

Introduction

Tom Burns and Sandra Sinfield

London Metropolitan University

Introduction

Education for Social Justice (ESJ) has been the *sine qua non* of LondonMet from its inception, indeed even going back to its originator polytechnics. As editors we have a deep and long-standing appreciation of this, in many and diverse ways: from having studied at one of its forerunners (Polytechnic of North London), having taught here, and having been leaders of the former Learning Development Unit, to now working in the Centre for Professional and Educational Development, embedding education for social justice in the staff development programmes and educational resources we develop and disseminate.

In our learning and staff development roles we have long been impressed by the commitment, passion and energy of LondonMet staff. Typically they embody exactly what ESJ is all about: compassionate pedagogy, inclusive assessments - and a willingness to go above and beyond for their students. This has never been more in evidence than across the last few years of the pandemic when all the teaching pivoted online and our staff put in that time and effort needed to redevelop their practice to deliver first class active and interactive learning, teaching and assessment online. Therefore, it was an honour to be asked to co-edit this Special Issue of *Investigations* with its focus on the University's Education for Social Justice Framework (ESJF) and the ESJ practice in evidence across the University.

In this Special Issue we have collected stories from our staff that tell the tale of LondonMet - its staff and its students - its passions and its liberatory practices. We have ordered them to constitute an argument-framed narrative: Setting the scene; Theoretical perspectives; Curriculum models and (re-)designs (including Work Based Models); and Critical academic literacies and creative practices. We hope you enjoy reading the research and writing of our LondonMet colleagues - and in future consider writing an *Investigations* article yourself.

Setting the scene

Whilst not all of our students are parents, many of them are time poor through work and caring responsibilities - thus we set the scene of our LondonMet context by showcasing a topic much neglected in the research around the student experience - that of the student parent.

Patrick Mulrenan, Heather Allinson, Jane Lewis and Helen Redd present findings from research into the experience of student parents, especially of the challenges of working at home during Covid. Their study emphasises that whilst students can work from home - and appreciate that flexibility - it is on campus and especially in the campus library where they are most able to **be** students.

Theoretical perspectives

In this section we have articles that explore various theoretical perspectives or approaches that might inform our own approach to education for social justice.

Ryan Arthur: Implementing Decolonial Pedagogy: provides a theoretical interrogation of what a decolonial pedagogy might mean - and what it might entail. He reminds us that whilst there is understandable scepticism around institutional efforts like London Met's ESJF, they open up spaces, opportunities, or 'cracks' for radical agendas. As Walsh (2019) contended:

'The cracks become the place and space from which action, militancy, resistance, insurgency, transgression and/as pedagogization are advanced, alliances are built and the otherwise is invented, created and constructed'.

Andrew Moran: Decolonising the Politics and International Relations Curriculum.

Moran argues that as a subject area, Politics and International Relations is dominated by a Western-centric view of the world. Working in a university that has one of the most diverse student populations in the UK, with a high level of black and ethnic minority students, it is clear that traditional curricula often do not reflect the interests of nor do they represent our students. This paper reflects on a student conference held by the Subject Area of Politics and International Relations at London Metropolitan University focused on decolonising the curriculum.

Hannah Baynham: Feminist Pedagogy in Higher Education: Provides a discursive literature review of pertinent Feminist perspectives and evaluates them in light of Early Years and higher education (HE) contexts. The article provides practical and personal insights into developing a Feminist Pedagogy for Social Justice.

Curriculum design

In this section the various articles offer case study examples of education for social justice in action in and out of the classroom.

Price, Whitehead, Khan and Webb set the scene in this section by exploring how an early research paper into the experiences of Black and minority ethnic undergraduate Health and Social Care (HSC) students studying at London Met influenced subsequent practice. The earlier research was published in the *Journal of Further and Higher Education* (2021). This article discusses the recommendations made by Webb et al for the undergraduate Health and Social Care (HSC) degree before comparing how these align with the London Met Education for Social Justice Framework.

Still with the HSC subject area, **Orion Griffiths'** article outlines an evaluation carried out on a level 4 module on a BSc Health and Social Care course, with the aim of improving teaching practice and student learning in line with the ESJF. Orion identifies critical and emancipatory pedagogy as the underpinning philosophy behind the new framework - and these provided cues for the design and interpretation of the evaluation outlined in this

paper. The overall emphasis here is the key role of education in creating a democratic, fair and humane society (Giroux, 2010).

Naveed Kazmi also discusses a module re-design. His goal was to redesign the UG Dissertation Module in Education with a focus on developing student writing, understanding and bonding. The article outlines an evaluation and redesign through partnership and in pursuit of Foucault's essential political problem: 'that of ascertaining the possibility of constituting a new politics of truth' (Foucault 1980 p133) - which is particularly pertinent to all research and the ESJF.

Embracing cultural wealth: innovative approaches to curriculum delivery in primary teacher education - Janet Douglas Gardner challenges a reductive notion of cultural capital through an interpretive UK lens of Critical Race Theory - embracing Black student identity and cultural wealth for what they bring to the HE and wider educational context.

With **Rethinking Student-Centredness: The role of Trust, Dialogue and Collective Praxis** - Alya Khan and John Gabriel continue the argument opened by Janet Douglas Gardner with their innovative research project which used oral histories to take a holistic look at positive ways of enhancing student learning experiences. Their narrative approach highlights the value of welcoming and utilising students' lived experiences - building a positive and critical dialogic that aligns with the principles of the ESJF with a focus on minoritised groups and redressing the awarding gap.

Simone Maier: 'Applying a "sticky curriculum" model and "integrated digital" approach to Foundation Year arts and design education'. Simone surfaces a curriculum model for Arts courses - but also perhaps a model for all of us developing a more emergent practice - and hoping that a more 'just' curriculum might evolve. Having identified a curricular model that fully supports the tenets of our ESJF, Simone argues the only apparent restraint is time. Time is needed to listen, reflect and work with colleagues to scaffold a collective development - and to meet the supercomplex contexts our students navigate (Abegglen, Burns, Maier & Sinfield, 2020). The Foundation teaching team is hungry to apply, critique and develop the "sticky curriculum" and surface its implications for furthering our ESJ efforts.

Marie Stephenson and Susannah McKee's article discusses their embedding of the Big Ideas Challenge (BIC) into the curriculum and celebrates their students' success in the subsequent change-making poster exhibition. The integrated BIC made space where the personal interests of students could be political and academic - and where their research and learning processes transformed their perceptions of themselves and what they might be able to achieve academically.

Sandra Denicke and George Fereday's practice builds wellbeing through praxis-based pedagogies. In their article, the authors show how critical pedagogic interventions have positive outcomes, fostering dialogue, bonding, belonging and enhancing learning. Closely aligned with ESJF dimensions, the article reveals the impact of embedded, authentic action learning; specifically, architecture students designing, building and enacting projects - taking theory from the classroom, outside, to London (City Farm) and internationally (an Italian rural village).

There follow two articles that explore work based learning (WBL) in HE.

Olaide Asuni explores approaches and implications for Psychology and **Stavroula Konidari** discusses experiential learning and its implications for Student Volunteering. There are a range of different approaches and perspectives to WBL, but the emphasis is on the impact of this powerful driver of learning - and making this achievable for time poor students, a central driver of ESJ. Both argue that placements solve the issue of 'no experience, no job' - and that the students benefit from the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience into learning.

And finally in this section, one outlier, where the result of taking a students-as-partners approach has resulted in a much heavier focus on individual work:

Marcus Astley discusses the redesign of assessment in a L6 Business Management module. Discussions with students resulted in the module moving from three summative assessments - two of which were team efforts - to one formative and two summative assessments, both of which became individual projects. These changes were welcomed by the students in an evaluation, even though students had typically gained higher marks for the group work than the individual. Perhaps this is highlighting the complexities of engaging with the student voice, balancing their perspectives and teachers' practice-informed professional judgements?

Critical academic literacies and creative practices

In this last section there are four articles inspiring us to creative action - and one book review taking us to a resource full of activities to integrate in our teaching, learning and assessment practices.

Chiara Cola: Poetically sets the scene - illustrating what might happen when more creative pedagogical and reflective practices are set in motion. This article explores the possibilities and tools of creativity in pedagogy, the multiple journeys it can undertake and the infinite destinations it can lead to. It is a fluid talk through of the author's approach as a designer and lecturer. This is a very personal piece of writing, with a fascination for the tutor's experience 'with' students - which possess an intrinsically poetic nature: "I hope the readers will find here interesting examples of this 'poetry in action', the transformative power of education and its potential impact on the wider society".

Burns, Desire, Gordon and Sinfield: The Apron challenge. This article discusses facilitating student learning online and at a distance - with an emphasis on embodied creative learning under the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions. It is a reflection on the module on "Facilitating Student Learning" that is part of CPED's Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in HE course, where from the 'get go' the team focussed on creatively building engagement, bonding and belonging before the students even entered the virtual learning space.

Nahid Huda's article discusses the contested nature of academic reading. This is one of the most insightful pieces on academic reading that we have encountered - and we highly recommend it as a future staple for all academic staff who want to help their students

overcome their resistance and 'shame'. If we accept that students use their learning to help them reframe their identities as well as a means to improve their outcomes, providing reading experiences that address students' needs on a holistic level is vital to engender meaningful change that does not compromise student agency. Arguably, confidence in academic reading plays a central role in mobilising this change and assessing how this is facilitated would be beneficial.

After reading, comes writing - and it is a pleasure to introduce:

Emma Davenport's The Writing Social. Emma set up her writing socials to overcome the isolation of pandemic teaching - but very importantly to start a conversation about academic writing in the context of Architecture, Art and Design. Students were offered ten experiences of social writing - wrapped around imminent summative assessments. Feedback suggested that the students had discovered practices that they did not know existed and that they could use in the future.

As you can become an academic reader - so you can experience academic writing as something you can learn to do and become. Emma urges us to build this form of writing development in and through as well as alongside the curriculum.

Book review

This leads us in a beautiful segue to 'Decolonising Academic Writing', the review of Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield (2021) [*Supporting Student Writing and Other Modes of Learning and Assessment. A Staff Guide*](#). The Guide has been brought to life by illustrations from Veronica Piras, one of London Met's Design students - and is freely available via Creative Commons. The review captures the views of a former colleague, Professor Debbie Holley, who writes in the Foreword:

"If we are to actively engage our students with their learning, it has to be where they learn, not 'over there' to be fixed by a skills team, however dedicated, but within the framework of true emancipatory practice, where their writing frees them to articulate their authentic voice."

Tom Burns and Sandra Sinfield
Special Issue Co-Editors

References

- Abegglen, S., Burns, T., Maier, S., & Sinfield, S. (2020). Supercomplexity: Acknowledging students' lives in the 21st century university. *Innovative Practice in Higher Education*, 4(1).
- Foucault, M. (1980) Truth and Power in Gordon, C. (ed.) *Michel Foucault: Power Knowledge – Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972—1977*, Vintage Books: New York.
- Giroux, H. A. (2010). Rethinking education as the practice of freedom: Paulo Freire and the promise of critical pedagogy. *Policy Futures in Education*, 8(6), 715-721.
- Walsh, C. E. (2019). (Decolonial) Notes to Paulo Freire: walking and asking. In *Educational alternatives in Latin America* (pp. 207-230). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.