognised that these individual skills and qualities often overlap and rely on one another. Understanding the interconnections between them is an essential task for research and theory development. Therefore, they should be considered a work-in-progress, serving as a starting point for further reflection, revision, and refinement, enabling individuals with different theoretical preferences to employ them as a pedagogical tool (Stålne & Greca, 2022).

Being—Relationship to Self	Thinking—Cognitive Skills	Relating—Caring for Others and the World	Collaborating—Social Skills	Acting—Enabling Change
Cultivating our inner life and developing and deepening our relationship to our thoughts, feelings and body help us be present, intentional, and non-reactive when we face complexity.	Developing our cognitive skills by taking different perspectives, evaluating information, and making sense of the world as an interconnected whole is essential for wise decision-making.	Appreciating, caring for, and feeling connected to others, such as neighbours, future generations, or the biosphere, helps us create more just and sustainable systems and societies for everyone.	To make progress on shared concerns, we need to develop our abilities to include, hold space, and communicate with stakeholders with different values, skills, and competencies.	Qualities such as courage and optimism help us acquire true agency, break old patterns, generate original ideas, and act with persistence in uncertain times.
Inner Compass Having a deeply felt sense of responsibility and commitment to values and purposes relating to the good of the whole. *Links to: Connectedness, Long-term Orientation and Visioning, and Perseverance.*	**Critical Thinking** Skills in critically reviewing the validity of views, evidence, and plans. *Links to: Perspective Skills*	**Appreciation** Relating to others and to the world with a basic sense of appreciation, gratitude, and joy. *Links to: Humility, Openness, Learning Mindset, Presence, and Mobilisation Skills.*	**Communication Skills** Ability to really listen to others, to foster genuine dialogue, to advocate own views skilfully, to manage conflicts constructively, and to adapt communication to diverse groups. *Links to: Presence, Humility, Perspective Awareness, Openness and Learning Mindset, and Inclusive Mindset and Intercultural Competence.*	**Courage** Ability to stand up for values, make decisions, take decisive action, and, if need be, challenge and disrupt existing structures and views.

Integrity and Authenticity	Complexity Awareness	Connectedness	Co-creation Skills	Creativity
A commitment and ability to act with sincerity, honesty, and integrity. *Links to: Self-awareness*	Understanding of and skills in working with complex and systemic conditions and causalities. *Links to: Critical Thinking, Sense-making, and Perspective Skills.*	Having a keen sense of being connected with and/or being a part of a larger whole, such as a community, humanity or global ecosystem. *Links to: Sense-making, Complexity Awareness, Inner Compass, Appreciation, Empathy and Compassion, Humility, and Inclusive Mindset.*	Skills and motivation to build, develop and facilitate collaborative relationships with diverse stakeholders, characterised by psychological safety and genuine co-creation. *Links to: Trust, Communication Skills, Inclusive Mindset and Intercultural Competence, Mobilisation Skills, Openness and Learning Mindset, and Perspective Skills.*	Ability to generate and develop original ideas, innovate and being willing to disrupt conventional patterns. *Links to: Openness and Learning Mindset, Perspective Skills, and Co-creation Skills.*

Openness and Learning Mindset	Perspective Skills	Humility	Inclusive Mindset and Intercultural Competence	Optimism
Having a basic mindset of curiosity and a willingness to be vulnerable and embrace change and grow. *Links to: Critical Thinking, Complexity Awareness, Perspective Skills, Humility, Creativity, and Communication Skills.*	Skills in seeking, understanding and actively making use of insights from contrasting perspectives. *Links to: Openness and Learning Mindset, Sense-making, Complexity Awareness, Critical Thinking, and Inclusive Mindset and Intercultural Competence.*	Being able to act in accordance with the needs of the situation without concern for one's own importance. *Links to: Openness and Learning mindset, Self-awareness, Connectedness, Empathy and Compassion, Presence, and Inclusive Mindset and Intercultural Competence.*	Willingness and competence to embrace diversity and include people and collectives with different views and backgrounds. *Links to: Communication Skills, Connectedness, Co-creation Skills, Perspective Skills, and Humility.*	Ability to sustain and communicate a sense of hope, positive attitude and confidence in the possibility of meaningful change. *Links to: Appreciation*

Self-aware-ness	Sense-making	Empathy and Compassion	Trust	Perseverance
Ability to be in reflective contact with own thoughts, feelings, and desires; having a realistic self-image and ability to regulate oneself. *Links to: Presence, Humility, Integrity and Authenticity, Openness, and Learning Mindset.*	Skills in seeing patterns, structuring the unknown and being able to consciously create stories. *Links to: Critical Thinking, Complexity Awareness, and Perspective Skills.*	Ability to relate to others, oneself, and nature with kindness, empathy, and compassion and address related suffering. *Links to: Appreciation and Connectedness.*	Ability to show trust and to create and maintain trusting relationships. *Links to: Integrity and Authenticity, Communication Skills, and Co-creation Skills.*	Ability to sustain engagement and remain determined and patient even when efforts take a long time to bear fruit. *Links to: Inner Compass and Long-term Orientation and Visioning.*

Presence	Long-term Orientation and Visioning		Mobilisation Skills	
Ability to be in the here and now, without judgement and in a state of open-ended presence. *Links to: Humility, Self-awareness, Openness, and Learning Mindset.*	Long-term orientation and ability to formulate and sustain commitment to visions relating to the larger context. *Links to: Critical Thinking, Complexity Awareness, Perspective Skills, Perseverance Humility, Creativity, and Communication Skills.*		Skills in inspiring and mobilising others to engage in shared purposes. *Links to: Communication Skills, Co-creation Skills, Trust, Inclusive Mindset, and Intercultural Competence.*	

Table 33.2 Detailed descriptions of the skills and qualities in the IDG framework and their links (Stålne & Greca, 2022)

The role of universities in promoting the IDG framework

The IDG Framework allows an appreciation of the multifaceted nature of inner development. As an organic process that aims to expand personal and collective growth as human beings, there is no guarantee of achieving the desired outcomes. It is essential to acknowledge these uncertainties and cultivate dedication, discipline, patience and trust in oneself and the process. Learning communities, such as those found within universities, provide a conducive environment for undertaking this journey (Stålne & Greca, 2022). This includes communal support and trust, enabling individuals to make sense of their experiences and benefit from shared perspectives. Universities can also play a crucial role in maintaining the joy of inner development, exploring its links to collective and structural change without disregarding its individual significance.

The framework also aligns with common graduate attributes, also known as graduate qualities or learning outcomes, and refers to the specific skills, knowledge, and qualities that a university aims to develop in its students throughout their academic journey (Barrie, 2012). They play a crucial role in shaping a university's education strategy by guiding curriculum development, improving student outcomes, enhancing employability, and contributing to the overall reputation of the institution. Like the IDG Framework, these attributes are intended to foster holistic development and equip individuals to become successful and responsible citizens in society. Therefore, universities can be seen as vital stakeholders in driving societal transformation and playing a multifaceted role in achieving global ambitions such as the SDGs (Zhou et al., 2020; Kioupi & Voulvoulis, 2020; Serafini et al., 2022).

Supporting Inner Development Goals in universities

Transformational learning, defined as the expansion of consciousness through which an individual can question themselves about their feelings, beliefs, assumptions, and perspective on their purpose (Simsek, 2012) arguably steps beyond the bounds of "traditional" education, but is a fitting approach for the IDGs. Transformational learning embraces a holistic and interdisciplinary approach to education, offering ample

opportunities for personal development, expression, emotional intelligence, social connectivity, and exploration. This transformative journey allows individuals to undergo profound shifts in their self-awareness, core values, and perspectives on the world, and the way they interact with others.

In addition, transformational learning programmes are rooted in participatory pedagogical methods, where students take an active role in their learning journey. Through continuous experiential involvement, they play a vital part in shaping the content and direction of the programme. Educators in this context adopt the role of facilitators, creating a nurturing and supportive environment that encourages deep reflection and critical engagement (Kiely, 2005). This involves not only exploring theoretical concepts but also applying them in practical scenarios.

At the core of transformational learning lies the incorporation of transdisciplinary perspectives and integrative epistemologies. By drawing from various disciplines and knowledge systems, this approach allows individuals to exceed traditional boundaries of learning, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. As a result, participants are encouraged to challenge their existing beliefs and value systems, opening up to new and expanded forms of meaning-making (Yukawa, 2015). This process enables learners to undergo significant personal and intellectual growth, resulting in a deep impact on their perspectives and interactions with the world. The following are just some suggestions as to how universities can embrace transformational learning and, in turn, the IDGs.

Curricular integration

Integrating inner development components within the academic curriculum reinforces their importance in the overall educational experience. Universities can include courses or modules that explore topics such as emotional intelligence, intercultural communication, ethics, and mindfulness practices. By infusing these aspects into the core curriculum, students can better connect theoretical knowledge to their personal growth journey (Stålne & Greca, 2022).

Inclusive learning environments

Creating inclusive learning environments is fundamental to supporting students' inner development. Universities must prioritise building a culture of respect and acceptance, where individuals from diverse backgrounds feel valued and heard. This involves promoting open discussions, encouraging active listening, and creating safe spaces for dialogue on sensitive topics. Through diverse perspectives and exposure to different viewpoints, students can develop empathy, critical thinking skills, and a broader understanding of the world around them (Keyser et al., 2022).

Service-learning opportunities

Service-learning bridges the gap between academic knowledge and real-world application. Universities can encourage students to engage in community service projects, where they address social issues, contribute to the welfare of others, and develop a sense of social responsibility. By actively participating in service-learning, students cultivate empathy, leadership skills, and a greater understanding of the challenges faced by various groups (Salam et al., 2019). This may lead to increased motivation in addressing social and environmental issues, driving positive change in local communities and beyond.

Global and cross-cultural exposure

Exposure to global and cross-cultural experiences is a transformative aspect of a student's development. Universities can facilitate study abroad programmes, international exchange initiatives, and partnerships with institutions from different countries (at home). Such opportunities enable students to immerse themselves in foreign cultures, languages, and traditions. By navigating unfamiliar environments, students develop adaptability, intercultural competence, and a deeper appreciation for diversity (Kistyanto et al., 2022).

Mindfulness and wellbeing initiatives

Universities can implement mindfulness and wellbeing initiatives aimed at empowering students to effectively manage stress, enhance their focus, and cultivate emotional resilience. By integrating these practices, students' mental health and personal development can significantly improve, equipping them with the tools to handle stress and challenges more adeptly (McDonald & Scarampi, 2018). Through the provision of meditation sessions, counselling services and stress reduction workshops, and a commitment to promoting work-life balance, universities can foster a supportive environment that nurtures emotional resilience and self-awareness among their student community (Baminiwatta & Solangaarachchi, 2021).

By implementing some of these approaches, where appropriate, universities can effectively assist students in nurturing their inner capabilities, enabling them to grow into sustainable change agents. By emphasising the importance between inner personal development and external systems transformations, universities can create a holistic approach to driving progress in sustainability efforts (Stålne & Greca, 2022).

Limitations

The IDG framework's primary purpose is pedagogical, seeking to attract attention, engagement, and further development. It acknowledges the complex interrelation of skills and qualities, which can be unpacked into sub-skills and understood holistically. However, it does not delve deeply into this aspect, acknowledging the need for more specific theoretical frameworks (Stålne & Greca, 2022). Instead, the IDG framework aims to be open-ended and versatile, encouraging development and adaptations in various directions. There are several other limitations that are important to address.

Firstly, the framework's approach to skills and qualities is, arguably, from an individual perspective rather than a collective one, such as groups, organisations, communities, processes, or methods. Currently, the collective aspect has not received enough attention and warrants further exploration.

Secondly, a notable bias is the focus on the Western, "modernised" world, with limited representation from the Global South and independent cultures. For example, the majority of survey participants and contributing scientists are from Western countries (Jordan, 2021). This bias is evident in the choice of methods included in the toolkit, and the way it is organised and presented. Whilst some effort has been made to include diverse perspectives, this will need to be addressed further in future iterations.

Another bias exists within the framework itself, as it may lead educators to overlook practices targeting other aspects of inner development or sustainability. Of course, other needs and preferences should also be considered when designing a curriculum, whether it is institutional, industrial, or subject-specific.

Finally, the connection between inner development and sustainability (IDGs to SDGs) remains unclear, and while some methodologies show links, a comprehensive integration is yet to be achieved. This aspect will need to be explored in future phases of the IDG framework (Stålne & Greca, 2022).

Overall, the IDG framework aspires to initiate a mindful exploration of inner development's role in addressing sustainability issues and hopes to contribute to a better understanding of both fields. Future work will need to apply, test, and collect feedback on the toolkit in different contexts and environments. Within the Higher Education context, it is crucial to explore which skills and capabilities allow themselves to be measured so that curriculum and other interventions can be evaluated.

Conclusion

There is no shortcut to inner development, whether it is on an individual or collective level. As universities strive to prepare students for the challenges of the future, exploring and possibly integrating the IDG framework into educational programmes becomes essential. By nurturing skills and capabilities such as communication, creativity, and critical thinking, universities can unlock the potential of a new generation of leaders. Through curricular integration, experiential learning opportunities, and the creation of inclusive environments, universities can provide students with the tools and support they need

to develop the inner qualities necessary to tackle complex societal issues and create a more compassionate and sustainable world.

Steps toward hope

- Embed the Inner Development Goals (IDGs) into Higher Education to support the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda.

- Cultivate core capabilities such as self-awareness, intercultural competence, and creativity through experiential, integrative curricula.

- Implement service-learning opportunities to enhance students' practical engagement and societal impact.

- Promote global engagement and wellbeing initiatives to develop ethical, reflective, and action-oriented leaders.

- Empower students to create lasting social impact by prioritising the development of IDG-related skills and qualities.

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34. The pedagogy of joy and engaged presence

Phoenix Perry

Abstract

This chapter presents a transformative pedagogical approach to teaching creative technology that moves beyond technical proficiency to nurture personal growth, interconnectedness, and social impact. Grounded in the work of bell hooks, the practice centres on a joy-infused, four-tiered methodology designed to cultivate communication, problem-solving, and enduring relationships beyond the classroom. Through the phases of Visionary Optimism, Intersectional Creativity, Authentic Engagement, and Holistic Creation, students are encouraged to actively shape their educational journey, deepen their creative potential, and connect meaningfully with the world around them. The chapter highlights how embracing vulnerability, inclusivity, and risk supports students in becoming empowered, hopeful agents of change.

Keywords: transformative education; creative computing; growth pedagogy; joyful learning; engaged presence

At the heart of education lies a simple, yet profound truth: the essence of teaching is not merely subject-based instruction, but nurturing growth. Teaching is about the transformative power of education; helping students traverse the landscapes of their chosen fields, equipping them

to amplify the blossoming of those they guide. A skilled educator does not merely deposit information but breathes life into their students' confidence, fortifying them for the challenges ahead.

In the realm of creative arts, academics are gifted with the role of being perception-shifters. We delve deep, reimagining and redefining the relationship between creativity and self. My own journey embraces a duality. Part artist, part technologist, I find myself both teaching art and guiding artists through the labyrinth of designing and building of technology. The confluence of these worlds offers a rare perspective, a bridge between the organic fluidity of art and the structured logic of technology. I see my role in education as a catalyst, urging students to stretch their boundaries, to immerse themselves in deep introspection and wonderment of the world around them.

The path of intertwining art with technology is not delineated with clear markers. It demands a trifecta of presence, discipline, and that elusive spark of creativity. It is a delicate dance requiring showing up consistently at the studio, maintaining discipline, and embracing a dash of creative alchemy. In part thanks to the insights I have learned through bell hooks, I have come to realise that the crux of teaching is not merely about imparting technical skills, but rather nurturing the student's inherent capacity for growth. This understanding is imbued with a deep reverence for oneself and the larger tapestry of the world. Drawing inspiration from her philosophy, I have woven a four-tiered pedagogy imbued with joy. Much like a transformative story, this methodology, when embraced, becomes transformative. Embracing this approach not only mitigates stress and fosters communication, it also sharpens problem-solving prowess, boosts self-worth, and kindles bonds that move beyond the classroom. This approach diverges drastically from traditional ways of teaching computation in that it allows the artistic process to enter the equation. When programming and making creative work are woven together, technology can become a transformational tool for self-discovery and self-reflection. This process produces technologists that are aware of their work in relation to their communities and worlds.

Every year, I have witnessed these transformative effects as I stand before my students, not just as an instructor but as a fellow traveller on the journey of discovery. By creating a sanctuary for growth, I have observed the beautiful metamorphosis that ensues. The distinctiveness

of my approach, I believe, springs from my own continuous immersion in the craft. I willingly pull back the curtain, allowing my students to glimpse my own moments of vulnerability, of grappling with the unknown in my own work. It is in these shared moments of uncertainty that they recognise a reflection of their own struggles. It reinforces the idea that it is not just acceptable, but invaluable, to tread into the unfamiliar, and to embrace risks. This philosophy champions an interactive dive into the learning experience. And with every step I take, I encourage my students to walk alongside, fully engaged. Mapping my creative journey is not just about understanding my own craft, but also outlining my method as an approach I can use for teaching practice-based computational arts. The steps here are not just theoretical; they are ones I revisit regularly, each time I create work.

Engaged presence forms the foundational bedrock of this approach, emphasising students' active and conscious participation in the classroom. As students immerse themselves further, they navigate through four distinct, looping phases of creativity:

Visionary Optimism: First, students tap into creative visualisation, illuminating potential outcomes with lightness and joy. Active listening and connecting with their peers helps them to envision possibilities.

Intersectional, Interconnected Creativity: This phase underscores the value of openness and an unwavering commitment to presence—both for oneself and in solidarity with their peers. It champions intersectional inclusivity, cultivating trust in the process, and reinforces the collective responsibility everyone holds for the shared wellbeing within the space. During this process conversations between students help them to understand ideas from new perspectives.

Authentic Engagement: Transitioning from conceptual to concrete, this phase emphasises the act of creation. Recognising the uncertainty that often accompanies starting new work, students are encouraged to lead with their body, embrace improvisation, and foster a mindset of curiosity over criticism. Nurturing patience emphasises the importance of consistently showing up to allow the creative process to happen.

Holistic Creation through Discovery: In this phase, students present and celebrate their work. Central to this inquiry is the question: "What have we learned, and how do we grow from here?" It emphasises the importance of being receptive to constructive feedback, welcoming

vulnerability, and understanding that all work is in progress and all work is progress.

My starting point is Visionary Optimism anchored in Protopia, as re-imagined by a group led by Monika Bielskyte that I am part of. Protopia encourages us to imagine a diverse future. It presents a pragmatic vision of tomorrow, one that is brighter than today and sidesteps the dystopian tendencies seen in much of technological science fiction. Moreover, it pushes back against the colonial biases in some utopian narratives. Protopia prioritises voices that are often sidelined, especially those of Indigeneity, Queerness, and Disability. The essence is about hope—"a future where we come together, embracing our imperfections" (Bielskyte, 2021). With this mindset, I introduce my students to speculative fiction writing, asking them to consider if they would want to live in the futures their technology proposes.

Visionary Optimism underscores the power of bold, forward-thinking endeavours to build a world that is more just, embracing, and kinder. It emphasises creating blueprints for action, tuning into the often-overlooked signals in our environment, and synchronising with them and our peers. This mindset is a proactive response to the overwhelming challenges we presently face on this planet. It presents hope, not as a mere dream, but as an authentic force for change.

I ask students to consider this: How can we carve a path towards a future that prioritises black, brown, Indigenous, queer, disabled, neurodivergent, and non-Western voices? How can we reshape the creation and sharing of knowledge, emphasising accessibility and open access? It prompts us to ask: what future do we aspire to inhabit? And crucially, how can our work contribute to realising that vision? The process starts by defining our goal.

Next, we delve into our Intersectional, Interconnected Creativity. This concept underscores the deep links between our creative endeavours and their ripple effects on us, our communities, and the broader world. It advocates that our wellbeing is intricately linked with others', positioning creativity as a medium for enriching society at large. By fostering presence, openness and acceptance, and nurturing collective wellbeing, we can support cohesive communities. This philosophy acknowledges that not everyone feels secure in expressing themselves, hence the importance of creating inclusive spaces where

every individual can find and hear their own voice within the collective chorus. It endorses the principle that many viewpoints have a role to play in the creative process, drawing attention to the richness and depth that a multiplicity of voices can contribute. The focus lies in making a commitment to ourselves and to our creative processes to generate waves of beneficial change that extend into our surrounding communities.

The first step in Interconnected Creativity is embracing openness, often catalysed by joy. Joy can be a springboard, propelling us towards novel experiences and ideas. As it unfolds, we are more apt to embrace risks, venture beyond the norm, and defy conventional thought paradigms. The journey begins by collectively chronicling daily moments of joy, culminating in a digital online stream. This shared space, peppered with vibrant photos, evocative videos, and reflective narratives—whether it is a sketch of indoor plants, snapshots of flowers, or a musing from a solitary walk—serves as a visual testament to life's subtle marvels. Through this lens, we begin to perceive everyday beauty, fostering a communal aura of well-being.

Crucially, I emphasise that each student plays an indispensable role in shaping our learning environment. By being present and actively contributing, we weave this tapestry together. This lesson mirrors bell hooks' sentiments in *Teaching to Transgress*, where she observes that making sure students hear each other's voices ensures that no student remains invisible in the classroom (hooks, 1994). As we progress, I emphasise everyone's vocal participation in every session, fostering an environment where everyone feels heard and acknowledged, laying the foundation for genuine inclusivity. This can be done in small groups via sharing the results of a creative brief with each other. This avoids the pressure students feel when needing to present to a whole class and builds community within a cohort.

Authentic Engagement champions a proactive approach to creativity, encouraging us to infuse our values into our work and to share our processes generously with each other. It is about improvisation and judgement-free exploration. This process thrives on embodied doing. Rather than leaning into criticism, it supports the cultivation of curiosity about our work and ourselves. To anchor this concept, I urge everyone to adopt a consistent creative ritual. This act of working day in and day out—of showing up, lets us discover what we do not know.

Authentic Engagement encourages students to recognise that their project can stand apart from themselves, paving the way for a reflective space, allowing them to approach their work with a growth mindset. Such an approach counters the common anxiety many creatives face where they are quick to undervalue themselves and their efforts prematurely. While initial efforts almost never result in masterpieces, there is always an opportunity to learn and refine. What insights does this project offer? Sharing one's work with peers and considering feedback is vital. By generously exploring our processes, we collectively affirm that it is acceptable to iteratively develop work balancing between our aspirations, and what we produce. This lesson, which is inherently challenging to impart, hinges on works in progress.

When it is time to exhibit our work, we arrive at Holistic Creation through Discovery. This represents a journey of self and group-discovery and creation that incorporates reflection, growth, sharing, surrender, celebration, and the presentation of creative work. It advocates an integrated approach incorporating personal development into artistic expression. It embraces connecting with others and accepting the vulnerability that comes with sharing work. It emphasises the healing process involved in allowing our works out into the world, where they can reach, resonate, and potentially inspire others. We arrive here through a public exhibition, publication, or performance.

In our journey through Engaged Presence moving though Visionary Optimism, Interconnected Creativity, Authentic Engagement, and Holistic Creation through Discovery, we have crafted a blueprint that extends beyond traditional pedagogy. It is a commitment to rigorous artistic exploration and genuine personal growth. As educators and creators, our mission is clear: to empower students with the tools and perspectives they need to not only navigate but to shape the future as change makers who continue pushing boundaries, challenging conventions, and producing work rooted in generating the transformational growth that our society needs to build a hopeful future.

Steps toward hope

- Teach creative technology beyond technical knowledge to foster students' innate potential for growth and appreciation of interconnectedness.

- Implement a joy-infused pedagogy that enhances communication, problem-solving, and builds lasting relationships beyond the classroom.

- Encourage engaged presence in learning through four phases: Visionary Optimism, Intersectional Creativity, Authentic Engagement, and Holistic Creation, empowering students to connect deeply with their creative processes and the world.

- Support students to become agents of change by embracing risks, sharing vulnerabilities, and fostering inclusivity, enabling them to challenge conventions and contribute to a hopeful and inclusive future.

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35. "Resilience Finders": Flourishing in life through immersive game experiences

Rachel Higdon and Hilary Thomson

Abstract

The resilience game "Resilience Finders" integrates storytelling, character creation, gamification, and immersive learning to offer a unique board game and live action experience for young people and adults. Designed as an alternative to formal educational and training models, the game focuses on personal development and building agency, supporting participants to flourish in both personal and professional contexts. Responding to the growing global demand for resilience amid challenges such as conflict, pandemics, sustainability issues, and uncertainty, Resilience Finders provides an experiential learning framework that fosters adaptability, creativity, and solution-finding skills. In alignment with the goals set out by the 2022 United Nations Transforming Education Summit—which calls for more dynamic, inclusive, and student-centred learning—Resilience Finders reimagines education to prioritise flexibility, strength, and human flourishing in an unpredictable world.

Keywords: resilience; gaming; creativity; experiential learning; sustainability

This chapter provides a case study of how a resilient mindset can be developed to support children, young people (that is, teenagers and young adults), and adults to navigate the complexities of their lives. It offers alternative perspectives (Churchill, 2018; Higdon, 2014, 2016, 2018) to formal learning in compulsory and post-compulsory education by using a gaming model that seeks experiential and hands-on learning in real time; where individuals and groups can try out solutions and problem solve in a safe environment and can interact between risk and protective processes. Feedback from teachers and facilitators is showing that young people and adults find the game positive and exciting, and it also reaches those that can be disengaged and disinterested in conventional classroom spaces. This case study hopes to inspire other teachers, facilitators, and young people to devise their own models and toolkits to develop resilience resources.

"Resilience is both the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to the psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that sustain their wellbeing, and their capacity individually and collectively to negotiate for these resources to be provided and experienced in culturally meaningful ways" (Ungar, 2008, p. 225). Michael Rutter (1987) recognises that these resources need to have protective processes to encourage individual and collective wellbeing. Research studies in resilience have expanded in the last thirty years and have centralised on human development. Even before the global pandemic, the development of resilience had been a focus due to the complexity of the emotional, developmental, economic and technical challenges that young people have to grow into and mediate within their own experiences (Goldstein & Brooks, 2023). The mental health of adolescents and young adults in the Western world was declining before the COVID-19 pandemic, with adolescents' and young adults' rates of depression and anxiety reaching historically high levels (Shanahan et al., 2023). There have been increasing research studies that explore the interactions between risk and protective processes and unpack the factors that inhibit or develop resilience (Ellis et al., 2017; Goldstein & Brooks, 2023: Wyman & Warner-King, 2017). Sam Goldstein and Robert Brooks (2023, p. 4) identify a "resilience mindset" as necessary to support young people to be functional adults; even those without obvious trauma or a clinical diagnosis need to cope with the pressures and expectations that exist

around them. As children grow into adults, they need to overcome adversity and disappointments to solve problems and to relate to one another, and to treat themselves and others with respect.

The boardgame, "Resilience Finders: The Book of Invisible Paths" uses storytelling, character creation, gamification, and immersive learning environments to create personal development programmes for young people and adults. The toolkit comprises a board game that sits alongside personal development exercises aimed at building resilience. The toolkit is designed to engage players and build a resilient mindset, giving participants' agency. It uses experiential learning and gaming as an alternative to more conventional school and tertiary education pedagogies, helping individuals flourish in both their personal and professional lives and develop inner mental strength and wellbeing.

The Resilience Finders toolkit can support teachers and classes working in the formal education sector and youth leaders and those working with disadvantaged young people and adults in informal education environments. It can also be used for staff training and wellbeing. The board game sits alongside personal development exercises aimed at building resilience. These are wrapped around a fantasy world and story metaphor. The story adventure consists of a journey across a fantasy land with challenges and tasks to complete along the way and milestones to reach. Players carry a virtual backpack that they fill with resilience through the journey. They collect a toolkit of strategies in the form of personal development exercises to help them make choices and move forward with their lives. People use their imaginations and escape into an alternative world while addressing their own "real-life" issues and feel supported along the way. The bright, colourful, and fun game format aims to increase mental wellbeing and motivate people to enjoy themselves, raising oxytocin levels and giving them an uplift.

The programme content draws on understanding the obstacles people face and the developmental stages we all go through in life. Within the safety of the fiction, players focus on confidence and self-esteem building; nurture empathy and positive mind-sets; and face failure and stress triggers and learn how to deal with them. Players also learn how to address the fear of change; develop healthy behaviours and foster better relationships and communities. By cultivating positive mindsets and unlocking people's ability to dream, experiment, and look

at things from different perspectives, players open up and have a chance to reframe the way they approach their own lives and respond to society. By playing the game, they increase their speaking and listening skills, language expansion, motivation, and interpersonal skills.

The toolkit uses a relational approach, giving every young person and adult a voice and a lexicon around resilience, which means they not only understand what it is, but can also talk about it in relation to themselves, others, and the world around them. This is part of developing essential life skills such as empathy, problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, and emotional literacy. This sits perfectly alongside the United Kingdom's (UK) educational policy and strategy that addresses developmental and emotional coaching, personal tutoring, personal, social, health and economic programmes, citizenship, and career guidance.

There has been an increased demand for resilience across all sectors. Global futures reveal that pressures like conflict, pandemics, climate sustainability, and uncertainty are more and more creating situations that need to be mediated and managed. Developing resilience and the skills to navigate life and thrive, rather than just survive, has never been more salient.

As a result, evidence is growing that there is a need to recognise, value, and teach people to be adaptable, creative thinkers, and solution finders so that we are more robust and better able to cope with societal changes and challenges. Transforming education (Sengeh & Winthrop, 2022; United Nations Transforming Education Summit, 2022; World Economic Forum, 2023) recognises the need to adapt to the shifting skills needed professionally, making learning more student-centred, connected, dynamic, inclusive and collaborative, allowing creativity to flourish. "Learning resources must evolve to reflect these transformations in how teaching and learning occur" (United Nations, 2022).

Currently there is a discrepancy between this aspiration and the trajectory of UK educational policy. The English curriculum is being narrowed and teaching methods streamlined with too much teacher focus on English and mathematics and pupil testing, which is affecting the quality of education (Ofsted & Spielman, 2018). Moving away from didactive teaching to multimodal learning immerses learners, helping them to understand and remember because they are engaged with a

number of their senses—visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic (Birch et al., 2010). There is a growing body of evidence that suggests that creative methodologies can support societal resilience and play a key part in future-proofing society (Sundaralingam, 2022).

The "fall out" from the COVID-19 pandemic has increased mental health problems and this is of great concern to the National Health Service in the UK. 8.5 million adults and 1.5 million children in England will need support for their mental health as a direct result of the pandemic over the next three to five years (Moynihan et al., 2021).

Resilience Finders was conceived by Hilary Thomson who facilitates the project through her creative company. Thomson is undertaking further development of the Resilience Finders toolkit and is supported by a variety of stakeholders in business and education. The stakeholders believe that this is an important piece of work for societal future-proofing.

Thomson has developed a system of creative processes that unlock people's potential and states, "I take them on a journey of self-discovery to find their own story. The only difference between a stumbling block and a stepping-stone is the way you look upon it" (Thompson, interview communication, June 23, 2023). The design and content of this toolkit draws on Thomson's experience of writing and delivering creative training programmes and workshops with both adults and children. It has been designed to be flexible so that the time frame, length, and structure of the game can be adapted to fit the teacher, trainer or facilitator's particular group size and context. The trainers and teachers pick and mix the personal development exercises that suit their group's focus, level and intention. The quality of the materials and artwork has been professionally designed to stimulate and engage the players. Thomson argues that it is important to send a subliminal message of value to players, many of whom may be from disadvantaged backgrounds. She argues: "How can you raise people's self-esteem, if you don't give them quality resources?" (Thompson, interview communication, June 23, 2023).

The methodology that Thomson uses draws on storytelling, immersive experiences, drama, coaching, gamification, and multimodal ways of working.

I have long had a fascination with people and the human condition... I find the internal stories people tell themselves and how this is reflected in their external behaviours intriguing. It is the push, pull... between this internal monologue and the external dialogue that informs who we are as people and how we react to the world. In the same vein, deconstructing what resilience is and how it informs and influences our behaviours is deeply interesting. The deeper I go, the more I realise that resilience is essential to the human condition. It does not exist in isolation but in the interconnectedness of everything. We have only to look at the natural world to see this in evidence. Now, with climate emergency on the horizon, we need to act fast and make a paradigm shift in our attitudes and ways of being. This starts with ourselves and how we empower and educate people. We need to not only look at people development but also world systems, how and what needs to change (Thompson, interview communication, June 23, 2023).

The game takes participants through a creative process that is practical, logical and experiential and therefore memorable. It uses lateral thinking, drawing from life experience and enabling the creation of new informed choices. It encourages people to take charge of their own destinies, preparing them to make changes and raising aspirations for their lives and their futures. Each individual's life is a story line and one that they have some control over.

Why is storytelling so powerful and important in times of change and transition?

Stories have been used powerfully in many cultures and in many languages to support people through transitions (Roche & Sadowsky, 2003) and are universal in crossing boundaries of language, culture, and age.

The archetypal story of change and transition is the "hero's journey". Every hero/heroine's story, whether it is the eponymous "Odysseus", or Dorothy in "The Wizard of Oz", follows a similar pattern:

- the status quo
- the challenge
- the stepping into the unknown
- the obstacles on the way

- the resources or "helpers"
- meeting the challenge/ transformation
- coming home again/ settling into the new landscape" (Sinclair, 2019).

Resilience Finders uses the hero's journey to harness individual stories of transition and challenge by helping individuals become the architects of their own lives, building their own unique identities and their own unique paths in life. Thomson claims, "It is through creativity and fun and sharing of ourselves that we create the glue that brings us together and enables us to create our own inner resilience in times of adversity" (Thompson, interview communication, June 23, 2023).

Resilience is a life skill that everyone should hold in order to cope with whatever life throws at them. By providing the tools to grow and flourish via an engaging, inspiring and adventurous narrative, thought and reflection are encouraged, which enriches minds and empowers lives.

The pilots

Initial trials of the toolkit between 2021 and 2023 proved that engaging people in this immersive environment has tangible outcomes. The trials took place in schools, youth groups and community spaces. Thomson argues that individuals are on their own unique path and learn essential life skills. In our interview she reads through the players' feedback and evaluations.

> Children, young people and adults found the game engaging and spoke of: coming alive; opening up, laughing; relaxing; communicating with each other; thinking about themselves; considering different perspectives; and helping each other. Teachers and facilitators have observed: kindness; team working; and people finding their voice, giving opinions, collaborating, generating ideas and enjoying themselves (H. Thompson, interview communication, June 23, 2023).

While piloting the game, teachers revealed to Thomson that they had seen a marked regression in young people going through the school system due to the pandemic (2023, trial 2, school 2). They argued that it would need a whole cohort of pre-schoolers coming into school, to

move through the whole school system, before the "fall out of Covid 19 is really behind us" (2023, trial 2, school 2). Teachers and youth leaders said that they were finding that children and young people were not as ready to learn or cope with everything life threw at them (2023, trial 3, school 3). They lacked resilience (2023, trial 4, school 4). They want children and young people to be happy and able to build healthy relationships, to understand their own emotions and those of others, and to know how to deal with stress, feel positive and confident and like themselves (2023, trial 3, school 3). This encourages young people to become independent, responsible citizens who can look after themselves, each other and their world. The teachers said that they were always looking for new ways and resources to support this (2023, trial 4 and 5, school 4 and 5).

Thomson intends with some UK universities to undertake systematic research trials of the game across local education authorities. Thomson is developing a live action role play of the game to complement the board game.

Take away

Gaming offers an alternative model for personal development in young people and adults. Preliminary findings show that immersive games are flexible and can be successfully adapted to meet the diversity in terms of ages, needs, and circumstances in order to be appropriate, relevant, and authentic experiences for the players. The creation of the games is also versatile:

- Teachers and group leaders can invent the games.
- The facilitator and the group can co-create the games.
- The students, young people and adults themselves can devise their own games and interactive models.

The toolkit and game have continuous iterations as the players give feedback and ideas for development.[1]

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1   Further detail of Thomson's toolkit can be found at www.resiliencefinders.co.uk and www.ministryofimagination.co.uk

Steps toward hope

- Use storytelling, character creation, gamification, and immersive learning to design engaging educational experiences like Resilience Finders for young people and adults.

- Focus on building personal development and agency through experiential and playful learning as an alternative to traditional curricula and training programs.

- Address the increasing demand for resilience by equipping participants with skills to navigate conflict, pandemics, sustainability challenges, and uncertainty.

- Recognise and teach adaptability, creativity, and solution-finding as essential skills for thriving in an unpredictable global future.

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36. Storying the silences of social mobility

Karen Arm

Abstract

This chapter explores class as a multi-faceted, intersectional concept best understood through subjective, storied realities rather than objective metrics. It critiques the tendency of universities to rely on reductive, clichéd understandings of student experiences and outcomes, thereby overlooking the complex emotional dimensions of class in Higher Education and missing crucial opportunities to design truly inclusive curricula and programmes. Drawing on findings from narrative research, the chapter argues for the creation of collective, person-centred spaces where working-class experiences can be openly shared, recognised, and valued. By illuminating often-unspoken class struggles, it offers empowering insights into social mobility and demonstrates the transformative potential of narrative approaches to class in Higher Education. In a sector increasingly dominated by metrics, such discourse is not only important but urgently needed.

Keywords: class; identity; narrative; social mobility; higher education

The political rhetoric

Political promises of social mobility via Higher Education (HE) are well rehearsed in the UK. University degrees are "sold" on the premise that they enhance job prospects, earnings, social position, health, and happiness; or the chances of a "better life", as the former Minister for Further and Higher Education put it (Donelan, 2021). This rhetoric not only blatantly "pathologises the working classes" (Archer, 2007) but fails to mention that graduates from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds often end up working in less prestigious jobs and being paid lower salaries than their advantaged peers (Savage, 2015). This is, in part, due to a hierarchically ordered UK Higher Education system, which sees people from lower social class backgrounds concentrated in the least prestigious institutions and degree courses (Waller et al., 2018). Despite this, the UK government continues to go to great lengths to engineer aspirations for social mobility through its arguments of the private benefits of HE participation. Examples of those who have achieved top professional jobs from disadvantaged backgrounds are showcased as evidence as a thriving meritocracy (rather than the anomalies that they really are) and used to fuel the "mobility myth" (Littler, 2017; Reay, 2017). Implicit within this discourse is the view that social mobility is a wholly positive and enriching experience for those individuals that accomplish it. Yet, little is known about the experiences of those that achieve the social mobility aspirations of UK HE policy by securing professional work. These stories fall outside of the government focus because, in policy terms, they are simply considered "job done".

In the UK, the Office for Students requires all eligible HE providers to consider differentials in the progression outcomes of their students as part of their institutional Access and Participation Plans.[1] This involves universities drawing on occupation and salary data of graduates collected via the Higher Education Statistics Agency Graduate Outcomes survey[2] to determine their success as institutional enablers of social mobility. Such quantitative analyses are problematic for several reasons. Firstly, the findings are not always statistically reliable because they are based on low—and unrepresentative—survey responses (HESA, 2023).

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1   For more information see OfS, 2018.
2   For more information, see https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/graduates

Secondly, they do not reflect the long-term social mobility of graduates because they draw on a fixed set of data collected at a fifteen-month interval after degree completion. Thirdly, the proxies used for social class background (such as POLAR4[3] and IMD 1 and 2)[4] are limiting when measured in isolation (Gorard et al., 2019). Class is a multi-faceted and fluid concept that is lived intersectionally in multiple and nuanced ways. It is not just about the job you do, or the salary this gives you, but is something that is embodied "in your reflexes, in your psyche, at the very core of your being" (Kuhn, 1995, p. 9). The socially mobile do not simply leave their working-class background at the entrance doors of the university. Nor do they pick up a middle-class identity on the first day of their graduate jobs. They experience complex, diverse, and protracted shifts in their class identity through and beyond HE. Yet, a rhetoric that exclusively focuses on objective markers of social mobility silences these subjective dimensions. My study has redressed this, by giving voice to the oft unspoken.

Narrativising the journey

The doctorate research explored the lived experiences of those who had achieved social mobility via the HE goals of the UK government, that is, the disproportionately few people from working class backgrounds who secure a professional graduate job.[5] Yet, rather than focus on the *measurable* aspects of social mobility, the study used narrative inquiry to instead focus on the *meaning* attached to this experience by the individuals themselves. As Pat Sikes and Ken Gale (2006) remind us, "human beings are storying creatures. We make sense of the world and the things that happen to us by constructing narratives to explain and

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3   For more information see OfS, 2022.

4   For more information see Ministry of Housing, Communities, & Local Government (2019).

5   All research participants included in the sample were purposively selected for being from National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification and Social Class (NS-SEC) groups 4–7 (based on parental background) at the point of first entry to Higher Education—commonly deemed "working-class" 2) and NS-SEC groups 1–3 based on their own occupation at the time of the first interview—commonly deemed "middle-class". In this sense they would, in policy terms, be considered social mobility "success" stories. For more information on NS-SEC see Office for National Statistics (n.d.).

interpret events both to ourselves and other people". It therefore follows
that our best hope of understanding the subjective dimensions of social
mobility is through narratives.

Seven individuals were invited to tell their stories of social mobility
via HE and all accepted. They were all British people, but were of
different ages, with varying educational histories and occupations, and
at different life stages.

Name	Gender	Age	Life stage	Occupation	Higher Education[6]
Julie	Female	Early 30s	Mother Single Living with partner and child Employed part-time	University Careers Practitioner	Undergraduate (Russell Group University) Postgraduate (Post-1992 University)
Tim	Male	Late 30s	Father Married Living with wife Employed full-time	Middle Manager in a bank	Undergraduate (Russell Group University) Postgraduate (Russell Group University)
Jessie	Female	Mid 20s	Single Living with partner Employed full-time	University Research Assistant	Undergraduate (Russell Group University) Postgraduate (Russell Group University)
Adam	Male	Mid 30s	Single Living alone Employed full-time	Design Engineer	Undergraduate (Russell Group University)

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6   The UK has different types of universities. For more information, see https://www.
     ukstudyonline.com/types-of-uk-universities/

Name	Gender	Age	Life stage	Occupation	Higher Education[6]
Sophie	Female	Early 40s	Mother Married Living alone Self-employed	Owner of Graphic Design Business	Undergraduate (Post-1992 University)
Jason	Male	Early 50s	Father Married Living with wife and children Employed full-time	Fine Artist and University Teacher	Undergraduate (Post-1992 University) Postgraduate (Post-1992 University)
Paul	Male	Late 40s	Father Married Living with wife Employed full-time	University Enterprise Manager	Undergraduate (Post-1992 University). Postgraduate (Plate-Glass University).

Table 36.1 Interviewees' self-described characteristics at the time of the first interview.

Narrative data was (co)created via a series of semi-structured interviews and photo elicitation methods over a four-year period. The data was juxtaposed with an autoethnographic account and narratively analysed using a "cleft habitus" Bourdieusian conceptual framework (Bourdieu, 1999, 2007).[7] As expected, no two stories of social mobility were the same. Each contained a unique plot, setting and characters. This is partly because people tell stories differently but mostly because social mobility is lived in nuanced ways. Whilst all presented themselves as examples of social mobility "success", under the glossy surface of their stories were three sub-narratives that told more complex accounts of the journey. It is to these stories that I now turn.

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7   The fully theorised outcomes of the study were written up as a doctorate thesis at the University of Bristol (Arm, 2022). This chapter is an extract of the thesis.

Stories of dislocation

Stories of dislocation were characterised by feelings of being "stuck" between two classed worlds and belonging to neither. This "cultural homelessness" created identity displacement in both the class of origin and the class of destination (Friedman, 2014), which was "lived as grief—a pain that is constantly spun from the recognition and experience of loss of a previous home without the pleasure of feeling safe in the new location" (Hey, 2003, p. 325). For example, my own autoethnographic fieldwork helped me reflect on being a mind and body out of place at university. Adam's story echoed the same sentiment with his discussion of attempting to belong in "a posh and wealthy" world, which inherently was never his. Similarly, Julie's story shows the cultural clash she felt studying and working at a university and not fitting in. (Fear of) being culturally exposed in the new class milieu created a psychological burden on many of the socially mobile in my study, as they developed "a heightened awareness of threats and dangers... constantly attuned to possible attacks and a resurgence of the humiliations and shames that populated a working-class past" (Reay, 2016, p. 37). For example, in Julie's interviews, she talked about the anxiety caused by her middle-class peers continuously making fun of her working-class accent throughout her time at university. Similarly, Jason discussed the anxiety caused by trying to hide his "working-classness" at art school and pretending to be more cultured than he was. Experiences like these not only create social distress but also ambivalence within the self... "leading to 'discomfort', 'paralysis' and 'suffering' leaving the individual plagued by a central internal conflict that organises every moment of their existence" (Friedman, 2014, p. 362). Far from straightforward stories of success, this sub-narrative demonstrates the emotional torment of social mobility via HE.

Stories of dual location

Whilst stories of dislocation emphasise identity displacement, stories of dual location speak of dual placement or "duality of the self" (Stahl, 2013). Indeed, some socially mobile individuals demonstrate an ability to hold dual class dispositions and apply them according to the social

context in which they are in (Lehman, 2013; Abraham & Ingram, 2013). These "double agents" (Hurst, 2010) use their "class bilingualism" (Wakeling, 2010) to flexibly move in and out of different cultural spheres. For example, in my own narrative of social mobility, I discuss how I used train journeys between home and university as an opportunity to "get in class character". This helped me to successfully manage the competing parts of my identity and maintain a strong connection to both my class of origin and destination. Tim's story of social mobility demonstrated his comfort at moving between his working-class family and middle-class friends, turning cultural codes on and off accordingly. Sophie also discussed her learnt ease at employing different ways of being in different social spaces, describing herself as a "class chameleon". Whilst this sub-narrative offers a more positive account of social mobility, it is not entirely trouble free. As Diane Reay (2002, p. 223) points out, successfully holding a dual perception of the self requires "an enormous body of psychic, intellectual and interactive work in order to maintain… contradictory ways of being". The ways that socially mobile individuals manage the ambivalence in their class identities and successfully operate in different classed spaces, however, is markedly different from the sub-narrative of dislocation discussed above.

Stories of relocation

Whereas stories of dual location focus on the management of conflicting class identities, stories of relocation suggest the possibility of reconciling these. Nicola Ingram and Jessie Abrahams (2016, p. 141) argue that a socially mobile "third space" "is useful in that it helps us think about ways of being neither working-class nor middle class but something else besides". It is a more positive narrative because it empowers socially mobile individuals to use their positionality as a tool for social action. The stories of relocation generated by my study reveal multiple ways that socially mobile individuals use their "unique vantage point" (Ingram & Abrahams, 2016) to challenge class inequalities within their professional lives. For example, Julie was undertaking research into the employability barriers for first generation entrants into HE to inform careers practice. Jason was exploring the ways that his own working-class identity and experiences could help him better support disadvantaged

students as a Fine Art teacher. Paul was using his own story of social mobility to inspire working-class people into taking up enterprise, business and leadership opportunities. Such findings suggest that the empathetic understanding of class developed through elevating one's social position makes socially mobile individuals well placed to actively dismantle class inequality, in small but significant ways.

The power of the story

In an increasingly metricised academy, stories are a powerful tool. My research has identified three sub-narratives of social mobility: stories of dislocation, dual location and relocation, which tell more complex accounts of social mobility than the metrics allow for. Lived experiences of social mobility, such as these, cannot be reduced to objective data measures but rather need to be understood through subjective storied realities. If we continue to silence these in the academy, we are at risk of perpetuating the myth that is prevalent in the political rhetoric, that social mobility is a straightforward and universally felt good for those who experience it. Yet, HE typically does not make space for such endeavours, opting instead for simplistic and cliched understandings of student experience through measurable numbers. In doing so it not only overlooks the "hidden injuries" (Sennet & Cobb, 1972) of social mobility but also the potential ways that the socially mobile can successfully manage their class identities and use these to challenge inequalities in HE and beyond.

My study has pointed to the need for universities to create purposeful space to talk about how HE feels. As Kathleen Quinlin (2016, pp.1–2) points out, "challenges to attitudes and identities and the forging of new relationships and commitments in a culture beyond family and home commitments are all significant aspects of student experiences and strongly emotional". This person-centred discourse is absent in a HE sector, which is metric obsessed. Pedagogic interventions to support the working classes in HE largely respond to deficits in economic, social and cultural capital rather than confronting the intense conflictions they feel in their sense of self. My research has illustrated the need for giving prominence to these oft-unspoken issues impacting on the socially mobile, which are otherwise side-lined in policy discussions.

Creating a collective space for working-class students to come together to discuss their experiences and to learn from socially mobile graduates who have already encountered (and successfully managed) these would be an incredibly empowering act in a sector that is otherwise preoccupied with promoting a culture of individualism and competitiveness in its student body (Wilson et al., 2021). As Catherine Reissman (2008, p. 5) points out, "stories can have effects beyond their meaning for individual storytellers, creating possibilities for social identities, group belonging and collective action". The work of Quinlin (2016) offers a potential pedagogic model for facilitating this in the academy. Drawing on notions of "post-qualitative research" (Lather & St Pierre, 2013), "poetic inquiry" (Prendergast, 2009), and "methodology of the heart" (Pelias, 2004), Quinlin (2016, p. 3) argues for the value in HE educators using emotively expressed and evocative stories in teaching and learning as a means of "opening up new possible and previously unimagined worlds" regarding how education feels. Creating time and space within the curriculum for storying the personal identity troubles and triumphs of those on a journey of social mobility via HE would not only illuminate an aspect of experience not often spoken about (nor accounted for in metrics) but could also produce empowering knowledge on the topic of social mobility via HE.

Steps toward hope

- Recognise class as a lived, intersectional experience that must be understood through subjective, narrative accounts rather than through reductive, metric-based approaches.

- Challenge universities to move beyond simplistic measures of student experience and outcomes, acknowledging the complex emotional and identity dimensions of class.

- Create collective, person-centred spaces within programmes and courses where working-class students and staff can openly share, reflect on, and validate their experiences.

- Leverage the reflexivity of socially mobile individuals as a tool to critique and disrupt class-based injustices within Higher Education and society more broadly.

- Prioritise narrative research and storytelling methodologies to generate empowering knowledge about social mobility and foster a more inclusive and socially just academic culture.

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37. How can you know what you don't know?: Changing the narrative around the "successful learner"

Stephanie Diane Jury[1]

Abstract

This chapter critiques the marketisation and commodification of Higher Education, which has shifted universities from centres of holistic learning to spaces where students are treated as "customers" and education as a "product". In this environment, individual exploration and self-development have been deprioritised, and the notion of a "successful learner" has become synonymous

with independence from support—an outdated view that fails to recognise the diversity of contemporary university cohorts. Drawing on a case study, the chapter advocates for a personalised approach to study skills development, incorporating face-to-face motivational interviewing, accountability check-ins, and tailored skills development plans. It argues that fostering and empowering students on their self-study and learning journeys builds genuine independence rather than dependence. Special attention is given to the role of non-cognitive skills in supporting stronger academic skills development, particularly for neurodiverse students. By reframing the narrative of what success in learning looks like, the chapter highlights the need for more inclusive, supportive, and human-centred approaches in Higher Education.

Keywords: neurodiversity; equity-deserving; universal design for learning; learning strategies; advocacy; student success

Introduction

Criticism of the marketisation and commodification of learning in Higher Education (HE) has surged over recent decades. Educators and support staff have concerns as universities move away from holistic student development to create "marketable 'products'" for fee paying "customers" (Askehave, 2007, p. 724; Fejes & Olesen, 2016). While this approach has increased the appeal of, and student diversity in, post-secondary education, ethnically and academically it fails to address the growing needs of this new population. Essential support networks for diverse learners, including Learning Strategists, counsellors, and accessibility advisors, must expand to accommodate these unique pathways into university.

Equity-deserving students, such as neurodiverse learners, students with disabilities, ethnic minorities, and Indigenous students, face challenges in navigating a system that is primarily tailored to domestic, middle-class educated students (Thomas, 2010).[2] In a commodified

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2   Equality in education refers to the same "access to education, educational provision and organization" for all students (Buchholtz et al., 2020, p. 16). Equity in education,

university, success is still defined by high grades, neglecting the development of traits like curiosity and collaboration (Cachia et al., 2018). For equity-deserving students, fostering these traits *first* is a marker of success. This highlights the crucial role of student support services in guiding students through conventional education systems.

With the increased demand for these services, it can be tempting to move towards a collective approach, such as through academic preparedness programming, as opposed to one-on-one support. This inadvertently promotes a "one size fits all" mentality, whereas personalised support creates space for students to be vulnerable, explore their strengths, and define their own success. In this chapter, I argue that there is a need for one-on-one student support, and that the collective approach, while necessary, cannot replace the need for personalised learning support, in particular for neurodiverse students. Drawing on my own role as a Learning Strategist,[3] I demonstrate how Personalised Learning Plans (PLPs), positive psychology, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and metacognitive strategies impact and foster academic skills development and character strengths.[4] Using a case study of one neurodiverse student, I illustrate how success, not solely measured through grades, emerges from the discovery and mastery of character strengths. This study aims to instil hope in readers regarding the continued success of one-on-one sessions in this ever-evolving marketised educational landscape, fostering new definitions of success through personalised, equity-based support.

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conversely, examines the "fairness" of this allocation in relation to "a person's contribution", or their skills and abilities (p. 16). In other words, equity looks at what barriers may hinder what an individual can do, and what would allow them to achieve the same outcome of success as their peers who do not experience those barriers.

3   A Learning Strategist is a professional who has training in metacognition (being aware of how we think and process information) and helps students develop effective learning strategies (including skills for self-advocacy, effective engagement with content, and organisation skills, including time management). Learning Strategists also work with students on non-cognitive skills, such as curiosity and creativity, perseverance, communication, motivation, and teamwork. As a Learning Strategist at the University of British Columbia, Okanagan Campus, I work predominantly with neurodiverse and Indigenous students to help them understand their unique learning needs and what success means for them. I employ positive psychology and Universal Design (UD) concepts in my coaching and teaching approaches.

4   For a more in-depth look at the science of character strengths, see Niemiec et al., 2017.

Success, Universal Design for Learning, and personalisation

Before examining how I work with students to redefine success for themselves, it is first important to understand what we mean by "success", and how positive psychology and UDL play important roles in reshaping success for students. Dirk Ifenthaler and Jane Yin-Kim Yau's (2020, p. 1967) systematic review on learning analytics and study success highlights that while the term "student success" lacks a universal definition, "course completion" and "student performance" are often considered key to a student's success by institutions. Most studies lack interventions for struggling students (defined as those achieving a failing grade). Only one study among the forty-six articles reviewed suggests interventions for coaching students through test anxiety and content knowledge.[5] With student dropouts often linked to a "lack of university support services and academic unpreparedness",[6] it is surprising that few studies have explored interventions with study support services, such as Learning Strategists (Ifenthaler & Yin-Kim Yau, 2020, p. 1963). While supporting academic success (i.e., content and grades) is valid, I argue that this view risks alienating struggling students by reducing their worth to grades rather than broader skills. Moira Cachia and colleagues' (2018) study of undergraduate psychology students offers an alternative definition of success, one coined from their interviews with students. They show that while students see academic success as the "accomplishment of the learning process; gaining subject knowledge; and developing employability skills" (Cachia et al., 2018, p. 434), they also acknowledge that in order to achieve this success they must first have "intrinsic elements" (Cachia et al., 2018, p. 436) nurtured, including self-management, motivation and personal skills. These intrinsic skills, then, are addressed through both course content, but more importantly, student support services.

With Cachia and colleagues' (2018) student-led, skill-based definition in mind, why do we still act as if all students fit the traditional,

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5   The study was Zimmerman & Johnson (2017).
6   This would include unpreparedness for the transition from high school to university and preparedness with academic skills, including reading, note-taking, time management, and study planning.

middle-class, ableist, heteronormative higher education model that is fixated on success through grades? While there is a growing acceptance of UDL among both teaching and support staff, it is not embraced by all. An underlying principle of UDL is "multiple means of action and expression" for students in assessment practices, which can include the expression and cultivation of non-cognitive skills (Dalton et al., 2019, p. 1). UDL allows for the "broadest range of diversity in our student populations" to be addressed (Dalton et al., 2019, p. 1); however, it is still an approach that accommodates the needs of the many, and not necessarily the more specific needs or support of a few. For these equity-deserving, particularly neurodiverse, students who may require additional accommodations or PLPs in order to thrive independently at university, UDL does not completely suffice. As a Learning Strategist, I bridge the gap between what UDL offers, and the specific one-on-one support that students require to be empowered to undertake self-directed learning. By working on academic and non-cognitive skills in recurring meetings, I encourage conscious engagement with their own strengths in order to improve these skillsets: the focus is not simply on grades, but on holistically developing as a life-long learner in order to take meaningful skills forward into their careers.

I personally use a flexible model that includes motivational interviewing techniques and positive psychology influences to teach metacognition.[7] I foster a student-centred, skills-focused approach to learning through face-to-face meetings with primarily equity-deserving cohorts. While my students want to achieve higher grades, there is recognition that work on other skills, such as time management and study methods, must occur first for the grades to eventuate. I utilise accountability check-ins with many students to offer ongoing support. Collaboration and co-advising with the Disability Resource Centre

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7 Motivational interviewing (MI) "is an effective counselling method that enhances motivation through the resolution of ambivalence" (Hall et al., 2012, p. 661). MI relies on the facilitator (i.e., therapist, counsellor, advisor, etc.) asking open-ended questions to facilitate and maintain participant autonomy. Facilitators build rapport through making affirmations, and use reflections and summarising to encourage "personal exploration" of internal/external motivators (Hall et al., 2012, p.663). Listening and understanding are key to a successful motivational interviewing session. Positive psychology "is the study of optimal experience" regarding how people live life and including how people live in psychological practice is necessary for holistic care (Park & Peterson, 2008, p. 85). For more, see Park & Peterson (2008).

(DRC) and Indigenous Programs and Services (IPS), from which most students are referred, ensures wrap-around support. This method of collaboration reinforces advocacy and builds communication and support networks for students as they embark on their studies. My role as a Learning Strategist, then, is to offer students the opportunity to build their self-reflective skills and self-awareness as learners.

Personalised approaches to metacognition

I am often asked how a student can arrive at university without the skills—academic and non—to succeed. I counter with, how can students know what they do not know? When transitioning from high school to university, how do they know their previous study methods or motivation techniques will not support them now? Expecting every student to have the same level of skills mastery, self-reflective knowledge, and resilience is unrealistic and unfair. While many students will, through self-reflective practice, determine what areas they need to work on to be successful at university, those from diverse (i.e., ethnic minorities) and neurodiverse backgrounds might lack exposure to the process of reflection, or may have experienced stigmatisation around seeking help and thus find the process of self-reflection with compassion challenging. Liz Thomas (2010, p. 433) asserts that "a traditional institutional habitus tends to reinforce initial inequalities, and these expectations are internalized by students".[8] Changing this narrative around success and navigating challenge requires a supportive environment for understanding the university learning process. Personalised teaching and support, I argue, allows for equity and consideration by offering a space in which students can be vulnerable.

I argue that personalisation emphasizes individual importance.[9] A

8   Thomas (2010) draws on the work of Diane Reay for her definition of institutional habitus as "the impact of a cultural group or social class on an individual's behaviour as it is mediated through an organization" (p. 431).

9   Thomas (2010) explores equity-deserving students' internalisation of academia's opinion of inferiority and how an inclusive institutional habitus fosters growth: "[I]f an institutional habitus is inclusive and accepting of difference, and does not prioritize or valorize one set of characteristics, but rather celebrates and prizes diversity and difference... [students] will find greater acceptance of and respect for their practices and knowledge, and this, in turn, will promote higher levels of persistence in [Higher Education]" (p. 431).

personal approach helps the acceptance of difference and the "self": "students who feel respected by staff are more able to take problems to staff, and thus sort them out" (Thomas, 2010, p. 432). Students also feel a greater sense of "self-confidence and motivation, and their work improves" when staff show a genuine interest in them and their background (Thomas, 2010, p. 432). I have found this to be true: my sessions start from a place of connection, interests, and experiences. Then, together with the student, we address concerns and conceptualise success for them.[10] Given that most of my meetings revolve around perceived or actual failure, the personalised approach rooted in positive psychology and character development works best for defining success for these students. Peer settings can be overwhelming when sharing such personal experiences. The personal approach provides individualised attention and a safe space to explore options, reconnect with their strengths, and grow as a learner. I highlight their strengths, normalise grades, and share my experiences. By doing so we prioritise areas to work on and form a trusting, open environment.

Case study

Defining success for the students I work with is the focal point of each session I have. For this chapter, I present a case study exemplifying the benefits of personalised support for fostering a safe space for individualised exploration towards success. This case is about the story of Blair, a third year, non-binary Engineering student with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) referred by the DRC. Blair

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10 For example, one ethnically diverse student believed she was not successful because she had barely passed her courses. However, at the beginning of the term, she became the caregiver of her two younger siblings due to a family breakdown. She did not consider how well she managed full-time studies, full-time work, and dependent care. The fact that she was passing her courses was successful given her challenges. By exploring her character strengths, and working with her creativity, persistence and love of learning, we found ways to manage her time more flexibly, and advocate for assistance. Working with her to develop her self-reflective practice and self-agency became defining elements of her success. At the end of our sessions, she identified how her ability to multitask and prioritise was growing thanks to her situation. She understood how to carry those non-cognitive skills across to her studies. Accountability check-ins consisting of follow-up meetings aided her progress and created a regular safe space for growth and experimentation with study style and preferences.

had accommodations[11] for their studies to aid in their learning but felt disconnected from the conventional definition of a successful student as they were constantly removed from their university cohort.[12] In their PLP, Blair initially labelled themselves as "lazy" due to time management challenges, which had been internalised from their pre-diagnosis high school days. Identifying time management as a target skill, I encouraged Blair to consider positive traits and relationships that could aid in their time management.[13] Additionally, educating Blair about ADHD management became crucial in acknowledging their strengths, such as hyper focus. Blair's passion for learning emerged as a character strength for them, allowing them to delve into subjects they were interested in for extended periods of time. However, addressing time blindness was essential, as it led to misjudgements in completing tasks.

Blair, who was also creative and had a close friend network, incorporated innovative approaches into their PLP to enhance homework engagement and learning. They utilised the teaching method as a creative outlet for studying material, using it to explore less interesting content by teaching friends and employing body doubling to combat time blindness and motivation issues. We channelled their hyper focus for interest-driven studying into an effective study method.[14] We also worked on their self-advocacy and understanding of equity and UDL, resulting in Blair utilising assignment extensions to alleviate stress and improve their focus. Blair's mindset transformed from fixed to growth: their neurodivergence and accommodations became avenues for exploring interests and courses within an equitable environment.

Blair was initially unaware of different learning approaches and truly believed that their inability to study and find motivations like others meant that they were not successful. Using positive psychology shifted Blair's motivation by integrating strengths into their studies. Our joint focus on independent learning and engaging with course material

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11   Including extra time for exams in a distraction reduced setting, note taking assistance, and extensions on assessments, if needed.

12   For discussion around deficit discourse and its impacts, see Larsen & Frost-Camilleri, 2023.

13   There are various "domains" within positive psychology that collectively allow an individual to have a "good life" and develop "positive subjective experiences" (Park & Peterson, 2008, p. 85). Positive traits and relationships are two such domains.

14   Such as studying subjects of interest outside of their peak focus times, as it was easier for them to find focus with these subjects.

with their friends allowed us to address time blindness and motivation challenges. Despite setbacks along the way, Blair realised that success lay in their self-development.

As part of understanding how to manage time blindness, we co-created their study schedule for two months. Weekly, we listed upcoming classes and due dates, with Blair adding them to a Google calendar. Initially, they would underestimate study time. I would guide Blair in determining when additional time was needed and advising them to seek advice from friends on shared subjects to refine their schedule. Over time, we made gradual progress.

A pivotal moment arrived near the term's end when Blair presented a complete self-made schedule encompassing study time, classes, assignments, and personal time. Blair told me they wanted to commit time to a new passion and had recognised the need to make adjustments to their organisation of time. They also expressed excitement in trying to plan for an upcoming assessment on their own. Blair then actively engaged in planning, seeking support from friends, and leveraging their character strengths to complete a comprehensive schedule. Independent completion of their schedule marked a significant win for us, leaving Blair feeling accomplished and better prepared for the rest of the term and life beyond university.

Empowered by their newfound skills, Blair became proficient in assessment planning, time blocking, and exam preparation. Our discussions extended to applying these skills in their upcoming internship, where they could embrace self-improvement and transform setbacks into opportunities for successful learning.

Though their grades did not soar, Blair accomplished a significant milestone by submitting all assignments for the first time in three years and practised essential academic and non-cognitive skills. They embraced skills like time management, creativity, perseverance, motivation, and social skills—skills that were once only reserved for traditionally "successful" students. While there is a prevailing emphasis on high grades as a marker of success in university programmes, my approach did not push or even encourage Blair to achieve high grades. My approach prioritised Blair's self-discovery and innate character strengths to develop stronger academic skills. Success, for Blair and me, meant cultivating self-awareness, confidence, and independence in learning.

Blair's grades may not mirror traditional success, but their journey encapsulated profound growth. Every year, I am required to send the university leadership statistics on how I, as a Learning Strategist, am improving student grades. Those statistics state that, on average, students who see me have a 10–15% increase in their grades. Blair did not fall into that 10–15%. In fact, their grades stayed the same, in the 50s and 60s. But for Blair, the real success was in them finding their feet, learning transferable skills, and defining success for themselves. Blair's confidence blossomed: they even started to encourage their friends to seek personalised support with me and took it upon themselves to teach them skills we had worked on together. In their final email before beginning that much-desired internship, Blair wrote:

> [P]lease do know that I am infinitely thankful for your support this semester. You've made the difference between me failing everything, or having a good chance at this.

> From the bottom of my heart, thank you.

Personalisation vs dependence

While the benefits of personalised support are evident in the example of Blair, not everyone agrees with this approach. I have received comments regarding potential student dependence on personal support throughout their degree, which may limit their workplace independence. Some suggest that what I do is "hand-holding" and recommend that I should allow students to struggle more to learn from their mistakes. I agree that there are times when a "tough-love" approach to learning can be beneficial; however, for students who have entered university with past-negative experiences of learning, this approach can be harmful. Instead of pushing them to do better, it can turn them away from their studies. As I mentioned earlier, how can we expect a student to know how to do something, or overcome a learning barrier, when they have never done so before? Blair exemplifies many of my neurodiverse students: they start with regular support and become independent learners. That initial "hand-holding" that is feared by some never happens: students achieve empowerment through scaffolded support and celebrated wins. I do not believe Blair would have succeeded had their exposure to

learning skills been a one-hour, one-size-fits-all crash course in a packed classroom. While I provide such classes at faculty members' request, it does not resonate with all students. Some need personalised attention and a positive outlook on their learning journey. They need to know they matter.

Conclusion

Ifenthaler and Yin-Kim Yau (2020, p. 1963) state that "the essence of study success is to capture any positive learning satisfaction, academic improvement, or social experience in higher education". While I am required to send university leadership committees the changes in Grade Point Average (GPA) of each student I see, before and after, to demonstrate both mine and the students' "success", they do not ask me how satisfied my students are with their learning, or how *they* felt they improved. But we who work with these equity-deserving cohorts do notice that satisfaction: we see how building students up, rethinking success, and meeting students where they are works. The individual approach of meeting students where they are and asking them, "What do you know? What do you want to know?", I argue, holds more weight than generic skills presentations.

Good grades and retention without purpose are not success stories: grades and retention with lifelong change are. Helping students discover their strengths and use them to overcome their challenges should be and is a part of the university experience. A Learning Strategist coaches students towards their potential.

Empowering students for post-university success equals educator success and, in encouraging those life-long skills, we have made them successful learners. I suggest that we—whether educators or support staff—adopt an approach rooted in the personal, by slowing our meetings down, sharing our own journeys, and using positive psychology to help our students grow. This chapter presented a case study illustrating how we can redefine the narrative around the successful learner in HE. We can reshape students' connection to learning by asking them to define success for themselves. I argue that personalised, skill-focused interventions do not breed dependence but nurture sustainable independent learning. This approach empowers students and gives them agency. Adopting

this more personalised approach to interventions demonstrates that university, and HE in general, is not just an exercise of GPAs and completion statistics but an experience of holistic development.

This chapter has aimed to encourage fellow student support staff and educators to change the narrative around success. I hope that it inspires a change in how we engage with students, by meeting them where they are, individually, and, more importantly, questioning and changing the narrative, at our leadership tables and in our classrooms, of what makes a successful learner.

Steps toward hope

- Challenge outdated notions of learner independence by recognising that needing support is not a weakness but a reflection of the diverse needs within university cohorts.

- Implement personalised study skills development through approaches such as face-to-face motivational interviewing, regular accountability check-ins, and tailored skills development plans.

- Empower students in their self-study and learning journeys to build lasting independent learning skills, rather than promoting a false ideal of immediate self-sufficiency.

- Reframe the narrative of academic success by highlighting the importance of non-cognitive skills, particularly in supporting neurodiverse students, to create a more inclusive model of learner development.

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38. An imperfect practice? What barriers are there to providing outdoor education opportunities for primary-aged children?

Megan McGee

Abstract

This chapter explores the limited treatment of outdoor education within the primary national curriculum, arguing that it reflects a broader misunderstanding of its value and purpose. Despite strong evidence that outdoor education supports children's mental wellbeing, curiosity, and holistic development, significant barriers remain to its widespread implementation. One notable recent barrier has been the restrictions on outdoor activities during the COVID-19 pandemic, which further limited access. To address these challenges, the chapter advocates for increased funding to create more outdoor education opportunities and recommends targeted training to enhance teachers' confidence and competence in delivering outdoor learning experiences. Strengthening the role of outdoor education within the curriculum is essential for fostering healthier, more engaged learners.

Keywords: outdoor education; primary education; English education; primary educators; nature; outdoor environment

Introduction

What is outdoor education exactly? John Quay and colleagues (2020) link outdoor education to the frequent use of physical adventure whereby the individual develops an understanding of the capabilities of the body and mind. Building on this, Wei-Ta Fang and colleagues (2022) assert that outdoor education combines various elements including, but not limited to, adventure and wilderness-based experiences. Fang and colleagues (2022) also state that in instances where a school is able to embark on a residential programme, teachers encourage their students to participate in a range of activities on offer, for example, mountain/rock climbing, canoeing and group games. In the English primary national curriculum (Department for Education, 2013, pp.198–199), outdoor education falls under the "physical education" section and is briefly noted under the Key Stage 2 (Years 3–6) subsection, whereby it states that children should "take part in outdoor and adventurous activity challenges both individually and within a team". Heather Prince and Lisa MacGregor (2022), when referring to the primary school curriculum and its inclusion of outdoor education, provide examples of how this may be practically integrated in a lesson. An example is that children in Years 1–3 (5–8 years of age) have to learn about a range of topics that link to the outdoor environment, such as animals, which include humans and plants. Whilst outdoor education is included in the national curriculum, its brief inclusion under the "physical education" section of the national curriculum as opposed to having its own individual section can be asserted to be a disservice to the practice of outdoor education and what the term truly embodies. Similarly, this brief addition leaves little guidance for primary educators when it comes to planning and facilitating outdoor education opportunities for students; this may act as a deterrent for some educators when it comes to leading such experiences for pupils for the environment outside of the classroom harbours more risk than inside, something that we will touch on later in this chapter. This chapter will seek to discuss the benefits of outdoor education, with a focus on children's mental wellbeing, whilst evaluating the potential barriers to children engaging, and having opportunities to spend time, in the outdoors and in outdoor education experiences within an English primary education context.

The pros and cons of outdoor education: What are the benefits and barriers?

Furthermore, outdoor education encompasses a variety of benefits, which, in relation to children's mental wellbeing, are of prime importance. Jeff Mann and colleagues (2021) argue that experiences with nature and how they impact a child's whole development have been evidenced; these experiences are thought to foster children's imagination and curiosity as well as having cognitive, emotional, and physical health benefits. However, there has evidently been a decline in children building a connection with nature and the outdoors. A MENE survey (Monitoring of Engagement with Natural Environment) conducted via Natural England found that in the years 2013–2015 a total of approximately 8% of children aged 6–15 in England visited the natural environment with their schools (Burt, 2016). More recently, a poll commissioned by the Wildlife Trusts (2021), an organisation focused on protecting natural spaces and connecting people to the natural environment across the UK, found that approximately 75% of participants surveyed believed that children do not spend an adequate amount of time outdoors, relishing in the natural world surrounding them. If outdoor education has proven benefits for children's mental wellbeing, then why are children within the UK spending less time outdoors? Could this lack of outdoor education opportunities and time spent in a natural environment be negatively impacting children's mental wellbeing?

Tying in with this discussion, it is imperative to acknowledge here that whilst outdoor education has noted benefits and advantages, specifically pertaining to mental wellbeing for children, it is not a perfect practice by any means. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit the world, we suddenly found ourselves having to quickly adjust to a new way of living in what was a terrifying, turbulent period of time. In an educational context, educators had to rapidly alter their practice to accommodate the current climate so that children did not miss too much of their education as school doors were shut and all were concealed in the safety of their own homes. Quay and colleagues (2020) discuss an educator's role during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, whereby they reflect on how many educators across the world were tasked with adjusting and even

"re-inventing" their teaching to corroborate with the circumstances at a time when face-to-face teaching was not possible. The article gives the example of online learning, whereby educators moved their face-to-face sessions online, delivering creative and engaging sessions to ensure students still experienced a sense of normalcy, attending lessons as they usually would in school. Whilst educators worked behind the scenes to make their online sessions as engaging as possible, children found themselves suddenly unable to experience the outdoor environment like they had before. Therefore, we mustn't turn a blind eye to the trauma the pandemic sparked for many children and their families. The subsequent lockdowns implemented by the UK government saw many become isolated in the confines of their own homes, with some living in unfortunate circumstances with the inability to escape, unable to see family and friends as well as losing the only sense of normality they had ever known. Unsurprisingly, this led to a sharp increase in mental illness in children and young people. The Mental Health Foundation (2020) found that studies conducted into children and young people's mental health and wellbeing during the height of the pandemic insinuated that those in the group experienced raised levels of anxiety and distress, with an increased probability of PTSD symptoms in children who had been quarantined. Additionally, NHS England (2021) reported that since 2017, the rates of probable mental disorders have risen; for 6–16-year-olds the statistics have jumped from roughly one in nine (11.6%) to one in six (17.4%). Such shocking statistics not only highlight how detrimental the pandemic was but arguably illustrate the importance of children having time outdoors and experiencing a natural environment with their peers. Despite educators' best efforts, the fact is that a large majority of children were unable to leave their homes and found themselves submersed in a new "normal" and, amongst other factors, this ultimately impacted children's mental wellbeing negatively as evidenced by the statistics detailed in this paragraph.

Moreover, another factor that can impact the quality of outdoor education that children receive pertains to the pressure that falls on the classroom practitioner to both plan and conduct outdoor education sessions. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the brief inclusion of outdoor education in the national curriculum provides little guidance for teachers on providing outdoor education sessions,

which can be contended to further deepen the pressure. Janke van Dijk-Wesselius and colleagues (2020) detail how a barrier for teachers when engaging in outdoor education is a fear of losing control, in addition to the challenges of managing difficult behaviour. The authors discuss the topic of safety and risk issues, whereby they assert that some teachers may find difficulty in being unable to see every child under their care at all times during outdoor activities; this can then lead to an inner conflict for the teacher where they wish to warn and protect children but, on the other hand, they also desire for their students to have the freedom to take risks. Likewise, Prince (2019) contends that some teachers may view risk management as being an administrative burden that overshadows the time needed to plan and carry out outdoor learning experiences. These barriers to teachers implementing outdoor education sessions could arguably, and inadvertently, impact their students. To clarify this statement, whilst the teacher may not conduct many outdoor education sessions for one or all of the reasons mentioned above, the lack of outdoor education sessions will directly impact the students of that teacher. It will be the students who will experience fewer outdoor education experiences as a result of the barriers that are negatively affecting their teacher's confidence to facilitate outdoor education experiences.

What can be done to improve outdoor education opportunities in English primary schools?

So, what can be done to improve outdoor education opportunities for primary aged children so that they are able to reap the benefits of the practice? One suggestion that can be taken from the discussion in this chapter is to better fund outdoor education opportunities for primary schools. Emily Marchant and colleagues (2019) found that the primary schools that took part in their research into curriculum-based outdoor learning reported a series of benefits in their students and teachers, which included an improvement in school engagement as well as a change in health and wellbeing. Further to this, Marchant and colleagues (2019) advocate more training and support for schools in order for outdoor learning to be the standard way that the curriculum aims are addressed. In recent years, there has been a visible push for the inclusion of forest school practices in English primary schools, an approach that stemmed

from Denmark. In their research which conducted interviews with children from two English mainstream primary schools, Janine Coates and Helena Pimlott-Wilson (2019) found that integrating a six-week forest school training programme into mainstream education supported children's cognitive, social, physical, and emotional development.

Linking into this, providing more funding for outdoor education opportunities in primary education will undoubtedly create a plethora of opportunities for educators to facilitate outdoor education sessions and enable students to engage with the natural environment to a greater extent. In addition, it will provide children with more time to spend outdoors, thus helping children build both a connection with, and appreciation of, the natural environment whilst also positively impacting their mental wellbeing as well as other aspects of their development. An example of an invaluable outdoor education resource tying into this point is PGL (Peter Gordon Lawrence, 2019), who operate as a leader in outdoor education for primary and secondary aged children, offering children courses in educational activities as well as residential trips where children can engage in activities such as rock climbing and canoeing.

In relation to this, another suggestion for improvement could be providing more training opportunities for primary teachers in outdoor education. If more teachers are trained in facilitating outdoor education sessions, we may see a rise in teacher confidence in conducting such sessions and, in turn, this may lead to a greater number of outdoor education sessions and experiences for students, positively promoting the mental wellbeing of both staff and students. Referring back to the example of the forest school approach, within the UK the approach has seen a steady increase in popularity (Forest Canopy Foundation, n.d.) and while its benefits have been highlighted by studies such as those conducted by Coates and Pimlott-Wilson, Stephanie Dean (2019) asserts that the UK implementation of this approach has taken shape to reflect a more "standardised" approach, like the National Curriculum, which can be seen in many primary schools, where the forest school approach has been included as a fixed part in the curriculum. To clarify, with the implementation of this approach within some English primary schools and its rising popularity among educators, this may give way to the opening of opportunities for teachers to learn more about outdoor education within

their own schools or from others who carry it out in their respective settings, thus creating another avenue for teacher confidence to be boosted while also acknowledging that the approach has been adapted to tie into the UK education system. This draws on the professional knowledge and pedagogical skills that primary educators already possess, enabling them to effectively facilitate outdoor education sessions.

To summarise, outdoor education is a practice that is shown to benefit several aspects of a child's development, namely their mental wellbeing, as was the focus in this chapter. However, there has been a decrease in the amount of time children are spending outdoors and the number of outdoor education experiences children have access to. This, coupled with factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic, has resulted in a rise in mental illnesses and disorders in young children. Further to this, the inclusion of outdoor education in the primary national curriculum is brief, which may be a possible contributing factor to the anxiety and uncertainty primary educators feel in planning and conducting outdoor education sessions, in turn unintentionally contributing to the decline in opportunities to be outdoors for pupils. This chapter suggests two practical solutions: providing more funding for outdoor education experiences in primary education, and more training opportunities in outdoor education for primary educators. Both suggestions emerge out of the discussion in this chapter and aim to improve the number of opportunities children have outdoors, advancing teacher confidence and easing pressure in facilitating sessions outdoors with an overarching view of benefitting children's mental wellbeing.

Steps toward hope

- Advocate for a clearer and more comprehensive integration of outdoor education within the national curriculum to better guide and support educators.

- Increase funding to expand access to quality outdoor education opportunities for both children and teachers, particularly in response to barriers heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Provide targeted training and professional development for teachers to build confidence and skills in facilitating effective outdoor education sessions.

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39. Moving, making, and mingling: Moving towards an embodied pedagogy

Susannah McKee and Marie Stephenson

Abstract

This chapter critically reflects on the impact of mind/body dualism on educational practices, highlighting how traditional separations between cognition and embodiment have shaped learning environments. In response, it offers a hopeful vision for holistic, whole-person "mindbody" approaches to education. Drawing on an initial exploration of literature in neuroscience, embodied cognition, embodied pedagogy, and the theory of the extended mind, the chapter proposes a framework to support reflection and guide a shift towards more embodied pedagogical practices. It presents examples of current embodied approaches across disciplines and invites collaboration for future reflection, experimentation, and development of embodied pedagogies.

Keywords: embodied pedagogy; embodied, situated and distributed cognition; extended mind; movement; making; mingling; milieu; mood

Introduction

We ask our BA Education students to critically engage with debates in education and interrogate assumptions underpinning educational practice. "What is education for? Why is it done in the way that it is? Is it inclusive? Fit-for-purpose? What might alternative, socially just incarnations of education look like?". Exploring such questions alongside students propelled us to take a more critical stance regarding our own teaching practice and the perceived norms of teaching and learning across Higher Education.

   bell hooks (1994, p. 147) argued that "individuals enter the classroom to teach as though only the mind is present, and not the body". The tradition of mind/body dualism in academia that sidelines the body and views "high-level" thinking as the business of the somehow disembodied mind continues to permeate educational practice, privileging mind over body, dispassionate logic over emotion, and the individual over the collective. In interrogating and rethinking this perspective we began to explore holistic and creative approaches that seek to involve the whole person and their social environment. In response to Lisa Clughen's (2023, p. 3) call for Higher Education practitioners to ask "Have I considered the body in this?" three initial reflective prompts emerged that we have found helpful to move us towards a more embodied pedagogy in our own course design and practice: moving, making, and mingling.

   Embodiment views "the interrelationship of the mindbody" (Clughen, 2023, p. 4) as key to human understanding of the world. Building on Andy Clark and David Chalmers' idea of the "Extended Mind", Annie Murphy Paul (2021) draws on research in the fields of embodied cognition (the role of body in thinking), situated cognition (the influence of place on thinking) and distributed cognition (the impact of thinking with others) to urge us to go beyond the traditional concept of "brainbound" thinking. David Nguyen and Jay Larson (2015, p. 332) offer a view of embodied pedagogies as facilitating "learning that joins body and mind in a physical and mental act of knowledge construction" with opportunities for "physical awareness, environmental and interpersonal engagement, and socially constructed knowledge". Consideration of embodied approaches is not intended as prescriptive or pre-supposing of any specific methodology but rather

is envisaged as complementary and dependent on context. With this in mind, we share here a framework for reflecting on opportunities to embrace a more embodied pedagogy.

Moving, making, and mingling (milieu and mood)

An initial exploration of the literature from neuroscience indicates a growing body of evidence for the interconnectedness of "the social, the emotional and the physical in cognitive processing" (Doherty & Fores Miravalles, 2019, p. 5).

Moving

We are bodies and bodies move. Guy Claxton (2016, p. 35) describes how even as they appear still, the internal workings of our bodies are in constant motion and dialogue embodying intelligence "at a cellular level". And we move dynamically through the world, interacting with our environment and those in it. Contrary to the image of a "puppet-master" brain directing the body's movements, embodied cognition research suggests an entwined and interdependent brain-body relationship, where intelligence resides in the mindbody (Claxton, 2016) and in which the act of "moving our bodies changes the way we think" (Paul, 2021, p. 45).

Movement improves physical health and mental well-being, leading to better learning outcomes (Clughen, 2022). Traci Lengel and Mike Kuczala (2010, p. 9) refer to research that suggests that "physically fit children perform better in the classroom", while Ann-Marie Houghton and Jill Anderson (2017, p. 10) emphasise the importance of addressing mental health and wellbeing in teaching contexts because "we know that wellbeing is necessary to our capacity to learn". Movement is, specifically, good for the brain. When we are engaged in physical activity more blood flows to the brain (vascularisation), mood-enhancing neurochemicals are released, and the production of new brain cells, or neurons, is promoted (neurogenesis) in parts of the brain related to learning and memory (Doherty & Fores Miravalles, 2019 in Clughen, 2022).

Movement enhances cognition. Paul (2021) discusses the impact of distinct types and intensities of movement on thinking. She cites studies

that suggest that physical activity puts us in a state of preparedness for learning, simultaneous movement and learning sharpens focus, speeds up cognitive processes and enhances creativity, and movement positively impacts memory and recall. Movement unrelated to academic content facilitates "brain breaks" (Lengel & Kuczala, 2010) or "active relaxation" (van Dam, 2020 in Clughen, 2022): essential time for the brain to process new information and "reboot". Breaks from learning that exert the body, argues Paul (2021), are far more conducive to learning than those that rest it.

Clughen (2022) cites numerous studies linking movement to positive emotions and positive feelings to motivation, engagement and memory. Put simply, movement enhances our mood and makes us more likely to fully engage with and be able to recall an activity (and its associated learnings) that we enjoy. Far from being incidental or peripheral, emotions are key components of human cognition (Doherty & Fores Miravalles, 2019) and a better understanding of "connections between cognitive and emotional functions […has] the potential to revolutionize our understanding of learning" (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007, p. 3).

Making

As "makers", we have a long tradition of crafting artefacts and tools to enhance our making. These external-to-us tools can become literal extensions of ourselves (Claxton, 2016) as the brain assimilates them into its "map" of the body. Embodied cognition research suggests that thinking does not necessarily precede the act of making, but that "craft *is* cognition" (Claxton, 2016, p. 3). David Gauntlett (2013) describes the act of using our hands to physically manipulate "things" as a tool for thinking. In his work with creative research methods, he observes participants "having ideas through the process of making" (Gauntlett, 2018, p. 19), just as Camilla Groth (2017, p. 14) acknowledges a "sense of knowing through making" and decision-making "in action" in her ceramic practice. Kuczala and Lengel (2010, p. 25) argue that this kind of implicit knowledge construction that "takes place beyond our conscious awareness" can be very powerful.

There persists a tendency to privilege the 'intellectual' over making

and doing, which Groth (2017) recognises in the distinction between how her crafting practice and academic work are perceived. Claxton (2016) suggests that somatic practices and intelligences are valued less in both educational and professional settings. Nevertheless, in response to our working and social lives becoming increasingly governed by an automated digital world that may marginalise the haptic, he identifies a move towards making and movement, a desire to "get back from the virtual to the substantial, from the symbolic to the concrete: from mind to body" (Claxton, 2016, p. 282). His hopeful vision for a future education is one in which students "manipulate" as well as articulate and where "manipulacy is talked about and valued as highly as literacy and numeracy" (Claxton, 2016, p. 271).

Making can also be a means of connecting with the world. The things we make become part of the fabric of our environment and "through making things and sharing them in the world, we increase our engagement and connection with our social and physical environments" (Gauntlett, 2018, p. 19). In an educational setting, Gauntlett (2013, 2018) observes how having a tangible artefact to see and touch facilitates opportunities for reflection and the development of ideas, but also social interaction and the cognitive affordances of "mingling". In summary, "through making we also make meaning, we communicate meaning and we share meaning" (Groth, 2017, p. 14).

Mingling

The importance of the emotional climate of the classroom (Sousa, 2006, in Lengel & Kuzcala, 2010, p. 9; Clughen, 2023) for learning and for student engagement and belonging (Thomas, 2012) makes a strong case for attending to the already well-established social nature of learning, for developing supportive learning communities within universities and strong links to the communities they serve, for example via knowledge exchange and opportunities for students to access powerful professional and disciplinary networks.

Paul (2021) shares research highlighting the cognitive benefits of thinking via our relationships, whether with experts, peers or in groups, for example citing physicist and educationist Carl Wieman's studies of peer interaction among science students (see the University of British

Columbia, Carl Wieman Science Education Initiative website) which suggest "intense social engagement around a body of knowledge" (Paul 2021, p. 188) is key to transforming habits of thought to resemble those of experts. Although university education typically prizes individual thought and opportunities for this are of course valued, academic papers are typically co-authored and research studies indicate the benefits of established experts making their thought processes more explicit for imitation by novices (Paul, 2021).

Sandra Abegglen and colleagues (2023) propose collaboration as central to socially-just, liberatory education, based on genuine partnership and co-creation, including between disciplines, institutions, students and staff, as an alternative to a competitive, individualistic, hierarchical approach. Clughen (2023, p. 10) discusses the social element of embodiment and suggests "teaching approaches that soothe, promote social co-regulation and create a pleasant space for all students" as part of recognising that "our bodies are shaped socially and culturally and are potentially the loci of social wounds and trauma". These close ties between the physical, social, and emotional led us to reflect further.

Milieu

Reflection via our initial, work-in-progress, "movement, making, and mingling" prompts led to a sense that this framework needed to evolve further to more overtly emphasise our constant intertwining with the places and spaces through which we move, and the opportunities for these to enable and empower rather than exclude or marginalise; or, to move the model onwards, an additional prompt, not separate but enmeshed, which we might call our "milieu". Claxton (2016, p. 54) refers to the intimate and dynamic interconnection of body and world, describing the body as a System, made up of inter-dependent sub-systems, but itself also a subsystem of the world it inhabits: "As my heart is to my body, so my body is to the world around me". We are not who we are in isolation but exist in a constantly moving dialogic relationship with our environment. Paul (2021) offers a hopeful view of the potential to use our surroundings as powerful "extra neural resources", citing research on the creativity enhancing potential of natural spaces, from the field of neuroarchitecture on creating built spaces conducive to

learning and on the potential to think in the "space of ideas" to use tools to externalise our thinking and reduce cognitive load.

Mood

The concept of embodiment acknowledges and values the role of the emotional in making meaning and constructing knowledge, rather than disregarding it as a potentially disruptive force in the more traditional, dualistic, and brainbound conception of dispassionate logical thought. We have cited neuroscience research that not only links movement to positive mood and cognition but also views a deeper understanding of emotional intelligence as potentially revolutionary. We have commented on the connections between the emotional, the social, and our wellbeing and recognised the impact of our surroundings on how we feel and think. Gauntlett (2018) refers to participants "playing" with materials as they make-think and Clughen (2017, p. 9) asserts that "bringing joy […] into the classroom, can serve to unleash an engaging, motivating, invigorating and inspiring force". "Mood" may then be a valuable addition to the reflective prompts we offer.

Embodied pedagogy in action?

Fittingly, it is our collaborative work in education-related programmes that has offered rich opportunities for reflective co-enquiry, together with our students, into the potential affordances as well as challenges of experimenting with more embodied approaches as part of our pedagogic repertoire. Even with inherent relevance to the discipline, like others (McIntosh, 2013; Clughen, 2023) we have found it useful to make visible and interrogate the rationale when doing so and include optionality and agency for diverse students to choose how/when to participate. For example, creative and embodied approaches to reflection, from multi-modal artefact making, to photo-collage and digital scrapbooking, have been offered as rich meaning-making tools available alongside written journalling or sound notes to support, extend and deepen reflection, including on students' own developing identities in the discipline. Sharing examples of rigorous social science based research using creative or visual methods (e.g., Kara, 2020; Gauntlett, 2018) has prompted students to consider how such tools may

(or may not) support research participants in the expression of their lived experience and the understanding of this in their own qualitative enquiries, as well as the implications for implementation.

We have been inspired by the harnessing of creative and embodied approaches (Abegglen et al., 2019a; Warren & Payton, 2021) as a positive counter narrative to the common "deficit" framing of diagnosing and fixing student "weaknesses". The centrality of academic reading and writing has led us to trial embodied reading practices to build empowerment and ownership around text processing and creation as embodied endeavours. Techniques have included collective work to mark-up core texts via text scrolls (Abegglen et al., 2019b) or digital annotations to recognise "moves" in the text, groupwork to reconstruct and map texts via matching / grouping cut outs of theories with supporting details, followed by Lego® modelling of these to support their "unpacking". Free writing, "post-it-note" mapping and articulation of text flow with peers can scaffold student writers in physically shaping a narrative thread to more meaningfully express their unique "voice", perhaps in contrast with somewhat generic, disembodied computer-generated texts.

Such approaches have been revisited as ongoing, transferable scaffolds. For example, a co-created digital Padlet wall helped galvanise the student learning community via freer dialogic interaction at entry level and was extended via links to wider professional communities in a later placement module. Reflecting via the prompts helped us see potential and progress, but also highlighted our ongoing common default to sedentary classroom learning. Co-reflection on variety within individual learning sessions and over semesters prompted the integration of fieldwork exploring university learning spaces and pilot interdisciplinary collaborations such as with theatre studies lecturer-practitioners.

Interdisciplinary cross-institution networking has supported the sharing of embodied approaches to learning, including examples of integration in fields with an inherent focus on the body, such as healthcare/the clinical disciplines. Michael Flavin and Jennifer Bates (2022) review examples of how arts-based methods can promote an understanding of the human experience at the core of healthcare education and practice, noting further potential, especially for the

integration of dance and movement. Further examples include "Moving Medicine" at University of Exeter medical school (Richards & Lucas, 2022) and "The Out of Our Heads Art in Medicine" project (University of Bristol). Paul (2021) provides examples of how teaching involving movement and gesture promotes greater recall and understanding of content, acknowledging yet countering concerns about compromising time for "content" teaching.

Nguyen and Larson (2015) share examples of embodied pedagogy not only in disciplines with an obvious connection to physicality or the social world, but also in more abstract fields, with less obvious but implied links to spatiality, such as maths, via embodied approaches such as manipulating digital simulations for complex mathematical problem solving. Clughen's (2022) guide to embedding movement across HE, along with Paul McIntosh and Digby Warren's (2013), and Warren and Johanna Payton's (2021) examples of embodied and creative approaches in diverse disciplinary learning contexts evidence wider application that is ripe for exploration.

Future possibilities

We have been inspired and challenged by (figuratively) dipping a toe into the literature from diverse fields offering insights that are relevant to embodied pedagogy, from neuroscience, psychology and cognitive science, to philosophy, computing and artificial intelligence, architecture, education, and the creative and performing arts. We have only touched the surface via selected sources of approaches that are, of course, contested, critiqued, and problematised, and which may align with our own interests, preferences, cultural backgrounds and embodied histories (including, for example, in language and yoga teaching). We nonetheless feel that the affordances of rapid AI-driven technological change, together with emerging interdisciplinary research and practice, offer increased impetus for the concurrent consideration of learning as an embodied, holistic, human process.

The vision of powerful and often untapped or overlooked opportunities to extend our thinking via our bodies, social relationships and spaces offers hope for tackling the entrenched educational inequalities via wider access to supportive and resource rich environments (Paul, 2021).

Staff and students alike would benefit from guidance on how to harness the evolving technology and digital spaces, as well as from access to intelligently designed, versatile and cognitively supportive physical spaces for in-person human interactions, opportunities for hands-on, creative, and meaningful "making and doing" and for movement, beyond the university gym (see Clughen's (2023) vision of wider integration of embodiment professionals in "mainstream" university activities).

Collaboration, dialogue, and participation in events where we have "moved, made and mingled" with diverse others, across institutions, disciplines, and wider communities have helped us reflect on where opportunities for embodied pedagogy might add options and value, aiding and integrating "content" learning. To create this text, we have experimented with embodied approaches from free writing, concept mapping, collaging, virtual, and in-person dialogue to participating in movement-based workshops, walking and talking. Just as we have sought exploratory spaces for students to "manipulate" ideas in development, so are we sharing our in-progress reflections on moving, making, mingling, milieu, and mood in search of curious co-enquirers with whom to continue the reflection and experimentation.

Steps toward hope

- Critically examine the influence of mind/body dualism on current educational practices and explore holistic "mindbody" approaches informed by research in neuroscience, embodied cognition, and embodied pedagogy.

- Adopt and adapt a reflective framework and practical examples from across disciplines to begin integrating more embodied pedagogies into teaching and learning.

- Support whole-person teaching and learning by inviting ongoing reflection, experimentation, and co-development of embodied educational practices with colleagues and students.

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40. Food for thought: Pandemic hope

Hilda Mary Mulrooney

Abstract

The pandemic simultaneously exposed long-standing weaknesses and sparked necessary innovations in education. As teaching and learning shifted online, many staff and students experienced a diminished sense of belonging, highlighting the fundamental importance of human relationships in educational environments. Food, with its multifaceted personal and cultural significance, emerged as a powerful tool for fostering connection and community. During the pandemic, food-related projects helped enhance belonging among staff and students, illustrating how shared experiences around food can build stronger interpersonal bonds and deepen cultural understanding. This chapter explores how food can continue to serve as a meaningful route to strengthen connections and cultivate a more inclusive and supportive educational experience.

Keywords: pandemic; connections; belonging; food; hope; relationships

Introduction

At a dizzying speed during the pandemic, the world closed down. By mid-April 2020, an estimated 94% of learners in two hundred countries worldwide were affected by the closure of their educational institutions (UN, 2020). Young people were sentenced to classes online for an unknown length of time to protect those who were vulnerable. The world waited for a vaccine, but in the meantime, Higher Education had to continue to function. Most universities were ill-prepared to switch teaching and learning to online provision almost overnight. Lack of infrastructure and investment in digital connectivity were exposed (JISC & Emerge Education, 2022). Staff, many of whom felt ill-equipped to do so, were suddenly required to deliver material designed for the classroom online, often with little preparation, and even less confidence (JISC, 2021; Iivari et al., 2020). Working from bedrooms, dining tables, and kitchens, with members of their own families wandering in and out of shot and often simultaneously home-schooling or caring for others, Higher Education practitioners stepped up to the plate and did their best to support their students. This was at great cost; the requirement to keep going caused many academics to report a dramatic increase in their working hours (Wray & Kinman, 2021; JISC, 2021; Watermeyer et al., 2020; Longhurst et al., 2020).

In the myriad of arguments about whether and how students should be compensated for the disruption to their education (e.g., Weale, 2023; OIA, 2021, 2022, 2023), there has been little thanks, recognition, or reward for those lecturers, academic, technical and support staff who worked incredibly long hours to make this provision available (Watermeyer et al., 2021). Often lacking adequate facilities and even equipment to make the content optimal (JISC, 2021), they did their best, while simultaneously struggling with the same unknowns as their students. If they had not done so, students would have suffered even more disruption, since education would have closed down completely. This fact has been omitted from discussions about the impact on students.

Despite the difficulties it caused, the pandemic also had positive impacts within Higher Education. While exposing weaknesses—including digital poverty affecting staff as well as students—it allowed

and even demanded rapid innovation, showing how things could be done differently. The digital skills of staff and students increased rapidly due to the move to online teaching, and the acquisition of such digital skills is essential for students (JISC, 2021; Vickerstaff, 2023). The use of technology within Higher Education has many advantages. The digital gains of the pandemic could be built on to shape future education, focusing on how students learn rather than solely the teaching methods used, and ensuring that the learning is designed for digital delivery (JISC, 2020; JISC & Emerge Education, 2022). The pandemic allowed traditional institutions an alluring glimpse of what might be possible, with time, with planning, with the right equipment, support and training for staff, and having prepared students and managed their expectations.

The need to connect

Whether learning is online, face-to-face or a blend of the two, something the pandemic really highlighted was the need for students and staff to connect and form relationships with each other and their peers (Curnock Cook, 2021). Sense of belonging fell throughout the pandemic in both groups (Gopalan et al., 2022; Tice et al., 2021; Mulrooney & Kelly, 2020), although this was not universal. For commuter students, those with a disability, those in paid work, and for some parents and carers, sense of belonging may have increased due to the improved accessibility and flexibility of online provision (Curnock Cook & Dunn, 2022). Given our understanding that developing a sense of belonging and connection includes four elements, namely social, academic, surroundings and personal space (Ahn & Davis, 2019), it is easy to see how the pandemic could negatively affect belonging. Lockdowns meant physical separation from one another while forming relationships online was more difficult. Students usually had their cameras off, often to preserve bandwidth, but the result for staff was the feeling that they were teaching "into the void", faced with rows of anonymous avatars on screen and with no body language to read. Reduced interaction and engagement of students online was a major concern for staff (JISC, 2021). Our research within our large, post-1992 institution with a strong widening participation focus found that the first lockdown reduced the sense of belonging in staff and students, with both groups identifying physical presence on

campus as important to developing this (Mulrooney & Kelly, 2020). Follow-up research suggested that staff and students had concerns about continued online teaching and learning and its impact on their relationships with each other (Abu et al., 2021). The question was, what to do about it?

Building connections online—the potential of food

How could connections be built online? While the IT and pedagogy staff worked hard to show us the potential of different programmes and teaching approaches, I thought about food. I am a nutritionist and dietitian by background, so my interest was not limited to a desire for the next meal. Food was shown to be a source of comfort to many during the pandemic (Lasko-Skinner & Sweetland, 2021); not surprising when everything else in our lives had changed. I thought about the fact that everyone has to eat, so food is both universal and intensely personal. We all experience food differently—think of foods you like, and your associations with them. They are unlikely to be exactly the same for those around you. Food has multiple meanings for people—it is not simply a means of transmitting calories and nutrients to the body. What we eat sends messages about who we are; our values, our experiences, our cultures, and even our religious and personal beliefs (Lupton 1994; Rozin, 2005; Williams et al., 2012). Food is a physical necessity but also acts as a metaphor—connecting us to people, places and times, demonstrating friendship, welcome and acceptance, and highlighting personal and cultural identities.

Food to build a sense of belonging

In the first lockdown, I decided to try using food to build a sense of belonging among staff and students at my institution. I invited them to share with me recipes that were personally meaningful to them, and to tell me why they mattered. This project was called Cultural Food Stories. I created an online questionnaire, which included statements derived from the literature on belonging (Yorke, 2016; Ribera et al., 2017) and asked participants to rate them, using a five-point Likert rating scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". Participants were asked

for basic demographic data (e.g., age range, gender, disability status), how long they had been at the university, and whether they were staff or student members. They were also asked whether taking part in the project had affected their sense of belonging. Staff and students were invited to participate online via their university email addresses. A total of 45 participants (28 students, 15 staff and 2 who did not state which group they belonged to) took part, 12 of whom were also interviewed. The majority (73.8%) said that taking part had increased their sense of belonging, none stated that it had decreased it, and this was not affected by demographic characteristics (Mulrooney, 2021). A total of 49 recipes and stories were shared, and I created an online recipe book with the stories, the recipes and the three words participants used to describe what food meant to them.

In the academic year 2021–22, I again used food to engage staff and students, this time exploring the values that food-related images chosen by participants exposed. I invited submissions of food-related images, together with why those images had been chosen and what made them meaningful to the participants. The images could be photographs taken by participants, or images they had found online or in magazines. The only criteria were that the images had to relate in some way to the food, and no identifiable individual could be included. Demographic information was collected to see if this affected responses. Participants again rated their level of agreement with a series of statements related to belonging (Yorke, 2016; Gehlbach, 2015; Gehlbach & Brinkworth, 2011) and food-related statements, using the same five-point Likert rating scale as previously. They also assessed whether their participation had affected their sense of belonging at the university. Images and stories were shared by 90 participants (23 staff and 67 students), 13 of whom were also interviewed. The sense of belonging at the institution was increased in 39.0% of staff and 49.3% of students, and decreased in none (Wojadzis & Mulrooney, 2023).

Both projects aimed to enhance the sense of belonging in staff and students, and both did. Intensely personal and moving stories were shared. Themes common to both projects centred around food as a link to people, places and occasions, which was particularly poignant in the early part of the pandemic when people were physically separated. For example, the recipes shared were chosen in memory of family occasions

(e.g., parties, weddings), a honeymoon trip, meals shared with specific people like grandparents and parents, and foods that linked participants to their countries of origin, none of which could be visited at that time. The multiple roles of the food identified in the work, many of which related directly or indirectly to belonging and connection, are shown in Figure 40.1:

Fig. 40.1 Key themes identified from interviews in Cultural Food Stories (Mulrooney, 2021, CC BY-NC 4.0).

An i-poem (Gilligan et al., 2003), written from the transcript of one participant in the Cultural Food Stories project, demonstrates the role of food in the pandemic and how it evoked memories of specific people, emotions, culture and belonging:

> ...food in my culture,
> Feel like you belong to that group and this joy,
> Those I cannot see at this time,
> Reminds me of her.

The projects were carried out at very different times in a period of intense global, national and individual change. Cultural Food Stories

was carried out in the first lockdown, when we could only leave our homes once a day and go only short distances. No one could meet family or friends other than those we lived with. The greater sense of belonging induced by taking part in the project was unsurprising in that context, and the importance of food as a mechanism of connecting with others was highlighted. The second project, carried out a year later, was when the vaccine had been developed and the world was slowly moving back towards "normal". Able to leave home and meet albeit still with precautions and avoiding large groups, Higher Education institutions had opened again. In my own university, small classes were held on campus while large group teaching remained online, so while better than the previous year, the situation was still unusual and the standard crowds on campus were absent. Many participants spoke of how they had adapted their usual food-related customs to the pandemic. Rather than celebrating important religious or cultural events by bringing food to each other's homes and eating together, they prepared the dishes and ate together online, connected to each other through the ether by their shared values and their food customs, but unable to be physically together. This speaks to our enormous human capacity to adapt, to accommodate, and to innovate. It also speaks to the multiple values of food in our lives, and I would argue, the potential to use food within education to enhance and explore belonging.

How else can food be used to enhance belonging in Higher Education?

There are many ways to do this, some involving actual food. Opportunities to eat together, to have a potluck where individuals bring their own dishes to an event to share, may be constrained by health and safety concerns. If they are not, they offer valuable opportunities to talk together about food, and to discuss and understand other cultures and food beliefs. In a diverse and multicultural institution such as my own, this is invaluable. Even if this is not possible, the sorts of projects I carried out are possible and no special nutritional knowledge is required. Developing institutional cookbooks gives an insight into the diversity of students and staff at an institution, but also demonstrates an interest in knowing what matters to them. My suspicion is that it is being asked

about something that matters personally to individuals, that contributes to their sense of belonging, suggests that institutions have an interest in people as individuals, and this matters to them. This is illustrated by quotes from some of the participants:

> It is very special to take part in a project that involves both students and staff using the universal medium of food to bring everyone together. Food brings people together in so many different ways and for so many different occasions. It is fun to share traditions, recipes and really interesting to hear other people's stories (Mulrooney, 2021).

> I loved taking part in this project man, good luck! (Wojadzis & Mulrooney, 2023).

However future teaching and learning takes place, the reinvention of learning so that the digitalisation of teaching and learning enhances relationships within and between staff and students has been called for (Schleicher, 2020). Focusing on student engagement and the quality of their learning experience is key (Sohail, 2022), and a sense of connection and belonging contributes to this. Humans are social creatures. The links formed with others are not only personally important but also enhance learning and attainment (Thomas, 2012) as well as staff satisfaction (Szromek & Wolniak, 2020). We could look at the move online necessitated by the pandemic through the lens of despair, something we had to fight through to get back to "normal". Alternatively—ideally— we could also see it as a badge of hope, highlighting the importance of human connections within education, whether forged in person, online or both.

Steps toward hope

- Recognise and address the loss of belonging experienced by staff and students during periods of enforced online learning.
- Prioritise the cultivation of human relationships and community as a central aim in educational practices, however that education is delivered.
- Integrate food-related projects and initiatives as a means to foster connection, belonging, and cultural exchange within educational settings.

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41. "It's a bit like academic me-time": Can virtual mini writing retreats contribute to a more joyful, creative, and humane Higher Education?

Aspasia Eleni Paltoglou, Alison Williams, Arriarne Pugh, and Rossella Sorte

Abstract

Academic writing is often a lonely and challenging activity, but writing retreats can reduce isolation, enhance studying effectiveness, and help foster scholarly communities. While existing literature discusses the effects of face-to-face writing retreats, there has been little evaluation of virtual mini writing retreats, which offer increased accessibility and the potential to embed effective writing habits into everyday academic life. This reflexive chapter, co-authored by two lecturers and two MSc students, explores the experience of participating in nine weekly virtual mini writing retreats, drawing on diary entries as a key reflective tool. The retreats provided a supportive and encouraging environment where staff and students felt empowered to be critical, honest, and creative in their writing. Participants also shared and discussed writing practices and tips, and noted

improved focus on their writing even outside of the sessions. In conclusion, brief virtual writing retreats may contribute to a more joyful, creative, and humane academic experience.

Keywords: writing retreat; academic writing; student engagement; community of practice; self-regulation; creativity

Introduction

Individualist deficit model vs supportive community approaches

Academic writing can be a lonely and challenging activity for staff and students alike. One of the challenges is finding the time and space to write (Cunningham, 2022). It is not unusual to procrastinate when working on a research paper or assignment or to be distracted by more pressing deadlines. It has been suggested that the ubiquitous deficit model, where students are told mainly what they have done wrong, is not the best way to support students in their studies; a more community-based approach is needed (Cunningham, 2022).

An example of a community-based approach is the practice of organising writing retreats for groups of students and staff, where writing sessions are interspersed with social and academic-skills-discussion sessions. Typically, writing retreats can last two (Sangster, 2021) or three days (Tremblay-Wragg et al., 2021; Quynn & Stewart, 2021), and can take place on campus (Quynn & Stewart, 2021; Sangster, 2021; Cunningham, 2022) or in a different location altogether (Tremblay-Wragg et al., 2021; Stevenson, 2021). In some cases, writing retreats are enriched by academic skills and time management workshops, as well as recharging activities (Tremblay-Wragg et al., 2021). Participants of the retreats can be undergraduate students (Sangster, 2021; Cunningham, 2022), graduate students (Tremblay-Wragg et al., 2021; Quynn & Stewart, 2021), or a combination of graduate students and staff (Stevenson, 2021).

Benefits of face-to-face writing retreats

A review by Rachel Kornhaber and colleagues (2016) suggested that writing retreats can have personal, professional, and organisational

benefits. The personal benefits include increased motivation, confidence, engagement, pleasure in writing, and a reduction in writing-related anxiety levels. The professional benefits include the enhancement of writing skills, teamwork, and the development of a community of writers. Organisational investment is the extent to which an organisation can support the participants of the retreat, for example, by providing experienced mentors. Although developing personal and professional skills can lead to organisational benefits, organisational investment is important for greater writing productivity and generally for the success of the writing retreats (Kornhaber et al., 2016).

The social aspect of the writing retreats appears to be an important reason why they are beneficial (Kornhaber et al., 2016; Murray & Newton, 2009); the sessions provide not only professional, but also socio-psychological support, which can enhance the wellbeing of students (Stevenson, 2021; Tremblay-Wragg et al., 2021). Rowena Murray and Mary Newton (2009) suggested that the very beneficial community of practice created during the retreats encourages the development of a shared vision, collegial support, mentorship, continuous mutual peer review, and social interaction. Similarly, Emilie Tremblay-Wragg and colleagues (2021) showed that the community of practice created during and after the retreat can reduce feelings of isolation and enhance academic skills for graduate students, thus tackling two issues that often hinder graduate students' academic development and can lead to delaying or even dropping out from their studies. Furthermore, Heather Sangster (2021) showed that a two-day writing retreat on a university campus can enhance motivation, increase confidence and encourage a more optimistic outlook towards the writing up of the third-year undergraduate dissertation. In summary, writing retreats can provide the personal and professional support that undergraduate and postgraduate students need to progress with their writing.

Establishing a writing habit with regular writing retreats

Interestingly, Kristina Quynn and Cyndi Stewart (2021) mentioned that graduate students found it difficult to maintain a writing habit outside of the retreat. Similarly, Murray and Newton (2009) noted that writing retreats do not tend to be experienced as a mainstream activity. This

is an important point and brings into question the efficacy of one-off, long sessions of intensive writing in helping students establish a writing habit.

One way to integrate writing retreats into academic life could be to organise regular sessions. A recent study showed that weekly half or full-day face-to-face writing retreats had multiple personal and professional benefits for third year undergraduate students (Cunningham, 2022). More specifically, the results showed that these regular writing retreats helped bring about a shift from an individual responsibility for goal setting to a group commitment, which made it easier to complete writing goals. Participants also noted that the support and pressure to write was very useful for the development of their writing. There was also a sense of a power shift, as students and academics worked together on their writing, which made students feel their writing was important. The students also noted that the writing retreat provided regularity and rhythm for their writing and an opportunity for socialising. Finally, there were some indications that the writing retreat made students realise the importance of goal setting, which they used beyond the retreat. Interestingly, the students also organised writing retreats without the facilitator, which were almost as effective, and increased student independence.

Online sessions

Even if the retreats are regular part of academic life, it is not always possible for the students to attend if they are face-to-face sessions. Making the sessions online could encourage more participation. An important question is whether online writing retreats can be equally as effective as face-to-face sessions. Clare Cunningham (2022) noted that online writing retreats had mixed reviews. Some participants felt that it was more difficult to focus on online writing retreats, and the sessions were rated as less useful than face-to-face writing retreats. However, some of the participants noted that online writing retreats were very accessible. We also recently reflected on the positive outcomes of using one-hour virtual weekly writing retreats within a personal tutoring group (Paltoglou et al., 2023). More evidence is needed to explore the effectiveness of virtual mini writing retreats in reinforcing beneficial writing habits.

In summary, whist there is some evidence that face-to-face writing retreats are beneficial for students, there is little evidence or evaluation of the effectiveness of regular virtual mini writing retreats. Online mini writing retreats are important because they have the potential to be more accessible, and they could help to integrate writing retreats and writing habits in academic life. Typical writing retreats tend to be peripheral to academic life (Murray & Newton, 2009), and not everybody has the time or resources to attend them. Murray and Newton (2009, p. 549) suggest that the "community could be virtual, imagined, or internalised once they had experienced [a] structured retreat". This indicates that an online retreat is a viable way to create a community of practice and more specifically a writing community.

The co-authors of the current reflexive essay participated in a weekly virtual mini writing retreat, which took place online in Microsoft Teams. The hope was that the participants would get a considerable amount of writing done and that they would feel part of a writing community. In the current essay we aim to reflect on the experience of participating in a mini online writing retreat, based on the diary entries of author Aspasia Eleni Paltoglou (henceforth, AEP).

Context

The module where the activity took place was a full-time dissertation module for the MSc Psychology Conversion course at Manchester Metropolitan University. Students are asked to work largely independently for this module, and they often delay working on the project to work on other modules, as other deadlines are usually more pressing; this suggests that students need additional incentives and support in order to prioritise the dissertation. Author AEP hoped to increase the motivation of students to prioritise the project by creating an optional writing retreat.

Two out of sixteen students joined the writing retreat (authors Alison Williams (henceforth, AW) and Arriarne Pugh (henceforth, AP)), as well as a member of staff (author Rossella Sorte (henceforth, RS)). Author AEP was project supervisor for AW and AP, but also the module leader for the dissertation module, and RS was a supervisor of other students in the module.

Author AEP created a Microsoft Teams group for sixteen dissertation students she supervised, and within that, advertised the writing retreat, and posted the Microsoft Teams link for it. It was made clear to the students that the activity was entirely optional, and that it would run once a week. Typically, each writing retreat session had two to four participants. The retreat typically lasted just over an hour. More details about how the sessions are usually organised have been described elsewhere (Paltoglou, 2022; Paltoglou et al., 2023). In brief, the sessions consisted of 5–10 minutes of discussion goal setting and/ or evaluation, followed by 25 minutes of writing in silence. Typically, there were two writing slots and three discussion slots. Author AEP noted down the gist of what was said in nine different sessions, as well as some personal thoughts about it, which were shared with the sixteen project students.

Discussion

This section summarises some of the most important points that came up in our discussions (as captured in the notes of author AEP) during the sessions and relates them to relevant literature.

Personal benefits

We pondered that, when writing alone, we sometimes go into a downward spiral of self-deprecation. One of us suggested that the writing retreats were "academic me-time"; they could create a warm friendly, positive, encouraging, and relaxing environment for writing, where the participants could connect with each other. They could also give participants the headspace to work on their writing. We reflected that although participants needed to state what they were going to work on, and declare how it went to the other participants, there were no expectations or very prescriptive instructions which could potentially inhibit writing and creativity. In other words, there was an atmosphere of friendly accountability. The writing retreat felt like a reward and as something to look forward to. Furthermore, we felt inspired and part of a writing community.

The above reflections suggest that participating in the writing retreat

enhanced self-regulation. Self-regulation is the ability to understand and manage one's own behaviours and emotions effectively, especially when the tasks are not pleasant and overwhelming feelings may occur. Higher self-regulation for university students has been linked with positive outcomes (Park & Sperling, 2012). Self-regulation in the writing retreat was the result of the co-regulation achieved with other members of the group who were committed to the same purpose.

These reflections and observations also suggest that regular virtual mini writing retreats could create a community of practice, which includes a shared vision, collegial support, mentorship, and social interaction (Murray & Newton, 2009) and that being part of the writing retreat community could enhance the wellbeing of students and academics and make writing less of an isolating experience (Stevenson, 2021; Tremblay-Wragg et al., 2021; Kornhaber et al., 2016). It has also been suggested that these short online writing retreats can increase motivation and confidence (Kornhaber et al., 2016).

Professional benefits

One of the important issues that came up in the discussion was that writing and working on a dissertation can feel too challenging, and that sometimes leads to procrastination (Steel, 2007). However, the rituality of the writing retreat helped reduce this procrastination. At the same time, the writing retreats created a space where we could be critical and honest with our writing, because we could verbalise and share ideas and thoughts about our writing with others. So, the writing retreats somehow gave the participants enough support and safety to empower them to be critical with their writing, something that was highlighted by Cunningham (2022).

Typically, students struggle to find large chunks of time to work on their assignments, perhaps the same way that academic staff struggle to find time to work on their research when they have to complete their teaching and administrative duties. Interestingly, we were all surprised as to how much we could achieve in an hour. We also highlighted that the retreat helped us focus on our writing; we felt that we would not have been able to do that outside of the writing retreat. This highlights the notion that we do not necessarily need long writing retreats away

from our everyday environments; simple, inexpensive, brief, online writing retreats that fit within the students' and staff's busy lives could potentially be equally beneficial. However, systematic research is needed to explore this further.

We often shared writing tips during the writing retreat sessions. For example, we talked about how helpful it could be to initially write down ideas with pen and paper, away from the computer. We also discussed the difficulty of deleting one's writing, and that sometimes it helps to save different versions of the paper, so that the writer can go back and find some of the deleted sentences if they change their mind. That gives the writer the courage to delete their writing when that is needed, and thus develop it further. We also talked about the benefits of starting a piece of academic writing by making a plan first, rather than just brainstorming. Furthermore, we discussed the pros and cons of focusing on one writing project versus focusing on several projects and alternating between them. We noted that different ways could work for different writers, including neurodivergent writers.

This discussion on writing tips resembles somewhat the workshops included in the retreats that previous studies showed to be very beneficial (Tremblay-Wragg et al., 2021). In our case, students and staff were co-creators of the discussion, as opposed to students being taught in a workshop. This reduced the power imbalance between students and staff and could potentially increase the confidence among the students (Cunningham, 2022).

Overall, our reflections further support previous studies on writing retreats and extend those findings, by suggesting that virtual mini writing retreats can have several personal and professional benefits (Kornhaber et al., 2016; Cunningham, 2022; Sangster, 2021; Stevenson, 2021; Tremblay-Wragg et al., 2021; Murray & Newton, 2009). The reflections also highlight the importance of positive emotions and emotional regulation strategies for creativity and productivity (for a discussion on emotion and higher education see Paltoglou et al., 2022), and suggest that virtual mini writing retreats can not only create a positive environment for writing and learning, but also encourage effective emotional regulation for staff and students.

Limitations

Very few students took part in the writing retreats. We acknowledge that students have many demands on their time, and mature students who also work or have families may find taking part in writing retreats challenging. It is also conceivable that the sessions could sometimes have a detrimental effect on lecturers' time. Cunningham (2022) suggested that the sessions could be organised solely by the students, but that might not always be possible. Further exploration of this issue is needed. This links to the importance of organisational investment for writing retreats to be effective (Kornhaber et al., 2016). As we have noted elsewhere, virtual mini writing retreats can be used in a variety of contexts, including within a personal tutoring group (Paltoglou, 2022; Paltoglou, 2023).

Conclusion

In summary, mini online writing retreats could have similar personal and professional benefits as face-to-face, longer writing retreats, although systematic studies are needed to explore this. Virtual mini writing retreats could enable students and academic staff to create a meaningful scholarly community and could help develop a more joyful, creative and humane education.

Steps toward hope

- Consider regular virtual mini writing retreats to create accessible, supportive spaces for both staff and students to develop effective writing habits.

- Foster a friendly, encouraging environment during retreats to empower participants to be critical, honest, and creative in their writing.

- Integrate diary-based reflection into writing retreats to capture participants' experiences and track the impact on writing focus and productivity.

- Facilitate the exchange of writing practices and tips among participants to build a collaborative and resourceful scholarly community.

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42. The opportunity of constraint: How beating one's head against the wall can open a door

Joshua Thorpe

Abstract

This case study explores how rules and constraints in writing can serve as empowering tools for creativity and growth. Focusing on a postgraduate student with dyslexia, the study examines the impact of two constraint-based writing workshops in helping him overcome his fears, rewire his writing processes, and accomplish goals he previously thought unattainable. The findings suggest that such approaches could offer innovative methods for teaching writing while challenging conventional notions of autonomy and agency in academic practice. The study highlights three key insights: language as a material force, the overrated nature of freedom, and the social dimensions of writing. These perspectives have the potential to reshape the way writing and academic literacies are approached in Higher Education.

Keywords: constraints; games; writing; Oulipo; dyslexia; autonomy; voice

Experiments in writing and the case of Tom

In 2018, a friend and mentor of mine, Lynne Crawford, came from Detroit to Glasgow to work with some colleagues in the arts. Crawford is a brilliant writer and writing teacher (see Crawford, 2016), and she offered to run a workshop on how to use rules and constraints in creative writing. We convened two intensive afternoon sessions at Glasgow's Centre for Contemporary Arts (CCA) called the "Circle for the Potential of Literature". The workshops, taught by Crawford and facilitated by me, were based on experiments and games invented by the writing group known as the Oulipo.

The Oulipo, or Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle, is a Paris-based group of (mostly male) writers and mathematicians that has operated since the mid-twentieth century (Mathews & Brotchie, 1998). Famous members have included Raymond Queneau, Italo Calvino, and Georges Perec, the latter having penned an entire novel, *La Disparition* (1969), without the use of the letter *E*. (At this point you might wish to try this kind of writing. I'm doing it right now, and it is difficult...so I'll stop.)

This type of text is called a *lipogram*, one that omits a certain letter. There are other games and processes too, such as *exhaustive description*, which attempts to describe something in an absurd amount of detail, or *N+7*, which arbitrarily substitutes all nouns in a text for other nouns according to a simple rule (Mathews & Brotchie 1998). The effects can be surreal.

The Oulipo's approach treats language not only as a medium, but as a *material*, like clay or paint. The aim is simply to see what happens. Like scientists or engineers, Oulipians subject the material of language to many tests. The writer becomes something like an experimental researcher who observes the outcomes of various operations. This is quite different from most received notions of the author, whose role is usually to persuade the audience, communicate truth, or express something "beautifully".

At our Circle workshops, we played games like those described above, and many others. We wrote sonnets and sestinas and did stints of "automatic" writing too. We used time constraints and observed a collective silence during writing periods. So, there were many rules, but lots of fun as well. We read our work aloud, laughing at the difficulty of

the constraints and delighting in the absurdity of the results. We bonded over our struggles and enjoyed the benefits of "parallel play" (where people enjoy the feeling of working independently in one another's company). Everyone seemed very pleased.

One participant, whom I'll call Tom, left the sessions noticeably inspired. Having described himself as "extremely dyslexic", he had come to the Circle to challenge his own writing habits and find ways of working that might get him past his anxiety and procrastination. Some months later, I interviewed Tom to ask if the workshops had paid off. The answer was a resounding *Yes*.

Tom found real enjoyment in the materials and processes themselves, quite separate from either a) his own identity as a communicator or b) the end product (both of which had previously caused him anxiety). The workshops also gave Tom permission to fail, as well as practical experience in risk-free failing (since success, in the traditional sense anyway, was no longer the point). Finally, the workshops demonstrated to Tom, through first-hand experience, that he *could* write, in fact that he could write quite a lot. The evidence was right there in his exercise book, in the form of several poems, stories, and mini essays.

After the workshops, Tom went on to write a new long-form work of poetic nonfiction as part of his assessed postgraduate creative work. He had not considered producing anything text-based before, and it wouldn't have come about if not for the Circle workshops. As regards the more formal academic thesis paper required for his qualification, this too, he felt, had been made easier and more effective by his experiences with experimental writing. In short, Tom had become a writer, all because he had spent two afternoons doing things like writing without the letter *E*.

Discussion: Three insights for learning and teaching

Obviously, the above case study represents a sample size of one. Even so, I feel it is worth considering and learning from. And I have seen similar effects with other students in the past. My experiences point to three worthwhile possibilities for how we teach and think of writing (and other academic literacies) in Higher Education.

Language is material

We can treat language as we would stones in a drystone wall or paint on a canvas. For some students, this approach can make a massive difference. When I worked at an art and design university in Toronto (OCAD U), I found that artists and designers responded well to this approach. These were students who often didn't think of themselves as "word people". Many had specific learning differences (SpLDs), and almost all considered themselves to be visually or materially oriented. Working with language in a more material manner helped many of these students pull up their sleeves and get to work. Instead of self-identifying as a bad communicator or thinking "I don't have anything to say", a student could take action, for example, cut up an article to make a collage, or build word lists, do visualisations in tandem with words… or spatialise their brainstorming activities with different coloured paper and ink on a wall.

To use a more pedestrian example, I've seen how something simple like a literature matrix (a way of taking focused notes on readings) can help student writers change their mentality from "writing" to *building* an essay. Writers discover their argument in readings instead of expecting it to leap magically from the void. And not only art and design students can benefit; I've found that students in STEM, humanities, business, and other fields can find these approaches really helpful too.

It occurs to me here that there is, from this angle, an optimistic perspective on artificial intelligence (AI) tools. AI tools materialise the production of texts to an extreme degree, so much so that they challenge the notion of authorship itself. This challenge will create some chaos in the immediate future (Thorpe, 2023), but there may be a bright side. Perhaps a new creative process of writing awaits us wherein the writer becomes more like a builder or curator of language. Barriers could be removed and the burden of being a "good communicator" might disappear. The question *Did you write this?* will cease to be coherent. We will replace it with, *Did you put this together?* In this way a writer will become a reader first. Critical reading, then, will become the essential skill practised by both "writers" and readers.

Freedom is overrated

I'm sure you've heard of "analysis paralysis", the phenomenon that says, when faced with too many options, humans tend to freeze (Kumari et al., 2021). Students today have far too many options: emails by the dozen, announcements and advertisements on multiple different apps, opportunities to take part in any number of activities, online courses and portals that are an absolute labyrinth... and all of this before a student even looks at their readings or makes a decision about which topic to write on. The cognitive load is brutal, just for showing up. This places unnecessary obstacles before all students, and especially those with SpLDs, anyone struggling with digital literacies, students with English as a second or other language (ESoL), and anyone coming from a prior education system that functions very differently.

This information overload problem is symptomatic of what I see as an overly neo-liberal manifestation of "active learning" or "autonomy": we have too many students to properly support, so we throw lots of videos and links at them and hope for the best. Don't get me wrong, the emancipatory origins of the idea of autonomous learners is wonderful, but in practice it often means we effectively toss students in at the deep end to sink or swim. We present students with the "what" but not the "how". Students are left with some notion of what we want from them, but very little practical guidance on the steps to getting there.

There are many possible solutions to this. One is to give students back some productive constraints, (not necessarily the type described in the case study above). At least in formative work, we can introduce rules, processes, procedures, structures etc., that help remove the unnecessary cognitive load and let students get to work. This can help them focus on what's germane to their learning (not what to click on next or when to schedule X). It can also help students get things done, and thereby demonstrate to them that they are *capable* of getting things done. Constraints may even provide a kind of safe space to encounter difficulty, and thereby lead to a kind of "growth mindset" (Dweck, 2006) that rewards effort and teaches resilience through experience.

Just an extra note here: connected to the overuse of the idea of autonomy is the emphasis on student "voice" and "perspective". Again, the intention is usually positive. But there are accessibility and

diversity issues to consider here. If someone, for example, has come up in an educational system that discourages individual voices and perspectives, we may unwittingly continue to disempower this person when we appeal to them casually to "voice themselves". Appealing to the materiality of language and introducing constraints may level the playing field in some ways that are very helpful.

I should note here that my above comments correspond harmoniously with the "academic literacies" approach to supporting students, first described by Mary Lea and Brian Street (1998). In this model, the behaviours and so-called skills associated with academic achievement are problematised as bound up in power relations, identity, etc. In the context of voice, for example, the academic literacies approach provokes the question *Do all students have equal and easy access to this resource called "voice"?*

Writing (and other academic work) can be more social

This connects to work by Etienne Wenger (2009) and Rowena Murray (2014), who argue for the benefits of designing learning as a social activity. Part of what made the Circle workshops work was that they were fun. The fun comes not just from the playing of games and their inherent challenges, but from the shared space, the comradery, the very subtle sense of competition, and the atmosphere of "parallel play" (as described above). Treating academic work as a social activity can reduce loneliness, give students a sense of shared purpose and community, and normalise the effort of process. Students can begin to find value in the doing of the work, not just the results.

Conclusion

These three insights—language is material, freedom is overrated, and writing can be social—have proven very helpful to me over the years I've spent in academic support. They have expanded my toolbox across a range of situations and diverse groups and levels. For example, I run writing retreats for undergraduate dissertation students that make simple use of all of these principles. In these retreats, we begin with "automatic" writing (writing as quickly as possible for short sprints),

do independent work within various time constraints, all of course in a social space promoting "parallel play" and discussion. Students report that these conditions are more enjoyable than working alone at home, but also more productive. Some have even said they've become better at managing their time in the weeks following the retreats.

I hope that these reflections on the case study of Tom have interested you, and that my interpretation of its success rings true. I look forward to testing some of these ideas more formally with larger groups. Of course, there are many other ways to experiment with how we teach and support writing and academic literacies in Higher Education, and I would love to hear what sorts of interesting work you are doing. Finally, I would like to invite readers to get in touch who would like further information on the types of games and procedures one can employ when focusing on the material and processes of language, rather than always focusing entirely on its instrumental function.

Steps toward hope

- Use rules and constraints in writing workshops to empower students, especially those with writing challenges, to overcome fears and unlock creative potential.

- Rethink traditional ideas of autonomy and freedom by recognising that constraints can foster creativity, focus, and personal growth in writing.

- Reconsider approaches to writing and consider alternative— more creative, collaborative, community-driven—approaches to writing to enhance academic literacies and student engagement.

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VI. FOCUS ON THE TEACHERS

Focus on the teachers: Introduction

Richard Heller

Potential authors were free to pick whatever topic they wanted, provided they offered hope for the future of education. The chapters were collected into sections of the book based on what we received. Six chapters seemed to fit into a category which focused on teachers. Each of the six chapters made several practical suggestions, based on their experience, for ways in which we need to look after our teachers. If we don't look after ourselves, how can we look after others?

The six chapters come from experiences in the UK, Central Europe, and Latin America. They start by identifying the problems in the context in which educators work, including: a climate of a growing workload and precarity of contracts; new technologies, changing teaching and learning modalities, innovative pedagogical strategies, diverse learning mindsets, styles, preferences, and motivation across different student cohorts, rapid information flows, up-to-date disciplinary expertise, and a focus on fostering global competences; a crisis in education more broadly as paralleling how we have treated the natural world; an overemphasis on homogenisation, outputs and productivity; and lecturers, tutors, and teachers being burnt out, overworked, and underpaid. The continuous challenges of teaching large numbers of learners alongside the growing pressures of admin, performance and research can absolutely take their toll. In addition, there is minimal evidence of support for academics to manage stress and their mental health.

Having identified the problems, each chapter offers solutions to provide hope for the survival, renewal, and improvement of teachers,

and hence the system. As one of the authors says "...how we facilitate hope when everything currently feels hopeless on many levels in our sector, is a mounting challenge".

The first of the chapters, "Addressing the challenges of the new, internationalised Higher Education ecosystem by applying successful teacher adaptation strategies: Promoting the human side of teaching in the Central European context" by Rita Koris, Marta Folmeg, Imre Fekete, and Ágnes Pál, offers hope through successful teacher adaptation strategies, promoting the human side of teaching. Their new model for education is placing the human side of teaching and learning at the heart of education, regardless of the teaching approach, method, modality, or interaction. However, instructors can only adapt successfully once their wellbeing is maintained. The practices highlighted in this chapter demonstrate that HE teachers could tame the beast in the uncertain times of the rapidly evolving HE ecosystem.

The next chapter, "If the tomatoes don't grow, we don't blame the plant: A reflection on co-created CPD sessions for staff reimagining education and the impact on their daily practice" by Mâir Bull, Stephanie Aldred, Sophie Bessant, Sydney-Marie Duignan, and Eileen Pollard takes up the theme and reports on co-created Continuing Professional Development (CPD) sessions. The co-created sessions modelled and advocated creative practice and active learning, considering how educators can be empowered with specific tools to make a difference to their daily practice and their own wellbeing.

The theme of educator wellbeing is taken up in the next chapter, "Embracing compassion and self-care: Educator wellbeing amidst the chaos" by Lee Fallin, who argues that you cannot look after others if you do not take care of yourself. Taking care of yourself as a teacher, as well as of your colleagues, is a pre-requisite for the development of a more supportive and humane academic culture. This will allow for human values such as empathy, respect, collaboration, and an ethical approach to find their way into policies and education itself. Lee provides a framework for academic self-care and makes the case that hope starts with us being kinder and more compassionate with ourselves.

Although most of the chapters relate to Higher Education, the next chapter "Decoloniality and nonviolence as a pedagogy of hope: Chilean pre-service teachers and their reconceptualisation of inclusive

classrooms" by Gaston Bacquet provides experience from a programme with Chilean pre-service teachers and offers a perspective, otherwise missing from the book, on colonisation. Focusing on nonviolence, in a decolonial community building framework, allowed these Chilean teachers to see a pathway to the development of collective, empathetic and interconnected learning environments. Discussions during the collective design of a pedagogy of nonviolence showed how their educational practice could be imbued with hope, resonating with the general theme of the book.

A very practical chapter, "Avengers Assemble! Working together and valuing professional services staff expertise in programme design", by Zak Liddell and Leigh Kilpert picks up the theme of collective educational practices by creating a Programme Heroes Model where Professional Services staff have a more central role in the educational process. Again, this section adds a new perspective to the book, this time by asking us to focus on the importance of a positive role for Professional Services staff. The chapter proposes a transformative approach which picks up the theme of collaboration by making programme design a collective and inclusive process where diverse perspectives are valued and integrated.

The final chapter "'If you know, you know': Creating lightbulb moments through reverse mentoring" by Rachael O'Connor describes an innovative programme of reverse mentoring: the pairing of a younger, junior employee acting as mentor to share expertise with an older, senior colleague as the mentee. Conversations are centred on the support and wellbeing of mentors, and unite people with particular, and without, lived experiences. Whilst much work on hope in academia focuses on building hope in students, reverse mentoring has the benefit of reciprocal hope building for students *and* staff. Whilst reverse mentoring can support in humanising staff and students to one another through authentic one-to-one conversations, it also encourages more widely improved relationships and more ethical considerations when engaging with others beyond reverse mentoring.

Each of the chapters reports individual efforts to support the teachers, and they represent wonderful examples. However, we really need a system change. The title of one of the chapters includes "If the tomatoes don't grow, we don't blame the plant"—a lovely summary of the need to find ways to nurture the teachers. As one author says: "For

me, there is a lot more hope in Higher Education if we can be that bit kinder to ourselves as Higher Education professionals—and extend that same courtesy to those around us". The enthusiasm of the contributors is palpable, and the examples of innovation are inspiring. Provided that the settings in which educators work are appropriate, this section of the book really does offer a hopeful future for education.

43. Addressing the challenges of the new, internationalised Higher Education ecosystem by applying successful teacher adaptation strategies: Promoting the human side of teaching in the Central European context

Rita Koris, Marta Folmeg, Imre Fekete, and Ágnes Pál

Abstract

Current trends in Higher Education (HE)—including the integration of new technologies, the need for more engaging teaching methods, and the acceleration of information flow—are reshaping the development of disciplinary knowledge and global competences. However, these demands place increasing pressure on HE teachers, risking their motivation, adaptability, creativity, and wellbeing. Empowering educators with effective solutions, tools, and methodologies is critical to meeting these challenges and fostering innovative teaching practices. This chapter examines successful adaptation strategies among HE teachers in the Central

European context, highlighting approaches that support teacher wellbeing and reaffirm the importance of the human dimension in education.

Keywords: Higher education; innovative teaching approach; teacher adaptability; teacher wellbeing; human interaction

I've come to believe it's not so much about what you believe; it's how hard you believe it
>   (Indiana Jones—*Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny*, 2023).

Introduction

Contemporary trends and directions in Higher Education (HE) are imposing new and added responsibilities, requirements, and challenges on institutions' management and faculty alike. In this evolving ecosystem of international and national HE, teachers are faced with new technological affordances, changing teaching and learning modalities, innovative pedagogical strategies, diverse learning mindsets, styles, preferences, and motivations across different student cohorts, rapid information flows, up-to-date disciplinary expertise, and a focus on fostering global competences. Surrounded by the jungle of the unknown, teachers have stepped on an adventurous path of innovative twenty-first-century teaching with the inspiring vision to finally discover the *holy grail* at the end of the journey. In the last few years, educators may have found themselves in the role of the famous professor Indiana Jones, and have had to use their wisdom, intellect, skillfulness, creativity, intuition, and sensibility to come to grips with the newly established situations, cope with the challenges, and find the well-deserved treasure in the moment of triumph. Dr Jones has never given up hope, even in the most difficult moments, and nor should we. In fact, teachers may not need to become Jones-like heroes to transform the emerging difficulties and Herculean tasks into thrilling opportunities. If teachers can adopt a positive attitude to accept the challenges and turn them to their own and their students' advantage, it will lead them to renew their teaching practice, develop their professional and academic competencies, and keep up with the pace of innovation. Therefore, staying up-to-date with the fast-paced developments—especially starting after the COVID-19

outbreak in 2019 that shocked all players in global HE—is not only essential, but also rewarding for teachers to provide effective, relevant, and high-quality education. Being willing to experiment with new teaching methods, assessment techniques, and learning resources can also enhance the learning experience for students.

However, such professional, pedagogical, technological, and personal adaptations are not at all easy and do not come without hindrance, and HE teachers' motivation, flexibility, willingness to change, creativity, and wellbeing are at risk. Therefore, it is essential to provide the necessary support and circumstances to empower HE teachers with the means of orienting themselves and their teaching approach in the newly established ecosystem of HE. It is also key to collect and suggest potential solutions, tools, and methodologies for them to be able to address these challenges and provide effective and innovative teaching. The aim of this chapter is to look at the stories of hope from a Central European perspective and showcase successful teacher adaptation strategies that may provide inspiration to colleagues across the globe.

The HE ecosystem in Central Europe

The HE ecosystem in Central Europe is diverse and vibrant, comprising a range of countries with their own unique tertiary educational systems and characteristics. Central Europe is generally understood to include countries such as Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria, and Slovenia. Central Europe is home to a mix of public and private universities, colleges, and technical schools. These institutions offer a wide range of academic programmes, from arts and humanities through business and economics to STEM fields. All these countries are part of the European Union and thus part of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), and they generally adhere to the principles of the Bologna Process, which aims to standardise and improve the quality of HE across Europe. Central Europe has a rich cultural and historical heritage, which is often reflected in the academic programmes and research focus of universities in the region. While English is becoming more prevalent as a medium of instruction, especially in graduate programs, many universities in Central Europe still offer courses primarily in their national languages. As most

universities in Central Europe have been actively working on increasing their internationalisation efforts, including through partnerships with foreign universities, exchange programmes, and attracting international students, the number of degree programmes and courses offered in English has been increasing. The Erasmus+ program and other mobility initiatives (such as the Central European Exchange Program for University Studies, CEEPUS) have facilitated student exchanges within Central Europe and with other European countries. However, universities in Central Europe tend to seek partnerships and mobility opportunities with institutions in Western Europe. These programmes have contributed to a more diverse and interconnected HE landscape in the region. Universities in Central Europe have been making efforts to enhance their research capabilities and promote innovation. They engage in collaborations with industries, businesses, research centres, and international partners to foster cutting-edge research. Tuition fees and costs of living can vary significantly from country to country. In some Central European countries, Higher Education is more affordable compared to Western European counterparts.

Like many regions, Central Europe faces challenges such as brain drain and adapting to the changing demands of the job market; these are the two main challenges that seriously impact HE in the region. Western European countries not only attract professionals and highly skilled individuals who leave their countries for better career and life prospects abroad, but they are also attractive for high-school graduates who want to enrol in HE programmes abroad. The former places responsibilities on the institutions to provide the necessary disciplinary knowledge and employability skills for their students to support their transition to the European job market. The latter poses challenges for the national HE institutions to keep their local students within the national HE markets by providing competitive degree programmes.

HE in Central Europe—following the global COVID-19 pandemic—has been going through dramatic changes and development, however not without problems. The pandemic has accelerated the adoption of digital technologies in education, leading to an increased emphasis on online learning and digital tools in Central European universities. Prior to the pandemic, online courses and blended learning were not the focus of attention at universities and they offered a limited number of courses

online. Most of the courses at these universities ran face-to-face, so the health crisis had an enormous impact on teachers and students alike in terms of shifting all courses to the online space. Learning management systems were mainly used for course administration and not for online teaching; therefore it was a major challenge for faculty to start using new tools and applications that they had never used before. On the other hand, institutions in the region—similarly to others around the globe—reacted quickly and were able to set up tools and procedures that aided professors in their online teaching. At first, many universities did not have established conventions as to what tools and platforms to use for online teaching.

Since the pandemic, most institutions have recognised the importance of digitally vested instructors who are able to portray high levels of technological-pedagogical knowledge (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) to cater to the changing learning characteristics of modern generations. It became clear after the pandemic that digital technologies should be exploited in the classroom and should not only be utilised in distant forms of education. It is best if the teaching staff have safe spaces such as formal or informal professional development workshops within their fields of expertise and adopt a "fearless attitude" (Liu, 2009, p. 105) of experimenting with educational technologies.

Teacher responses to the burdens of twenty-first-century HE

Nowadays, instructors face several challenges in the changing HE landscape to ensure effective teaching and student engagement. One of the challenges is the continuous evolution and uptake of technologies and, most recently, the boom of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies in HE (Chassignol et al., 2018). To grapple with these changes, instructors openly discuss the potential of AI technologies with their students with reference to the assignments students have to submit as well as the ethical considerations beyond using AI text generators. A good example of applying AI tools for learning is that instructors guide business students through the process of writing powerful motivation letters with the help of an AI text generator and then offer a handful of ideas on how to use their human talents and creativity to improve

the automated texts and create a unique piece of writing. As another example, AI technologies can assist students' learning by summarising or generating questions on learning materials (Benites et al., 2023).

Having to shift teaching modalities is another challenge. Instructors may adapt by sharing experiences and best practices for using digital teaching tools effectively, catering to the general preference for visually appealing and video-based content (Fekete & Divéki, 2022). Embracing new pedagogical approaches, such as project- and problem-based learning while promoting inclusion and diversity, helps engage various learning styles and preferences (Koris et al., 2021). Managing the information surge requires critical thinking and digital literacy to assess information reliability on both the instructors' and the learners' ends. Staying current with disciplinary knowledge also necessitates conducting research and being present in the world of academia.

Exploiting the human side of teaching also demands a general openness to diversity in cultural attitudes, respecting the shifting needs and interests of Generation Z students. This means that instructors should portray global competences and the ability to discuss local and global issues in the classroom with a special focus on sustainability, climate issues, and conflicts (Vesala-Varttala et al., 2024).

European projects as a means of teacher adaptation and innovative teaching

The Erasmus+ programme was launched by the European Commission in 2014, promoting the following three key actions: the mobility of individuals (KA1), cooperation among organisations and institutions (KA2), and development and cooperation at the policy level (KA3). The second key action is a key pillar of internationalisation of HE institutions. By organising strategic partnership projects, colleagues from different universities identify existing gaps and genuine needs in a project proposal, and during the framework of the project, they create viable solutions to these gaps transnationally. These projects aim to target the improvement of the quality of education and training not only at the partner institutions, since the open educational resources created in the projects are freely accessible to anyone interested. Intensive cooperation among colleagues from different universities brings considerable

benefits: establishing networks within the European HE space can lead to research collaboration, to the harmonisation of HE programmes, and to a meaningful use of the mobility of individuals (students and staff). As one of our lecturers observed, "Erasmus strategic projects are like a breath of fresh air—you get in touch with colleagues from other universities who share your vision about innovation and modernization of HE, you become part of a community". Thus, the human side of these international projects does matter a lot. One key element of successful projects has been the enthusiasm and commitment of the colleagues involved, who found the possibility of joining efforts with staff from partner universities extremely inspiring. Another key factor is that bottom-up initiatives have been extensively encouraged, and students' positive feedback is also a key indicator and contributes to the increase in teachers' motivation.

The following series of European projects implemented at Budapest University of Economics and Business illustrates well the possibilities of cooperation in the Central European context and beyond. In the ICCAGE project (Intercultural Communicative Competence—A Competitive Advantage for Global Employability, 2015–2017),[1] participants developed teaching modules transnationally to engage groups of students in virtual intercultural interaction and exchange with partner classes in geographically distant locations. This was how Virtual Exchange (VE), also called Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL), was first introduced at an institutional level at one of the leading Central European universities, and since then further efforts have been made to incorporate this practice into the internationalisation strategy of the university. Another strategic partnership project named INCOLLAB (Interdisciplinary Collaborative Approaches to Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, 2017–2019)[2] aimed at fostering cooperation between language teachers and teachers of other academic subjects, while the objective of the third project, CORALL (Coaching-oriented Online Resources for the Autonomous Learning of LSP, 2019–2022)[3] was to create intellectual outputs to support autonomous language learning. The Learn to Change project (LEARN TO CHANGE—Collaborative

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1 See https://iccageproject.wixsite.com/presentation/about-the-project
2 See https://incollabeu.wixsite.com/project
3 See https://corallprojecteu.wixsite.com/presentation

Digital Storytelling for Sustainable Change, 2020–2023)[4] was created and implemented within the framework of the COVID-19 response, as a call from Erasmus+ to support digital education readiness and creative skills. Based on the materials developed in the CORALL and the LEARN TO CHANGE projects, the participating institutions have organised several Blended Intensive Programs (BIP), which comprise online instruction and a one-week, in-person, intensive international course. The design, organisation, and implementation of these European projects have proved to be a means of teacher adaptation to the constantly evolving HE ecosystem as the participating institutions and teachers have managed to introduce innovative teaching practices into the classroom.

Instructors' wellbeing

The key to teachers' successful adaptation to the new environment and the new model for education is placing the human side of teaching and learning at the heart of education, regardless of the teaching approach, method, modality, or interaction. However, instructors can only adapt successfully if their wellbeing is supported (Mudrak et al., 2018). Teachers can improve their wellbeing and prevent burnout by focusing on self-evaluation and the continuous improvement of skills. Flexibility, agility, and effective communication are also vital. Systematic planning of teaching and innovative thinking further boosts an individual's confidence, and participation in a mentoring programme encourages personal development. Embracing lifelong learning helps maintain enthusiasm and motivation. Flexible timetabling should be considered to avoid burnout. Focusing on emotional wellbeing, mindfulness exercises, and mental health services can help to alleviate stress and support teachers' mental balance. Together, such measures promote teachers' sense of wellbeing and job satisfaction.

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4   See https://blogit.haaga-helia.fi/learn-to-change/

Promoting the human side of teaching

The practices highlighted in this chapter demonstrate that HE teachers can indeed "tame the beast" of uncertainty in a rapidly evolving HE ecosystem. These examples illustrate how instructors can adapt to the changed circumstances by drawing on their resourcefulness, creativity, intuition, and innovative potential—adapting pedagogies and approaches to meet new demands in the classroom. As long as the human dimension of teaching remains central, there is reason to be hopeful. The story of Dr Jones may be one of the more adventurous ones, but the "stories of hope" HE teachers have shown are no less significant in their quiet courage and commitment.

Steps toward hope

- Provide targeted support and resources that help educators integrate new technologies, adopt engaging teaching methods, and manage the fast-paced flow of information.

- Implement strategies that actively support motivation, creativity, and mental health, recognising these as essential foundations for sustainable and innovative teaching.

- Foster educational practices that value personal connection, empathy, and the holistic development of both teachers and students, particularly in adapting to evolving HE environments.

- Create hope by activating teachers' resourcefulness.

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44. If the tomatoes don't grow, we don't blame the plant:
A reflection on co-created CPD sessions for staff reimagining education and the impact on their daily practice

Mâir Bull, Stephanie Aldred, Sophie Bessant, Sydney-Marie Duignan, and Eileen Pollard

Abstract

This case study reflects on the co-design and delivery of a series of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) sessions for teaching staff, aimed at reimagining education and enhancing educator wellbeing. The sessions modelled creative practice and active learning, exploring themes such as creative and playful pedagogies, object-based learning, sensory teaching experiences, and techniques for effective use of voice and body language. Insights from the first workshop were captured in a video[1] animated by recent graduate Kalon Smith (2023). Using

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1 Throughout the 10% Braver Teaching workshop Manchester Met graduate, Kalon Smith was busy sketching, capturing the salient themes from the day and then

the metaphor of Higher Education teachers as tomato plants, the study highlights the need for a nourishing educational ecosystem, with a particular focus on the vital role of educational developers in supporting teacher growth and flourishing.

Keywords: creative   practice;   wellbeing;   active   learning; reimagining; CPD (continuing professional development)

Introduction

Fig. 44.1 "Tomato Plants" (image by Kalon Smith, Manchester Metropolitan University, 2023, CC BY-NC 4.0).[2]

During the co-design of a series of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) sessions for teaching staff at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), we (a group of educational developers) reflected on the analogy: if the tomatoes don't grow, we don't blame the plant. Let's assume that the tomato plants are teaching staff, the tomatoes are students, and the soil and other environmental conditions are Higher Education (HE) and the wider educational landscape. Tomato plants cannot produce juicy tomatoes if they have too little water, sunshine, or nutrients. So why are teaching staff routinely held accountable for

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bringing them to life in an animation (Smith, 2023)—his illustrations also feature in this case study.

2   See full video at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EYuOEpQqUBw

any, or indeed all, of the problems related to student outcomes? This emphasis on performativity in England, reinforced by HE marketisation (Jones, 2022), has created a culture of blame and a worrying decline in staff health and wellbeing (Wray & Kinman, 2021; Jayman et al., 2022).

Ken Robinson (2022; and Robinson & Robinson 2022) characterised this crisis in education more broadly as paralleling how we have treated the natural world; an overemphasis on homogenisation, outputs, and productivity. Like the decline in our natural environments, our one-size-fits-all model of modern "factory" education has led to a decline in the health of our educational environments and a diminished experience for staff and students. Inspired by the works of Robinson, and his daughter Kate (Robinson, 2022; Robinson & Robinson, 2022), we set about designing CPD sessions underpinned by creative practice and active learning, that explored educational approaches such as play, object-based learning, sensory experiences, building confidence and presence through drama skills, and connecting to the natural environment. We wanted to support and nurture our tired, stressed, and overworked "tomato plants", to help them reimagine not only their teaching approaches, but also the broader HE ecosystem and their place within it. This reflection summarises these co-designed sessions, considering how educators can be empowered with specific tools to make a difference to their daily practice and their wellbeing.

10% Braver Teaching

Vignette 1

I pushed open the door to the memory room, realising I was holding my breath I felt a child-like sense of curiosity. Postcards were pegged on washing lines criss-crossing the room. Some were front facing, depicting art from a broad spectrum of styles, others revealed their written sides saying things like "your first lecture" and "a challenging teaching memory". Music was playing, calm but uplifting. I loved how evocative the space was and instantly I felt flooded with memories.

Our starting point: "10% Braver Teaching" workshop

As a group of educational developers, we felt passionately about Robinson's (2022) reframing and wanted to respond with an offer for colleagues to reimage education. We borrowed the phrase "10% Braver" from WomenEd (Porritt & Featherstone, 2019), a feminist movement sweeping the globe, predominantly in schools but now in HE. Although WomenEd is about connecting and giving a voice to aspiring and existing women leaders, its tagline "Being 10% Braver" is about being empowered to try new things—the idea is that even being 10% more courageous, stepping a little out of one's comfort zone, can often make a big difference. We therefore designed a workshop that called on colleagues to be 10% Braver in their teaching—to experiment, to be playful and creative, and to consider how these methods could impact their teaching and wellbeing. The invite to attend went out across our institution, although more colleagues from our Arts and Humanities, and Health and Education faculties took up the voluntary places. Within this cohort, there was a wide variation in experience including those with over a decade in the classroom, to those new to teaching, some having transferred from industry recently.

In the workshop, staff moved in a carousel around experiential activities. We wanted to practise what we were preaching and nurture a creative experience where colleagues could touch, smell, see, hear, and even taste during the session. For example, in one activity staff constructed plant cells with scented playdough (pictured below, in Figure 44.3), reflecting on where tactile tasks could be used in their own disciplines, and the value of working collaboratively with students on playful learning experiences. In another part of the space, colleagues chatted about the ingredients of a creative workplace and broader macro factors, whilst mixing, pouring, and tasting in a group cooking task. This exercise generated a range of discussions about experiential learning and relational pedagogy, but also the power of food in creating a sense of community and belonging.

The vignette above describes a participant's experience in one of the activity spaces, "The Memory Room". This small space was emptied of furniture and instead string cross-crossed just above eye-height. On the washing lines were postcards depicting works of art on one side, with memory stimuli on the other, for example "your first teaching memory",

"your favourite teaching moment", and "the smell of a classroom". Light instrumental music was playing, and participants entered either individually or in pairs, to move around the space and consider the memories it triggered for them. Outside the room, sofas and chairs made a comfortable space for colleagues to chat freely about their responses and listen to others' reflections.

Fig. 44.2 "Burn Out" (image by Kalon Smith, Manchester Metropolitan University, 2023, CC BY-NC 4.0).[3]

The soil components

As the groups interacted with the activities, they reflected on the ingredients of the "soil"—and how they would like to reimagine their own educational practice. This led, perhaps inevitably, to a critique of the meso and macro factors that influence education. The crucial factors for any organisation wishing to nurture creative processes and outputs (in other words healthy soil) are summarised here:

> a) organisation-wide supports; (b) psychological safety; (c) recognition of the value of intrinsic motivation; (d) sufficient time; (e) autonomy; (f) developmental feedback (including the freedom to fail and try again); (g) creativity goals (Amabile et al., 2012 in MacLaren, 2012, p. 162).

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3   See full video at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EYuOEpQqUBw

The above provided a crucial framework for us when planning the next wave of CPD sessions for staff. However, it was important for us as workshop leaders to recognise that we can encourage staff to reimage education, but education is only part of a much larger system that needs to be reformed to truly reinvigorate the soil for our tomato plants. Jean Anyon (2005) asserts that the macroeconomic policies, controlling such things as minimum wage, affordable housing, and social benefits, create complex limiting circumstances that education cannot singularly overcome. What we can all do though is reimagine with "critical hope". Critical hope is described as "developing the individual and collective spirit to imagine future possibilities and fostering the energy to continually create transformative spaces of action in order that they might be realised" (Danvers, 2014, p. 1239). Or, as Angela Davis would say, our place is in the struggle.

The practical steps for remaining critically hopeful within this struggle concern building in ongoing space for individual reflection on what gives *you* nutrition as an educator. Is this in reading and writing, perhaps through dialogue with others, or regularly attending events and conferences? Whatever it might be, it is crucial to make sure that some aspect of this wellbeing activity is scheduled into your calendar or diary each week, preferably each day, maybe using a particular or significant colour-code. Once you have decided on what gives you nutrition, it is worth then considering how you will make time, for example, using Pomodoro or other creative time management techniques.

Fig. 44.3 Images from 10% Braver Teaching workshop (images by author, CC BY-NC 4.0).

10% Braver Colleagues

Vignette 2

When the end of module feedback came through, I read bland comment after bland comment. But something in the pit of my stomach knew worse was coming… and then three insulting statements appeared including "this

unit was a complete waste of time". I was so incredibly embarrassed and feared what might happen next. My chest hurt and all I could think was how much effort I had put in across the year, in more areas than I could list, yet it all seemed to pale into nothingness in light of these student comments.

A follow up series of events: "10% Braver Colleagues" lunch and share

One unexpected insight from 10% Braver Teaching was that, however much colleagues enjoyed the interactive exercises, they repeatedly emphasised how much it meant just to get together in person and talk. Several people shared very personal and emotional experiences, some even cried. As a result, and as a low-key way of continuing the conversations, we decided to host an informal "Lunch and Share" hour towards the end of each month. We used the handouts below to guide colleagues who attended and took it in turns to share with the group.

10% Braver Colleagues

Sharing Prompts

- How are you finding this point in the semester?
- Have you experienced any challenges in the last few weeks?
- What are you feeling positive about or looking forward to at the moment?

Active Questioning

Focus on asking open-ended questions, rather than providing advice/your opinion. You may want to ask questions such as:

- What would success look like?
- What is the difference between how you see things now and how you would like them to be?
- Can you explain? What exactly? How do you know? Can you give an example?
- How do you feel about that? What assumptions are you making?
- What are you going to do next?
- What are the key things you've learnt from this?

What do we mean by 'process' rather than 'outputs'

Fig. 44.4 A handout from 10% Braver Colleagues, 2023 (CC BY-NC 4.0).

The practice was linked to Reg Revans' famous Action Learning Sets, which he used when he was director of education at the National Coal Board in the 1940s: "He proposed that in a changing world people should be masters in

the art of posing questions as nobody knows what is going to happen next" (Johnson, 1998, p. 296). In an age of climate crisis, ChatGPT, Brexit, rising costs-of-living, and inflation and a world recovering economically, emotionally, and spiritually from a devastating pandemic, we really are now living in a time *where nobody knows what is going to happen next*. But it helps to talk, and as one participant said, it was "amazing to have the space to talk and reflect".

We considered 10% Braver Colleagues and some of the experiences educators have reported over the years in various institutions, as illustrated by Vignette 2. We decided to focus on two key discussion points in particular: reframing and wellbeing.

Reframing and wellbeing

Linet Arthur (2009) analysed staff responses to negative student feedback using the memorable "Shame, Blame, Tame, Reframe" model. She found that staff who felt little agency and influence tended to feel shame and/ or would blame the students. Staff who had more agency would either try and "tame" or "reframe" the situation. Reframing can involve mature reflection, professional dialogue and rethinking, for example: context, content, level, student expectations, programme-level factors, assessment alignment etc. To reframe the issues raised by unsatisfied students, we would argue that a humane environment is required, and this is what we aim to facilitate in all our workshops too: support, trust, and importantly time to reflect, and this reflection will in turn lead to growing self-awareness. This self-awareness is a powerful attribute, which encompasses "cognitive, imaginative, creative, lingual, emotional and somatic dimensions of the individual" (Yeatman, 2022, p. 251).

Reframing and wellbeing discourses have informed our planning for the next series of workshops. We are more mindful of the pace of the sessions, as one of our participants summarised that they loved the session but would have liked more time to "digest" and consider the tools. We are advocates for creative teaching methods and the notion that these have a positive correlation with student engagement and staff enjoyment; however we do recognise that not everyone may be in the right space, metaphorically, to embrace new pedagogies—it takes time for the tomato plants to grow and develop after all. Therefore, encouraging colleagues to consider their own needs and the extent to which they can experiment or embed techniques

such as play, experiential learning or object-based learning, for example, will be crucial to the success of the next wave of CPD sessions.
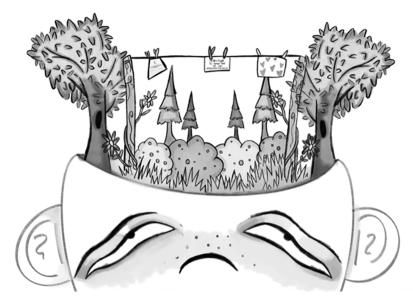
Fig. 44.5 "Thoughts" (image by Kalon Smith, Manchester Metropolitan University, 2023, CC BY-NC 4.0).

The Secret Teacher

Vignette 3

"Oh I'm definitely going to try that", exclaimed a staff member enthusiastically. I had just demonstrated the "hip drop"—a secret weapon in teaching that very slightly adjusts your posture, still tall with feet shoulder-width apart but with a slight drop of the hip that pushes the weight to one side. It's so minor that most don't consciously notice the change, but it's incredibly powerful, communicating confidence without aggression. The room buzzed excitedly as colleagues tested postures in pairs, reflecting on the look and feel of the poses.

The discussions from teaching staff that followed the previous workshops indicated an energy and desire to use more creative methods; however, some felt their classroom confidence was holding them back from being "10% Braver". The request was for a wider toolkit that

would empower staff, foster student engagement and build a positive classroom culture—so we created "The Secret Teacher" workshop, using drama practices to explore teacher presence, in particular voice, body language and space. One of the activities encouraged staff to reflect on Patsy Rodenburg's (2017) Three Circles of Energy (pictured), and how the demeanour in each circle would affect students and their levels of engagement. The circles of energy prompted some interesting analysis; staff identified with a range of the descriptions, either recalling real experiences or considering the potential impact of the behaviours on their own wellbeing and enjoyment of teaching, as well as on students' learning.
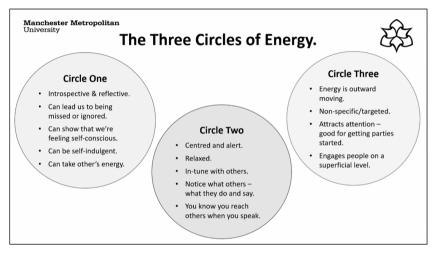
Fig. 44.6 Three Circles of Energy (after Patsy Rodenburg, 2008) (image by authors, CC BY-NC 4.0).

Fig. 44.7 Photograph from The Secret Teacher workshop (image by authors, CC BY-NC 4.0).

Theory aiding reflection

Psychologists Edward Deci and Richard Ryan's (2009) self-determination theory maintains that human motivation comprises the innate psychological need for competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Lucy Crehan (2016, p. 52) defines "relatedness" as like "social capital", the value and strength of human relationships. Relatedness is not just about staff–student relationships though, but staff–staff interactions too, with opportunities to share ideas, learn from one another and build professional trust being seen as vital (Crehan, 2016). On reflection, these concepts of competence, autonomy, and relatedness were crucial themes of our workshops too.

True learning happens when we try new things—when we practise something, see how it goes, and then try it again. Pedagogical practices that encourage metacognition and active reflection are built on this premise (Rempel, 2022).

In "The Secret Teacher" session, opportunities for social interaction, building relationships, and fostering confidence were woven throughout. We used humour and play as useful tools, along with storytelling (of "failures" too, of course) and experimentation. These ingredients helped to foster "mattering". Gordon Flett (2018, p. 5) states that mattering "captures the powerful impact people have on us and it reflects the need to be valued". In addition, Flett (2018) outlines that the person who matters is resilient and engaged, but without mattering people are prone to intense stress. Moreover, racialised colleagues and those from a range of marginalised backgrounds face additional barriers to feeling they matter in a HE context (Ahmed, 2012).

Conclusion

As educational developers, our role is to collaborate with and support individual academics, and the wider university, aiming to enhance the student learning experience. We are a vital component of the soil and the HE ecosystem that nourishes the tomato plants and supports them to yield fruit. If we want to reimagine education, we also need to reimagine educational development; this small experiment in one university is one step closer to doing that. Through the workshops

outlined in this case study, we have aimed to move away from one-hour, online, lunchtime sessions, squeezed between meetings and focused on the latest HE agenda, to somewhere more creative, open, playful, sensory, emotional, and honest. In these sessions we weren't talking about graduate outcomes, good honours, awarding gaps, or ChatGPT—this was a space for imagining how university education could be different and how educators' lives could be better nourished. Some of the more practical tools we hope that we have equipped our tomato plants with, include: confidence to try more creative and playful pedagogies; inspiration to use objects and sensory teaching experiences; and recognition that time and space to reflect on "how things are going" needs to be built into weekly schedules, and that techniques for effective use of voice and body language, enhancing our "teacher presence"—are vital for combating those "imposter syndrome" feelings and giving us a greater sense of ownership and peace in our classrooms.

> This was an excellent workshop which has left me enthused. I have been teaching for over 15 years and sessions like this are a great opportunity to stop and reflect on my practice and think about what I can do better (Workshop participant feedback, The Secret Teacher).
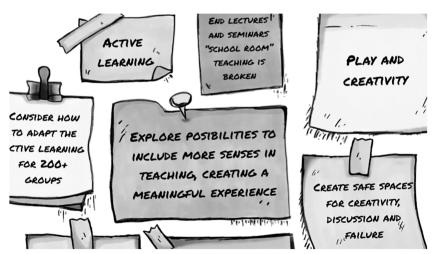
Fig. 44.8 "Moving Forward" (image by Kalon Smith, Manchester Metropolitan University, 2023, CC BY-NC 4.0).

Steps toward hope

- Develop professional development opportunities that not only advocate but demonstrate playful pedagogies, sensory experiences, and dynamic teaching techniques.

- Support educator wellbeing through a nourishing ecosystem.

- Recognise and cultivate the conditions—both institutional and relational—that enable teachers to thrive, using metaphors like the tomato plant to reframe support strategies.

- Position educational developers as central agents in creating environments that foster teacher growth, creativity, and resilience in Higher Education.

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45. Embracing compassion and self-care: Educator wellbeing amidst the chaos

Lee Fallin

Abstract

This chapter is a call for self-understanding and hope, beginning with the individual. It explores how Higher Education professionals can apply self-compassion—through self-kindness, recognition of shared humanity, and mindfulness—to support their own wellbeing amid the growing pressures of teaching, administration, and research. As lecturers, tutors, and teachers face increasing burnout, overwork, and underpayment, self-compassion offers a practical framework for academic self-care, helping educators to hold themselves with gentleness rather than harsh self-judgment. The chapter also argues that the principles of self-compassion must extend to colleagues, fostering a more supportive and humane academic culture.

Keywords: educator wellbeing; kindness; self-care; compassion; self-compassion

When a student comes calling...

"I'm so sorry for not getting this done yet. I feel really bad..."

A flustered colleague apologises to me for not sharing a project document before our meeting. They're clearly stressed about this, but as our conversation develops, it turns out they prioritised one of their students over preparation for our meeting. As the familiar story goes, unexpected, unannounced and upset, a student had knocked on my colleague's door to get the help they needed. My colleague did the right thing—the human thing—and reprioritised. The student got the time they needed, and I lost a bit of preparation time for a meeting because of it. The latter was my colleague's cause for concern—but ultimately—it was concern over something that had already happened and was out of my colleague's control.

I get it. We have a duty to our colleagues as much as we do to students, and my colleague recognised that their decision has impacted me. Yet, even though I told them I felt they had made the right decision, they were still beating themselves up over the impact on our meeting. Since when did we all start to feel bad for doing the right thing?

Chaos from a messy world

This one interaction has been an important source of reflection for me— for months. Mainly because this is a common story, and something most academics or Higher Education professionals have experienced. Over and over again, I hear from colleagues that fall behind their expected progress because of things far beyond their control. With post-COVID-19 recovery (Gamage, 2023), economic instability (International Monetary Fund, 2022), a cost-of-living crisis (Office for National Statistics, 2023), and a growing mental health epidemic (Campbell et al., 2022), we are all bound to come across unexpected moments where students (or colleagues) need us. While we cannot control the unexpected, we can control how we respond.

The juggling of complicated academic and pastoral workloads (Shaw & Blazek, 2023) has become normalised in the current neo-liberalised, marketised Higher Education landscape (Breeze et al., 2019; Cannella & Koro-Ljungberg, 2017). The competing demands of research, teaching

and pastoral support have led to "overwhelming stress and conflict" (Shen & Slater, 2021, p. 100) for both academics and professional service staff. Yet, in a recent systematic review, Ogechi Ohadomere and Ikedinachi Ogamba (2021) demonstrate minimal evidence of support for academics to manage stress and mental health. This is in a climate of a growing workload and precarity of contracts, leading to the University and College Union's (UCU, 2023) "Four Fights" campaign, which has long advocated for better pay, a fairer workload, greater equality, and the elimination of precarious employment. Then there was the COVID-19 pandemic and the significant disruption that it brought to global Higher Education (Corbera et al., 2020; Gamage, 2023). Yet, it can also be argued that COVID-19 was a turning point, with Esteve Corbera and colleagues (2020, p. 191) calling for a "culture of care" to "make academic practice more respectful and sustainable". We now just need to deliver that in the post-lockdown landscape, a period that is increasingly becoming characterised by further uncertainty. War, conflict, political upheaval, and the rise of artificial intelligence have dramatically changed the world landscape (Vinjamuri et al., 2025), and the profound impact this is having on Higher Education is continuing to emerge. International student mobility and concern over the cost of university education are part of the global narrative of Higher Education. In a context of upheaval and cuts across most institutions, there has never been a more important time to consider the role of compassion and care in Higher Education.

A culture of care presents a significant opportunity for hope in Higher Education. Putting care first ensures human values like empathy, respect, participation, collaboration, and ethics are considered within all academic policies, procedures, and ultimately, actions and interactions. These human values are important and should sit at the heart of everything we do. However, it is important to note that values like empathy and respect should not be about selflessness and putting students first (often at our own expense). Academics and professional service colleagues are an important part of this equation, and with the examples of wellbeing and sustainability, they are firmly in the frame. Ultimately, this is about finding ways forward that work for everyone involved, or at least as many people as possible.

Self-compassion as a framework for academic self-care

Inevitably, when we have to deal with a challenging situation or when something goes wrong or not to plan, we reflect. It can be argued that the competing demands on academic time and the often-challenging issues that students bring us certainly provide plenty of opportunities for such reflection. Reflection is an innate human skill (Bassot, 2020), but it can easily turn into unhelpful self-critique. Reflection focused on this alone goes beyond the helpful forms of reflective practice we see established in models from Stephen Brookfield (2017) and Jennifer Moon (1999). It becomes toxic and harmful—and even more problematic when we are powerless to control the outcomes. I am not arguing against reflection. As Higher Education professionals, we absolutely should reflect on our teaching, research, and pastoral support practices (Brookfield, 2017), but such reflection should focus on realistic targets (Bassot, 2020)—we cannot magic more time into the day. We cannot control those times a student (or colleague) just needs us, and other things must wait.

This whole book focuses on stories of hope—and my argument is that hope starts with us being kinder and more compassionate with ourselves. We need to give ourselves hope. This is not selfish or disconnected—but an acknowledgement that you cannot look after others until you can take care of yourself (Johnson & Humble, 2022). I think a lot of this starts with self-compassion, an intentional act (Waddington, 2017) of "compassion turned inward" (Neff, 2012, p. 80). Kristen Neff (2012) argues that self-compassion has three components:

1. **Self-kindness**—give yourself a break and avoid harsh self-criticism when it ceases to be constructive. Self-kindness is based on positive actions and emotions to nurture yourself when things go wrong.

2. **Humanity**—acknowledge we are imperfect and make mistakes. Self-judgment can be isolating and self-distorting. Acknowledging humanity acknowledges failure and challenge as part of being human.

3. **Mindfulness**—be self-aware, balancing useful reflection against overthinking. It is a therapeutic technique used to be present, accepting your feelings and experiences without judgment.

These things rarely come easily. We are trained to be critical – to dig into situations and get to the bottom of things. But maybe we also need to recognise when to give ourselves a break. Likewise, we should apply that same understanding, compassion, kindness and humanity to our colleagues and students too. Neff's (2012) frame of self-compassion is not new, but I see new validity for it in Higher Education (see Figure 45.1).
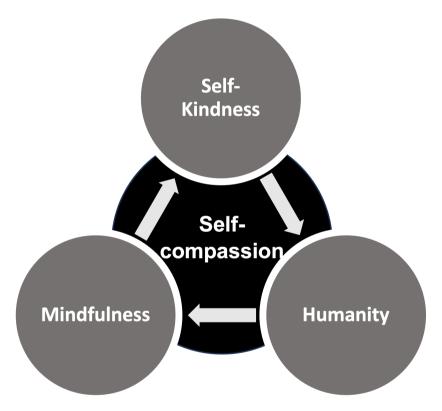
Fig. 45.1 Self-compassion (image by author, based on the theories of Neff, 2012, CC BY-NC 4.0).

A critical approach to self-compassion

While mindfulness is a vehicle for keeping reflection therapeutic, we should also be aware that it can place too much focus on the role of the self (Purser, 2019). While this might seem counter to the argument I

am developing, there is nuance here. Ronald Purser (2019) argues that mindfulness has been co-opted to serve neo-liberal interests. Ultimately, it can keep us focused on ourselves as opposed to the systems and processes that lead to the challenges in the first place. I argue that we should have a critical mindfulness that supports us to work within a framework of self-compassion, allowing us to be less self-critical, especially when, as this chapter has shown, many of these factors are outside of our control. However, such an approach to mindfulness should also allow us to recognise when policy, procedures and structures are the source of the problem. In such cases, we should take the onus further off ourselves and place our effort towards challenging the system. This should always be done carefully and in the context people are working within.

It is also important to acknowledge that academics and professional service colleagues are diverse. I realise I am writing optimistically regarding the very possibility of self-compassion and mindfulness—this is not easy. In some cultures and neurodiversities, aspects of self-compassion and mindfulness may be very challenging or even impossible—and yet, tolerance, kindness, and compassionate pedagogies are often a route for their success (Hamilton & Petty, 2023). This is an essential acknowledgement too. The scale of modern Higher Education can be overwhelming (Breeze et al., 2019), but we must never forget the individual. I cannot emphasise enough how much this applies to not only students, but also colleagues, managers, and others we may work with. You may need a break—but so do they (at times).

Sharing the love: Extending the understanding to others

As much as self-compassion starts with us, we can extend it to others. This is also in full acknowledgement that such kindness is not always going to be extended back. Colleagues and students will have different approaches and understanding—and this is something we need to respect as well. This is yet another aspect of compassion—extending it to others, even when we may receive nothing in return. Sometimes doing the right thing really is enough.

For me, there is a lot more hope in Higher Education if we can be that bit kinder to ourselves as Higher Education professionals—and extend

that same courtesy to those around us. Ultimately, we cannot control what happens, but we can control how we hold ourselves to account and how we feel about our progress. By extension, we can control how we hold others to account and how we feel about their progress. While this essay is fundamentally a call for self-understanding, it extends to understanding others. This is a call for hope, that starts with us—with something we can fundamentally control—our feelings, our self-accountability and our support for each other as colleagues.

We need to go easy on ourselves

Considering the significant global and local changes within Higher Education, it can all feel a little overwhelming—and further paradigm shifts in education are on the horizon (Orr et al., 2020). Times will inevitably be tough, especially as we need hope. I've found great solace in the use of a structured planner, something that provides space for weekly planning, but also space for weekly and monthly reflection. Every month, it asks me "what tasks were not accomplished *and why?*". Every month that gives me a chance to practise—in writing—self-compassion. I embrace my successes as much as my failures, but I've learned to learn from them, and not dwell. This has been liberating—and for me—hope comes from more compassion and kindness, and that always starts with the self.

I recognise this is not easy. I think forgiveness is not as innate as reflection and self-critique, but it is a worthy goal when we are applying it to ourselves. As the title suggests, things are that little bit chaotic right now. However, as this essay has argued, it is through embracing compassion and self-care that we can bring a little hope to ourselves—and hopefully that kindness will pass on to others. Next time you're about to apologise for something, think hard. Was it *really* your fault, and can you just let that issue go?

Steps toward hope

- Actively practice self-kindness, mindfulness, and recognition of shared humanity to support personal wellbeing and resilience in the face of academic pressures.

- Shift from self-criticism to self-support, focusing on how to respond to challenges with understanding rather than harsh judgment.

- Foster a culture of collective care by showing the same kindness and understanding toward colleagues.

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46. Decoloniality and nonviolence as a pedagogy of hope: Chilean pre-service teachers and their reconceptualisation of inclusive classrooms

Gaston Bacquet

Abstract

This chapter explores how Chilean teachers' initial assumptions about inclusiveness were shaped by narratives from the Global North that narrowly framed inclusiveness as a method addressing disability or specific learning needs. Their concepts of violence and nonviolence were similarly limited, focusing only on direct violence and pacifism, respectively, without recognising structural and cultural dimensions. Through regular engagement with decolonial perspectives on nonviolence, participants experienced a paradigm shift, coming to understand nonviolence as an active, relational practice that fosters empathy, community, and collaboration. This shift inspired new hope and optimism, positioning nonviolence as a sustainable, human-centred path to inclusiveness that emphasises shared human experiences over socially constructed identity differences.

Keywords: inclusiveness; nonviolence; decoloniality; Global South; Higher Education; pedagogy

The issue with identity: *Us* versus *them*

In 2018, Kwame Appiah gave a lecture on the topic of Western civilisation. By linking the historical contact of Western Europe with non-European societies through travel and exploration, Appiah (2018, p. 164) indicated that culture does not belong to anyone in particular: "culture isn't a box to check on the questionnaire of humanity; it is a process you join, a life lived with others". However, through the process of colonisation, the West succeeded in creating and implanting not only the idea of Western culture, but the notion that any culture that was different—the African, the Indigenous, the South American, the non-White—was simply inferior (Mignolo, 2002, 2009, 2017; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). This separation, the creation of the colonial Other, has had, as Francis Fukuyama (2019) expounds, deep historical repercussions; for while we carry with us our own sexual identities, our ethnicity, our own values and beliefs system, our cultural differences, the very notion of identity is, in fact, Western. It is here that Appiah's (2007) invitation to understand identity from a twenty-first-century perspective can be useful; for while humanity has always been diverse, the Western idea of identity and the constructs that accompany it are quite new, dating back to the work of Erik Erikson in the 1960s (see Bamberg et al., 2021). Although eliminating the idea of identity might seem anathema, particularly for groups who have had their culture, language, beliefs, and behaviours stripped of all value through oppression, the idea of identity in itself is an oppressive construct put forth by the colonial powers and should be challenged. This does not mean negating or invalidating differences; on the contrary, our rich diversity should be acknowledged. However, the affirmation that who we are—intrinsically human, as most Eastern traditions posit—is not dependent on any of the social or cultural circumstances surrounding us; nor it is not determined by the colour of our skin or our sexual orientation. Certainly, there are very real implications of oppression; this 'us versus them' dichotomy has led to the perpetration of direct violence against those who have been historically marginalised, and has allowed for unequal structures to come into place and cultural violence to emerge. These unequal structures, anchored in a power imbalance that according to Fukuyama (2019) has increased in par with economic growth, have historically been the focus of the struggle for disadvantaged groups from a perspective of class; however, the focal point

of that endeavour has shifted in the twenty-first century to an identity struggle for greater dignity, not only expressed in greater economic but also social equality; in other words, groups that have been historically disenfranchised, such as migrants, LGBTQI+, low-income groups, or ethnic minorities strive for adequate and wider recognition (Fukuyama, 2019). And yet, this struggle (perhaps as a natural consequence of it) has also resulted in what Appiah (2018) argues against: the separateness—the "us" versus "them"—that identity politics has led to.

Moving towards a holistic concept of inclusiveness

With this in mind, how do we then approach inclusiveness in a holistic manner? How do we navigate our differences in a manner that acknowledges them without exacerbating them? Judith Butler (2021) has argued that we live in a world where some lives are more clearly valued than others, and by reasons of "racism, xenophobia, homophobia and transphobia, misogyny and the systemic disregard for the poor and the dispossessed" (p. 28), we fail to identify and empathise with those who are different, and thus neglect to acknowledge someone else's loss and grieve them as we would our own. Complementing this view while offering a distinct perspective, Appiah (2007) presents us with two challenges: the first one is the recognition of our responsibility for every human being and their lives regardless of gender, religion, race or any other identity construct, and the second is to take an interest in the practices and ideas that make those lives meaningful and significant. Appiah (2018) further argues that we are given a position within a social group that comes with certain expectations of behaviour and actions, both done by us and to us, as well as certain characteristics that theoretically answer the question of who we are.

We can conclude then that the difficulty arises when we become so identified with the constructs of gender, race, faith and culture that we begin to separate from others. Appiah further argues that inclusiveness, nonviolence, a sense of community, and peaceful co-existence are choices rather than an inherited legacy, and that such values should be used as a resource to live harmoniously rather than to lock ourselves into a specific, fixed identity connected with a specific social group.

Nonviolence as a path to inclusiveness

I will begin this section by dispelling the notion that nonviolence is simply the "absence of violence" or the rejection of violence. The Sanskrit word "ahimsa" reminds us that nonviolence, as envisioned in Hinduism, refers to causing no harm through thoughts, words, or actions (Kirkwood, 1989), and this a key concept informing my research with Chilean Pre-Service Teachers. Historically, nonviolence has involved, as participants discovered, a committed engagement in political action while refusing to take part in violent acts. This is exemplified in important historical events: Mahatma Gandhi's satyagraha (1906) for instance, which served as the ideological foundation for the Indian independence movement, calls for direct noncompliance to those exerting violence upon us through committed resistance, and in further analysing it, Anil Ojha (n.d.) described it as "a weapon of conflict resolution". In his famous speech during the March on Washington in 1963, Civil Rights leader John Lewis highlighted that the struggle for civil rights was a nonviolent revolution and that "we will take matters into our own hands and create a source of power, outside of any national structure, that could and would assure us a victory" (Ojha, n.d., p.1).

Finally, renowned Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh (1987) founded what he called "Engaged Buddhism" at the height of the American war in Vietnam; he expressed that "out of love and the willingness to act selflessly, strategies, tactics, and techniques for a nonviolent struggle arise naturally" and that "nonviolent action, born of the awareness of suffering and nurtured by love, is the most effective way to confront adversity" (p. 1). In other words, what these positions share in addition to the strong spiritual element (Gandhi was Hindu, Lewis was a Christian, and Thich Nhat Hanh a Buddhist monk) is the view of nonviolence as anti-oppression action, to which I might add the concept of collective action. Though each of these proponents spoke to individual commitment they did so in view of the social issues of the time, which required collective action for success.

Here, then, we have a worldview that advocates strengthening inter-dependence rather than individuality and a type of inclusiveness that understands social differences and that aims—through nonviolent means—at taking action towards a universal unity regardless of

class or gender. Although in the lectures I mentioned earlier, Appiah does not refer to yogic or Buddhist texts, his ideas chime with them: he argues that overidentification with the concept of "us" separates us and creates conflict with "them" (a concept also present social psychology—see Turner and Tajfel, 1979), while another Eastern text, the *Yoga Sutras*, asserts that our suffering derives from our identification with external elements or aggregates, and that the remedy lies in our "disassociation", or more accurately, non-identification (Iyengar, 1993, p. 124). In advocating a code of conduct that "educates us towards spiritual poise and peace and under all circumstances" (Iyengar, 1993, p. 11), Iyengar's commentary on the sutras further argues that, in order to gain knowledge of ourselves and our consciousness, we must engage in non-attachment and renunciation, including (and here is the relevance to this research and the imbrication with over-identification), non-attachment to fixed views; these views, often rooted in bias or self-interest, prevent us from seeing others in their purity; thus, when the bias is removed we are more able to "gladly help all, near or far, friend or foe" (Iyengar, 1993, p. 17).

These are the examples that inspired me to work with Pre-Service Teachers in Chile; the participatory project we engaged in aimed at equipping them with the necessary tools to deal with issues of group identity and the ensuing exclusion and discrimination they found. How could we use nonviolence to deal with the exclusion and discrimination they found?

A pedagogy of hope

Guided by this question, thirty-six Chilean Pre-Service Teachers engaged in the study and collective design of a pedagogy of nonviolence (Wang, 2013, 2018), aimed at drawing from a range of nonviolent perspectives and approaches to pave the way towards greater inclusion of historically marginalised learners. And it is in the results of their discussions that we find how nonviolence can imbue our praxis with hope.

Inclusiveness from a nonviolent perspective comprises *everyone* who has been historically marginalised, excluded, and discriminated against; in other words, those whose lives have been socially and culturally devalued. And it is here that participants' paradigm shifts offer us hope

through the recognition of our mutually bound existence regardless of faith, gender, ethnicity, beliefs, modes of life, ability, literacy or education.

In general terms, participants' insights emphasise their newly acquired cognisance that human beings are in fact interdependent and not the participants of what Butler (2021) calls "the fantasy of our self-sufficiency". They also expressed an awareness of what non-Western wisdom traditions offer in this context, which is a proposition to live not for ourselves but for each other. As one participant noted, fostering nonviolence requires us to embrace the fact that we are one in another, rather than a series of separated entities.

Furthermore, many participants expressed how their view of the classroom as a social space had shifted from it being a place of individualistic pursuits to one of collective aspirations. One participant noted a transformation in their attitude, finding themselves thinking about "we" and working communally while putting aside their sense of ego. Another participant expressed a newly gained awareness of being part of an interconnected network constructed on love, understanding and diversity, and their own existence being linked to that of others. Further to this, there was a general consensus on how our educational efforts should be devoted to helping others gain a more profound sense of our shared humanity and the importance of community.

Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh (2018) explain coloniality as a dimension that implies a manner of being, knowing, and doing that started with the colonial experience and which remains as its legacy. This manner of being, knowing, and doing seeks to and continues to perpetuate existing power structures and hierarchies that are constitutive of Western political and economic models. Nonviolence challenges these practices from a decolonial standpoint; from a classroom perspective, it promotes a sense of oneness within the community rather than discriminating against individuals on the basis of race, sex, gender identity, social class, or any other exclusionary dimension; teaching educators how to communicate, how not to judge or how to develop empathy and compassion through contemplative exercises (Barbezat & Bush, 2013) helps us see others in all their dignity without seeking to undermine them.

A key component of decolonial thought is that is not circumscribed by Western ideas and models; rather, it acknowledges the colonised as

sustainable and valid creators of knowledge while seeking to liberate the coloniser from the limitations and the damage the modernist mindset has done to others. Examples provided by participants throughout the project, for instance, draw from feminist pedagogy (Shrewsbury, 1987) by encouraging teachers to consider gender perspectives when teaching due to what they have observed as the unfair differences in the way they see boys and girls being treated. Their suggestions expand to diversifying instructional materials, so they are more representative of our ethnic, sexual, cultural, intellectual and religious diversity. Importantly, and in line with recent critiques of neo-liberal hegemony on curricular practices (Gyamera & Burke, 2018; Hakala et al., 2015; Sayer, 2019), participants' proposed strategies aim at decentralising the classroom by repositioning the role of the teacher and that of the students in a more concentric manner, each contributing in as equal measure as possible.

Additionally, there is strong evidence that reading about different indigenous wisdom traditions helped inform participants' awareness of how to build inclusive, sustainable relationships; this ranged from drawing upon the traditions of different Indigenous traditions on community building to a community-based pedagogy rooted in our relationship with and need to care for the environment as well as each other.

Finally, the concept of community building is fundamental in a decolonial framework; as Anibal Quijano and M. Ennis (2000) posit, hierarchical relations that perpetuate models of domination and exploitation are not only a key embedded element in colonial models but in being so, also allow for the continuation of structural violence. Therefore, creating egalitarian, equitable communities goes directly to the heart of this issue. For instance, one participant noted that they had not considered how gender or racial inequalities can be seen in differentiated opportunity and access, but that as a result of the work we did, they had felt better equipped to tackle these as an educator by reviewing and modifying their curriculum to promote the visibility and representation of the LGBTQ+ community.

Conclusion

To conclude, if there is one element we find in every manifestation of violence it is that of *dehumanisation.* In the end, the process of establishing difference through the marginalisation of the Other is one of making the other less human and less valuable and therein lies the link to inequality. Therefore, the practice of nonviolence through its different articulations is one of *humanising.* Developing empathy, compassion, love, and a sense of interconnectedness is the means to learn to see others as equally human, equally worthy of respect, and equally sharing in the whole of our human experience with its joys and tribulations. Building and developing a nonviolent framework of praxis requires this understanding, and participants showed hope that these are perspectives that can now inform their own work.

Steps toward hope

- Challenge narrow, Global North narratives by incorporating structural, cultural, and relational dimensions of violence and nonviolence into teacher education.

- Regularly expose educators to decolonial approaches that emphasise interconnectedness, community-building, and the shared human experience.

- Foster the ability to see others as equally human, deserving of respect, and sharing in the full spectrum of the human experience.

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47. Avengers Assemble! Working together and valuing professional services staff expertise in programme design

Zak Liddell and Leigh Kilpert

Abstract

This chapter examines the traditional divide between academic and professional services (PS) staff in universities, where academics are positioned as subject experts and PS staff are often viewed as mere operators. It argues that greater collaboration between these groups can address shared challenges in programme design and enhance student outcomes. Drawing on research that highlights the positive impact of PS staff involvement, the chapter proposes the "Programme Heroes Model"—a transformative approach that fosters collaboration, values diverse expertise, and reimagines programme design as a collective, inclusive process.

Keywords: programme design; collaboration; interconnectivity; cultural capital; professional services

Introduction

There has recently been a growing appreciation for the value of professional services (PS) staff within UK Universities. Roles like educational developers and digital education staff have gained recognition for their contributions to the enhancement of teaching and learning. Despite this progress, there remains a notable absence of involvement from both departmental and Registry[1] staff in the critical processes of new programme development, and programme review and amendment, other than to provide administrative services. This exclusion has led to significant gaps in understanding, and hindered important developments, ultimately impacting both the student and staff experience.

Academics traditionally hold a privileged position in universities as subject and content experts, wielding significant influence over the design and delivery of academic programmes. However, their ability to innovate and navigate the complexities of administration and the realities of a marketised sector can often be hindered by perceived bureaucracy. In contrast, PS staff often find themselves relegated to the role of "mere" operators and bureaucrats. This can lead to a self-imposed disempowerment, where their expert knowledge and insights are overlooked or undervalued. By accepting this limited role, both academic and PS staff contribute to the creation of a fragmented landscape, characterised by gaps in understanding and limited collaboration (Whitchurch, 2008).

The lack of meaningful engagement between academic and PS staff creates conflicts and inhibits the establishment of productive working relationships. These conflicts can manifest in a variety of ways, from misalignment in programme design to the failure to adequately address the needs and aspirations of students (Graham, 2012). The negative consequences of these conflicts echo throughout

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1   In the context of UK Higher Education, the "Registry" refers to an administrative department within a university. Sometimes referred to as Academic Services, this department is often responsible for the maintenance of university academic regulations, student records, education administration, and examination arrangements. It plays a crucial role in ensuring the smooth operation of the university's academic functions and upholding its regulatory compliance.

the educational ecosystem, compromising the quality of the student experience and hindering the realisation of desired educational outcomes. The negative consequences of such divisions have previously been explored by Celia Whitchurch (2008), who suggests the concept of the "third space professional" as being a useful link in facilitating effective communication and understanding between different stakeholders. However, despite the potential of third space professionals to bridge these gaps, academic programmes are not always directly included within the third space. This exclusion limits the involvement of PS staff in programme development, review, and amendment processes, further perpetuating the disconnect between academic and professional spheres.

In this chapter we aim to address these pressing issues by highlighting the expert knowledge and contributions of PS staff in programme design and development. Building upon the works of scholars such as Basil Bernstein, Pierre Bourdieu, Dilly Fung, and Carroll Graham, we explore the concept of cultural capital and the validity of PS staff's knowledge. By synthesising existing research and theories, we propose a model of interconnectivity that emphasises collaboration and equal status among all stakeholders involved in programme development and amendment. Drawing inspiration from the Avengers™ (Marvel Characters, Inc.), we believe that by working together as a cohesive team, harnessing the diverse knowledge bases of different staff members, we can achieve the greatest impact and foster an environment conducive to effective programme design.

Why does it matter?

To understand the significance of involving PS staff in programme design, review, and development, it is crucial to examine various factors that affect and highlight the importance of their contributions. This section explores the following factors: definition; power; process; people; impact; evaluation. (See Figure 47.1—for the connections between these factors.)
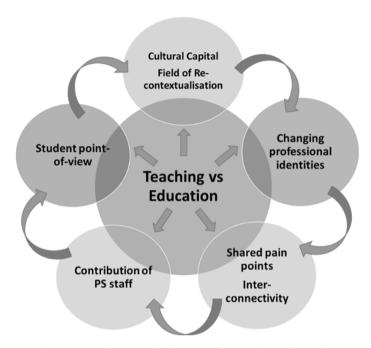
Fig. 47.1 Connections between the factors affecting PS staff contributions to programme development (image by author, CC BY-NC 4.0).

Definition: Teaching vs education

Within the UK Professional Standards Framework (AdvanceHE, 2019), a distinction is made between teaching and education. Teaching refers to the delivery of subject-specific content, while education encompasses a broader scope, including the design, development, and enhancement of learning experiences. By involving PS staff in programme design, institutions can tap into their expertise to create more holistic educational experiences that extend beyond subject-specific teaching.

Power: Cultural capital

Bourdieu's (1993) concept of cultural capital emphasises the value of knowledge, skills, and experiences that individuals possess. PS staff bring diverse cultural capital to the table, rooted in their expertise in administrative processes, understanding of student support needs, and knowledge of institutional structures. Similarly, Bernstein's

(2000) concept of the field of recontextualisation recognises the power dynamics involved in knowledge transmission. Involving PS staff in programme development allows for the recontextualisation of academic knowledge within the administrative and support structures, leading to a more comprehensive and inclusive educational environment, as well as smoother functioning institutions.

Process: Shared pain points and interconnectivity

Collaboration between academic and PS staff can address shared pain points and challenges faced in programme design. By fostering interconnectivity and meaningful dialogue, these two groups can identify and address gaps in understanding, streamline administrative processes, and enhance the overall effectiveness of programme development and amendment. Helen Matthews (2019, p. 10) expressed this idea as follows:

> Focusing on connections between processes and making connections between the different groups of people who deal with them provides a new perspective on process improvements that can lead to real progress.

People: Changing professional identities

Whitchurch's notion of changing professional identities is particularly relevant in understanding the importance of involving PS staff in programme design. As professionals adapt to evolving Higher Education landscapes, their roles and responsibilities expand beyond traditional boundaries. Recognising and utilising the expertise of PS staff in programme design acknowledges their changing professional identities and the valuable contributions they can make to the educational ecosystem.

Impact: Contribution of PS staff to student outcomes

Research has shown that the involvement of PS staff in programme design positively impacts student outcomes. Graham (2012) emphasises the role of PS staff in enhancing the overall student experience and supporting student success. Jenny Roberts (2018, p. 151) highlights the importance of administrative and support structures in fostering student engagement

and satisfaction when she says, "a holistic institution-wide commitment to successful student outcomes necessitates the coming together of academic and professional staff in support of the student learning journey". By actively involving PS staff, institutions can leverage their expertise to create student-centred programmes that meet the diverse needs of learners.

Evaluation: Student point of view

A key aspect of evaluating the importance of involving PS staff in programme design is considering the student perspective. The National Student Survey[2] (NSS) and similar feedback mechanisms often measure student satisfaction with the organisation and smooth functioning of the course. Involving PS staff in programme development can contribute to well-organised and smoothly running courses, ultimately enhancing the student experience.

The factors we have outlined above show why it is important to involve PS staff in programme development. Their operational expertise, understanding of student support needs, and knowledge of quality assurance may contribute to an inclusive educational environment and degree programmes that have integrity. Collaboration between academic and PS staff can address shared challenges, enhance student outcomes, and create a more positive student experience. Acknowledging the changing professional identities of PS staff and their valuable contributions can lead to a more holistic approach to programme design, benefiting both staff and students alike.

The Programme Heroes Model

To address the challenges and enhance collaboration between different stakeholders involved in programme design and review, we propose the implementation of the "Programme Heroes Model". This model aims to create a collaborative and inclusive environment where key

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2   The UK NSS is an annual survey for final-year undergraduates in the UK, established in 2005. It evaluates student satisfaction with courses and overall experience, influencing university rankings and quality assurance. Administered by the Office for Students and other UK regulatory bodies, its results are publicly available.

players, including expert PS staff and other "heroes", contribute with equal responsibility and authority. This approach contrasts with the traditional approach of single named academic programme leads responsible for all elements of the programme, including internal quality assurance processes. Whilst ultimately there will likely be an assumed leader of any team, the Programme Heroes Model offers a framework that brings together currently fragmented discussions and ensures continued engagement among all stakeholders to avoid "civil war".

Recognising and uniting our heroes

Each of the characterised roles can contribute to programme development and review in their unique ways, and collectively they form a diverse and powerful team. Here's how each role could contribute:

Academic/teaching staff (*Iron Man*)*:* With their expertise and intelligence, academics bring subject-specific knowledge to programme development and review. However, they can lack a willingness to work as part of a team.

PS staff (*Captain America*)*:* Local PS staff (particularly those working in education administration and student experience) contribute by using policy and process as a shield, to protect quality and standards. They bring a planning-oriented approach and contribute to the practical aspects of programme development; however, balance is needed to avoid dogmatic restrictions.

Registry services (*The Hulk*)*:* Powerful enablers or blockers, these staff play a crucial role in ensuring compliance with regulations and operational efficiency. However, their potential disconnect with other teams highlights the importance of fostering better communication and collaboration.

Digital education staff (*Thor*)*:* Digital education staff "fly in" with powerful tools and possess knowledge beyond the local understanding. Their contributions to programme development involve integrating digital pedagogies, designing blended or online learning experiences, and supporting the adoption of learning technologies. A whole team approach will help apply this to the reality of the "on the ground"

experience.

Education development unit staff (*Black Widow*)*:* They possess a deep understanding of pedagogical theories, learning design principles, and curriculum development. Although they may be underpowered in terms of institutional authority, their ability to adapt and integrate into different teams makes them invaluable for promoting effective teaching and learning practices.

Students (*Hawkeye*)*:* Whilst often overlooked, their perspective, insights, and feedback are crucial to stay on target for programme development and review. They contribute by offering valuable input on curriculum design, teaching methods, assessment approaches, and the overall student experience. Engaging students as active participants in programme development ensures that their needs and aspirations are considered, leading to more student-centred educational experiences.

Bringing together fragmented discussions

The Programme Heroes Model aims to bridge the gaps between different stakeholders by fostering the type of interconnectivity described by Matthews (2019). Discussions related to teaching, assessment, student experience, and regulations and operations, and associated factors are no longer fragmented. Instead, the heroes collaborate to ensure that these areas are addressed holistically and coherently in programme design and review processes.

The Programme Heroes Model is designed to be applicable in both programme design and review. During the initial design phase, the heroes collaborate to create programmes that align with agreed objectives related to teaching, assessment, student experience, regulations, and operations. Each of our heroes contribute their own perspective to each of these areas, rather than enforcing traditional siloes. (See Figure 47.2, for the themes and factors for group discussion.) In the review phase, they assess the effectiveness of the existing programmes, identify areas for improvement, and work collectively to make necessary amendments.
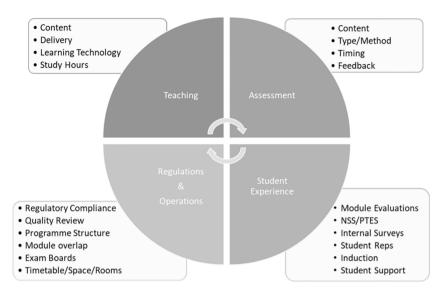
Fig. 47.2 Interconnected themes and factors to be addressed by collective programme heroes (image by author, CC BY-NC).

Key features of the model

Shared space: The Programme Heroes Model emphasises the importance of continued engagement between the heroes. Regular meetings and open channels of communication must be established, whether physically or virtually, to ensure that all stakeholders have a platform to contribute their expertise, address challenges, and share best practices. This ongoing engagement fosters collaboration and creates a sense of collective ownership over programme development and review.

Rotating meeting chairs: To promote inclusivity and shared responsibility, the role of meeting chair rotates among the heroes. This practice ensures that different perspectives are represented and provides an opportunity for each stakeholder group to lead discussions and decision-making processes. By rotating the meeting chair, power dynamics are mitigated, and the contributions of all heroes are valued.

Modelling at the senior level: Successful implementation of the Programme Heroes Model requires support and modelling at the senior level of the institution. Senior leaders must recognise the importance of collaborative programme design and review processes, champion the

involvement of PS staff, and actively promote interconnectivity among all heroes. By leading by example, senior leaders can inspire a cultural shift towards more inclusive and effective collaborative practices.

In summary, the Programme Heroes Model offers a comprehensive solution to enhance collaboration and interconnectivity in programme design and review. By recognising the expertise of all stakeholders, including professional services staff, and providing a framework for their equal participation, this model creates an environment where diverse perspectives are valued and integrated. When these roles collectively contribute to programme development and review, their diverse expertise, perspectives, and experiences create a well-rounded and comprehensive approach. By fostering collaboration, effective communication, and mutual respect, the team can leverage each hero's strengths to create impactful and student-focused programmes.

While the model suggests a core team of heroes in "Phase One", this can be adapted to the institutional structure and allow flexibility for other heroes to join when required such as external examiners (Black Panther, always coming from somewhere better than our own institution where things apparently "just work"), or the social media savvy marketing and communications team (Spider-Man).

Conclusion

The challenges that UK universities face in programme design and development necessitate a transformative solution that fosters collaboration, recognises the expertise of all stakeholders, and promotes interconnectivity. The Programme Heroes Model, inspired by the Avengers' unity and strength, offers precisely that. This collaborative approach aligns with Whitchurch's (2006; 2008) concept of changing professional identities, recognising that both academic and professional services staff play vital roles in shaping the educational landscape. By embracing the diverse cultural capital and knowledge base of all stakeholders, as proposed by Bourdieu (1993) and Bernstein (2000), the model ensures that programme design encompasses a broader scope, moving beyond teaching and integrating various educational aspects.

The model's flexibility to include additional heroes, such as external examiners and marketing teams, as needed, allows institutions to

adapt to changing needs and contexts. This adaptability aligns with Matthews' (2019) and Fung's (2017) ideas on the importance of making connections between different groups of people and processes. The Programme Heroes Model encourages interconnectivity by breaking down silos and bringing together discussions that were once fragmented, as highlighted by Graham (2012) and Roberts (2018) in their studies on the contributions of various staff members to student outcomes.

Moreover, the emphasis on modelling at the senior level aligns with Fung's (2017) concept of shared pain points and the need for cooperation and collaboration among different staff categories. When senior leaders champion the Programme Heroes Model, they demonstrate a commitment to inclusive decision-making, reflecting the idea of a "level playing field" with equal status for all stakeholders.

As the heroes within the Programme Heroes Model work together, harnessing their diverse strengths and expertise, they create a well-rounded and comprehensive approach to programme design and review. By embracing interconnectivity and fostering a culture of cooperation, the model aligns with the research and theories of the referenced scholars, enabling universities to overcome challenges and achieve excellence in education.

In this journey towards effective programme design and review, the Programme Heroes Model serves as a beacon of unity and empowerment. By recognising the importance of all heroes—academic staff, professional services staff, and students—and promoting their active participation, UK universities can elevate their educational offerings and positively shape the future of Higher Education. Like the Avengers, working together as a cohesive team, they can overcome obstacles and create an educational environment that truly values the contributions of all, leading to enhanced student outcomes and a transformative student experience.

Steps toward hope

- Encourage meaningful collaboration between academic and professional services (PS) staff to address shared challenges and enhance programme quality.
- Acknowledge the critical contributions of PS staff alongside

academic staff, shifting perceptions from operators to co-creators in the educational process.

- Adopt a transformative framework such as the Programme Heroes Model to empower all stakeholders, foster mutual respect, and improve student outcomes through collective expertise.

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48. "If you know, you know": Creating lightbulb moments through reverse mentoring

Rachael O'Connor

Abstract

This chapter examines how reverse mentoring can cultivate mutual hope among students and staff in Higher Education (HE) through humanising, authentic conversations that spark transformative "lightbulb moments" and inspire activist mentalities for institutional and cultural change. Drawing on existing HE hope literature and previous research on reverse mentoring, the chapter positions reverse mentoring as a vital beacon of hope in an increasingly disillusioned sector, highlighting it as both a site of agency and a new pathway for generating hope. While acknowledging criticisms—such as the perceived limitations of individualised conversations—the chapter argues that these interactions can catalyse broader cultural change by reshaping wider relationships beyond the mentoring dyad. It concludes with a call to action for more intentional efforts to foster lightbulb moments, expose HE communities to equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) topics through lived experiences, and embed EDI goals firmly into everyone's work.

Keywords: reverse mentoring; humanisation; conversations; hierarchy; equity, diversity and inclusion; under-representation

This chapter argues that reverse mentoring can generate hope in Higher Education (HE) as it contributes towards mutual humanisation of staff and students to one another and the occurrence of "lightbulb moments" of realisation. This is facilitated through the personal exploration of topics not typically broached in staff/student engagement when the usual order of hierarchy is maintained, as in more traditional mentoring, and when time for staff–student conversations is typically much more limited. These moments can generate a ripple or web effect across institutions, engaging a wider range of people in conversations about equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) and calling them to action through a self-authored obligation, generated through meaningful and often emotive conversations.

Designed to intervene in the status quo, reverse mentoring intentionally sets up collaborative conversations between people who have some difference between them, perhaps due to life experience, opportunity, background, or identity. It challenges deficit narratives around under-represented identities by empowering people to become mentors who may be more used to playing subordinated roles in HE or viewed as being in need of mentorship themselves. Consequently, it seeks to challenge (and reverse) power dynamics and hierarchies historically embedded into the fabric of organisations or communities. For example, a disabled student who aspires to join the legal profession may be mentored by an "able-bodied" lawyer about how to "get in". A Black junior academic may be mentored by a white senior professor about research progression. Those who fulfil the traditional habitus of HE (and other elite professions such as law) are often assumed to be good mentors due to their dominance of the field (Bourdieu, 1977). Yet how often do we suppose that there are benefits to flipping the mentoring roles in these examples? This is what reverse mentoring is centred around—the importance of lived experience expertise. In the human resources context, reverse mentoring can be simply "the pairing of a younger, junior employee acting as mentor to share expertise with an older, senior colleague as the mentee", which has potential to "build the leadership pipeline, fostering better intergenerational relationships, enhancing diversity initiatives, and driving innovation" (Marcinkus Murphy, 2012, p. 550). Wendy Marcinkus Murphy (2012) also notes reverse mentoring is "an opportunity for learning by both participants

and a creative way to engage millennial employees". In this context, the basic premise of reverse mentoring in the workplace is applied to the student/teacher dynamic.

Such traditional mentoring dynamics as those noted above reflect wider representation problems. The progression of staff representation in HE in the UK is slow (AdvanceHE, 2022—noting that over 80% of staff in these statistics are working in England) and historically bound up with institutional oppression and discrimination that will take decades to undo. This must remain a priority for our sector. However, in the meantime, we can't blindly continue and hope that one day this problem will be solved by someone else above us. We must act now to empower students who may not see themselves in the staff they work with or the futures they aspire to. Where we recognise students' lived experiences as expertise through reverse mentoring, we can support them to feel liberated by their identities and experiences, rather than oppressed (Freire, 1970). We can also develop the practices of staff who share their enhanced knowledge and skills with other students and peers. Centring students as knowledge producers through the role of mentor to staff "may disrupt traditional forms of knowledge construction" (Wallin & Aarsand, 2019, p. 71) that serve to keep marginalised voices suppressed and consequently, move the dial forwards on the progression of equity in HE.

Cultivating hope

Existing studies elucidate many benefits of hopefulness. Hope is important to a range of factors in HE study including academic success and wellbeing (Coetzee et al., 2022). However, how we facilitate hope when everything, currently, feels hopeless on many levels in our sector is a mounting challenge. To name just a few significant issues impacting the HE sector as I write: the student mental health and wellbeing crisis (ONS, 2022; Tribal, 2022; Student Minds, 2022), the legacy impact of COVID-19 on campus communities and engagement (Darroch, 2023; cf. Holden, 2022), the cost of living crisis and student poverty (Carter, 2023; ONS, 2023), industrial action and increasing divides between HE staff and management and the continued implications of a Conservative government "crackdown on rip off degrees" (Department for Education,

2023), seeking to strip dignity from the study of many critical areas. In the UK, the sector is also in deep financial distress with many institutions announcing redundancy schemes at present (Times Higher Education, 2025). Consequently, this is "a time where it is increasingly difficult to think radical and dream of a different society" (Wallin, 2023, p. 57). To cultivate hope in these conditions, we have to do things differently and intentionally. There is growing evidence that intentional interventions can facilitate the development of hope (Gallagher, et al., 2017; Yotsidi, et al., 2018). If there's one thing we need right now in HE, it's hope.

In experiencing what may be perceived as idealistic staff–student relationships through reverse mentoring, for example, relationships through which we see each other regularly, talk about non-academic topics, trust one another with our stories and identity characteristics, hope can be created. Through the trust and cohesion built during reverse mentoring, we don't have to put on a façade, leading staff and students to describe it as therapeutic. This is the sort of hope that encourages us to think that maybe all of our student relationships could be this fulfilling (and vice versa for students with staff relationships). "Hope, as a cognitive process [...] lays in the heart of the process of pursuing a goal" (Yotsidi, et al., 2018, p. 396). Whilst we might all have goals of being more inclusive, having better relationships with our students, listening meaningfully to others and being good or better allies, those goals may fall by the wayside without the essential prerequisite of hope. For example, if we always feel time poor, have to focus too much on content in the classroom and don't have lived experiences to draw on, "ideal world" goals may feel unattainable. We need something motivating us to act or change—an impactful story.

Reverse mentoring conversations can light or relight the fire that motivates us to depart from the status quo where that is not serving us or our students. The status quo is nearly always the easiest option. The option we take out of necessity, out of fatigue, out of helplessness to change. However, the hope created through for other relationships through fulfilling reverse mentoring connections may enhance self-efficacy and, consequently, perceived ability to succeed (Sezgin & Erdogan, 2015), supporting the generation of new pathways fuelled by agency promoting discussions (Snyder, et al., 1991). It can also create hope for students that there is care, compassion and desire to change

rising up from the roots of HE and that their voices and experiences are a pivotal part of that change. Knowing high levels of hope can also play a protective role (Coetzee, et al., 2022), we owe it to our students to intentionally facilitate this protection from what may otherwise be marginalising or discriminatory HE experiences, especially for those with often marginalised identity characteristics and limited forms of capital.

Why reverse mentoring?

My reverse mentoring journey began with a pilot scheme through which international undergraduate students studying law mentored academic and support staff on issues linked with their lived experiences (O'Connor, 2022). Although HE reverse mentoring is relatively under-researched, there have been a number of empirical studies in recent years that have contributed to building our understanding (e.g., Petersen & Ramsay, 2021; Cain et al., 2022). I expanded my reverse mentoring work to the students as partners and the co-design field (see Mercer-Mapstone, 2017), recognising the importance of embedding students' voices as mentors *and* in the design of the scheme itself to facilitate holistic authenticity. This project used reverse mentoring to develop "business as usual" practices within HE, focusing on personal tutoring. I recruited a team of students who self-identify as under-represented to co-design a reverse mentoring scheme that ran across campus. The scheme was part "traditional" reverse mentoring, focused on students' lived experiences to build personalised connections, and part "action research" as staff/student pairs worked together to develop proposals for improving personal tutoring institutionally, based on their reverse mentoring learnings. Other work I have led includes: international students mentoring campus police officers (O'Connor, 2024); junior and aspiring lawyers mentoring senior leaders in law firms; and students from a range of under-represented backgrounds mentoring university senior executives (O'Connor, et al., 2025). My work has also explored the influence of reverse mentoring on self-determination (O'Connor, 2023a) and self-authorship (O'Connor, 2023b) in students, both closely associated with hope. This work has been united by a common thread of spotlighting mentors' vast lived experiences to challenge dominant

narratives in HE and offer hope to students and staff through the practical act of contributing towards change, rather than regarding change as something we read about in strategies or that happens to us. Reverse mentoring, where it has a clear purpose, centres us (staff and students together) as the doers, the activists, the changemakers. It is a true enactment of partnership.

An underpinning strand of my ethos as an educator is challenging traditions and the view that a traditional or non-traditional student or university experience exists. I was drawn to reverse mentoring as an intentional disruptor of power dynamics and its ability to expose what "non-traditional" might mean for individuals behind the label. Where we focus on EDI as a conversation topic or theme between student mentors and staff mentees, reverse mentoring may expose mentees to real-world experiences of racism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia and other forms of discrimination and microaggressions that we never truly understand if we don't experience them personally, protected by privilege. To be inclined to act, we need an internal "lightbulb moment". Hearing personal stories from those who truly understand these experiences is, in my view, the best way for us to take responsibility for and action against discrimination—to make us mutually human to one another. As HE staff, we cannot be bystanders in the pursuit of equality. This has always been a primary goal of my reverse mentoring work—to support myself, colleagues, and students to engage in the fight against inequalities in HE (and consequently the wider world), whilst also empowering students to recognise and value their self-worth and contribution to a greater good. For all the negative narratives, challenges, despair, and stories of being let down by hierarchical systems I hear from students, the catalytic power of reverse mentoring conversations continues to give me hope. Hope that there are ways for us all to connect and understand one another, no matter how different or distant we might first appear. Hope that lived experiences, particularly of people from minoritised backgrounds, can become sources of power and influence, instead of HE being continually shaped by hierarchies and out-of-date power structures that stifle change and progress. Hope that things will change, because they have to, but we have to be part of the movement.

Beyond the conversations: Is it enough?

Whilst reverse mentoring can support in humanising staff and students to one another through authentic one-to-one conversations, it also encourages improved relationships more widely and more ethical considerations when engaging with others beyond reverse mentoring. Knowing the fifteen students I co-designed the above-mentioned reverse mentoring scheme with has changed me as a person. It also changed their perspectives of self and what it means to be or feel under-represented—this can itself be a source of empowerment as opposed to a deficit label (O'Connor, 2023a). It isn't just that we built great working relationships with each other—those relationships also influence how we interact with others. I found it influenced my day-to-day relationships with other students, and helped build the students' confidence to interact with other "senior" figures in the university.

I learned (and am continuously learning) about the intersectional experiences of trans students, non-binary students, students who have had experience in prison, students with hearing related disabilities, students of different faiths and religions, students of colour, and much more. I also learned what it's like right now to be a student coming from a very similar background to my own. Whilst I never thought of these students as anything other than human, hearing their stories and working closely with them to achieve a common goal, underpinned by our shared sense of under-representation, made them so intensely human to me that memories of our discussions have influenced my approach towards others in my daily life since, at work and beyond. The potential influence of developing these detailed relationships with students cannot be underestimated. I am a better human now than I was before I worked with these students and therefore a better teacher, researcher and tutor. They also regard themselves as more worthy, more confident and more powerful. Reflection on reverse mentoring experiences can change our perspective on how we view our classrooms and other student facing spaces. Where we centralise being human and understanding and knowing one another as paramount to success, we decentralise an overt focus on content and learning for assessment, restoring some of the joy into academia that pressure and process may take away. Staff unite with their students as co-learners—we become

one another's lightbulb moments each day—the learning journey never ends.

There may, understandably, be doubt as to how much individual conversations can contribute to changes on a broader scale. At my first academic conference several years ago, I discussed reverse mentoring as a catalyst for culture change. At this point, I hadn't done any reverse mentoring and was exploring study design. Someone in the audience said: "we know trickle effect doesn't work", implying that because of the one-to-one nature of reverse mentoring relationships, they are not capable of influencing institutional culture. I doubted myself and worried they were right. Feelings triggered by imposterism as a junior, working-class, female, first-generation academic were all around me (see Simpkins, 2018). However, I have seen and researched many examples of reverse mentoring since then and now feel confident to challenge this view vehemently. Reverse mentoring has significant potential in our sector, provided it is used as a vehicle or stepping stone towards something else, not as an end in and of itself. Conversations are only the beginning of the process—conversations are the facilitator of hope. It's what we do subsequently, in response to these feelings of hope, that creates change on a wider scale.

I count every student and staff member who has engaged in reverse mentoring work with me as part of a community centred on genuine trust and love (Shakir & Siddiquee, 2023) that I feel privileged to belong to. This is vital, given evidence that staff are significantly challenged in supporting students' sense of belonging if they do not themselves feel that they belong (Blake et al., 2022). The work we have done has supported me to be more actively engaged in the fight for equity alongside students (and staff) who shatter "traditional" moulds and concepts in HE—together we are activists, promoting grass-roots leadership on institutional issues (Kezar, 2010). Colleagues who took part in my pilot project years on still tell me how their mentors' stories have stuck with them and informally influence their day-to-day practice as teachers and humans. "Personal partnerships are rooted in emotions" (Felten, 2017) and emotional experiences stay with us. The more staff I engage with as mentees, the more I am reminded how scarce an opportunity it is to be able to listen to our students talking about who they are, what they have experienced in life and how it impacts on their University experience

and being able to reciprocate in these conversations, deciphering them clearly from pastoral support meetings. These conversations should be at the core of all we do, rather than just being the concern of pedagogical research projects. The embedding of our identities as staff and students into our practice as educators and learners must be reciprocal, and it must be part of our future sustainability as a sector.

There are also many examples of student mentors going on to other projects, roles and opportunities fuelled by what they learned through reverse mentoring, using their enhanced confidence and skills to catalyse change more widely within their schools and networks. Although one-to-one conversations are a vital part of the process, as noted, reverse mentoring is ultimately about what we do within our multifarious micro-communities in response to those conversations. That's where the impact happens. This isn't our job alone as researchers in reverse mentoring. If student mentors, staff mentees, and co-designers feel fully empowered by reverse mentoring, they will also take up the mantle of influencing and impacting others, widening our community and spreading messages of hope and humanity. Through this, our seemingly "invisible" collaborations are brought to light "so that these practices can be shared" (Kezar, 2010). So, the short answer to the question in this sub-section is no, reverse mentoring is never "enough". But it's a start and if we don't start, nothing ever changes. And if we don't share, we miss an opportunity to inspire someone else to stand up and share their stories too.

Switching on the lightbulbs: Concluding thoughts

To create lightbulb moments across our communities, reverse mentoring must be carefully planned and supported and it must be reciprocated. As bell hooks (1994, p. 21) said, "I do not expect students to take any risks that I would not take, to share in any way that I would not share". In a sector that is becoming increasingly concerned with EDI, belonging and mattering, we must not assume that students can or will want to engage with us around these topics if we are not reciprocating. Reverse mentoring provides a clear signal to students that their voices and experiences matter—they are experts—but also that what they know and understand about *us* matters. Our human connection is as

vital as our academic connection, but the latter is suffering under many aforementioned weights bearing down on our sector. We need to be intentional about addressing and repairing this community damage.

You can start smaller if a reverse mentoring scheme seems too involved for where you are or what capacity you currently have. Start finding out who your students are, why they are here, and what influences them but, crucially, let them come to understand this about you in return. Once we start this work, we need a plan for longevity and widespread engagement, because hope generated through conversations can be jeopardised if students (and staff) face non-inclusive, inauthentic approaches elsewhere outside of the reverse mentoring "bubble" you might create. The ability to be human with one another is about culture. Cultural acceptance of a new way of doing things is challenging to achieve in HE, which stands on a deeply entrenched history of hierarchy, elitism, and privilege. We have to be prepared for adversity along the way but we must not let that take away the hope we can generate through these conversations.

This chapter has sought to convince you of the power of reverse mentoring to create lightbulb moments, which can, in turn, instigate meaningful change and connection between people who may previously have seen themselves as separated by divides. In the context of academic development, Susannah McGowan and Peter Felten (2021, p. 473) ask: "Are we contributing to a more just and humane world […], or are we part of the machinery maintaining failed, inequitable, and unjust systems?" This is a question we should all be asking ourselves in the context of our own practice. Reverse mentoring provides a useful setting in which to explore these questions. What I particularly value about reverse mentoring conversations is that, provided they are centred on the support and wellbeing of mentors, they unite people with particular lived experiences and those without, rather than viewing them as in opposition to one another (Wallin, 2023). Whilst much work on hope in academia focuses on building hope in students, reverse mentoring has the unique benefit of reciprocal hope building for students *and* staff. Consequently, such schemes can put EDI work on everyone's agenda, rather than relying on a few people (typically people already marginalised within HE) to further progress—as the oppressed, we need our "comrades" to make freedom from oppression a reality

(Freire, 1970, p. 47) or, to translate that into more millennial terminology, "if you know, you know" (and then you have to take action). When we experience lightbulb moments, they become part of us to the extent that we can no longer regard ourselves as outside of the work needed to make a change. We may still feel on the periphery, but we become part of the conversation and, crucially, part of the mission for change through our united sense of hope. So, let's start talking…

Steps toward hope

- Leverage reverse (or reciprocal) mentoring in your organisation to humanise relationships and cultivate hope.

- Facilitate, with guidance, authentic, student-staff conversations that spark lightbulb moments and inspire activist mentalities at all levels for institutional and cultural change.

- Use one-to-one or small group reverse mentoring experiences to influence broader relationships and drive larger cultural shifts within Higher Education—one relationship and interaction at a time.

- Actively expose staff and students to equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) topics and ensure that advancing EDI becomes a shared responsibility across all workloads.

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Conclusion: Steps toward hope

Sandra Abegglen, Tom Burns, Richard Heller, Rajan Madhok, Fabian Neuhaus, John Sandars, Sandra Sinfield, and Upasana Gitanjali Singh

We asked our contributors for "Stories of Hope": the key hopeful messages from each section of the book are summarised below.

In "I. Examples of System Change", we see how despondency about the current challenges facing the sector can be lifted through fresh ideas and possibilities for reform. Giving students more agency, involving the wider community, developing a humane perspective, reimagining mentorship, thinking laterally, and engaging in playful experiments all offer hope for a changed and renewed education system.

Hope also shines through examples of innovation, particularly those leveraging new technologies. In "II. How Technology Can Shape the Future", chapters illustrate how technology, collaboration, and digital communities can help create a more immersive, inclusive, and supportive future. Although written before the explosion of the artificial intelligence (AI) revolution, these chapters paint a hopeful picture of how technology can enhance—rather than replace—the essential human elements of education. Emphasising creativity, inclusivity, and community-building, these examples inspire hope for the future of Higher Education.

In "III. Creative Curriculum Design", the chapters provide practical advice on implementing change, alongside inspirational accounts of how to instil hope and embody hopeful educational practices. They remind us of what makes education truly educational: embracing complexity, taking risks, and finding joy through the serious business of play and playful teaching approaches.

The theme of hope continues in "IV. Imaginative Collaboration and Co-creation", where it is nurtured through community and collective action. Although hope can feel elusive in a competitive, marketised, and often isolating Higher Education environment, these case studies show the transformative power of "coming together". The innovative models and methods shared allow us to reimagine collaboration—between educators, students, and broader educational communities—and offer a compelling vision for a more hopeful future.

In "V. Beyond the Curriculum", the chapters present a range of inspirational approaches that aim to transform the curriculum and the wider education system to align more closely with values such as compassion, humanity, and social justice. By embracing diversity, encouraging co-creation, and fostering personal and collective wellbeing, learners and educators alike are empowered to flourish. These examples offer hope—but they also underline that real change depends on our willingness to move beyond current constraints, embracing personal development and creativity in both design and practice.

Finally, in "VI. Focus on the Teachers", the authors offer practical strategies for supporting the wellbeing of educators. As Rachael O'Connor reflected in her chapter, "...how we facilitate hope when everything, currently, feels hopeless on many levels in our sector is a mounting challenge". This book reminds us that hope begins with ourselves—with self-kindness, compassion, and care. Looking after ourselves is not selfish or disconnected; it is essential. We cannot nurture hope in others unless we first cultivate it within ourselves.

Hope is not a passive feeling; it is an active, courageous choice. It demands that we believe in better possibilities even when faced with immense challenges. As this collection shows, hope is found in the daily actions of educators who dare to reimagine, to innovate, and to care—for their students, for their communities, and for themselves. If we choose to nurture it, hope can be the catalyst that transforms not only our educational practices but also the very systems in which we work. The future of education is not written yet—it is ours to shape, together, through imagination, collaboration, and a steadfast commitment to a more humane and hopeful world—and that is our hope.

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About the Team

Alessandra Tosi was the managing editor for this book.

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Illustrations were created by Rachel Denbina, a Graduate Assistant Researcher with the School of Architecture, Planning, and Landscape at the University of Calgary, currently pursuing her Master of Architecture.

Jeevanjot Kaur Nagpal designed the cover. The cover was produced in InDesign using the Fontin font.

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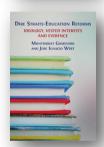## The Struggle You Can't See

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Bringing together a diverse range of educators and practitioners, this collection showcases real-world innovations that challenge the status quo and offer glimpses of a more humane and inspiring educational future. From rethinking systems and curriculum design to fostering imaginative collaboration and exploring the role of technology, the book highlights practical, hopeful interventions that are already making a difference.

This is not a manifesto of complaints but an invitation to reimagine education. The contributors offer fresh perspectives from around the world, illustrating how small but meaningful changes can transform learning spaces, empower educators, and inspire students. For academics, teachers, administrators, and anyone invested in the future of education, this book serves as both a source of inspiration and a call to action. It is an evolving ecosystem of ideas—grounded in practice, rich with possibility, and rooted in radical hope. Now is the time to create the change we wish to see.

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