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Our book has just been published in a recognized publishing house in Bucharest. You can see it at:

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I hope that the book will be successful among university teachers. Thank you very much for your contribution to this volume. I was very happy to have the chance to work with you. I have three books for you, but I do not know how to get to you. Maybe you have any idea.

You can cite your chapter as follows:

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## **CREATIVE STRATEGIES THAT PROMOTE STUDENT STUDY SUCCESS**

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### **1.1 Introduction**

In United Kingdom Higher Education students are said to ‘read for their degrees’. This indicates that there is very little direct teaching, and if there is, it is often in a traditional lecture format, and that contact-time with academics, those members of the university who teach or research, is limited. Instead the students are expected to be able to organise themselves for independent study and inter-dependent learning. This means, the students are expected to understand the forms and processes of university teaching and learning; to know how we teach and assess, and what sorts of academic work they have to undertake to get tasks and assessments successfully completed. They are also expected to have the motivation, self-discipline and agency to engage actively and proactively with their learning; to be able to

step back from their learning experience to develop critical and analytical thinking skills, and to improve on future performance.

The reality is that many students are underprepared for the sort of university teaching and learning environment just described. They come from a transactional pre-university system (at least in the United Kingdom) where the emphasis is on 'teaching to the test' to ensure that students meet performance targets (Jozefkowicz, 2006). Hence, many students struggle with university-level academic work; to think and act autonomously while self-governing their studies. In our particular institution, London Metropolitan University, this is complicated by the fact that most of our students are classified as 'non-traditional' (London Metropolitan University, 2018); they are often the first in their families to attend university and they work, often full time, alongside having caring responsibilities. This means, our students have very little or no time for academic study outside of class contact time, let alone for the sort of extra-curricular activities that develop them the most and that make them ready for work (something which is often taken-for-granted by Higher Education institutions and future employers that look for those extra skills and achievements).

There are many - and often elaborated - attempts to help these students succeed at university study. This often happens through extra-curricular 'skills' programmes that aim to bring these students 'up to speed' and 'fix' their 'deficits. Interestingly, what helps non-traditional students to succeed are not 'bolt-on' courses and workshops but the development of creative and inclusive curricula that build on their strengths and meet their needs (Warren, 2002). This has proven not only to help non-traditional students to succeed but to help all students maximise their potential (Satterthwaite, 2004). This, however, requires the involvement of all staff and not just Learning Developers; professionals in the United Kingdom Higher Education system with a special responsibility for developing student learning, and articulating with discipline staff on how to develop student teaching. Learning Development is the responsibility of all those involved in learning and teaching.

The purpose of this chapter is to share our experience of developing and teaching an interdisciplinary first-year undergraduate module where we embedded emancipatory and creative study strategies that promote student study success. We thereby argue for a model of teaching and learning that accommodates the 'flawed self' of both the learner and the teacher - a model that acknowledges and accommodates learning in all its complexity.

## 1.2 Study 'skills'

Our role since the 1980s has been to investigate in practice - and in our particular contexts - what facilitates and what might impede student learning. This has included an engagement with and promotion of Learning Development (Hilsdon, 2011): in undergraduate courses, staff workshops and faculty meetings. This also included, based on our empirical experience and our research, the writing of a study guide for students: *Essential Study Skills: The Complete Guide to Success at University* (Burns and Sinfield, 2016) - now published in its fourth edition - as well as a guide for academics: *Teaching, Learning and Study Skills: A Guide for Tutors* (Burns and Sinfield, 2004) and in 2011, as part of the Universities into the 21st Century initiative: *Learning Development in Higher Education* (Hartley, Hilsdon, Keenan, Sinfield and Verity, 2011) which we co-edited with other founder members of the Association for Learning Development in Higher Education (viz. <http://www.aldinhe.ac.uk/>).

The nature of student study success has also been mapped by others and a seminal text that critically discusses (the often contrasting) expectations and interpretations of successful learning and teaching in Higher Education is by Lea and Street (2006). Their work distinguishes such practices as study skills, academic socialisation and academic literacies (Lea and Street, 2006):

*Study skills:* This idea suggests that there are various discrete skills and strategies that students need to employ to succeed: time management, note making, reading for learning, writing in the correct genre and mode etc. This is often critiqued as a deficit model where the student is seen as flawed and in need of fixing. Whilst we reject the notion of the deficient student, we do argue that there are moments when students do not understand how to study successfully. For example, when entering university, many will not understand that they need to make active and memorable notes, having been taught instead to passively rely on staff handouts. Being allowed time and space to rehearse successful note-making strategies might improve agency; thus tackling study strategies directly, and in a supportive and transparent way need not be experienced as remediation and may enable students to proactively take control of their own learning.

*Socialisation:* The socialisation argument suggests that disciplines and academic communities

have habits and epistemological practices that students need to learn, that they need to copy and embrace, in order to become full community members. This too is often critiqued as a passive model representing the student as inexperienced learners that need to be molded into successful adults (and employees). However, if we take the Lave and Wenger's (1991) apprenticeship model of 'Communities of Practice', it becomes evident that novice students will need to learn how to become academics within their own epistemic communities, and that this need not be a passive and unquestioning indoctrination but an active and embodied process of becoming.

*Literacies approach:* This more critical approach suggests that the student is an (active) actor and agent in their own learning; they are subjects capable of operating with awareness and criticality within their epistemic communities. This contradicts the general assumption and perception that student literacy is 'falling' and that students lack essential writing skills. Lea and Street (2006) argue that current perception in regards to academic literacies need to change; rather than locating 'problems' within individual students wider institutional approaches to student study (and writing) need to be developed and embedded - based on more equal tutor-student relationships.

Lea and Street (2006) argue that they favour academic literacies because a 'New Literacy Studies' approach to student writing encapsulates the other two approaches. Although this argument is plausible, there is still an underlying assumption that writing is a skill to be mastered - with a linear progression from 'basic' literacies to 'academic' literacies (considered the highest level of literacy). We argue for a more nuanced discussion of and approach to student learning that integrates and fosters more than one approach. Students need to be provided with opportunities that creatively scaffold their learning throughout their studies, and that build on their existing skills and knowledge. They need to be welcomed and recognised as whole human beings - with all their strengths and weaknesses.

In our teaching, we aim to promote multidimensional and proactive student learning. Most importantly, we aim to take into account the whole student, and the subtle range of attributes and practices they will need to develop over time to become academic in their own discipline. Underpinning this approach are arguments surrounding critical, emancipatory and empowering pedagogy (Freire, 1970), and an emergent approach to practice that fosters creativity (Jackson, Oliver, Shaw and Wisdom, 2006) for self-

actualisation (Maslow, 1970) and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982). Included in this is the idea of a spiral curriculum (Bruner, 1960) - where practices, theories and concepts are returned to with ever greater degrees of complexity and understanding - and that makes time and space for meaningful learning (Berg & Seeber, 2016). This requires a continuous and critical reflection (Schön, 1983) of learning and teaching from both academics and students. In particular, it requires challenges that pique students curiosity and invite them to learn - without one particular skills-set in mind.

Angelo's (1993) 'Teachers Dozen' offer clear, research-based guidance for teaching that promotes 'higher learning'. The fourteen practices offered underpin academic success for all students, stressing the importance of the following (Angelo, 1993):

- Active learning;
- Focussed attention on plus awareness of the importance of what is to be learned
- Tutor and student goals being in alignment;
- New information must be meaningfully connected to prior knowledge - and actively remembered;
- Unlearning (preconceptions and misconceptions) is more difficult than learning new information;
- Personally organised information is more likely to be retained, learned and used;
- Learners need feedback on their learning early and often; to become independent they must learn how to give themselves feedback;
- The ways in which learners are assessed and evaluated powerfully affect the ways they study and learn;
- Mastering a skill or body of knowledge takes great amounts of time and effort;
- Learning to transfer knowledge to new contexts requires a great deal of practice;
- High expectations encourage high achievement;
- Teachers need to balance levels of intellectual challenge and instructional support;
- Motivation to learn is alterable; it can be positively or negatively affected by the task, the environment, the teacher, the learner;
- Interaction between teachers and learners is one of the most powerful factors in promoting learning; interaction among learners is another.

Drawing together what empowers students to learn with what facilitates effective teaching, we have developed a first-year undergraduate module that introduces students to their disciplinary subject as well

as to academia and academic practice per se. Making use of ludic and creative practices we pose authentic challenges that invite students not only to actively learn, but also to consciously engage with their own processes of learning.

### **1.3 The ‘model’ module**

Based on our experience and research, we developed *Becoming an Educationist (Becoming)*; a paradigmatic ‘skills’, ‘socialization’ and ‘literacies’ module that was in reality a ‘Community of Practice’ that engaged students in ‘real’ learning. The module was designed to be a ‘de-schooling’ process (Illich 1970); to break out students from previous transactional, passive and spoon-fed models of education to liberate them to explore what learning and studying actually involve. We wanted our students to experience and feel both in an embodied and in an intellectual way what university can be like when teaching and assessment are developed in creative and empowering ways. Plus, we wanted them to develop the courage to follow their own interests, and take responsibility for their own learning and development.

*Becoming* was aimed at the first-year undergraduate students of three different courses based in the School of Social Professions. The three courses were aimed at students interested in becoming Educationists in the widest sense: teachers, youth workers, educational instructors, learning consultants, health promoters, community supporters etc. The student body of these courses traditionally consists of over fifty percent non-traditional students (Blagburn and Cloutterbuck, 2011); students that are mature, have work commitments, are looking after dependents and attend part-time at least part of the academic year. This means, students on these courses manage, on top of their studies, multiple and often conflicting responsibilities. In these particular courses, students are also coming from a wide range of educational backgrounds, and hence they often struggle to find a ‘common ground’ for their learning.

*Becoming* was credit bearing running over the whole of the academic year. This gave the module the necessary ‘seriousness’, and it created time and space not only to explore topics and themes in depth but also to ‘be with’ students (Nancy, 2000). This helped students bond and belong; to ease the transition into academia and to reveal that intense engagement with themes and topics creates opportunities for ‘rich’ learning. We utilised ‘drawing to learn’, ‘free writing’ and ‘blogging’ to help students develop thinking and writing habits such that, especially with the blogging, they wrote more often and thus became better at writing (Abegglen, Burns and Sinfield, 2016a). We scaffolded student reading through the use of visual

practices and ‘textscrolls’ (Middlebrook, 2018), and we asked them to experiment with creative practices such as songs, dances and videos/films/animations (Burns, Sinfield and Abegglen 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2018d, 2018e) with the aim to shake up their notions of ‘education’ and to introduce them to successful study practices.

In the following sections we will share some of the activities that we undertook with our students in more detail with the hope that readers will adapt them to their own teaching and learning practice - and to their particular context.

*Top tip: Resources that support many of the activities suggested below can be found here:*

<https://learning.londonmet.ac.uk/take5/index.html>

## **1.4 Act. Bond. Communicate**

Most academics, although often delivering traditional lectures, understand that discussion facilitates learning and that a class or cohort of students are de facto a ‘Community of Practice’ (Lave and Wenger, 1991). However, most academics do not understand just how much student bonding and belonging, and active and dialogic learning, benefit from being scaffolded in the first few weeks of a degree programme (Wilcox, Winn and Fyvie-Gauld, 2005). We therefore make sure that our students have enough time and opportunities to ‘be’ and ‘learn together’. We also insist that they learn how to frame and ask questions before we move on to engage them in dialogic role plays and simulations, and finally introduce them to drawing and writing to learn.

### 1.4.1 Questions not answers

When our students first enter our class, rather than telling them what ‘our’ module is about, we ask them first individually, then in small groups and finally as a whole class, to decide between them the ten questions that must be answered about the module as a whole for them to have a successful academic year. This is a powerful way of not only introducing the module, but also familiarising students with small group work, and the power of discursive (Foucault, 1972) learning and the dialogic (Bakhtin, 1981). Once we have covered ‘What’s the course about?’ and ‘How will we be assessed?’, the students tend to ask surprisingly in depth and incisive questions: ‘Why do you love teaching this module?’, and, ‘If it’s a choice between obeying policy and looking after the needs of your students, what would you do in practice?’. Encouraging the students to ask questions helps transfer ownership of the module - from us to

the them. Moreover, it is always good to be pleased and surprised by students and the questions they pose as this helps to create a positive and aspirational atmosphere in the class. Plus, opening a module by asking questions helps to spur their interest. They want to know more - not just about the content but about learning itself: 'Why are there more questions than answers, Grandad?' (Mahmood, 1974).

#### 1.4.2 Role play and simulation

Typically we follow up this first question and answer session with a few sessions driven by problem-solving role play and simulations (Chan, 2012). For example we have a post-apocalypse scenario: with survivors in a nuclear bunker deciding who to save and why; followed by a session where the 'war' is over and a new society can be established: 'What world will you build and why?' This follow up session can be linked to any discipline. In our Education sessions obviously we include questions on education: 'What education system would you build and why?', but with Law we would focus on a legal system and with the sciences we would concentrate on the scientific structures required to build sustainable ecosystem. Important is that students first debate these questions in their respective groups before communicating their answers to the rest of the class. We also ask students to reflect on the whole process and outline why they prefer particular solutions. In a meta-discussion, we often ask them to reflect on the values that affect answers (and behaviours) - and link this to wider professional and ethical practice.

*Recommendation: Our role play/simulations can be accessed from here:*

*<https://learning.londonmet.ac.uk/take5/simulations.html> - but a quick Internet search should unearth ones that are suitable for your subject or at least can be adapted to your particular course.*

#### 1.4.3 Active learning

Once this 'groundwork' has been undertaken, we make sure to engage students in active learning (Angelo, 1993; Bonwell and Eisen, 1991) as much as possible. In particular, we build in small tasks and activities that help students further bond with each other and also advance with the module content. For example, we often start classes with a quick quiz. It is useful way of reminding them of last week's session and finding out about their knowledge gaps. However, we make sure that these quizzes are not tests but fun ways of refreshing their memory and of foregrounding that revision is necessary for successful learning. The quizzes are therefore often group tasks students need to complete together. These tasks can extend beyond lecture content. With new students, we always do a 'treasure hunt' where they need to find particular locations at University (for example, Student Services, the gym, the cafeteria etc.)



and take selfies to prove they have visited the place. The group with the most creative selfies wins a small prize. Important is that these activities engage students while still being meaningful. They also need to leave room for discussion and debate.

*Recommendations: Other possible active learning ideas include:*

*Require different groups of students each week to make short, memorable and paradigmatic notes of the session - and share them with the class. The class as a whole can judge whether or not they are complete notes and amend them accordingly. This emphasises to the students that they must take control of what and how they learn. At the end of the course a prize can be awarded to the most memorable notes overall.*

*Rather than 'teach' all of the course, divide the course material into sub-topics and require different student groups to prepare and deliver not a presentation but an academic seminar or an interactive workshop on that topic. Not only does this transfer power to the students and promote their agency and ownership, the researching, shaping and refining of these teaching sessions provokes truly powerful learning in the students.*

*Set as part of your overall assignment the production of a Reflective Learning Log - either in diary or online Blog format. In the log students have to reflect on what they have done - why - and how it will help them in the final assignment. If you do not want to award marks for this, give a small prize for the most creative or dynamic log. Again, this activity underscores student agency - and just how much academic labour they must do to engage with and learn their topics. When we have encouraged students to complete these reflections as blog posts, and initially in their own 'voices', we have seen a concurrent/subsequent dramatic improvement in the students' formal academic writing.*

## **1.5 Utilising creative and visual practices**

Drawing is one of the most under-used learning techniques or academic literacies. Perhaps because most of us stop drawing when we leave Kindergarten, it becomes something that we do not do. Instead of being enjoyable, drawing makes us feel vulnerable, silly, inadequate or foolish. But drawing can be an intellectual activity that helps us analyse, reflect upon, investigate, explore, understand and communicate about the world, our experiences and our studies (Ridley and Rogers, 2010; Abegglen, Burns and Sinfield, 2018). We focus on visual thinking when developing our students' ability to unleash their

creative selves in their studies - and to support their development as critical agents in an increasingly visual, multimodal world (Giunta and Janus, 2016). For example, we might ask them to give us feedback not in writing but by drawing a rich picture or a super doodle (for tutorials on rich pictures and other visual representation systems, viz.: <http://systems.open.ac.uk/materials/T552/>), we ask them to supplement their notes with visual mnemonics to make key ideas, concepts and theories memorable and we ask them to illuminate their Reflective Learning Logs or Blogs with memorable images or infographics - not least because this sort of transliteration of ideas from spoken or written words into the visual is a powerful re-genring (English, 2011) activity that reinforces understanding as well as fostering deep learning.

### 1.5.1 Collages

We find however that before harnessing drawing, first academics need to help students to lose their fear of this practice. A stepping stone on the way to this is to first experiment with collage-making. Successful collage practice helps students appreciate the power of visual thinking without making them feel too exposed in the first instance. As the class bonds more and trust builds up, then students are ready to take those brave steps into drawing to learn.

A first collage activity that we tend to undertake with our undergraduate students asks them to think of the first few weeks at university - the good and bad - and to make a collage. We ask students to rifle through magazines and newspapers thinking about those first weeks and to use any pictures they are able to find and that they think help them represent their experiences. Once finished, we ask students to share their collages with each other - and that each partner first analyses the other's picture. This is a powerful introduction to 'active looking' and 'active listening', as well as to analytical and critical thinking and speaking - but in a very low risk mode.

Next, we encourage students to write about their collage - to first describe the image they have created and then to elaborate the thoughts that accompanied the collage-making. This can be developed into a first reflective writing piece, used to develop the students' ability to write in an interesting way - and to have something to say. If appropriate we might ask them to turn this into a more substantial piece of writing or to use this to seed another project - for example - producing a multimodal reflection on their learning journey. Basically, we are leading students through descriptive writing into analytical writing - and asking them to take control of that writing process: to shape and structure the words and, iteratively,

to craft something that tells an 'academic' story - and in a way that is interesting to read. That writing can be thus developed and shaped - that it is an iterative and learning process in and of itself - is powerful transformative learning for students.

Finally we may ask students to engage in a metacognitive process: to reflect again, specifically on this collage-making as a mode of scaffolded reflection and to consider for themselves when and how they might use such techniques again in their own learning - promoting them to actively think about their own learning.

*Recommendation: Suggest to students that they make a habit of collecting pictures from newspapers and magazines so that they always have a stack of images to use.*

*Top tips: As students get more experienced at collage-making, they can use collages to get started on an assignment. With the assignment question in mind, they can choose pictures that seem to represent the question, parts of an answer, or their own beliefs or thoughts on the topic at that time. The important thing is that they create a picture that spurs their thinking. The collage can then be used to write a first, tentative answer to the assignment task or question.*

*Note: Collages can also help students overcome writing blocks because they can help them to see things in fresh and energising ways.*

### 1.5.2 Blind drawing

Another activity that can ease students' fear of drawing is 'blind drawing'. Blind drawing is not drawing with your eyes closed - but drawing whilst looking at what you are drawing without looking at your drawing paper. This takes pressure off students because the drawings produced cannot look 'real' - but they can look good in some other way. We always enjoy the wonky and quirky look of these drawings - and so do they. So, we ask our students to settle down and just start looking at lots of different things in the room around them. They are then asked to select something they can easily see - not only objects but also people - and start drawing, moving the pencil back and forth across the paper without taking it off the page or looking at the paper. We encourage them to really see - and not to stop moving the pen or pencil on the page until they have captured all there is. Once finished, we ask them to look at their drawing and enjoy the weird and wonderful outcome. Typically there is much laughter as the drawings are shared, this increases their confidence and shows them that indeed everybody can draw.

Following on from a blind draw, in one of our sessions, we have asked first year undergraduate students

to draw ‘ontology’ and ‘epistemology’ and to share and discuss the drawings that they have made: ‘What new insights can they perceive about these tricky academic topics in this way?’. Again the students tend to surprise themselves and us with their insights - and again - this sort of success through creative thinking helps to develop a sense of self-belief and self-efficacy which helps them to succeed also in more traditional academic arenas.

*Recommendation: To encourage your students to develop a flexible and swift drawing habit try this: Five drawings in five minutes. Give the following list to students and ask them to draw a picture in response to five of the words for one minute each: Asymmetric, beautiful, colourful, detailed, edge, far away, geometric, hidden, inside, joint, knot, look up, miniscule, number, opening, pattern, quirky, reflection, sensuous, texture, underneath, view through, wall. Ask students to keep these drawings in a little exercise book - to just enjoy them – or to see how they can use the drawings in their note making and learning.*

### 1.5.3 Draw more. Draw digitally

Once students feel more comfortable with drawing, they can start drawing a representation of all the information that was presented in a lecture or that is contained in an article or chapter. They can experiment with colours, shapes and figures. They should be as imaginative as possible! The visual representation should help them reflect on the content. If students like to be challenged, they could start their essay by drawing it first. They could approach this by doodling, sketching, painting, creating a storyboard, producing a comic book, or developing a mind map/diagram.

*Recommendation: For those unsure how to approach visual notetaking read Noble Chloe’s blog. Noble Chloe realised that many of her fellow students did not make visual notes because they thought that they could not draw. Chloe produced some simple lessons on shape drawing that show beyond any shadow of a doubt that anyone can be visual, because you do not have to be an artist to make visual notes:*

*https://noblechloe.wordpress.com/[first-year-learning-logs/visual-notes/who-says-you-need-to-be-able-to-draw-to-make-visual-notes/](https://noblechloe.wordpress.com/first-year-learning-logs/visual-notes/who-says-you-need-to-be-able-to-draw-to-make-visual-notes/)*

*Top tips: Rather than asking students to produce written summaries of their reading or to write an essay explanation of a complex theory or process, require instead that they produce a StoryBird version of a chapter or article or produce a Comic book to explain complex ideas simply.*

*Storybird (<https://storybird.com>) is a digital storytelling platform that offers image choices as people construct their own stories. Here is a StoryBird version of a sample chapter taken from*

Piaget: <https://storybird.com/books/chapter-3-parents-have-a-prior-right-to-choose-the/?token=jxkumdebz3>.

*Comic books have become more popular in the Academy, MIT used to ask their graduate students to convert their ideas into Comic Books for High School students and Nick Sousanis has risen to fame recently after presenting his PhD as a Comic Book (viz. <http://spinweaveandcut.com/comics/>).*

*For more ideas on how to harness digital storytelling in your practice explore #DS106: <http://ds106.us/about/>. DS106 started as an open online freely shared 'course' on Digital Storytelling and now houses caches of excellent ideas for teaching and learning as well as offering opportunities to join in with subsequent DS106 course or idea iterations.*

In addition, students could use drawing to create a journal where they reflect visually upon all of their learning. This will help the students surface and learn their material, and at the end of a course or programme, they will have an inspiring visual record of their time at university that they can show family and friends - and that will give them happy memories of their studies for years to come.

*Recommendation: Some people buy quite expensive sketchbooks from art shops – others make their own sketchbooks with cardboard and string and various different sorts of paper; this gives each book a wonderfully unique and special feel.*

*Top tips: Utilise rich pictures and diagrams: when starting on a new topic, make space for the students to think about it by drawing a picture or diagram of all that the topic means to them. The following link takes you to some small Systems Thinking and Practice (Diagramming) tutorials: <http://systems.open.ac.uk/materials/T552/>. These constitute different draw-to-learn activities including spray diagrams, rich pictures, systems maps, influence diagrams, multiple cause diagrams, sign graphs. Explore all the tutorials – and use the strategies in your teaching - and encourage the students to use them in their thinking.*

*If further developing Visual Learning: Pauline Ridley from Brighton University has put together a whole website focusing on the role of drawing in learning and research: <https://blogs.brighton.ac.uk/visualllearning/>. Please explore this website and use the ideas in your own studies. Pauline has also produced Drawing to Learn booklets that can be downloaded from her visual practices website: <https://blogs.brighton.ac.uk/visualllearning/drawing/> - use these to help you to be a more creative and more successful teacher.*

## 1.6 Promoting multimodality and harnessing digital technology

In *Becoming* we ensure that we move smoothly from visual practices per se to recognising and developing our personal and professional selves: developing critical agency in a world that is increasingly digital and multimodal. We bring this together in the first research project that we set students: to discover what facilitates and impedes University teaching and learning. We showcase the results of the students' work in the Multimodal Exhibition that the students have to organise and run in order to present the results of their investigations.

### 1.6.1 Multimodal practice and the Multimodal Exhibition

Thus, after and alongside engaging students in active learning and in drawing-, talking- and problem-solving- to learn, we set our students the challenge of exploring the University's formal and informal learning spaces as participant observers and to make conscious to themselves what helps or hinders student learning. This acted as a first step towards undertaking their own qualitative research project into some aspect of teaching and learning and also facilitated an embodied way of experiencing and then critiquing taken-for-granted educational practice (Abegglen, Burns and Sinfield, 2016b). As said, we wanted to 'de-school' (Illich, 1970) our students and help them to un-learn dominant education narratives, and see university teaching, learning and assessment 'as if for the first time' (Burns and Sinfield, 2016). As it is difficult to 'see differently', we harnessed the power of multimodality itself and asked our students to (re-)present their findings not in an academic poster or a formal presentation, but in unusual ways: knitting, jigsaw puzzle, cartoon, 3D model, animation, video, cabinet of curiosity, poetry. As with 'drawing to learn', these very acts of re-genring (English, 2011) were designed to propel the students into new ways of thinking, seeing, understanding and communicating. As a further development, rather than have students submit their work at a formal assessment point, we invited them to present their findings in a Multimodal Exhibition - to which other staff and students would also be invited. (For an overview of the Exhibition, please see our class blog:

<https://becomingeducational.wordpress.com/2015/11/11/mentees-multi-modal-exhibition/>).

Not only did the students flourish when given this unusual and difficult task, they also enjoyed the responsibility of setting up the Exhibition - and they blossomed when their work was positively received. This was very different from a typical first year assessment point of an examination or an essay which becomes fraught with the possibility of judgement and failure; and which tends not to excite or stretch the students - and thus 'failure' or a version of it is more likely (Göpferich, 2016). Subsequent submissions of

Reflective Learning Logs revealed that the students were literally dancing with excitement before the Exhibition: they wanted to impress - and to be impressed by - their peers; they wanted their hard work to be appreciated and valued. Moreover, we could see in their representations of University teaching and learning that they were developing an understanding that good teaching requires the space and place for students to 'be with' each other and become actors and agents in their own learning. Subsequent discussion and their own meta-reflection in their Learning Logs and Blogs revealed their increasing self-confidence and sense of self-efficacy - which was, halo-like - improving their academic performance overall.

### 1.6.2 Harnessing technology

In our practice, although often 'practical' and embodied, we acknowledge that we live in a digital world and thus we harness digital technology and social media not only in our learning, teaching and assessment practice, but also to enable students to connect with each other - and with us. For example, we use Twitter and Facebook to seed academic thinking and share academic strategies and advice.

*Top tip: Find #studychat on Twitter and see <https://www.facebook.com/LondonMetStudyChat/> on Facebook to connect with us and other academics interested in learning and teaching.*

We develop fluency in digital technology and social media, not via a checklist of skills that students must acquire, but by engaging 'student voice' and presence, including in our insistence that the students 'learn out loud' by blogging their learning (Abegglen, Burns and Sinfield, 2015). We also require our students to engage with 'digital storytelling' (see <http://ds106.us/about/>) as a form of emancipatory practice.

The first digital task that we set students is deceptively simple, and we set it in the first few weeks of our programme - telling students that they have several weeks to undertake the task before we share their artefacts in an end of term event. We challenge the students to produce a 'Digital Me', saying that this will help us get to know them - and for them to get to know each other. Perhaps as you read, you are already wondering: 'What is a Digital Me? What does that mean? What would I do if set such a task?' At least, we hope that you are wondering what this might mean - and we hope that this is the process that our students go through. We want our students to experience this challenge as another creative problem to solve - and, unlike with the exam or the set essay, there is no right answer here (Holt, 1981). Our students are free to interpret that topic very widely; they are also free to reach out to and help each other; the

constraints are that they must use a digital tool with which they are unfamiliar to tell their story - and that the story itself is two-minutes long or under.

The students' artefacts are shared in a Showcase Event at the end of the first term which is celebratory and seals the bonding and belonging work that we have undertaken over the term as a whole. We find that after having undertaken this project, our students have improved their communication skills overall and developed in particular their skills in using digital technology and social media for communication. They have successfully managed both the task and their time - as well as juggling all the other tasks that we have set them. They have experienced an ongoing and meaningful communication with peers about ideas, theories and technologies - and taken their first step in communicating their experiences and ideas to others, both in person and online. But most importantly, and less overtly quantifiably, they have been excited, challenged, frustrated, elated, concerned... and ultimately impressed with each other and themselves.

*Recommendation: Get even more digital: Check out this 'padlet' of artefacts that were all made on the same topic: E-learning and Digital Culture: <http://padlet.com/nurmih9/fe6dgg43g5dt>. Be inspired. Then go to Alan Levine's 50-ways blogspace and use some of the tools there to create animations or comic books: <http://50ways.cogdogblog.com/>.*

*Top tips: Harness technology by replacing some of your 'written' assignments (essays or exams) with digital artefact production where students produce a video essay or animation as dynamic and challenging alternatives (viz. Giunta and Janus, 2016).*

*MOOC it: Advice that we would give to all creative academics - and that we would also give to our students - is to find and do an art-related MOOC (massive open online course). The first one we took was Introduction to Art: Concepts and Techniques. Each week we were introduced to new ideas in art and then put them into practice. We had to upload pictures of our art attempts for other people to review – and we had to give feedback on other people's art. The effect was stunning on our 'art', on our self-confidence and also on our creative teaching. That is, each week that we undertook a new art assignment we also thought: How and where can I use these ideas in my teaching - or in setting alternative assessments? If you are interested in seeing what we did – you can search our Last Refuge blog (search for lastrefugelmu). Our posts on the first #artmooc start here: <http://lastrefugelmu.blogspot.co.uk/2013/05/artmooc-introduction-to-art-concepts.html>*



## **1.7 Academic practices**

At the same time as introducing our students to active and owned learning built on visual, creative and multimodal practices - we also scaffold their more obviously academic 'skills': reading, writing, preparing for assignments; though we do not see these as separate 'skills' but emergent practices intrinsic to becoming/being academic. In this section of the chapter we want to further reveal an authentic and meaningful way to introduce students to formal academic reading; we want to illustrate some successful strategies for helping students to develop their academic writing - and their own writing 'voices'; and we want to discuss assessment and the setting of assignments - making a plea for the utilisation of assignment practices that are more diverse than the exam or the essay.

### **1.7.1 Reading: Textmapping**

In United Kingdom Higher Education academics do not produce a work book or course reader for their students. Rather, they curate a selection of apposite reading by putting together a Reading List of essential and recommended reading. These lists refer to texts that are typically chapters from academic textbooks and journal articles. Students may also be referred to digital (re)sources and alternatives like YouTube, Blogs or Twitter. The advantage of this system is that the students from their first moment in University are being introduced to the sorts of texts and materials that they will be producing themselves - not just as future academics but also as students.

The disadvantages of this approach include a sort of overzealousness on the part of the academic who wants to direct students to sources of breadth and depth but who in the process may produce Reading Lists of such length and complexity that the students feel overwhelmed and thus are disinclined to read anything at all. Further, these academic texts are often intimidating and alienating in and of themselves. Students approach them with no idea of how they could and should pre-read and then actively read: for understanding; to seek for answers to an assignment question; to deepen the knowledge that they have been introduced to in formal teaching sessions; and for pleasure.

To scaffold student agency in meaningful academic reading we introduce them first to the collective and collaborative reading of textscrolls, rather than of codex, bound books or journal articles (Middlebrook, 2018; Abegglen, Burns, Middlebrook and Sinfield, forthcoming). A textscroll is simply a chapter or

article printed off - with the pages joined side-by-side so that a continuous flow of text can be presented to the reader. Scrolls do quite a few things for teaching and learning that modern books, bound or digital, cannot (viz. Middlebrook, 2012). The scroll's expansive, panoramic display is wide-open to the senses, to exploration, and to discussion: the structure and flow of ideas is instantly visible. Random access, the ability to move anywhere in the text, is excellent: rapid, easy, and fully-contextualised. The scroll's unfurled display invites all readers, staff and students, to get up and move about, to walk back and forth across the span, to feel how their bodies scale to the text, to move in close to 'understand' the details, and to move back to 'farstand' the larger context.

*Recommendation: A scroll can be made by printing off or photocopying a chapter or article, on one side of the paper only and preferably enlarged to A3 size, for there is something intrinsically more friendly and accessible about the enlarged text. The pages are then cellotaped together side by side to produce a scroll. Make time for reading textscrolls in class.*

*Top Tips: An extension of the textscroll activity is the JigSaw reading/teaching technique: <https://www.jigsaw.org/>. With respect to reading, choose, say, four different texts to be read for an assignment. Number them 1-4. Form class groups of four students each. Each person in each group gets a different text, from 1-4. Students then form 'expert' groups: all the 'ones', together; all the 'twos', together - and so on. Each expert group thoroughly discusses their own text - and thinks how it could help with the assignment. After a set time, all the experts go back to their original groups and discuss the different texts read. This empowers students to read dialogically and with a purpose - and to take ownership of texts powerfully through discussion and collaboration.*

*If you want to develop collaborative reading in online spaces, check out <https://web.hypothes.is/>. This allows collaborative reading and annotation of any chapter or article that you can access online - and draw into its orbit.*

### 1.7.2 Writing to learn

In our experience academics tend to think that students just do not or cannot write, whilst our students tend to 'hate' academic writing, not least because they have often had negative experiences and fear being judged - and failing. As they then resist writing, their writing tends not to improve - and academics continue to worry about the students and their lack of writing 'skills'. A typical response to this is to insist on additional classes on spelling, punctuation and grammar. We argue that rather than worrying about their writing skills and writing per se, academics should help students develop writing habits. Our

response is to give students more authentic writing challenges and to tell them that we see academic writing as a process - and that we want them to 'write to learn' not 'learn to write'. Thus, rather than a recondite focus on spelling, punctuation and grammar, we foster students' academic writing by using a range of writing exercises including blogging to learn (covered above), slow- (DeSalvo, 2014) and free writing (Elbow, 1998).

The aim of free writing is not only to develop students' writing confidence, but also to encourage students to think more critically about a topic or issue – and to experience writing as a thinking process: writing to learn. As Elbow (1998, p. 28) states: 'Producing writing, then, is not so much like filling a basin or pool once, but rather getting water to keep flowing through till finally it runs clear'. Slow writing, is writing taken slowly (DeSalvo 2014) – and we argue that as academics we need to make spaces in our classes and in our schedules for slow academia (Berg and Seeber, 2016): thinking that is shaped over time – and that promotes deep thought.

*Recommendation: Set regular free writing 'tasks'. Typically start with a Writing Workshop, a one-hour session on a final assignment. Students have two pieces of paper. Reveal the assignment question. Ask the students to write continuously on the assignment for ten minutes. If they stop writing for any reason, no matter how trivial, they must write down that reason. At the end of the ten minutes reflect three times on the writing process: 1) How did that feel? Explore how to turn around negative feelings and harness positive ones. 2) Why did you stop - and what can we do about it? Discuss that writing is a two-fold process - one is to get words out, the second is the refine those words. If they try only to write perfect words (one draft writing) they are in effect writing and editing at the same time. Write first - edit later! 3) What can they take from the activity into the actual assignment they are writing? When we have undertaken this activity with our students, many of them completely lose their fear of writing and always begin an assignment with an initial free write to discover what they already know.*

*Before students hand-in an assignment, hold another Writing Workshop where students bring in drafts of their assignment for peer review against assessment criteria. Put up the criteria. Allow time for students to read each other's work in pairs - and to annotate with reference to the criteria - where have they been met? Which have not been addressed. They then discuss each others' work.*

*Top tips: Introduce writing into your weekly teaching routine - at least ten minutes of 'writing to learn' where you make the time and space for the students to write their learning in their*

*journals or even preparing and uploading Blog posts in class time. This demonstrates in embodied ways that their writing improves with practice.*

*Direct students to useful online resources:*

*Free write everyday. Try this 750 Words site.: <http://750words.com/>.*

*To move from note-making to formal academic writing, try Cornell notes:*

*<http://coe.jmu.edu/learningtoolbox/cornellnotes.html>. Even if you are writing your PhD:*

*<http://thesiswhisperer.com/2012/12/12/turn-your-notes-into-writing-using-the-cornell-method>.*

*Worried about writing in a formal academic style? Check out the Phrasebank by Manchester University (United Kingdom): <http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/>.*

*And no one talks about writing without worrying about plagiarism - so do check out our*

*Preventing Plagiarism course: <http://learning.londonmet.ac.uk/TLTC/learnhigher/Plagiarism/>*

### 1.7.3 Creating meaningful assessments

Given the constant measurement, the high stakes assessment, the League Tables, that most students will have experienced prior to attending university (viz. Section 1.1: Introduction), we argue that it is necessary to invigorate teaching and learning practices with the driver of creative assessment in order to destabilize transactional notions of education itself and engage students in their own learning. If we dare to be creative (Creme, 2003), they will find that creative assessment practices can give students access to and agency in and through the curriculum - while engaging them in the learning process.

Creativity in assessment is not only the use of creative (arts-based) methods but also of other creative, fresh ways to make assignment tasks inspiring and engaging for students. Thus, creative assessment practice may mean that rather than setting a formal, time-bound exam, you set more creative and provocative writing challenges, for example, requiring students to produce a newsletter or comic book to illustrate an idea - or you might design essay questions that challenge students into synoptic learning. Assignments can be multimodal, asking students to produce digital resources or a video diary instead of a reflective report. Or digitally enhanced, for example, building a website, curating online resources to enable further study of a course or topic; or you can require them to 'follow', comment upon and finally analyse the Twitter outputs or blogs of people relevant to their line of study. Politicians or diplomats if studying politics or international relations, for example. Academics may also 'experiment' with combining different assignment tasks and genres - like photo- or video- 'essays'.

With any assessment process and the design of any assignment, consider the ‘affordances’ of the mode you have chosen: why an essay rather than a digital artefact, for example? What is it from your course that you want the students to revise and further research? What particular thought or communication skills do you want to nurture? And so forth. Once you have these in mind, do not forget to share your thoughts on the what/why/how of your assignment with the students. Consider developing ‘assessment criteria’ with the students themselves. Think about building in more choice - so perhaps suggest the goal of the assignment - and then ask the students to present their ideas or findings in a challenging format - allowing them to choose the mode or genre.

*Recommendation: Get students involved in the assignment process (the design, the marking, the feedback).*

*For further inputs see: Assessment and Feedback by the Higher Education Academy (2014) -*

[https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/resources/assessment\\_and\\_feedback.pdf](https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/resources/assessment_and_feedback.pdf)

*Also, explore: Elkington and Evans (2017) Transforming Assessment in Higher Education, Transforming Teaching Inspiring Learning HEA series:*

<https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/hub/download/Transforming%20Assessment%20in%20Higher%20Education%20-%20A%20Case%20Studies%20Series.pdf>

In *Becoming*, our model module, we gave students the ‘choice’ as to what to submit for one of their assessments (Abegglen, Burns and Sinfield, 2016c). We asked them to submit a portfolio providing evidence of engagement in three (creative) projects chosen from the range that we offer throughout the module: Multimodal Exhibition, Digital Me, Blogging to Learn etc. - or a project they had set themselves. Students were encouraged to submit the three projects of which they are the most proud. The element of choice gave them the freedom to explore and to follow their passions - and to navigate academic space in a meaningful manner. As with Cheng and Warren (2007) we found that our students were not only more interested and therefore motivated because they could choose between different tasks, but also produced work of higher standard. Plus, by allowing our students to choose their assignment submissions, joyful things happened: where they surprised us and themselves with the things they are capable of.

*Recommendation: Within your own programme, devise an assessment strategy that challenges and provokes students into engagement; that allows students to meet your aims and desired*

*outcomes; and that aligns the assessment practices themselves with your pedagogic approach. Map assessment opportunities within and across degree programmes ensuring that a range of authentic and relevant, creative and epistemic challenges are set across the programme as a whole.*

*Top Tip: Check out: Norman Jackson and the Creative Academic project:*

*<http://www.creativeacademic.uk/> and Tal Thompson: <https://medium.com/age-of-awareness/regurgitation-factories-5-ways-to-cultivate-a-creative-mindset-813aade61a24>*

## **1.8 Conclusion and recommendations**

All students have to make a transition into the more independent learning landscape that is Higher Education. Whilst the conversation at university management level may revolve around ‘skills’ and ‘fixing’ ‘deficit’ students and staffroom conversations may circle around complaints about recalcitrant or lazy students: ‘Students these days, they don’t read, they can’t write!’; we argue that this transition is facilitated by developing creative and empowering praxes. We promote therefore practices that develop student voice and self-efficacy, that foster holistic understanding and knowledge, and that acknowledge and accommodate students and their skills as a whole. Students succeed when faced with teaching, learning and assessment strategies that deliver challenges which pique curiosity and offer a real and relevant invitation to become academic within epistemic communities. This chapter was designed to share some of the activities and practices that we employed to enable our first-year undergraduate students to flourish at University, to bond and belong, to discover for themselves the power and joy of collaborative working and to enter their epistemic communities with confidence: to study and learn successfully and powerfully.

In our teaching, we take a dialogic rather than a didactic approach and encourage the emergence of heutagogy: self-directed and self-determined learning. As emancipatory educationalists we argue that this is the goal of academia: for students to take control of their learning, finding their academic identities in ways that are recognised by the academy, but which they negotiate on their own terms. We were well aware that changing our approach to teaching could be confusing for students used to the lecture-seminar format where the lecturer presents – and represents – the all-knowing teacher (Illich, 1970). However, we developed a course that started as creatively as it progressed and where the final assignments (Exhibitions, Projects, Digital artefacts) were also aligned with the ludic and empowering agenda of the course as a whole. Moreover, we gave the students space to explore and time to experience and

experiment with their own learning. As Jackson (2013) and Johnson (2010) argue, for creativity and innovation to happen students need time. They need time to be creative, to take risks, to lose a fear of failure – and time to ‘be with’ (Nancy, 2000) and learn from each other. As Johnson (2010) states: Ideas need to “collide” with other ideas in order for something bigger to emerge. This means, students need the space and time to swap and to mingle – to connect – with their lecturers – with their learning - and with each other.

We have advocated active and creative teaching, learning and assessment designed to facilitate student ownership of their learning, to make sure that they become actors and agents in their own learning and to encourage them to perform at their best in assessment because they are intrigued and challenged by the assignments that you set. In the process we have sketched in practices that accord with such things as Object -, Question-, Inquiry-, Project- and Problem-Based- Learning, coupled with dialogic engagement and discussion that models engaged academic practice per se. There is also much emphasis on visual and multimodal practices: harnessing the visual in terms of rich pictures, collage, sketch books and mnemonic triggers in actively made notes; in digital artefacts as thinking and learning processes, but also as assessments alternative to the essay or the exam. Once we allow ourselves to harness the visual and the multimodal (Burns, Sinfield and Abegglen, 2018 a-e), we start to think in deeper and richer ways about ideas (English, 2011).

In practice, we argue that the activities outlined here should be embraced and embedded in, across and through the curriculum, rather than just in one module - and we have constructed our #Take5: <https://learning.londonmet.ac.uk/take5/index.html> blog to help share stories of the creative and emancipatory work that academic staff are undertaking to this purpose across the HE sector not just in the UK, but internationally as well.

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