

**Title:** Is there space for fun in HE learning and teaching?

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**Summary of Session:** This session will present preliminary empirical research findings about student and staff perceptions of fun and its value in HE, taken from a funded student-staff partnership project by an Academic Developer and Sociology Undergraduate.

**Theme:** This presentation relates to the theme of 'staff and student experience' by exploring staff and student perspectives of what constitutes as fun in teaching and learning in HE and its value using a student-staff partnership approach to work towards bridging these understandings.

### Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- Become familiar with key literature and contentious debates regarding notions of fun in HE learning and teaching.
- Reflect on student and staff perspectives of fun in Higher Education learning and teaching and relate this to their own experience and understanding.
- Appraise the literature and research findings about fun in HE and identify potential opportunities to use this to enhance pedagogic practice and student experience.

### Outline

Whilst there is established literature of the importance of play in children's learning and growing acceptance of 'Playful Learning' pedagogy in adult learning (Whitton and Moseley, 2019), there is a distinct research gap of broader notions of 'fun' in HE learning and teaching. Alongside this, there are assumptions that students are having fun in their university learning experience through playful learning and gamification. However, it appears that there is a distinct lack of research that critically examines UG students' and teachers notions of fun in learning and its perceived value. This presentation contributes to this gap by presenting preliminary empirical research findings of data collected from UG students and teachers as to what constitutes as fun in learning and teaching as well as its perceived educational value. The research has adopted a student-staff partnership approach (Healey, Flint and Harrington, 2014) by co-designing and undertaking this study in partnership with the ambition of working together to obtain dual perspectives of student learning experiences and staff teaching pedagogy. We feel that this research is relevant and timely in several ways including considerations of the backdrop of neoliberalism and the marketisation of higher education and the links of fun to notions of 'student satisfaction.' Additionally, the study has the potential to explore how perceptions and experiences of fun in learning and teaching have been influenced by the current pandemic and move to hybrid and online learning. This could provoke stimulating debate regarding what fun could look like in the future of HE and transforming learning experiences.

## Activities and Approximate Timings

- We will commence the presentation with a brief literature review of notions of fun, play and games in the context of HE to contextualise the presentation for delegates and formulate the argument regarding the research gap in this area (10 minutes).
- Following this, we will briefly outline the methodology for further contextualisation for participants and present the preliminary data findings so far from the study (15 minutes).
- We will conclude the session outlining what our tentative results offer so far in debates relating to student experience and staff pedagogical practice, and finally offer delegates the opportunity to respond to the study through some thought-provoking questions based on the study so far such as: Is there a space and place for fun in HE learning and teaching?
- How do student and staff perspectives of fun align? (5 minutes).
- What does fun look like in online learning? Subsequent Q&A will take place for 10 minutes.

## Preparation before the session

N/A

## References and sources

Whitton, N. and Moseley, A. (2019). *Playful Learning: events and activities to engage adults*. London: Routledge.

Healey, M., Flint, A., & Harrington, K. (2014). "Framework for partnership in learning and teaching in higher education." *Higher Education Academy*. Retrieved from [https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/resources/engagement\\_through\\_partnership.pdf](https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/resources/engagement_through_partnership.pdf)

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