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Supporting staff to meet increasing challenges in higher and further education

Julie Hall, Solent University Southampton

Julie Hall delivered a keynote address at SEDA's 23rd Annual Conference in Birmingham, November 2018.

The keynote addressed four questions, responding the theme of the 23rd annual conference in SEDA's 25th year, 'Supporting staff to meet increasing challenges in higher and further education':

1) What does supporting mean in the current context?
2) What are we doing when we work to meet increasing challenges?
3) Do these challenges help or hinder us as educational developers?
4) What should the SEDA manifesto be in the current climate?

My aim was to reflect on the complex position of educational developers as articulated through SEDA keynotes and scholarship over the last 25 years. Now, as a Deputy Vice Chancellor, I see huge opportunities for educational developers in a difficult time in the UK for higher and further education. However, this calls for a reassessment of our aims and our approach to facilitating change.

The current climate is undoubtedly challenging as both further and higher education sectors grapple with precarious funding, increasing demands and uncertain recruitment. Brexit, a demographic dip, an increase in employer pension contributions and a funding review have created a perfect storm. Relentless media coverage around greedy senior managers and poor value for money creates additional pressures. Looking back into SEDA's history, however, we see that a critical aim of the organisation has always been to protect and develop the quality of higher education in response to challenging circumstances. In 1992, for example, when the student population hit one million, SEDA declared:

> *'If the quality of provision is not to suffer, different approaches must be developed with forethought, sensitivity and imagination. Indeed if institutions reconsider the goals at the same time that they make changes to their courses and teaching, the quality of their provision and the quality of the student achievement can actually improve.'*

What does supporting mean in the current context?

The keynote argued that the kind of support educational developers have offered since 1992 has always responded to context, focusing on the development of different approaches to teaching 'with forethought, sensitivity and imagination',

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first through courses in teaching and then also through a range of schemes often linked to government initiatives such as the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund or Centres of Excellence in Teaching and Learning.

A review of previous SEDA keynotes and indeed our own scholarship, in this publication and our journals, indicates quite clearly that supporting colleagues is complicated for educational developers. In the main, scholarship has centred on the complications of our practices in particular contexts. We have looked internally, reflecting upon our identities as developers, our theoretical field of study – conceptions of 'development', notions of professional learning in the academic context and our understanding of the craft of academic development in action – exploring what works and what we are implicated in. The increasing profile of scholarship across educational development could be interpreted as a way of reflecting publicly, conceiving our practice as a distinct subset of the academic profession and a defence against some academics' resistance to support and development, in addition to the obvious academic scepticism and snobbery that permeate higher education. The internal gaze could even be seen as a retreat.

Twelve years after SEDA's 1992 statement, Ray Land's SEDA keynote in 2004 introduced us to an ecological paradigm for our craft which suggested a range of orientations to educational development across two axes – 'domesticating and liberating' and 'systems and the person'. The model suggested we have choices and preferences in terms of the orientations we take in supporting colleagues under challenging circumstances in response to changes in context. It certainly made me more conscious of the context in which I was working in the 90s and how my preferences for particular kinds of educational development work might be seen by my colleagues and senior managers. It made clear that educational development was not a neutral or benign activity.

Six years later, in 2010, Graham Gibbs warned us that we need to stop some of those beautifully crafted practices we hold dear if, once again, the quality of provision were not to suffer as marketisation and competition became more dominant. Gibbs accurately predicted a growing call for measures by which universities would be judged and argued that educational developers needed to shift their focus to strategic-level work that made a difference to metrics and provided evidence of impact – working with course teams rather than individuals, for example, and working on evidence-based measures that made teaching more effective.

Bringing the keynote up to date, I suggested that eight years on, costs are under greater pressure, metrics are more dominant and layered across these challenges, educational developers are caught in a web of commodified, commercialised education, often implicated in the use of high cost tools to track and measure and 'deliver' teaching. These tools include virtual learning platforms, student record systems, student feedback systems and learner analytics, with educational developers employed to ensure academic colleagues engage effectively. We are therefore well and truly implicated in a complex context of surveillance and measurement, and providing support in this environment has shifted from being the invisible 'domestiques' supporting the academic experts in the peloton with sustenance and advice, to janus-faced creatures torn between liberating and domesticating.

Yet this isn't entirely true. I suggested that one can also argue that this is a golden time for educational developers. The context we describe as challenging has also brought teaching quality to the fore like never before. Even Vice-Chancellors ask about it! Deputy Vice Chancellors like me now have challenging objectives set across curriculum development, student experience and teaching enhancement. Should educational developers not be celebrating the opportunities brought by league tables with teaching measures? Beyond this, are we not lucky to be educational developers at a time when universities and their students are calling for attainment gaps to be closed, for the curriculum to be decolonised and for equal recognition for teaching and research?

For me, supporting in this context is not about working at the margins, in third space, deciding our own priorities. As a Deputy Vice Chancellor, I argue that third space can be no space or insignificant space. It can be a space where we 'other' those who see things differently. Educational developers have an opportunity to take a more central strategic space to support colleagues with 'forethought, sensitivity and imagination' so that with 2.3 million students, provision does not suffer.

What are we doing when we work to meet increasing challenges?

Sugrue *et al*. (2018) have recently analysed the trends in educational development scholarship and noted the overwhelming dominance of work which continues to focus on working with small groups and individuals on PGCerts and developing teaching practices. Yet emerging scholarship trends indicate some work on students as partners, technology-informed practices, paying attention to the people we're working with and mixing formal and informal development. My challenge to the conference was to ask whether educational developers should reach out, be more capacious, echoing Clinton Golding's question 'Do we constrain ourselves and ultimately the potential of the academic development project by cleaving to too narrow a conception?' (Golding, 2014).

To meet increasing challenges, I argue that we should welcome the strategic potential of educational development, letting go of some of the anonymity and freedom of third-space working, recognising that in taking the bigger stage tensions have to be addressed. Leading on creative curriculum design, for example, will bump up against academics' traditional approaches and regulations designed to bring administrative coherence and perhaps even save money. I agree with Sugrue *et al*. that developers now require the 'equally exciting and frightening ability to service as activist advocates within universities, to model leadership, to advocate for sustainable innovations, to be strategic, to be politically aware, aware of values, of power and positioning within the organisation' (Sugrue *et al*., 2018).

As a DVC, I see educational developers as critical players in strategic priorities and organisational development. Developers play a critical role between other professional groups, lecturers on the ground, the student experience, the disciplines, and the strategic importance of curriculum and teaching practices and particularly as critics of and commentators on government policy. Sharing my own strategic challenges I explained that developers were central to recruiting and developing good people who stay and who care about teaching and research, building course teams, closing attainment gaps, creating attractive distinctive curricula to improve recruitment, improving TEF, KEF and REF metrics, responding to local need e.g. apprentices, industrial strategy, working with students as partners, celebrating good practice, diversifying income streams addressing the gender pay gap, and embedding university values.

Do these challenges help or hinder us as educational developers?

I believe the challenges can help educational developers by bringing our work to the fore. For me, a new ecology for educational developers looks more like a honeycomb or constellation of communities; it recognises complex intersections with administration, students, technology, values, research, cultural norms, strategies, and government imperatives, accrediting bodies, collaborations that might be international or combine public and private providers. While in some universities I hope there may be opportunities for developers to work closely with senior leaders or on critical strategic developments, in others barriers may of course remain. Unfortunately, some senior leaders have yet to understand the contribution educational developers can offer. Nonetheless my argument is that educational developers can reach out to colleagues and students across the university to contribute to the many challenges currently faced by universities.

Having followed a career pathway as a lecturer and educational developer, I have no hesitation in utilising my university's educational development team for projects that are absolutely central to our survival – curriculum review, retention, building research, new course development, career progression, inclusive practices *etc*. I have also encouraged joint working with other teams such as Quality Assurance, the Student Union, timetabling and registry, recognising that educational development practices open up valuable opportunities for joint learning, reflection and development.

First developing and then reviewing all undergraduate programmes against a Solent Curriculum Framework has been hard work for the educational development team but has resulted in sustained impact across course teams – many who had never attended any learning and teaching workshops before. An email from one of the Deans emphasised the strength of this approach:

> *'Dear Julie, I just wanted to report back on how well the design sessions have been conducted/ delivered. Staff have been anxious and there's always an element of "not another workshop" apathy knocking about. This has not been the case here. Tansy should be commended for delivering an exciting, innovative and empowering workshop that has left me with a School of Duracell bunnies! (Which is a good thing...mostly). I couldn't have asked for a better outcome. That's why I am taking the unusual step of letting you know. Things are changing!'*
> (Dean of School, Art Design and Fashion)

What should the SEDA manifesto be in the current climate?

To conclude the keynote, I returned to the 1992 SEDA statement when student numbers hit one million. However, we should not forget that the statement included a second

sentence which remains a call to arms for the UK SEDA community. This is especially so when, committed to SEDA values, we see comprehensive higher education under attack: 'Indeed, if institutions reconsider their goals at the same time that they make changes to their courses and teaching, the quality of their provision and the quality of the student achievement can actually improve'.

As DVC, I know that I need educational developers to do both – support people to enhance, change and develop teaching while also helping the institution survive, flourish and publicly articulate and reconsider our goals. There is more understanding of the ways universities work and change – especially in relation to the student experience and teaching and learning – in educational development centres than in any other part of the institution. Educational developers are thus well placed to speak out not just to other educational developers, but to the wider world of higher education.

I suggested that for the next 25 years SEDA commits to leading discussions on the goals of university education and improving student learning through looking outwards and working collaboratively across our universities developing:

- The multifaceted roles of the academic from novice to experienced professional
- Curricula which are inclusive, exciting and effective in preparing students for a technological age
- Partnerships to enhance skills and knowledge and that address the challenges facing universities and students
- The educational implications of government policy on higher education
- Civic engagement to widen participation and demonstrate the value of universities
- SEDA positions on key topics such as gender pay gaps, widening participation, attainment gaps, learner analytics, change in universities, curriculum development, career development, learning spaces, learning with technologies, REF, KEF and TEF.

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To review or not to review? Is that the question?

W. Alan Wright, University of Windsor, Canada

In 1988, I was appointed founding Executive Director of the first university educational development unit to be established in Canada's Atlantic Provinces. Our team at Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia built an active and, I would say, dynamic centre, yet there was little established in terms of solid or objective criteria for gauging the success of our efforts. When I travelled to my native Montreal in the early 1990s and questioned the director of a long-standing educational unit as to criteria for judging one's accomplishments, he informed me that neither he nor the unit had been evaluated in the nearly twenty years he had been on the job.

Feeling that the absence of an evaluation or review mechanism was unfortunate and that benign neglect on the part of senior academic administration put a unit in a vulnerable position long term, I determined to adopt the practice of initiating a review of my unit and to invite qualified external examiners to be a part of such a review.

Thirty years after my first posting, I can point to systematic reviews involving external examiners as a pan-Canadian practice, and join in the celebration of a new Guide (Ellis *et al*., 2018) on the subject. The Guide, *Centre Reviews: Strategies for Success*, was written by seven contributors from across Canada and edited by lead writers Donna E. Ellis and Stephanie T. L. Chu. The Guide is a part of a series published by the Educational Developers Caucus (EDC) of the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE) and is available online. Much of the article printed here consists of quotations, paraphrases, and excerpts from the Guide.

As a part of the background research for the writing of the Guide, we found the literature on the subject of unit reviews sparse and the international appetite for and tradition of unit reviews uneven. On the one hand the association of Australian academic development directors had proposed a detailed 'benchmarking' process to apply to unit reviews (CADAD, 2011), and virtually all centres in the USA reported some degree of systematic assessment of their activities (Hines, 2017). On the other hand, educational developers we contacted in Belgium suspected that unit reviews would likely be used by senior administrators to rationalise cutbacks and some colleagues in the UK felt that reviews played into a national trend in HE already too reliant on measures, evaluation requirements, rankings and audits.

Although academic developers in Canada are certainly not free from the pain of arbitrary cuts, reorganisation and unfortunate remit changes imposed by senior administrators, we are pushing to bring evidence to the table and striving to take the lead on evaluating our work through transparent processes and well-planned examination (including self-examination) of the work of our units. With the above rationale, our Guide lists six potential benefits of reviews to units and to universities.

Benefits of reviews to units and institutions

What are the possible benefits of a Unit Review? The Canadian *Guide to Centre Reviews* outlines six benefits, paraphrased here:

1) For the educational development unit, a review provides the impetus to step back and reflect on important strategic questions
2) The review process can provide team-building for the unit's staff
3) A review enables senior academic administrators to consider key ways the educational development unit can contribute to the institution
4) Gaining feedback and ideas from expert colleagues outside of your institution provides alternative perspectives as well as external endorsement
5) The institution can gain insights into how the work of the educational development unit compares to what is being undertaken in other university settings
6) A review signals to the institution that the educational development unit is engaged in an academically rigorous process similar to the academic program review process. (Paraphrased from Ellis *et al*., 2018, p.12)

Circumstances leading to an educational development unit review

The circumstances leading to an educational development unit review vary greatly. In some cases a unit takes the initiative to undertake a review, in other cases a review is a part of a periodic process, and in still other cases a review is imposed by senior administration. The Canadian *Guide to Centre Reviews* outlines ten such circumstances, summarised below:

1) In some instances a unit may be subject to a mandated periodic review as prescribed by an institutional by-law or regulation
2) A unit may initiate a review for a variety of reasons, including to demonstrate a commitment to continuous improvement
3) The senior academic administration may initiate the review and determine the terms and conditions, yet this may lead to constructive dialogue
4) A review may be undertaken to study organisational structures and resource allocation
5) The departure of a unit's director or manager sometimes provides an opportune time to take a fresh look at the mandate, activities, structures, and impact of the unit
6) Units are sometimes reviewed in the context of a university-wide process to determine resource allocation
7) A review can emerge due to a perceived lack of relevance or competence of the unit by some campus stakeholders
8) A unit may be reviewed solely on the basis of a need for budget review
9) A unit may be reviewed to examine the balance in orientation towards attending to teaching, research, and service activities
10) A unit may need to examine its essential purpose, mission, and major goals. (Ellis *et al*., 2018, pp. 22-25)

Whether initiated by unit staff or mandated by external parties – whatever the circumstances – the writers of the Guide feel that a review must be well planned, that the review should involve a large number of stakeholders, and that the framework, intentions, and remit should be clear to all parties. Having our Guide available, complete with a sample calendar, example terms of reference, references to self-studies, reviewer reports and responses online, as well as sample site-visit schedules, better equips all parties to undertake a process which is inevitably time-consuming, often onerous and sometimes nerve-wracking for the parties being evaluated. Lending structure and transparency to the undertaking and making the results of previous reviews available has functional, psychological and emotional benefits to those most closely involved.

During my exit interview with the President of Dalhousie University in 2001, I expressed the concern that my departure might be seen as an opportunity to re-structure or even dismantle the unit I had built, with the campus community, over the preceding decade. The President's reassuring declaration was, with conviction, 'We are beyond that'. In fact, many years later, the strength of an educational development unit in many universities still may wax and wane with changes in unit personnel and the sometimes rapid turnover of leadership at the level of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor. The status of an educational development unit is seldom as well established and solid as that of an academic department *per se*. All of us in academic development have witnessed, from near or from afar, imposed cutbacks and restructuring which we have considered neither fair nor evidence-based. Still, as educational developers, we need to work towards rational consideration and ongoing re-evaluation of our overall aims, activities, and our accomplishments. The Canadian *Guide to Centre Reviews* provides what we see as sound strategies for success in that regard.

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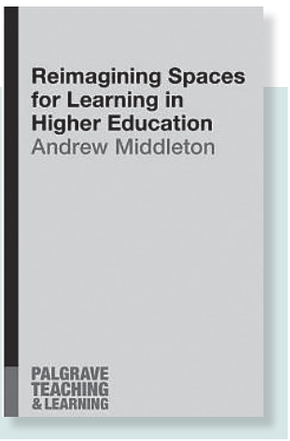
Book Review

Reimagining Spaces for Learning in Higher Education

by A. Middleton

London: Palgrave (2018)



This insightful and pertinent book is a welcome addition to any educational developer's library. It is divided into two sections, the former exploring how we might understand 'space' in terms of teaching and learning and the latter exploring how we might re-envisage new ways of being within those spaces. There are 14 chapters each supported by well-informed and referenced discussions as well as a range of extremely useful case studies. Each chapter fits well within the respective sections and a number of them are outstanding, particularly 2, 4 and 6 in the first section and 7, 9 and 11 in the second.

Chapter 2 reminds us of former, seminal texts which underpin certain theories of learning with very interesting discussions on connectivism and rhizomatic learning. Here the individual, the institution, the learner, the tutor interact in non-hierarchical, random and unregulated multiplicities of being – the rhizome – concerned only with surface connections, constructing identity through social interactions without the need to consider the origin nor the ending – merely the processes involved.

Chapter 4 explores spaces, places and boundaries and the pages concerning 'Third Space' provide a compelling overview of the hybrid nature of this space, the significant space between university and home. Although not referenced here, it has resonances with the work of Professor Keith Smyth (2015) in supporting student engagement.

Chapter 6 ends the first section with an exploration of innovative practice where you will find lengthier case studies highlighting in detail the need to appreciate both staff and students as innovators who should be empowered to think 'out of the box'.

Chapter 7 opens the second section with a concise and meaningful discussion of open and flexible approaches to learning with a fascinating re-imaging of self-determined learning in the digital-social age.

Chapter 9 really helps in understanding social media as a potential and, in some instances, as an established cooperative learning space. Sue Beckingham's case study (14) on tweet chats is excellent, carefully highlighting the enabling yet constraining feature of tweets. For me, such examples of the use of technologies disassemble and rearrange approaches to learning in a positive way. In particular, they collapse traditional spaces, overturning the classroom as a place of enclosure, to open up new spaces no longer controlled but rather facilitated by the teacher.

The penultimate chapter has personal, professional resonances for me (Bostock, 2018) in that it discusses, in a very expert fashion, how technology itself is not the driver of innovation in learning, rather one of the enablers wherein the learner is empowered to embrace new challenges and possibilities.

Overall the book's potential rests in the fact that, although each chapter is on certain levels interlinked with the others, they can be used quite powerfully on an individual basis as they not only contain a rich resource of useful ideas on specific topics direct from peers through case studies, but also they are each accompanied by a final section with questions for reflection and discussion. I highly recommend it.

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'Excited' yet 'paralysing': The highs and lows of the feedback process

Emma Medland, University of Surrey

This article reports on a project that was supported by a SEDA Research and Evaluation Small Grant, 2017.

Feedback is fundamental to student learning, and yet student experience surveys have consistently identified it as the most problematic aspect of the higher education experience both across and beyond the UK. Research has identified misaligned perceptions of feedback between markers and students (*i.e.* whilst markers believe that students pay little attention to feedback and that their feedback is highly useful, students view it as inadequate and question its utility), and has tended to focus on espoused rather than actual experiences of the feedback process. In addition, the evidence base has tended to concentrate either on students' or markers' perceptions of feedback, rather than the interaction between them and how they interpret the same piece of feedback. Consequently, research that focuses on actual (as opposed to espoused) feedback practices between markers and students within their natural pedagogic environment has been called for, as a means of illuminating the 'decentralised, subject-specific decision-making processes' (Bloxham *et al*., 2011: 655) that underpin the construction of meaning through written feedback.

The SEDA Research and Evaluation small grant enabled an exploratory investigation of the feedback process in order to illuminate the lived experiences of feedback from both the markers' and students' perspective. This was achieved by exploring the messages conveyed by markers and received by their students, and how shared meaning can be co-constructed through dialogue.

Methods

Three participant markers, one from each of the three faculties that constitute a university in the South East of England, worked with three of their students (n=9; N=12). The study drew on the work of Bloxham *et al*. (2011) who developed a case for using think aloud methods to illuminate 'lived experiences' of marking. A think-aloud approach involves 'recording participants as they attempt to verbalise their thinking during completion of a task' (Bloxham *et al*., 2011, p. 660). This was combined with individual semi-structured interviews of markers, and joint interviews involving 'one researcher talking to two people together [one marker and one student], for the purposes of collecting information about how the pair perceive the same event [i.e. feedback]' (Arksey, 1996). Think-aloud data and the written feedback documents were used to guide the focus of the joint interviews and support the development of shared understanding of the written feedback artefact. The think-aloud data, interviews and joint interviews were recorded and transcribed, and thematic qualitative analysis was used to analyse the transcripts.

Findings

The thematic analysis resulted in two overarching but interrelated themes: 1) Affective Filter; and 2) Expectations. The Affective Filter theme focuses on the emotional reactions of both students and markers to the feedback process, and the impact that these emotions have on behaviour. The Expectations theme is typified by the 'struggle' that both students and markers have in understanding each other's expectations and how feedback can both help and hinder this process.

Affective Filter

The emotional investment of both students and markers was apparent throughout the transcripts. For students, this related to the assessed work that they had submitted and their response to the feedback received (e.g. 'I was quite invested in this piece of writing so, I guess, I could be blind to some of the criticisms'). For markers, this related to consideration of the impact that feedback can have on students' emotional and behavioural responses to that feedback (e.g. 'feedback that doesn't close a student off to listening to it, that helps the student actually understand what the marker's trying to say and act on it without causing negative emotions and closing them off, I suppose, from acting on it'). All transcripts contained evidence of emotive language, both positive (e.g. 'excited', 'happy', 'enjoyed', 'appreciated', 'liked') and negative (e.g. 'paralysing', 'struggle', 'difficulty', 'I cried', 'argh'). Whilst the positive emotional reactions far outweighed the negative ones, the negative emotional reactions appeared more extreme and influential on future behaviour (e.g. 'I've had other comments before which [sic], I wanted to cry. Because, they do provide some critique, but it's done in a way that is paralysing'). This effect was exacerbated within written feedback, perhaps due to the absence of interaction and non-verbal cues that typically accompany verbal feedback (e.g. 'the [written] feedback process distances the marker and the student').

There was evidence of students reacting differently to the same emotions. For example, some students were motivated to 'prove them wrong' in response to feedback comments that were described as 'really harsh' or 'critical'; others were 'paralysed' by it. Whilst having clear applicability to Pekrun's (2006) Control-Value Theory, in which the same emotional response can result in 'activating' or 'deactivating' behavioural responses, findings also suggested a more nuanced response relating to student expectations. The extent and type of emotional and behavioural reaction to feedback appeared to be filtered through student expectations of the grade that they should receive for their work. Where the grade awarded met or exceeded student expectations, this was accompanied by positive emotional reactions and a greater openness to engaging with feedback comments. Where the grade awarded fell below expectations, this was accompanied

by negative emotional reactions and a greater chance of disengaging from the feedback process, regardless of the grade actually awarded. For example:

> *'I think at first you see the grade and if it's lower than I expect then that can make me quite angry and then I'm already, especially if I think that the essay is of good quality. If I think yes I wasn't, it wasn't as good as what I can usually produce then I can sort of accept it. But if I feel like there is a definite divide between my view and the view of the marker that makes it very difficult.'*

A further extension to the Control-Value Theory concerned the positive emotional reactions to feedback and a divergence in behavioural response to this. Whilst all participants describing positive emotional reactions showed evidence of an activating behavioural response, this could be divided between responses that were largely led by marker suggestions, and responses that were led by student initiative. These two responses are defined by Winstone *et al*. (2017) as volition and agency, respectively. Therefore, based on the findings and a combination of the conceptualisations of Pekrun (2006) and Winstone *et al*. (2017), these behavioural responses to positive emotion show what could be described as volitional activation and agentic activation.

Agentic activation involves student self-regulation that goes beyond the immediate application of feedback and seeks to connect it with other feedback and apply it to future tasks (e.g. 'I do try to go back and look at the points that I've been given and think how can I apply that in future essays'). In essence, it is a more self-sustaining reaction to feedback and indication of the development of feedback literacy (Carless and Boud, 2018). Volitional activation, on the other hand, relies on the feedback to guide reaction and is restricted to the work under scrutiny (e.g. 'I hoped that in some aspects he would have given me how should this be done, or how some places where I went wrong can be corrected'). This form of activation was also characterised by a learned helplessness in which past marker feedback, or self-evaluative feedback, was not implemented due to external pressures outside the control of the students, such as word limits and deadlines (e.g. 'I felt like I had to condense this so much to fit it on the page that I couldn't have expanded on what I wanted to say'). Learned helplessness was also a feature apparent in marker transcripts in relation to their tacit knowledge (e.g. 'it's that bit in the criteria that says to get a 90-100 this work has got to be of publishable quality and it's conveying that…I can't just say you got a 75 because your work is not of publishable quality because that's a bit mean').

A final feature of this theme related to the discomfort exhibited by markers and students in the identification of strengths and areas for development. Students were uncomfortable with identifying the strengths of their work and would often move, unprompted, on to discussion of the areas for development (e.g. 'it's really strange to try to go back over your work and give it positive stuff, because usually you are so critical of your own work'). Markers, on the other hand, appeared less comfortable with identifying areas for development and often accompanied this with the identification of strengths of the student's work, as a form of 'politeness jewellery' as the linguist Tracy (2008) refers to it (e.g. 'I think you've tried to integrate a lot of different things, which was really creative, but maybe didn't leave you the space to really explore how all of those things link together'). This discomfort was not necessarily reflected in their written feedback, however. Nevertheless, many students also highlighted the identification and explanation of the strengths of their work to be just as important as identification of the areas for development, due largely to positive feedback making the critically constructive comments 'easier to digest' and 'like a little pat on the back'.

Expectations

As mentioned above, the literature highlights misalignment between students' and markers' perceptions of feedback. One key area relates to the volume of feedback. Whilst markers believe that they provide sufficient (and increasing) levels of feedback, students often indicate that they do not. A potential reason for this mismatch lies in what is, and is not, considered as feedback. Whilst all students in the sample received pre-assessment feedback concerning the assessed tasks from their markers, without exception, the students perceived this as part of the dialogue of 'learning and teaching' or 'guidance', rather than feedback. When asked to describe feedback, student responses invariably focused on transmission-based, post-assessment written comments. The majority of student participants also called for more use of a small number of specific action points for development, rather than more and more detailed feedback comments, which were sometimes described as 'overwhelming'.

A great deal of the instances in which students did not understand a feedback comment as discussed within the joint interviews, related to difficulty in accessing the academic standards and expectations of their markers, as well as the inconsistency in expectations and interpretation of standards between markers. Feedback was seen as a window into the academic expectations of a marker (e.g. 'I worked out that structure from the feedback that I got in first year'), which included both their interpretation of academic standards (e.g. 'I didn't even know what signposting was until someone mentioned it in the feedback, and then I was like, cool, I'll do that next time') and their personal expectations of students. This resulted in new assessment tasks for which students had yet to receive feedback being described as 'writing a bit blind'. There were a number of instances where the marker would struggle to articulate their understanding of academic standards and the expectations underpinning their tacit knowledge (e.g. 'because this was the first module, and we didn't really know what we were going to get, it took a while to get a sense of what we were going to mark, how we were going to mark them'). Difficulty was also associated with understanding the experience and expectations of their students (e.g. 'it's so hard to know, because I think there are so many individual differences among students to what you work well with and what you prefer'), which the dialogic nature of the joint interview addressed. One such student expectation related to the widespread belief that the marker's effort should match that of the student, in order to highlight

engagement with their work (e.g. 'so if I got to do something and I'm really proud of it and then I get feedback that's not very detailed. If it was a good mark or not such a good mark, I think I'd be annoyed either way, just because I'd want some recognition for the effort that I put into it').

Conclusions

As highlighted in Carless and Boud's (2018) conceptualisation, managing affect is one of a set of interrelated elements of feedback literacy. However, the findings of this study indicate that the importance of the affective dimension should be emphasised as it appears to act as a filter for engagement with the feedback process (for students and markers). This filter can serve to prevent dialogic feedback due to disengagement from written feedback (e.g. 'some of my friends who don't think they've done very well in an essay will put off reading feedback for weeks because they just don't want to read it'), and student concerns over appearing emotional in front of their markers and/or emotions being a distraction from learning (e.g. 'especially if something's made me angry or upset, there is that bit of uncertainty. When I go to talk to that person, how am I going to be in the conversation?'). Yet emotive language was used in relation to all aspects of the feedback process both as a support and hindrance to engagement. The joint interviews supported dialogue around the feedback process, which served not only to support the translation of feedback comments and the development of shared understanding between student and marker (e.g. 'it's kind of given me more insight into how I can break out of the 2:1 and into the first dimension'), but also to externalise the tacit knowledge underpinning marker experiences of producing feedback and students' experiences of engaging with that feedback. Furthermore, engagement in the research project supported students to revisit and engage with the feedback (e.g. 'sometimes when you read feedback for the first time you just get confused a bit, but then you read it again and it starts to make sense'). Perhaps most importantly, the research also supported students to link the feedback comments to their work and their future development as learners. Furthermore, it encouraged staff to critically reflect upon the feedback shorthand employed (e.g. 'that's probably me saying to myself, why on earth have you kept that in there?') and provide an insight into the emotional investment that students often associated with assessed work. As a result, the findings add weight to the call for a shift from a transmission-based view of feedback, towards dialogic feedback in which the relational and affective dimensions of the relationship are central to the sustainability of the feedback process (e.g. Ajjawi and Boud, 2018; Dawson *et al*., 2018; Pitt and Norton, 2016).

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Expectancies and impression management: Evidence-informed guidelines for lecturers

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Overview

In order to make a good *first impression*, lecturers need to understand how students draw conclusions about what they can expect based on their initial impressions. While these first impressions are not unchangeable, creating a good first impression can be highly influential to the development of effective student-lecturer relationships. The ideas and evidence we present here give lecturers a framework broadly relating to verbal and non-verbal cues so that they can make deliberate decisions about how to present themselves in professional environments.

First impressions and expectancy formation

First impressions are an unavoidable consequence of initial interpersonal interaction. For instance, when a lecturer meets a group of students for the first time, those students will attend to various sources of information (e.g. clothing, body language, reputation) and use them as a basis for the creation of initial impressions. Following these impressions, students will start to make judgments about the lecturer and form initial expectations of what they think is likely to happen during future interactions between themselves and the lecturer.

Although this initial interaction may be fleeting, the impressions and expectations formed as a result of this first meeting can have important consequences regarding students' attention to instruction, student learning and performance, as well as the nature of the student-lecturer relationship that is subsequently developed. The effects of these consequences can also be fairly robust and long-lasting.

As an example, consider the student who is about to choose which subjects they will study in the upcoming semester. This could be heavily influenced by the initial impression created by a lecturer. Indeed, if the lecturer makes a favourable first impression, then the student may choose to study the module, keen to maintain the positive working relationship that – from the student's perspective – has been established. Alternatively, prospective study options may be ruled out if the student associates the module with a lecturer who created a poor first impression.

Birch *et al*. (2012) examined how students create first impressions of a lecturer. Here, a sample of 452 university students were asked to respond to a questionnaire that measured the relative importance of 30 different sources of information when forming an initial impression of a lecturer. These sources were then grouped under three broad categories of dynamic behavioural cues (e.g., speed of speech), static cues (e.g. gender), and third-party cues (e.g. qualifications). In addition, descriptive statistics identified that the three most highly regarded sources of information were: clarity of voice, level of preparation, and control of class.

Overall, the results indicated that dynamic behavioural cues have the greatest impact on first impressions. The second most important category appears to be third-party cues, with static cues having least influence. Clearly, there are exceptions to these rules. For example, a lecturer with numerous publications in international, peer-reviewed journals will likely carry a reputation with them that outweighs dynamic cues.

Despite these exceptions, however, it appears that factors outside of the lecturer's control (e.g. gender) are deemed less influential than controllable cues (e.g. verbal and non-verbal language) in terms of the impact they have on the expectancy-formation process. This would suggest that lecturers have a great deal of control over the expectancies that students form of them.

Expectancies and initial student-lecturer interactions

Students' impressions and expectancies of a lecturer may be an influential factor in the development and maintenance of student-lecturer relationships and student behaviour. Moreover, these initial impressions are often created on the basis of *thin slices* of information presented outside of the conscious awareness of both student and lecturer (Ambady, 2010; Ambady and Rosenthal, 1993; McAleer, *et al.,* 2014). Therefore, it is important that lecturers develop a greater awareness of the messages they send to students through verbal and non-verbal cues.

There is also evidence (e.g. Olson *et al*., 1996) to support the notion that expectancies have the potential to influence perceivers' attention and encoding processes (e.g. whether students listen and/or think about what is said to them). This expectancy-attention link has important implications not only for the development of the relationship between student and lecturer, but also for student learning. Indeed, if a student is unable or unwilling to attend to the information presented due to their expectancies of a lecturer, then their learning and development are likely to be impeded.

As a result, expectancies have been proposed to be powerful determinants of interpersonal interactions:

> *'We rarely if ever confront others without some expectations about how they should behave...We are not passive observers of our respective social worlds, but active forces in the shaping of those worlds. To an important extent we create our own social reality.'* (Jones, 1986, p. 41)

Batten and Batey (2015) examined the extent to which expectancies developed as a result of lecturer reputation impacted on students' attention. Although the results were non-significant, students in the experienced reputation group generally gazed towards the lecturer for longer, while students in the inexperienced reputation group exhibited greater fixation frequency (looked at the lecturer on more occasions). These findings indicate that reputation-based expectancies have the potential to influence students' behavioural responses to lecturers within a field-based setting.

Impression management

Leary and Kowalski (1990) refer to the way in which lecturers are able to monitor and control how they are perceived (by others) as *impression management* (also known as *self-presentation*). Here, a lecturer's ability and willingness to manage their impression is determined by a balance between two components – *impression motivation and impression construction*.

Impression motivation is defined as the degree to which a lecturer is motivated to control how students see them, conceptualised as a function of three factors: the goal-relevance of the impressions a lecturer creates, the perceived value of desired outcomes, as well as the discrepancy between current and desired images. On the other hand, impression construction consists of the methods adopted by a lecturer to create the specific impression they desire, influenced by five factors: self-concept, desired and undesired identity images, role constraints, students' values, and current or potential social image.

Based on this framework, a lecturer will try harder to create an impression if they perceive there is strong reason to do so (*i.e.* high impression motivation), while the impression constructed involves a balance of the five factors identified above. For example, when delivering a lecture to a group of students for the first time, a lecturer may have a strong motivation to try and control the way in which students perceive them. As a result, their ability to construct an appropriate impression becomes important to them. Yet, in order to create a good impression, this lecturer will need to: (a) have a positive and strong sense of self-concept; (b) be able to recognise how they can create a positive image relating to the role of a lecturer; (c) be able to avoid negative images for the role of a lecturer; (d) meet the positive expectations of the students; and (e) guard against the potentially negative expectations that students may have of them.

Interestingly, if the lecturer lacks confidence in their ability to make the desired first impression, increased stress and anxiety can occur. This situation can affect students as much as it can affect lecturers. In other words, when people (lecturers and students) have motivation to control how others see them, the consideration of the five factors that control their ability to construct a positive image can lead to them feeling stressed. This is not necessarily a bad thing as the stress can cause people to become more motivated to create a good impression. However, if there is a lack of confidence in self-concept, or a lack of understanding of what the desired image is, this stress can be counter-productive.

Thus, impression management is useful in helping to explain the way in which people (lecturers and students) behave in different situations. Even when people are *being themselves*, this simply reflects a moment in time when there is low motivation to control how others see them. Yet, being aware of impression management means that lecturers can learn to plan for situations where there is high motivation to control how others (e.g. their students) see them. It can also help lecturers become more empathetic in understanding why students choose to behave as they do in the presence of a lecturer (or other students).

Expectancies and impression management

Swider *et al*. (2011) undertook mock interviews with undergraduate students to analyse the strategies used by interviewees to manage their impression, as well as the subsequent grades awarded to the interview by the interviewer. This study examined how interviews place the interviewee in a situation where there is a clear need to impression manage, but with relatively little knowledge of the expectations of the interviewer.

During the interviews, two broad impression management tactics were observed. The first tactic saw interviewees use opportunities as they arose in conversation to self-promote attributes by drawing on personal experiences. The second tactic saw interviewees *create* an image in a way that either embellished on personal experiences slightly or progressed to extensive fabrication in an effort to foster a false impression.

Unsurprisingly, self-promotion as a tactic fared better than either *image creation* tactic. However, those students who thought they had engaged well in initial *ice-breaking* conversation with the interviewer fared worse than those who thought they had not made a connection. Indeed, the latter were largely successful in *getting away with* image creation tactics almost as much as those using self-promotion.

It is possible that interviewees who felt they had made an early connection might have become overconfident and/or too comfortable. In contrast, those who had not felt they had made a connection likely continued to work hard to present themselves as favourably as possible – even if this led some of them to embellish/fabricate the truth in places. These findings indicate that first impressions may not be as favourable as individuals initially think they are, suggesting that keeping a level of guardedness may be a third tactic to avoid overconfidence.

Impression management using verbal and non-verbal cues

The initial presentation of self (*i.e.* the lecturer) as a 'sender' to an important 'receiver' (*i.e.* students), even before a word has been said, plays an important role in how the 'receiving people' make initial assessments of the 'sender'.

Commenting on the importance of verbal and non-verbal behavioural cues in employee-customer interactions, Sundaram and Webster (2000) suggested four key factors that communicate people's mood to others. The first is kinesics, which relates to the way that body movements send messages. Specifically, it has been suggested that:

> *'The cues of casual smiling, light laughter, forward body lean, open body posture, and frequent eye contact are perceived as conveying intimacy and non-dominance - the characteristics commonly associated with friendliness and courtesy…kinesics such as stoic facial expressions, either staring or avoiding eye contact, backward lean of body, and closed body posture are perceived as conveying dominance, unfriendliness, and emotional distance.'* (Sundaram and Webster, 2000, p. 381)

The second factor is paralanguage; referred to by Sundaram and Webster as the factors associated with how people speak, such as vocal pitch, loudness, pitch variation, pauses and fluency. Here, it suggested that:

> *'Service providers' usage of a slower speech rate, lower pitch, moderate pauses, and less inflection will enhance customers' perceptions of friendliness and credibility. While service providers' usage of a faster speech rate, higher pitch, high vocal intensity, and higher inflection will enhance customers' perceptions of competence, but will reduce their perceptions of friendliness.'* (Sundaram and Webster, 2000, p. 384)

The third factor is known as proxemics, which refers to the distance and relative postures of the two (or more) people who are interacting. What appears to be particularly relevant here is how touch is used. Indeed, while some people may feel that early touching such as arm patting (apart from handshakes) before a relationship has been built is an invasion of personal space, there is much data to suggest that: 'touch can be used to communicate friendliness, warmth, and appreciation in all types of service encounters' (Sundaram and Webster, 2000, p. 384).

The final factor is *physical appearance*, with Sundaram and Webster (2000) stating that:

> *'...men working in professional services such as financial and legal services can wear a suit and tie to project poise, competence, and credibility. Female employees in professional services settings can wear navy, black, and gray suits to project competence and credibility. Attire colour affects physical appearance and the resulting perception. In general, darker suits create a perception of dominance and authority where lighter suits are associated with friendliness. Pinstripes and solid white shirts are associated with credibility. While warm colours (e.g. red and yellow) are likely to create perceptions of dominance, cool colours (e.g. green and blue) may reinforce perceptions of friendliness and warmth. Colour intensity has also been shown to affect perceptions. For instance, light to moderate intensity colours, compared with bright colours, will result in more positive evaluations.'* (Sundaram and Webster, 2000, pp. 385-386)

Although Sundaram and Webster are writing for a service industry, the ideas presented above offer an evidence base from which lecturers can plan for and make sound judgments as to how they can present themselves favourably when placed in situations where a first impression could count for a lot.

Similar conclusions have been reported within contexts such as coach-athlete (e.g. Manley *et al*., 2016) and client-practitioner (e.g. Lovell *et al*., 2013) relationships. Moreover, recent reflections from Graduate Teaching Assistants have outlined how similar strategies have been used to build mutual rapport and confidence during initial interactions with students (Heaviside *et al*., 2017).

Summary

Within this article, we initially explored some of the factors that may shape student impression formation. We followed with an examination of the issues involved in creating an impression within the context of impression management. Ideas emanating from interpretations of expectancy theory and evidence from within and outside of the learning and teaching arena led to suggestions about how lecturers may present themselves in professional environments to create favourable first impressions and, ultimately, positive working relationships with students.

In particular, we recommend that lecturers: (a) spend time considering what students' expectations are likely to be, as well as what they could do to meet them through impression management; (b) identify what their positive attributes are and how these can be communicated directly or through a third party to students; and (c) plan and practise the use of verbal and non-verbal cues to inform impression management.

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Case study on posters and group work: Diversifying assessment on an MA in Academic Practice

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Introduction

This case study outlines the challenges faced and insights gained by introducing a group assessment on City's MA Academic Practice. Centred on developing a poster artefact, this activity raised issues of inclusive practice and the assessment of group work, as well as questions around information literacy for teachers and participants alike.

Background

Shortly before I joined the Department of Learning Enhancement and Development (LEaD) in August 2017, the MA Academic Practice (MAAP) team adopted a new group-work assessment for one of its constituent modules: the only one on the programme. The module in question – Student Support and Personal Tutoring (SSPT) – is one of the modules accredited at UKPSF D2 for the University's PG Certificate in Academic Practice. It is taught face-to-face over four teaching days in the Spring term of each academic year. There is also an associated Moodle space and participants are expected to undertake significant independent study. I took module leadership for this module shortly after my appointment and set about turning the group-work theory into practice and running the new assessment for the first time.

The rationale for introducing group assessment was twofold: firstly, it was to vary the assessment types experienced by participants on the MAAP. Previously SSPT participants had written a 3000-word essay which, although it encouraged them to reflect on practice and make suggestions for enhancements in their contexts, it did not result in an output that could actually be used other than for end-of-module assessment. Secondly, with the continued emphasis in HE on preparing students for the workplace (Berry, 2007), more staff are running group-work assessments with their own students (or are being strongly encouraged to do so). Group work (and assessment that involves it) continue to have the reputation of being challenging for academic staff to facilitate and for learners to engage with successfully (Martin Davies, 2009; Soetanto and MacDonald, 2017). These challenges can be even greater when distance or online learning are involved (Smith *et al*., 2011). Giving SSPT participants direct experience – as learners – of engaging in such an assessment was intended to help them reflect on and empathise with their own students' experiences of similar assessments and (hopefully) validate their continued use.

Putting theory into practice

SSPT participants are now required to work in small groups to design a professional poster on a jointly agreed aspect of student support/personal tutoring aimed at informing others in their context. In addition to the poster, participants have to submit an individually written reflective report detailing the group's choices, undergirding these with relevant literature and identifying points of personal learning (thus aligning their work explicitly with the UKPSF dimensions).

Poster or infographic?

One of the first choices I had to make as module leader was exactly what kind of poster did I want the participants to produce? Reading the module specification, assessment and grade-related criteria, it was not entirely clear whether the desired output was an academic poster with extensive references (like those presented at academic conferences) or an infographic intended to convey complex information quickly and clearly using graphic means. In different places, the module documentation implied both formats. After consulting closely with colleagues, I decided that the emphasis on practical usability and the need for the poster to 'speak for itself' (on school noticeboards, *etc*.) suggested the infographic format made most sense. (The confusing elements in the module documentation were carefully and repeatedly explained throughout the module's first iteration and have been amended for the next.)

The role of digital tools

The choice of an infographic necessitated further pedagogic decisions: what technology and learning spaces would we use? I was concerned that, by asking participants to produce a graphic artefact, the assessment should remain valid. In other words, we should make sure we were assessing evidence of participants' understanding of student-support issues, not their skills in graphic design. This concern was met with a learning technology solution. We set up a number of accounts on Venngage (https://venngage.com/), an infographics program with a wide choice of templates which all the participants could use to be sure of having a visually satisfying design. Variation in grading should thus, we hoped, be influenced more by the participants' levels of information literacy than their informational design skills (Secker and Coonan, 2013). Integrating learning technology into the practical realisation of the assessment also had the benefit of meeting one of the module's learning outcomes. As we were planning to use a web-based program and intending to devote meaningful amounts of class time to practical group-work activity (see below), we needed to make sure that we had appropriate learning spaces in which we could work with participants. Thus we made sure we had a computer lab with circular tables and 'pop up' PCs for day 3 of the module, where the groups had a morning to work together on their poster project.

Running the module

As noted above, group work and group assessment are seen as challenging and difficult pedagogic modes. We had already identified 'muddy' areas in the module's existing documentation and I knew (from past experience of running group assessments) that I would need to be hands-on and proactive from the start if the participants were going to engage successfully with the group assessment and the class-based and online activities designed to prepare them for it.

Facilitation and scaffolding

Before the first face-to-face teaching day, I ran an ice-breaker on the module's Moodle space which encouraged participants to introduce themselves and say a little about their student support/personal tutoring experience. This worked well with the majority of participants posting. I endeavoured to role-model good practice by responding to participants' introductory posts – in particular making 'scaffolding' links between their articulated experience and issues that would come up in the module, recognising when I had met or taught them before in the context of the MAAP, and welcoming them all. The liveliness of these early pre-teaching discussions drew other lecturers on the course into the discussions, which was useful on a module that relies on a wide range of specialist contributors (in technology, academic support, mental health, *etc*.).

Developing communities of practice and staying relevant

In order for group assessments to have the best chance of working, the groups who work together on them need to be given time and facilitated opportunities to meet each other, develop rapport and spend time thinking about how they are going to complete their task (as well as reaching a shared understanding of why the assignment has been constructed in the ways that it has, and what they need to do/produce). It was an important feature of the assessment brief for this module that the poster could be used within participants' schools to increase awareness of student support/personal tutoring issues. It therefore made sense for groups to be formed from participants from the same schools or cognate areas (e.g. participants from the School of Health joined with externals working in related fields in NHS trusts). It was hoped also that such an organisational approach might assist in some small way towards the further development of participants' discipline-based communities of practice (e.g. Fearon *et al.*, 2012).

Group formation and independent working

The first day's activities were all geared in some way towards achieving the formation of participant groups with something in common and allowing their members to establish rapport (e.g. through peer-to-peer discussion of in-class questions; participation in a world café activity, *etc*.). All the groups were invited to come up with names for themselves, which were then used consistently across the module. Bearing in mind the fact that personality clashes *etc*. within groups sometimes cause problems with group work/assessment, individuals were allowed to swap and change groups freely during the first two days (and after that they would be permitted to change if they requested my permission to do so). Drawing on Elton's (1996) advice to engage in prompt and clear discussion of assessment requirements, the extrinsic factor most likely to cause learners anxiety, the poster task was discussed in full

on day 2, with supporting sessions actively exploring posters, infographics and introducing Venngage. I drew on the expertise of our Education Technology and Neurodiversity teams to help make these sessions both authoritative and inclusive. By the end of day 2 of the module, all groups were well established, working together purposefully and displaying obvious rapport.

This blended and scaffolded approach to establishing the groups made, I consider, all the difference in ensuring the success of the first between-class, independent study activity: a fact-finding exercise for which each of the nine groups were tasked with discovering as much as they could about resources for and practice of student support and personal tutoring in their schools. In the month between classes, online engagement was high (each group had been given their own named Moodle forum to record and discuss activity) and very purposeful. When the participants came back together in class, they were given class time and individual support from LEaD's academic team to work through and reflect on the results of their fact-finding, firm up their choice of poster theme, and get to grips with using Venngage in a suitably laid out PC lab. Attending to one of the early intentions of setting up this group assessment in the first place – developing staff understanding of and empathy with their own students' engagement in group work – the final session of day 3 included reflexive discussion of students' digital and information literacy as well as of academic integrity.

Following the conclusion of the module (day 4 focused on student counselling, mental health and personal tutoring), participants continued to develop their posters and also began to work on their reflective reports individually. They all had the opportunity to submit both poster and report in draft for feedback from a member of the module team (22/30 participants submitted work for comment).

Assessment

Overall, the posters we marked were of a good standard and our hopes that using Venngage would establish a relatively level playing field in terms of graphic design were realised. However, the marking team's experience of grading and feeding back on the final assignments confirmed our initial doubts about the clarity and marker-friendliness of the original assessment and grade-related criteria. Some criteria clearly related to the poster and report exclusively; others were not so clear-cut. This raised the question of how we were going to be transparent about awarding a mark for the poster that was common to all members of a group if some criteria were shared. Careful moderation helped us feel confident that we had been fair and consistent in our marking despite these challenges. Options for revision were: tightening the criteria so that there are no 'shared' criteria, or giving clearly separate part marks for poster and report. Eventually we decided to tighten and reword the existing criteria and label clearly which ones were relevant to the group activity and the individual reflection. I have also introduced a criterion specifically about inclusive practice as this was an element which became a significant theme as the module unfolded. As this year progresses, I will spend plenty of time in class talking through the criteria for assessment with SSPT participants.

Some 'dos' and 'don'ts'

This experience has enabled me to generate some recommendations for running group-work assessments. Many of these will be familiar but it is, I think, useful to remind ourselves of common issues around good practice and challenging scenarios.

Do:

- Consider including group assessment in your programme if group work is not currently assessed anywhere, having 'team work'-related learning outcomes, and/or that there are distinct employability-associated or practice-related reasons for developing your learners as team workers.
- Consider having a blended approach whereby learners are stretched to cooperate and make decisions both face-to-face and online/at a distance.
- Clearly distinguish in assessment and grade-related criteria which marks are awarded for group activity and which for individual achievement and talk regularly to the students about these.
- Ask learners to produce something that is going to be useful in some way in their current practice/learning environment or future study/employment.
- Include an element of individual reflection and/or peer appraisal into your assessment. These different perspectives can be very revealing of common group-work issues such as free-loading or teams-working-as-individuals and can help you assess group projects fairly.
- Explore how education technology could help you run your group assessment and help your learners meet the learning outcomes in valid and equitable ways.
- If you are going to use educational technology, take time in making an appropriate choice (involving specialist colleagues), and make sure all learners can access the technology easily and – ideally – use it collaboratively.
- Try and make sensible choices about appropriate learning spaces for your face-to-face (and online) sessions. If your learners are going to be working in groups/using technology in class, make sure they have suitable surroundings and resources.
- Allow plenty of time in class for groups to form, bond and to begin working purposefully together. You will need to monitor these processes quite actively!
- If you have external students (for example, from the NHS or other professional contexts), make sure you monitor how effectively they are integrating into their group(s).
- Talk to co-teaching colleagues at every stage; they are a great source of solutions as well as reassurance.
- Devote time early to explaining the assessment task and don't neglect any aspect of this because you assume it is 'straightforward'. It may not be and learners may be so anxious about the group assessment that they miss things they would otherwise pick up on.
- Explain what you regard as good practice in group work, e.g. coming to decisions collaboratively might produce more rewarding results than rigidly apportioning tasks to individuals.

- Be an active moderator on any online forums and try to find as many opportunities as possible in class to give groups feedbacks on their plans.
- Expect the unexpected.
- If things go wrong with groups, make time to help find solutions but also just to listen and acknowledge upset if that is what is needed.

Don't:

- Assume an uncomplicated relationship between group assessment and team-working in the workplace. There are significant and crucial differences, especially with respect to power relationships in the workplace and the complications inherent in assessment in the academic setting. You should recognise and be realistic about those.
- Schedule group assessments at points of high stress and very high stakes for students, if you can avoid it, e.g. at the end of their final year.
- Have criteria of assessment / grade-related criteria which make it difficult for markers and students to distinguish between marks awarded for group work and for individual achievement.
- Try and organise and facilitate a group assessment entirely online unless this is unavoidable.
- Assume your learners are 'digital natives' or that they will be able to use any educational technology you recommend/deploy instinctively.
- Underestimate how quickly and how badly group work can go wrong. Remain vigilant for any change in tone in online or face-to-face discussions and have some strategies worked out for how groups who find it tricky to work together might get back on track/work more pragmatically.
- Underestimate how much planned facilitation and scaffolding work you will have to do as module leader/ member of the teaching team. Supporting teams to work together takes time, effort and no little vigilance.
- Expect learners to be able to form, bond and work together purposefully in groups entirely in their 'independent' study time. This is unrealistic. Learners often need more not less support when you are expecting them to work in groups.
- Assume external students will be able to integrate into internally composed students groups without additional support/reassurance.
- Assume – if things go wrong – all members of a 'broken' group need solutions. Sometimes they just need to have their upset that things haven't worked out acknowledged.

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SEDA Spring Teaching Learning and Assessment Conference 2019

Collaboration to support the student experience and progression
9 May 2019 - 10 May 2019

Clayton Hotel Belfast

The themes of student experience, outcomes and progression continue to dominate discussions about the nature of Higher and Further education. We will examine approaches to and techniques of collaboration, both within and across institutions, which aims to provide the most meaningful support for students as they progress through their courses and make transitions between educational levels. The sessions will focus on innovation / developments and / or evaluation / research where collaboration has proven effective to meet current and likely future challenges

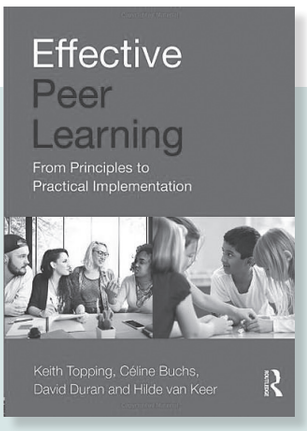
Book Review

Effective Peer Learning: From Principles to Practical Implementation

Keith Topping, Céline Buchs, David Duran, and Hilde van Keer

Routledge

ISBN-10: 1138906492



In everyday encounters, we continually learn from and with each other; as practitioners, there can be no better feeling than to observe our students flourish as they engage in discussion or share experiences and opinions with their peers. Peer learning underlines so many discourses of higher education: the sense of learning as 'culture', or 'social justice', or 'employability' – as those all too important transferable skills are developed and refined. Peer learning forms the fulcrum of all courses and, for some, it has assumed a different resonance with the addition of the new 'Learning Community' statement in the revised National Student Survey ('I have had the right opportunities to work with other students as part of my course'). With this in mind, the publication of books like *Effective Peer Learning* is somewhat propitious.

Effective Peer Learning is divided into four parts. Peer learning, as the authors underline, is complex and it exists in several guises. It is all too easy to gloss over the dimensions and characteristics of peer learning so, in the first part, there is a comprehensive dissection of peer tutoring, cooperative learning and peer collaboration. In each of these there are differences in equality (or directionality), mutuality and the degree of structuring. The meat of the book is devoted to an explanation of the principles for peer learners – how to prepare and train learners to undertake their roles, and to monitor the process of interaction. Drawing on the thoughts and ideas of several studies and thinkers, numerous evaluative models are outlined. Following this, the book attempts to illuminate how these principles play out in the classroom, citing several procedures. The final part synthesises the advantages and benefits of peer learning which, in my view, should have been included in the book's introductory pages, and concludes by examining some of the main problems in embedding peer learning, offering advice along the way.

It is difficult to judge who might benefit from reading this book. Many textbooks on teaching and learning are geared towards the new tutor, since this is where there is most activity in terms of staff development or training. However, and overall, there were frequent moments when I felt disengaged with this book. Would-be innovators looking for a book to dip into for practical guidance might be disappointed as large chunks read like a review paper. Whilst I have no qualms about learning about the thinking that has led to the present state of understanding in peer learning, the book lacked a thrust of its own and the authors' voices felt too faint. This may explain why the authors suggest reading the book 'in stages' and allowing time for reflection. The middle parts of the book, which aim to tackle some of the practical issues, could have benefited from better signposting at the beginning of each chapter. I struggled to derive a sense of what many of the chapters were setting out to achieve and I often found myself flicking through the pages, just to see how the ideas and themes were aligned. The chapters are uneven in style – for example, some ending in excellent summaries, others less so. Regrettably, however, I found myself re-reading several sentences as the standard of English was, at best, average in several places.

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Drama for teaching and working in academia – Using stagecraft to develop academics and their teaching practice in Higher Education

Dr Maren Thom, Queen Mary University of London

Introduction

The relationship between acting and teaching is tangible. Concepts of performance, embodiment, narrative and entertainment feed into the teaching role. For my SEDA Small Grant Research Project, I used the methods of performance to look at the development of teachers and academics in HE, and the intersection of the two related roles. I developed workshops covering voice, dramaturgy, stagecraft and character to investigate how drama training affects teachers and academics in HE. This research shows how, with the help of dramatic training, an academic, teaching persona can be developed, enhanced and utilised in terms of performance, character and communication.

Background

My background is training in Drama at the University of Manchester, working in theatres in Hamburg and Berlin as in-house director and dramaturge and a PhD in Film Studies. It is this background that has informed my desire to bring drama methodologies into my work as an education advisor at Queen Mary University of London over the last three years.

When I started teaching, the parallels between academic and actor became immediately obvious. The relationship between acting and teaching is real and tangible. Concepts of performance, projection, embodiment, narrative and entertainment feed into the teaching role. The skills of delivering ideas convincingly in person, and being able to control an audience, I thought would be beneficial to academics, both for teaching and presenting research.

To investigate, I created workshops combining methods from dramaturgy, actors' training, improv theatre and comedy, in order to create new methods of teaching and presentation for academics. These successful workshops became a SEDA-funded research project in 2017. My study has two phases, the first having ended in July 2018. I developed and ran drama workshops for early career academics from across disciplines who had been teaching between one and three years. The data gathered from these workshops, the analysis, findings and recommendations, are detailed here.

Acting as part of academic development – Investigating the effects of acting methods and dramatic practice on teachers and workers in HE

Scholars have analysed how acting enhances teaching; controlling modes of communication is at the heart of effective teaching (see sources below, under Further Reading). Engagement with dramatic practices can develop the role of teacher such that the 'teaching identity' qualitatively affects the engagement and learning of students. Until now, the application of acting skills to teaching has mostly been aimed at teachers at school level. What has been lacking is an approach meant for academics and their Higher Education (HE) teaching roles, and their roles as public-facing researchers.

The performance methods of the teacher parallel the work of an academic. Both are highly performative, relying on character, communication and presentation. An academic in HE may benefit from a strong, persuasive presence, not only in the classroom but also as a researcher. To talk about ideas and practices with confidence requires a robust sense of self, and this can be nurtured through performance training.

There is also an existential element to studying dramatic methods for teaching, a fundamental change in how the teacher understands their own persona afterwards. Özmen (2010) describes how teachers, after acting lessons, developed a new professional 'teacher identity'. Meijer *et al.* (2009) found that 'paying attention to the connection of the personal and the professional in teaching and teacher education may contribute to educational goals that go far beyond the development of the individual teacher'.

One of the focuses of this research is the relationship between personal development, enhanced through stagecraft, and the professional conduct of an HE academic, with the aim of seeing how it affects the experience of HE teaching for students and drama-trained academics.

Aims and questions

The goal of this research was to test:

- The applicability, functionality and efficacy of specially designed elements of dramatic practice to academic teaching
- How the development of a teacher identity is conducive to the development as an academic.

The research asked these questions:

1) Can we apply the methods of constructing a performance-based teacher identity to the specific needs of HE teaching?
2) To what degree is the development of a performance-based teacher identity conducive to simultaneous development as an academic?
3) What ideas and practices must a drama for academics course cover?
4) How should a course like this be taught?

Method

In order to introduce drama methodologies into academic development, and to collect data on its efficacy, I offered workshop sessions that could be attended singly or as part of a series. I designed these workshops as short sessions, introducing the possibilities of dramatic methods. Long-running courses would have been too time- and labour-intensive for full-time academics.

My aims were to give academics a beginner's toolkit, enabling them to start using drama methods, and to give them an awareness of how teaching and the research presentation can be improved by dramatic training.

I offered four workshops:

1) Train Your Voice for Teaching
2) Using Dramaturgy to Design Seminars and Lectures
3) Stagecraft for Performance in Academia
4) Creating an Academic Persona.

I ran about 40 individual sessions for about 200 participants from September 2017 to July 2018. My participants came from a diverse range of disciplines, and were mostly early-career lecturers in the first or second year of university teaching. Most were doing this in parallel with PGCert training and HEA Fellowship applications.

Several participants took all four workshops. The workshops, which were limited to 8-12 participants, were always fully booked weeks in advance.

Data gathering

I collected the data for this study in these ways:

1) Observing the workshops and interviewing the participants. I also kept a journal recording the experiences
2) Participants' feedback sheets, collected after each session
3) Online evaluation from twenty participants, reflecting on their experiences after having put into practice what they learned in the workshops
4) Eight 30-minute interviews of participants who had done all four workshops, asking them about putting the methods of the sessions into practice.

Analysis

These are the objectives of the individual workshops and reflections on the related data.

1) Train your voice for teaching

I designed this workshop to introduce participants to vocal delivery techniques, create awareness of the voice as a tool, show how to care for the voice, and show how to train and use it fully. It started with a vocal warm-up, followed by a lecture on voice production, and then discussions on voice usage. The main part of the workshop was vocal exercises in breathing, volume, articulation, and drama. This was backed up by advice about stress and fear of talking.

The voice workshop was, in terms of demand and feedback, the most successful. It attracted the most participants, most likely because it had immediate use while also being outside many people's everyday access.

My main observation from this session was that participants could experience such an immediate physical transformation, through experiencing themselves in new ways audibly, that they would immediately sign up for the other workshops.

For many participants the novel physical experience engendered a new confidence, not only as teachers and presenters but also as individuals. The application of this brought positive feedback:

> *'I have especially drawn from the voice-workshop, which for me is not only helpful for my teaching but even in my everyday life, to be aware of how my voice is and know why it is the way it is and what I can do to change it.'*

One participant described how this workshop changed her behaviour in the classroom:

> *'As a shy person I don't even like the idea of people looking at me, but this has given me the confidence that I can speak loudly and move around and be ok. Just alone the fact of being able to project your voice without shouting and without hurting your voice that gave me quite a lot of confidence in the classroom.'*

However, the brevity of the introductory session was felt to be too limiting for one participant, who said:

> *'The voice workshop I struggle with more. Because it's harder to change over a short period of time. I try to warm it up beforehand which helps.'*

2) Using dramaturgy to design seminars and lectures
This workshop was to introduce academics to dramatic composition and dramaturgy. This was the only session not based on physical activity but on the art of storytelling. It started with a talk on dramatic composition, ranging from Aristotle to contemporary screenwriting, with the intent of translating these to academic presentations. The session asked participants to consider structure, tension, impact and excitement.

Fairly quickly I changed the title from Using Dramaturgy to Using Dramatic Composition. The concept of dramaturgy is not readily found outside Germany, and seemed too obscure to fulfil participants' expectations.

One of the observations from participants was that the potential benefits to their teaching practices were hard to imagine. This was most evident in the feedback forms, where often the relevance of storytelling to teaching experiences could not be felt.

However, many participants, after reflection, said that thinking dramatically has helped them when planning projects. One wrote:

> *'They made me realise the importance of dramatic arc of the lecture and also helped me learn how to draw students' attention more effectively.'*

Another, who teaches law, wrote:

> *'I found that making my session much more interesting in incorporating… dramaturgy – into it. It has made me rethink, what I thought were quite boring legal material, into a new way of thinking about the material itself. It has helped my own understanding of it and it has changed the way I deliver this "dry" material to my students.'*

In this way, dramatic construction can not only provide a tool to give students new ways to access learning but can also improve the academic's relationship to their own materials.

3) Stagecraft for performance in academia
Watzlawick *et al*. (1967) stated that 'one cannot not communicate', claiming that 'activity or inactivity, words or silence, all have message value: they influence others and these others, in turn, cannot not respond to these communications and are thus themselves communicating'.

With this in mind, the emphasis of this workshop was on technical aspects of performance and practical stagecraft. It covered stage presence and the use of space in the service of narrative dynamics. Looking at the use of a stage through dramatic visual cues, intimacy and distance, blocking, sightlines, props and gestures, this session focused on 'how to be on stage'.

This session was the second most well received. The physical experience of expressing academic narratives through dramatic means had an immediate effect on many participants. The different modes of intimacy (such as hand gestures), rules of the stage (all movement draws attention) and blocking (what do I communicate with my movements?), had a great impact. One participant said:

> *'As someone in their early teaching career you are obsessed with what you are doing in the room. So, this was really different because it sort of did bring back the idea of classroom management in a good way. Because it is about keeping the students engaged. All the stuff about where you are in the room when you are saying things and how that makes a difference to the message you are kind of saying. Just like being more purposeful with your movements as you are talking.'*

In feedback, many expressed surprise at the impact of non-verbal communication, and how much taking advantage of visual cues can profoundly change the impact of teaching and presentations.

A big lesson for participants was that in order to become the centre of attention, rivals for attention must be used sparingly. This is often revelatory for participants who have learned to rely on technologies that circumvent student engagement.

One participant talked about the long-term impact of this session:

> *'It makes me more confident when lecturing, it's more interactive. I engage the audience more I think…And people have written comments that this is the best lecture they have had. One student wrote something like "The best type of lecture is when the lecturer just talks at you about the topic and not reading off the slides".'*

This illustrates how stagecraft helped participants be more confident as presenters, and how this directly affected student learning.

4) Creating an academic persona
This workshop was aimed at those who wanted to create confident personas, not only for presentations, but also as representatives of their work. I used methods drawn from acting, especially character work (e.g. self-analysis, personal gestures) and improv theatre (e.g. status games) to help academics think about their performative persona. The concept of persona was analysed to help academics to distinguish between their public and private selves. The purpose was to help academics develop a persona, a 'thick skin' that helps deal with constant academic scrutiny of ideas and supports the performative aspects of lecturing.

This was the least well-attended workshop. Many participants felt that as beginners in drama methods they would need more time to invest in such an intimate session. Also, the relevance of the workshop to teaching was not obvious; character work did not seem to have immediate benefits for teaching or academic practice to some participants.

This session was intentionally challenging, asking of participants a willingness to self-analyse and an openness to other's perceptions. The people in this workshop had often done the others, knew what to expect, and generally had a positive experience. The main feedback was that participants found it beneficial to understand themselves as a persona in order to cope with the pressures of academic life. One talked about how the workshop changed her teaching methods:

> *'I learned that it is in my power what kind of persona I want to adopt at any time…For my being able to be a different persona is now there as a kind of tool to reach for if something is not working in the room.'*

The workshop showed that a principal benefit of character work is a more reflective approach to teaching.

Overall impact

The feedback showed the workshops were successful in their aim of introducing participants to drama methods for teaching and working in HE. Nineteen out of twenty-one participants found the workshops very/extremely useful. Many emphasised that personal development is often neglected as part of Educational Development in HE, saying that drama had positive benefits for their academic work. The most common feedback was that the workshops gave people 'confidence', not only to the practice of teaching but also to themselves as people.

Impact on students

In interviews, participants gave personal examples of putting drama methods into practice, often commenting that student behaviour changed towards them positively:

> *'I have noticed with the session that students engage with me a whole lot better. They have started to contact me outside the session. I feel the session go better and it feels much nicer. It works much better overall.'*

Impact on research presentation

The experience of feeling 'more confident' also had an effect on participants' work more broadly, when working with other academics. One wrote:

> *'I "applied" the learning in workshops or meetings with colleagues where I feel more comfortable to contribute and speak up, do breathing exercises beforehand, or try to tell a story about my research.'*

Mind shift

Özmen (2010) talks of the emergence of a 'teacher identity' through acting training. The potential of drama for teacher training is to go beyond short-term fixes for specific problems to allowing teachers to reflect on how they can communicate more effectively.

One participant described their process, after having attending the workshops, as a new way of thinking about themselves as practitioners:

> *'I think it was like kind of a mind shift. Of course, I would have been preparing classes, thinking about content and what am I going to get them to do with that content. But I would not have thought about things like "where am I going to be in the room" and "what actions can I do to emphasise the message a bit more".'*

Another common response was a new-found passion for drama. People who had described themselves as 'shy' wanted to continue with drama outside the context of university. Several have taken up improv sessions.

Recommendations

The developers and designers of professional development programmes in HE, such as PGCAP and PGCert, should consider the inclusion of drama training units in and around their courses. This would familiarise staff with presentation techniques and encourage the development of teaching identities. Moreover, dramatic methodologies would make the often unfamiliar field of educational research more relatable.

Conclusion and next steps

The first part of my research shows that drama methods can improve significantly the relationships academics have with themselves as performers and their roles as HE teachers. This leads to beneficial impacts on their relationships with students and colleagues, and an impact on student learning and academic development.

One of the lessons was that, in order to introduce novices to the benefits of drama, they should experience in the first session an immediate physical change. The voice-work proved ideal for this. Once the benefits of working with physicality were established, other non-verbal modes of storytelling could be developed.

The feedback showed the workshops help participants unify the personas of academic and teacher, directly benefiting teaching (a participant commented 'my teaching became more reflective and I believe improved a lot') and the role of the academic working with students in Higher Education.

However, there seems more to be gained through a more thorough and fundamental training in drama methods. The second phase of my research started in October 2018 and will follow academic teachers on an intense course, analysing their personal development over this period.

I hope that for academics teaching in HE and working in academia, the development of a teacher identity will be invaluable, for both staff and students. With this research I hope to fill the gaps in the understanding of the practical uses of acting and dramatic methodologies for teaching.

Further reading on acting enhancing teaching

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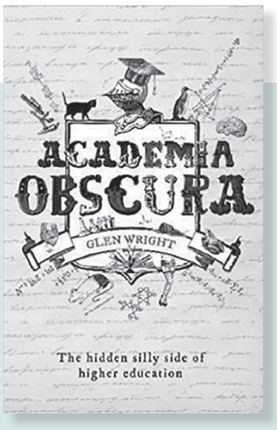
Book Review

Academia Obscura: The Hidden Silly Side of Higher Education

By Glen Wright

2017

ISBN-10: 1783523417



Okay, so this is not an academic development book, yet the academy can learn a great deal from it. The subtitle 'the hidden silly side of higher education' suggests a more frivolous book than this actually is. I read the 215 pages in a couple of days and there is much to amuse, and Glen Wright has done a superb job in collecting it all together and the chapter titles like 'publish or perish', 'academic publishing', 'writing', 'teaching' and so on, will echo with all academics.

Whilst presented as amusing the material is also a little depressing. For example, the idea of 'shadow conferences' (pseudo-symposia) which seem to simply 'scam' academics is surprising and cautionary. The case reported here is of a conference named Entomology-2013, which 'shadowed' Entomology 2013. The only difference is the dash in the title! Beware.

I started with the 'teaching' chapter and again found some of the stories, for example, 'pass everyone', quite disheartening, although understandable. The section describes the passing of student athletes to allow them to continue on courses. One of the teachers involved did so because, it is reported (p. 128) 'that he was haunted by the fate of two athletes he taught in his career who lost eligibility and drifted – one was murdered after returning to his hometown and the other ended up in prison'. The case here is not 'silly'. It could provide the basis of a discussion into aspects of personal/professional boundaries.

Equally not 'silly' is the reporting of the American website Rate my Professor. A study into language use on the site reveals that certain words, for example, 'smart', are used with greater frequency for male teachers than for female teachers. Female teachers tended to fit stereotypes, suggests Wright, of 'bossy' or 'nurturing'. This section reports an idea proposed by a Republican Senator for public voting for teachers. This is downright bizarre (and definitely 'silly'). The suggestion was that an institution would publish the names of the bottom of five teachers (on some kind of performance scale) and that students would then vote. The teacher with the lowest number of votes would lose their job!

Within the book, there are also interludes, which report some of the 'silly' work. Two examples. Apparently due to the theory of relativity, that is travelling long distances at 'lightspeed', Luke Skywalker is 638.2 days younger than his twin, Leia (p. 35). If vampires existed and they feed once a month, using some mathematical modelling, they would 'wipe out humans in approximately 2.5 years' (p. 158). The same also applies to zombies. 'Silly' perhaps, but the application of science to a problem.

My favourite section was the stuff about the use of Twitter by academics. At #ScienceAMovieQuote, people have posted 'a beautiful marriage of science and movie geekery' (p. 174). My favourite quote from this page, 'I'm just a girl, standing in front of a rat, asking him to press a lever'.

Finally, Bob Dylan also gets a mention in the 'publish or perish' chapter, a small part of which deals with the use (or hiding) of song titles/lyrics in academic papers. Anyone want to try to incorporate Bob's 'wiggle, wiggle, wiggle, like a bowl of soup' (Wiggle, Wiggle for Under the Red Sky, 1990) into a paper?

So a fun read but 'silly'? I am less sure.

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Collaborative creativity as pedagogic practice

Rebecca Thomas, University of East Anglia

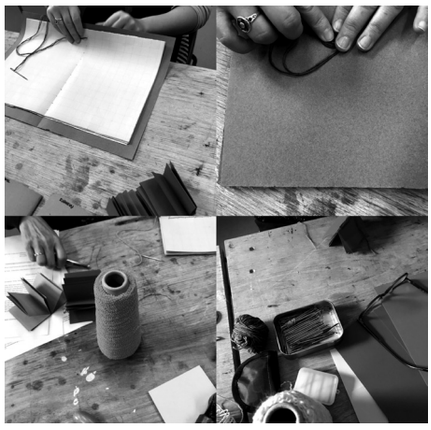
I work in the Centre for Staff and Educational Development (CSED) at the University of East Anglia as a Lecturer in Academic Practice. Since January 2018, I have been running a series of weekly creative learning sessions, open to staff from all disciplines, held in a dedicated art room within the School of Education. The aim of these meetings is to produce a regular context in which lecturers can become involved in making, collaborating and discussing various teaching-related issues with academics from outside their own discipline and 'comfort zone'. The 'hands-on' aspect of the workshops is important, fostering a sense of connectivity, not just between the participant and the materials they use, but also among the different members of the group. In organising and running these meetings, I draw on my own background as a visual arts lecturer and practising artist.

Book making 1

The sessions address a number of distinct but interlocking concerns around collaboration, interdisciplinarity, and the practice of making visual works which can be shared and discussed. Holding weekly meetings provides a core community of participants (regularly joined by others) who engage in collaborative learning within the broader framework of an attempt to re-energise teaching and learning. We are keen to generate new approaches to teaching, a concern that is aided, rather than diluted, by the cross-discipline nature of the group. A sense of exploration and fun pervades these lunchtime meetings, which are creative, playful and sometimes a little messy. Such practical involvement seems to cement the group's coherence, perhaps because for many of those involved, making things with paint, clay, collage, cardboard or Lego is something they don't usually do. Discussions often cover how and why making and sharing things in a practical rather than 'intellectual' sense is valuable, both in its own right and as a means to other ends. However, being so playful does not preclude taking the meeting seriously, maintaining academic rigour when it comes to examining what we have made, and how we hope to apply what we learn from these meetings to teaching itself. Our discussions are focused and in-depth.

A key aim of the sessions is discovery through practice. Emphasis is placed on collaboration with other staff and an open, exploratory way of working is fostered rather than one prioritising technical skill. The point is to encourage an investigative approach to learning and problem-solving, one applicable to actual teaching situations.

The staff attendees have applied much of what we have explored in the sessions within their own teaching, including within the fields of anthropology, geography, geology, midwifery, nursing and sociology. For example, one Lecturer in Human Geography initiated a project in which his students assembled an exhibition on the theme of the Anthropocene, drawing inspiration from my object-enquiry session and the collaborative approach we used, as well as checking out collections at the University's Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, again based on one of our meetings. Students contributed various objects including packaged oranges, a ready-to-eat steak, reproductions of paintings, and corporate logos, as well as writing a short museological text to accompany each item displayed. In another instance, a sociologist teaching International Development encouraged her students to use, rather unusually, video and theatrical performance to look at justice-related issues. This approach unnerved the students at first but by the end of the module they provided excellent positive feedback regarding this. My overall impression, after observing staff who had attended the creative learning sessions, was that a much livelier, playful and collaborative way of teaching was unfolding within the classes (whatever the subject area), and several of the 'props' I'd used were making an appearance, too: items of food, storage boxes, and explanatory texts.

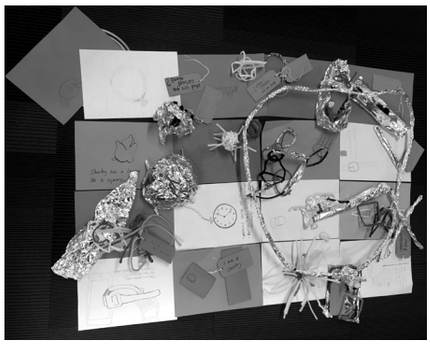


Book making 2

As Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi observes in *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention* (1997), 'creativity…is a process by which a symbolic domain in the culture is changed. New songs, new ideas, new machines are what creativity is all about' (97:34). Such novelty is also an intended outcome of our meetings, which should provide methods of carrying out teaching

in novel ways; perhaps some of what actually happens in the workshops might be adapted for direct application with student groups.

We are currently well into a series of nine workshops which include projects such as making a visual diary, using art materials and technical equipment in unorthodox and anarchic ways, interpreting the esoteric cultural objects to be found in the University's Sainsbury Centre, and investigating chance as a means of enlivening modes of teaching and learning. Other themes include looking at the influence of specific places on how we teach, the use of games, puzzles and play in educational strategies, and a consideration of what it might mean to develop a strong sense of self-reflexivity as a teacher.



Curious considerations

I began the delivery of the workshops by relating playfulness to the essential issues that creative learning could address. As one participating colleague observed:

> *'Rebecca showed us relevant objects – including some of her own artworks – and books, media and techniques to explore these, and invited participants to make connections with their own teaching practices. She suggested how the materials she provided might be used, while leaving things open for participants to take risks and have fun. The emphasis was very clearly on exchanging practices, with participants sharing ideas and insights derived from creative activities'.*

This response was very encouraging, as it shows that through these workshops a range of insights applicable to teaching were indeed being developed. Another colleague praised the diary-making session, reporting that:

> *'While using paper, thread and scissors, academic colleagues explained how they might use their diaries themselves and shared ideas on how they might ask students to put together and write in a diary.'*

This is a good example of workshop material being directly carried across into teaching.

To paraphrase the title of David Gauntlett's 2018 Polity Press volume on the social power of creativity, 'Making is Connecting'. Given the ever-increasing incursion of reductive corporate values into the education system at the present time, creative approaches to teaching require nothing less than the most dedicated recognition and support.

Find out more about Creative Learning UEA at http://ow.ly/kmt030mhFzV.

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Developing a systematic whole School approach to inclusive practice through Universal Design for Learning

Sean Bracken, University of Worcester

Anniversaries provide a useful juncture to cast a critically reflective eye on journeys travelled. With this in mind, just over a year has passed since the University of Worcester college minibus began its early morning sojourn heading some 100 km northeast with a destination of De Montfort University (DMU) in Leicester. There were eight colleagues aboard who came from a diversity of discipline schools along with several student services representatives. The shared aim among the wayfarers was to discover more about how the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework could respond to the learning requirements of an increasingly diverse student body at our University. DMU has been particularly successful in developing a whole organisational approach to UDL as a means of ensuring inclusive practice. Such was the national interest in the implementation of the UDL framework that representatives from around 20 other universities also attended the information seminar.

The desire among colleagues at the University of Worcester to enrich their understanding of UDL initiatives in Higher Education had emerged from an earlier national conference hosted at the University in June of 2017. This event had showcased how systematic whole organisational approaches to inclusive practice might be designed and implemented. Building on the

Department for Education report entitled 'Inclusive teaching and learning in higher education as a route to excellence' (DfE, 2017), it was clear that UDL was emerging as a powerful conceptual framework to underpin positive change processes. A critical attribute of this framework is that it provides scope to unify planning among differing strands of the student HE experience, including student services, library and information services, estates, information technologies, and the wider academy. Thus UDL has potential to act systemically and strategically to ensure the learning requirements of the vast majority of students have been addressed through anticipatory design. Increasingly, international research illustrates that UDL can transform educational provision through a framework that uses multiple means of engagement, multiple means of representation and multiple means of expression (see for example, the work of: Burgstahler, 2013; Cook and Rao, 2018; Gomez, 2015; Rao *et al*., 2015).

So, what has changed since that journey of learning began over a year ago? A recent audit of inclusive practice within the School for Education revealed that a strong community of professional practitioners has emerged within the School, with UDL acting as its wellspring of inspiration for pedagogical design and practice. Perhaps the greatest exemplification of this community is through its online Yammer network. Colleagues within the Department for Children and Families coordinate a dynamic Yammer group, which shares best practice around the UDL.

Additionally, within and beyond this department, UDL principles have inspired colleagues to seek out ways in which accessible technologies can meet the learning requirements of all learners, especially those who traditionally have been marginalised. With the support of Library and Information Services, a formative research project is being developed to investigate how the use of audio books may support a diversity of learners including those with visual impairments, those who come from first generation backgrounds and other learners who may benefit from access to audio learning. Increasingly, accessibility apps have been built into the Talis reading resource lists thereby enabling students with dyslexia to access and use a diversity of digital colour overlays.

Colleagues in the Department are using UDL as a systematic approach to inform the revalidation of all courses. Collaborative planning has ensured that colleagues have agreed to adopt a similar template for all course Blackboard VLE formats, thus adding coherence and quality to the student experience. In a similar way, the team responsible for the PGC in Secondary Education have also focused on the development of consistent, accessible design in the use of VLE learning and teaching platforms so that students can navigate their way around, and interface productively with, tools that can enhance the learning experience. To further complement this work, the team has piloted the early release of learning materials so that all students can access and engage with critical content prior to the scheduled lecture periods. Other technological learning tools such as Pebblepad portfolios have also been reconfigured to include some UDL principles.

Meanwhile, colleagues from the Department for Education and Inclusion along with colleagues in the Primary Education Department are collaborating on the use of Lesson Study to promote a collegiate form of peer-supported professional development that reviews and strengthens implementation of the University's 'Policy and procedures on inclusive assessment' (University of Worcester, 2016). The research project is particularly mindful of the multiple means of expression strand within UDL; this encourages educators to design a diversity of ways in which assessment as and for learning can be evidenced. This small-scale British Academy funded research project is also purposefully focused on anticipating student variability in learning and assessment requirements, thereby ensuring that assessment processes purposefully tackle inequities in outcomes through a research-informed socially just perspective (Hanesworth *et al*., 2018).

UDL also provides a conceptual framework to chart a reflexive review of practices in postgraduate courses. As the MA Education suite of modules and the overarching programme are undergoing review, there is scope to identify and learn from and adapt inclusive design strategies being adopted at the undergraduate level, for example by incorporating a diversity of assessment modalities that reaches beyond the 'one size fits all' traditional approach to curriculum design. Significantly, the UDL framework now constitutes part of the first module on the PG Cert HETL, so that there is potential for a shared understanding of the ways in which UDL can complement learning for all students.

In order to ensure wider take-up and greater sustainability of this model of inclusive change management, colleagues who wish to update modules and courses within the School of Education are urged by leaders responsible for course quality to reflect on the ways in which they may be made more accessible through consideration of the UDL framework (CAST, 2018). Ultimately, as shared by Hanesworth *et al*. (2018, p. 10), an ever-increasing emphasis on shared collegiate understandings of what constitutes UDL- informed inclusivity may be best actualised when four dynamically interacting dimensions of change management are brought together – these include:

1) Setting of an organisational vision for inclusive curriculum and assessment design. This would involve clearly articulating the ways in which strategic leaders encourage novel learning and teaching perspectives
2) Developing avenues and mechanisms for all educators and student service providers to encourage a collaborative, partnership-based approach, especially by seeking to include the voices of students and staff who have been marginalised;
3) Investing in the resources of: time, technological hardware and software for staff and students and ensuring there is professional development capacity to engage effectively with curriculum and assessment change processes
4) Through praxis, extending the culture of change to incorporate exemplified minimum standards and best practices for inclusive, socially just curriculum and assessment design both within and external to the institution. For example, by informing and involving external examiners of the positive implications for UDL on student learning outcomes, thereby impacting more widely on external cultures of HE praxis.

A useful way to reflect upon, and to further develop, the initiatives shared earlier would be to illustrate how colleagues can extend and strengthen their UDL planning and practices by considering the interplay between the attributes of inclusive change management as outlined above. Such an approach would enable exemplification and prioritisation of next steps and would further enable planning ownership among course teams and their students. A sample of such a dynamic planning framework is provided in Table 1.

Universal Design for Learning Features	*Organisational vision and strategic leadership*	*Developing shared approaches*	*Resources and professional development*	*Extending the culture of change*
Multiple means of engagement	Identification of strategic UDL champions in senior leadership. Top down and bottom up synergies: including students and middle leaders. Formation of inclusive curriculum and assessment policies based on principles of social justice.	Collaborating to articulate a strategic vision for inclusivity that recognises systemic nature of inequalities. All stages of course development and implementation incorporate reflection using the UDL framework. Collaborative formative development of exemplification of how UDL operates in praxis.	Guidance and guidelines for establishing minimum standards of inclusive anticipatory design. Use of joint practice development to enhance sustainability of UDL. Course leadership and recognition programmes incorporate aspects of UDL. Targeted action research and reflexive praxis.	Inclusion of accessibility literacy into all programmes. Choice and diversity of assessment processes. Revalidation processes apply inclusive UDL consideration.
Multiple means of representa-tion – how do we disseminate?	Involve students' unions in defining what a UDL approach to HE pedagogy might look like. Ensure Learning/Teaching and Quality Coordinators are UDL champions. Engagement with external expertise in the field of UDL.	Investment in accessible technologies for student use, for example, use of formative online assessments. Consideration of how inclusive assessment is facilitated through pedagogical accessibility, for example lecture capture and notes in advance.	Incorporation of unconscious bias professional development. Including multiple identities in pedagogies and assessment. Providing scope for personal academic tutors to strengthen assessment literacy. Including accessible and enabling technologies as a key focus for CPD. Providing insights into how peers have developed consistency in VLE format and content for all learners.	Establishing communities of practice to collaborate on driving change for a social justice approach to assessment and feedback. Developing toolkits and flowcharts to illustrate inclusive assessment policies and processes. Internal and external facing websites hosting all policies and practices.
Multiple means of action and expression – what do we do to embed?	Formation of key strategic action groups, for example BAME assessment, achievement and retention, with student leadership. Identification of inclusive assessment and pedagogy as priority area in strategic planning. Recognition and rewards for inclusive assessment and pedagogies.	Consistent checking of formative learning through interactive assessments (in action). Providing online and hard copy case studies of how inclusive assessment policies have been realised in practice. Sharing of key strategic decisions beyond working groups through blogs and accessibility of minutes.	Encouraging targeted research to investigate the impacts of differing strategies at course and module level. Consistent checking with diverse student body. Using attainment data for marginalised groups as the basis for CPD and action. Applying concepts from Dis/ability Critical Race Studies to explore student narratives of empowerment and marginalisation.	Developing systems and processes to ensure that UDL features on annual enhancement plans. Collaborative contributions to research to strengthen internal culture and inform external practices. Engage external examiners with new assessment and feedback policies and practices that embed equality and diversity.

Table 1 UDL dynamic planning framework

Conclusion

The UDL framework is increasingly being recognised by HEI practitioners as providing a well-researched and meaningful conceptual framework for enabling joint meaning-making among students, support staff and academics in order to address inequities in learning outcomes. What is promising is that the comprehensive nature of the resultant pedagogical strategies engenders student autonomy, so students become 'purposeful and motivated, resourceful and knowledgeable, strategic and goal oriented' (CAST, 2018).

At the same time, the framework architects were keenly aware of wider systematic organisational and societal biases and prejudices that can militate against all students realising their true potential. The UDL framework encourages practitioners to become more aware of how these challenges to success operate at a strategic and practical level as students learn. In becoming ever increasingly aware of how to equip marginalised students with the knowledge, skills and capacities to overcome these challenges, the framework provides a tool for pedagogical hope and success.

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Essentiality of humour in class

Mousir Khan, Aljouf University

How many of you still remember the teacher of your college days who had more to offer than just those nondescript, soporific lectures; someone who had to offer a wisp of humour in his/her class? I'm sure there are quite many of you who still remember him/her fondly. Teaching methods or pedagogy have grown so complex and cumbersome for most teachers, these days, that the simple and most essential things in teacher-student interactions are being missed out, especially humour.

Though it is accepted that a successful class is the one that is interesting, it is hardly ever said that humour/amusement should be an essential element in the classrooms (which a teacher should employ appropriately so as not to turn themselves into a complete comedian).

Throughout my teaching experience as a language teacher and a lecturer in literature, I have always sought an opportunity to employ humour as a condiment in almost all of my classes for the students to absorb the information that's being given out. Yes, it does indeed mean intermittently cracking a joke in the middle of your lecture, or making a funny face (however ludicrous it may sound), using buffoonery, irony, *etc*., to generate a comical effect.

I have always found positive benefits of this practice and I recommend employing it to every teacher who has until now been struggling with writing up numerous lessons plans only to be on the verge of being stressed out. Cheer up and cheer up your students!

The positive benefits are as follows. A good joke is bound to grab a student's attention whether it's in the start (where he or she is interested to hear the joke) or at the end when the students, who have heard it, are amused by it and as a result there is laughter in the class. This is when you can tell the student has connected with what is going on in the class. The second benefit is that cracking a few jokes makes you appear more of a friend (someone you can approach) and being a serious unsmiling pedagogue makes you nothing but a despicable villain. This doesn't mean you are friendly *only* if you crack jokes, no. You could be friendly as well as being serious. However, it is not going to be the same as you being friendly and at the same time, someone who tells a few jokes. The difference is that you're going to be more approachable in the

former case and less approachable in the latter. Being more approachable is crucial for developing a healthy rapport with your students. The third benefit is rather consequential in nature and may not be directly related to the use of humour in the class. Nonetheless, it is significant. Use of humour makes a class interesting and an interesting class stands out among the other not so interesting ones. Whatever has been taught in that particular class is easily remembered and recalled. In other words, humour employed as a condiment in the lessons not only makes them interesting and easy to absorb but also contributes to the student's process of memorisation.

I do not wish to elaborate more on the importance of humour as I leave the readers to think and decide for themselves. There have been numerous times during my college days when I have been, myself, in no mood to attend classes. However, the sheer humour of my teacher had made me sit through his classes and leave with a cheerful smile on my face.

All in all, however unconventional it may be, humour creates a more conducive atmosphere for learning where the gap between a teacher and student is reduced and there's a free and easy interaction between the teacher and his/her student(s).

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