

EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

The Magazine of the Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA)



Issue 22.1

March 2021

£10.00 Cover price (UK only)

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Survivor's guilt and COVID: Teaching in higher education in the time of a pandemic

Jo Peat, University of Roehampton

Imposter syndrome has long been talked about in higher education as both a student and staff phenomenon (Parkman, 2016; Wilkinson, 2020). As Simpkin (2020) states, 'This is not surprising given the academy's foundation on the principles of constant critique and scrutiny, and its historical association with upper-class white men.' Imposter syndrome is not, however, the reserve of those not fitting the stereotypical norm; it is experienced by academics from all backgrounds, heritages, ages and genders. As Dave Brodbeck, associate professor at Algoma University explains, 'I objectively know I'm good. Subjectively, I often feel like an imposter. Almost all of us feel that way in my experience' (Parker, 2019). Imposter syndrome does not stop there: in the context of the subject, imposter syndrome includes becoming aware that the ways one has been teaching have been little more than learnt behaviour. As Wisdom points out (personal communication, 2 November 2020), being put in the position of realising that one does not instinctively know how to change this behaviour to suit new conditions puts one in the role of the imposter. Not only is one unable to change one's ways, one does not know in which ways they should be changed. This underlines the vulnerability which accompanies imposter syndrome. Of course, the term 'imposter syndrome' may not adequately describe this phenomenon, being hidebound by previous connotations, but it serves the purpose of being a platform from which to explore these feelings.

We have recently witnessed a new syndrome in higher education: in March 2020 higher education pivoted from on-campus to online. Students who had never before studied remotely and academics who had never before taught in this way were confronted with this new challenge. This was a time for trying out new approaches, biting the bullet to attempt remote delivery and taking pedagogic risks, anathema to many. This trial-and-error phase was supported in the main by an understanding and forgiving student body, who recognised the efforts their lecturers were making to enable them to continue learning. The pivot to online has been hampered by a number of factors: at times technology has failed to live up to expectations, either because of the technology itself or as a result of our lack of expertise in using different platforms and resources in this way; academics have had to rethink how they engage and enthuse students in their learning; relationship-building, central to higher education study, particularly for personal tutors and students who are first-generation to attend university, has had to be re-thought; co-operative learning has had to be developed for a remote environment.

Since the start of the autumn semester many universities have once again pivoted, this time from a completely remote mode of teaching and learning to a blended one. Some on-campus teaching has resumed, in response to student demand and a desire to return to what we perceive as our normality and how the university

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2021 (Vol.22)

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experience ought to be. We could posit that there has been a financial imperative too, in terms of filling accommodation and bringing students to campus to populate cafés and eateries. This return to campus has not been without its challenges. Not only have academics had to continue with their mastery of the online elements of blended learning, the on-campus elements have also had to be re-thought: on-campus learning has to be done in a COVID-secure environment, so no poring over shared documents; no working with shared resources that can be passed between students; students must be seated in a socially-distanced manner; only a limited number of students can be in a room at any one time.

At first glance, the move to blended learning puts all academics in the same boat, albeit acknowledging different levels of expertise and experience in developing and delivering blended learning. Everyone would be working in a similar way, delivering some teaching on campus and other elements online. What was perhaps not foreseen was that not all academics were going to be able to work in this way, and the resulting complexity in terms of perceptions of worth, effort and fairness has been challenging.

Some academics have been unable to return to campus at all. This may be because they are shielding as a result of a personal vulnerability; that they have to shield to protect vulnerable members of their households or that they are actually unwell. Others have chosen not to return because of perceptions that the campus is not COVID-secure; that public transport is risky or just because their teaching can be done equally effectively from home. All of these reasons are valid, particularly in universities that stated at the beginning of the pandemic that there would be no compulsion for staff to return to campus if they felt unable or uncomfortable doing so. Remaining remote is, of course, an uneasy bedfellow with the discourse of supporting the declared wish of students to return to on-campus teaching.

The other main group of academics is the group that has returned to campus. Many of these colleagues have done so because they prefer the teaching they formally engaged in and want to go back to this; others have returned as they feel that learning purely online leads to an impoverished student experience, particularly in universities not set up to teach in this way; others have returned as universities have stipulated that students should have a certain number of hours of on-campus teaching and they feel compelled to comply as there is no absolute reason why they should not be on site; yet others have returned as they are aware that some colleagues are genuinely unable to be there in person, so they are plugging that gap.

There is another group that merits close attention, who may fall into either of the above groups, that is, colleagues who have joined an institution since lockdown in March. Some will still not have set foot on campus and are working in what we could consider a double vacuum: this is largely a new way of teaching for them and they do not have the institutional compass by which to navigate; they are flying blind. Established staff at least know each other so can base their electronic connection on that previous knowledge. New staff have not had the chance to absorb 'the culture of the department', 'the way we do things round here', or to get to know who might be a potential ally. These colleagues may also be on part-time or temporary contracts, with their associated uncertainties. Given that many colleagues with the cultural capital of a particular institution are struggling at present, the pressures and stresses on this new group must not be underestimated.

The different ways of working of these two main groups are not without issue. Although objectively having some academics on campus and some working remotely would seem a pragmatic solution, in limiting the number of people on campus at any one time and allowing those unable to return to continue to teach, there have been perhaps unforeseen consequences. Some colleagues who have returned to campus are fearful of being present but feel they have to be, as there is no 'real' reason for them to remain remote. Some feel they are carrying the burden of engaging students, of being the first port of call for queries, questions and expressions of dissatisfaction, of having to react quickly as a result of changing circumstances, and that they become the 'face' of the programme, the person students will turn to with problems. In programmes with a high level of collegiality,

this is not necessarily problematic; for others, where there are cliques and pre-existing rifts, this is causing resentment.

For those remaining remote there are other concerns. There is the perception that they do not know what is going on at the institution, that they are somehow not being kept abreast of changes and decisions. There is usually no basis in fact for this, but isolation from the day-to-day business of the university, particularly in a time of such uncertainty, can easily lead to insecurity and, at its most extreme, feelings of persecution. Isolation can be injurious to mental wellbeing, particularly when imposed. Colleagues who are working remotely without contact with others are finding the eradication of the home/work boundaries difficult to manage and measure, and feel that they have to be accessible at all hours in order to demonstrate that they are indeed working. Watermeyer *et al.* (2020) report that respondents in their research alluded to 'the collapsing of customary parameters separating work from personal lives and the timelessness of being online in a home setting exacerbating compulsive working'. Fear of redundancy haunts the whole sector, of course, adding to the feeling of unease and vulnerability of all colleagues, but perhaps particularly strongly felt by those who cannot venture on campus to learn more about the reality of the situation. This in turn can result in presenteeism, leading to further poor health, exhaustion and other workplace issues.

A sub-group within this remote group is made up of those who are actually thriving in this remote world. They are enjoying the break from commuting and on-campus teaching and are more relaxed and productive in their home environment. Counter-intuitively this is not always easy to cope with. Colleagues who are remote hear through the grapevine and other formal and informal channels of the issues faced by those physically on campus, the increasing cases of illness and the ever-growing workload. The fact that they are 'OK' is difficult to reconcile with the news from the coal face and this is leading to feelings of what we could term 'survivor's guilt'.

The term 'survivor's guilt' is usually associated with the emotional trauma and distress felt by those who have survived a great disaster. Soldiers who have survived war but lost comrades demonstrate this as do those who have survived terrorist attacks which have killed friends and colleagues. We can certainly see a form of this historic survivor's guilt in our times of COVID, where hundreds of thousands of people have lost their lives and many others have survived. In higher education there is the documented 'survivor's guilt' of first-generation higher education students, who feel guilty about their educational opportunities and achievements when their family members do not have similar access to higher education (Romero *et al.*, 2014).

There is also a more recent phenomenon, included here as a further illustration of survivor's guilt, which has emerged from COVID. It is worth noting that the term 'survivor's guilt' comes laden with existing interpretations and connotations and may not be the most apposite to explain the feelings and emotions engendered by the current crisis in higher education. To clarify, what is meant here is how this phenomenon manifests itself in feelings of guilt in being

able to carry on, largely unaffected in a time when so many cannot. There is a different, potential outcome too, where those going into the workplace feel contemptuous of those staying at home or, perhaps more likely, those who are staying at home fearing that their colleagues may be contemptuous of them (Wisdom, personal communication, 2 November 2020). As Erin Smith (2020) explains, while mental health advocates and support groups are right to remind people who are struggling that it's 'OK not to be OK' during this pandemic, it's important to remember it's 'OK to be OK' too. Kim Felmingham in this same article states that 'feeling guilty about being "OK" during these challenging times isn't just a "perfectly normal" reaction – it's part of our evolutionary programming [...] feeling survivor guilt means you are feeling empathy for others who have been less fortunate. In an evolutionary sense, empathy allows us to form close social bonds and connections with others'.

Whilst this is reassuring in terms of explaining and legitimising our feelings, it does not reduce the survivor's guilt and the knock-on effect for colleagues' mental wellbeing. Traditional collegiality stemming from frequent interaction, informal and formal meetings, water-cooler discussions, is largely absent in our remote world. Where once we could talk over such issues by popping into the office next door or talking over a coffee together, in order to have the opportunity for interaction we have to set up a Zoom, Skype or phone call, thereby making this a planned and, therefore, more formal interaction that lacks spontaneity and the human elements of body language and tone of voice unmediated by technology. A situation that could be quickly resolved face-to-face can take on different dimensions when working remotely, being more decontextualised and unable to be addressed in our tried and tested ways. Collegiality can be quickly eroded in such circumstances, leading to further misunderstandings, stress and rifts. As Wisdom (personal communication, 2 November 2020) suggests, perhaps here concepts of collegiality are being exposed for reconsideration.

Although this is not the place for a lengthy discussion of reconceptualisations of collegiality, it is, perhaps, helpful to consider developments and changes in these COVID times. Some of the aspects we are used to considering as central to the concept are less in evidence and, as demonstrated above, there is a certain precarity with our previous conception of collegiality. It may be that this is nothing new and that academics are just showing their true colours as a 'loose confederation of warring tribes' (Yes, *Prime Minister*, 1986). However, there are positive outcomes in evidence. Currently, colleagues are developing new pedagogies, different ways to interact and meet, to attend performances, to build community with students. This is beginning to extend to new ways of building relationships with colleagues. At the University of Roehampton, for example, an online community of practice has developed, the Remote Learning and Teaching Group, that meets online to consider changes to teaching and students' learning and make recommendations based on experience, expertise and enthusiasm (Peat, 2020). One academic department holds monthly 'Coffee and Croissants' drop-ins, where colleagues get together online to talk over challenges,

issues and opportunities and just to chat; an individual programme holds a daily check-in, a 15-minute morning meeting, to give team members the opportunity to catch up and share concerns. These are initiatives which have started as colleagues become cognisant of the fact that peers may be feeling isolated, insecure and uncertain about change and want to put something in place to support them on an informal basis. Even though these meetings might not be as comfortable, relaxed and spontaneous as previous physical get-togethers, they are certainly providing a forum for support, dialogue and a new form of collegiality. As a direct result of this digital format, these opportunities are available to all colleagues, whether working on campus or online, thus providing a bridge between the two groups. Collegiality is certainly challenged in these 'new' times, but a desire to maintain links, professional dialogue and contact and resourcefulness, is leading to the development of new networks and modes of interaction for colleagues. As our 'new normal' progresses and develops, we are likely to see more of these grassroots initiatives and, perhaps, new forms of collegiality developing and thriving to help us transition into the 'next normal'.

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Student groups: In search of the new normal

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Working in groups, either on projects or in class sessions, is now a common experience for students across further and higher education. Alongside well-established group methods such as problem-based learning (PBL) workshops, we now have several newer approaches which have demonstrated impact on student learning and achievement, such as Team-Based Learning (TBL) and SCALE-UP (McNeil *et al.*, 2019). This was not always so – those of us with long memories can remember vigorous debates about the value of groupwork for students' personal and professional development. While the contribution that groupwork can make is now generally accepted, arguments still persist, usually in the form of debates about how or even whether groupwork should count towards an individual student's mark

profile. We have to leave this specific debate for another day – the purpose of this article is to raise questions about changes in the nature of student collaboration and groupwork which we can expect to see (and which we must be prepared to support) as HE and FE gradually re-emerge from the immediate crisis of the pandemic. These changes have important implications for educational development as they influence curriculum development and delivery.

Groupwork as preparation for 'the world of work'?

One main argument in favour of student groupwork is that it provides useful preparation for the world of work. We agree. New challenges to both public and private enterprises make this argument even more persuasive:

'Pretty much all the most challenging work today is undertaken in groups for a simple reason: problems are too complex for any one person to tackle alone.' (Syed, 2019, page 14)

Syed's book demonstrates how important 'cognitive diversity' is in groups – bringing together people with different perspectives to develop better solutions to complex problems. As the problems confronting organisations become more complex and uncertain, the processes of group collaboration become more important.

The world of work/employment is changing in many ways, and we cannot predict exact outcomes. But some current trends and developments are going to continue through to whatever

we might call the 'new normal'. The most obvious example is the way the pandemic forced organisations to switch over to remote online working, as it did for universities and colleges. This change is not just a temporary fix. Many companies have confirmed they are not going back to their old office system, and many were already moving towards more systematic use of teleworking. Recent reviews highlight: increases in remote-working which are not just reactions to the pandemic; research which suggests increases in both productivity and satisfaction from remote working; and the increasing range of technical developments to support home- and remote-working (Nichols, 2020).

Are we adequately preparing our students to cope with these likely challenges of the post-pandemic work landscape?

The answer to that question at the moment is 'probably not'. And this is not surprising given the speed of change and the enormous pressures that all staff have confronted over the last year. It is difficult to contemplate long-term plans when every day is continuous 'firefighting'. However, as institutions, agencies and commentators are increasingly looking to the post-pandemic future (e.g. Hillman, 2020), student groupwork is an important area in which to explore change and develop insights to cope with various futures. And this has knock-on implications for educational development as we explore below.

Future likely scenarios for teams and groups?

In terms of groups and teamwork, we suggest four main scenarios which our students will confront in their future working lives:

- *Going back to 'old normal' – with some moves to blended or hybrid.* Many workgroups are likely to revert to practices which are close to their pre-pandemic practice, although we expect that they will make more use of collaborative and online technologies. Groups will work face-to-face with all members present (in theory if not always in practice) and with some online support which could range from web access for research to online collaborative documents.

- *Moving to 'Hyflex'.* Many workgroups operate in a way that can be described as Hyflex (hybrid flexible) where members can be present either physically or online and this can change from meeting to meeting. Hyflex teaching has been recommended as one way to 'conquer teaching during a pandemic' (Ferrero, 2020). The main principle is that students can *choose* to be online or onsite on a daily or weekly basis; some members are able or choose to attend face-to-face meetings and others join online, brought into conversations through web-conferencing tools. Evaluation of this teaching method is expanding (e.g. Beatty, 2019). Tutors we have talked to about it have highlighted issues of the skills needed to operate successfully and the need for good technical support and facilities in the classroom.
- *Completely virtual.* All (or nearly all) meetings take place online with minimal (camera on) or no physical face-to-face contact.
- *Fully flexible.* Groups can spend some time considering their objectives and the technologies available to help. They then adopt a systematic and fully flexible approach to take advantage of advantages of both face-to-face and online interaction, using the appropriate mode and tools to suit the task at hand.

What is the problem?

Many, if not most, books/guides/websites on student groupwork that we have reviewed say little or nothing about this variety of teamwork scenarios and the different uses and applications of technology which are implied. This criticism even applies to some recent publications (e.g. Hopkins and Reid, 2018).

Our own student guide is also guilty of this, but that is a function of when it was written and published (Hartley and Dawson, 2010). We are working to produce a revised version for 2021 that explicitly draws upon current examples that make use of technology to support both face-to-face and/or online groupwork. We also want to hear

from anyone with examples/case studies we can publicise through our website (in development).

Students need to be prepared for likely workgroup scenarios, so all our institutions need to make progress in (at least) the following areas:

- Incorporating an appropriate mix of online group activities in all courses with opportunities for reflection on their processes and outcomes. Some practical examples which staff can employ are suggested in the next section below
- Supporting academic staff to develop the skills and insights to manage this range of activities
- Enabling academic developers to develop similar skills and insights and to then become appropriate role models through their inputs to PGCerts and workshops
- Revising support materials for students to reflect both the potential and uncertainties around future patterns and processes of effective groupwork.

There is also an urgent need for further research in this area. Findings which reflect pre-pandemic practice may no longer apply. We must also be suspicious of general models of group behaviour which have little supporting evidence in relation to student groups. A typical example is the forming/storming/norming/performing model of group development. Specific research on student groups often finds very different patterns (Hartley, 2005).

Potential ways forward

To illustrate ways that we can better prepare students (and staff) to cope with the uncertainties of post-pandemic groupwork, we suggest three areas of opportunity:

- Finding a framework
- Scaffolding
- Ensuring inclusivity.

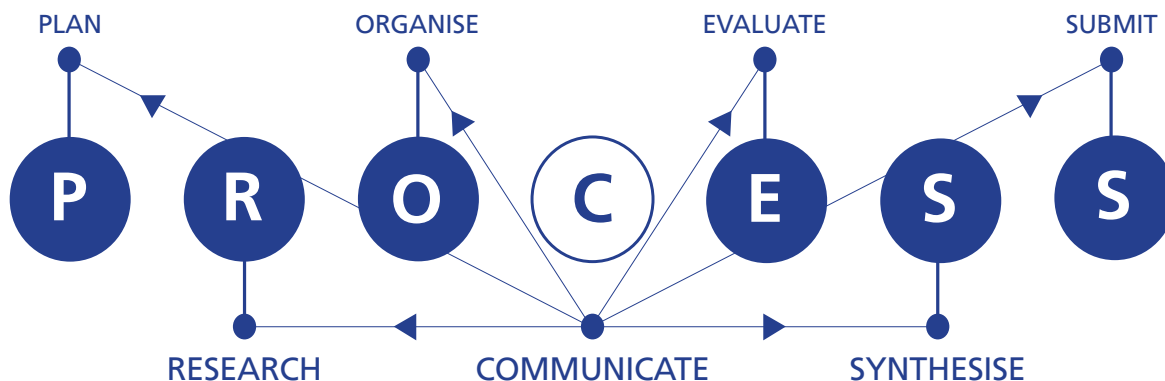
All these areas can be the focus of activities with staff as well as application with student groups.

Finding a framework to support student group development

When you try to understand complex systems like human groups, it helps to have a model or framework which

suggests key components. Our earlier article (Beckingham *et al.*, 2020) suggested the ‘5Cs’ (Nerantzi and Beckingham, 2015). More recently, we have developed a framework

using the ‘proCess’ mnemonic (see Figure 1). Note the emphasis on C for communication! A key factor that can make or break a successful group is how well members are able to communicate.



Communication is fundamental to success in Groupwork

Figure 1 The proCess model

This framework can be used with students in two different ways:

- Students can assess the likely effectiveness of their group against each component, using Table 1
- Groups can identify specific technologies to support their groupwork, as in Table 2.

| Component | What this involves |
|---------------|---|
| Planning | Understanding the task and assessment criteria Agreeing ground-rules Agreeing schedule/deadlines Choosing technologies |
| Researching | Deciding what you need to find out to meet the assessment criteria Using techniques to provide the information you need (e.g. online search or interviews, or both?) |
| Organising | Making a good start – having a productive first meeting Agreeing group roles Organising meetings Making decisions |
| Communicating | Establishing positive relationships Understanding what happens in the group Reviewing and revising ground-rules Dealing with conflict |
| Evaluating | Monitoring how you are doing, both in terms of the task and relationships |
| Synthesising | Bringing all the information together so your completed ‘product’ presents a coherent picture Making sure every member of the group has gained maximum benefit from the work |
| Submission | Making sure your final work meets all assessment criteria Checking your work to achieve the highest grade possible |

Table 1 The proCess model

Using the proCess model, we can identify tools to use at different stages of a group project/activity.

| <i>Component</i> | <i>Technologies to consider</i> |
|------------------|--|
| Planning | Online meetings – MS Teams, Zoom, Blackboard Collaborate |
| Researching | Collaborative bibliography – RefWorks |
| Organising | Keeping in touch (chat apps) – Discord, WhatsApp, Snapchat Agreeing meeting dates – Doodle Shared workspace – Google Drive, Office 365 |
| Communicating | Any of the above or below that meet the communication need |
| Evaluating | To do lists – MS To Do, Google Tasks, Google Keep, Todoist, Trello |
| Synthesising | Collaborative documents/presentations with version control – Google Drive, Office 365 |
| Submission | Proofreading – spellcheck, Turnitin |

Table 2 Potential technologies

Scaffolding groupwork

Many students find groupwork challenging to start with. Providing opportunities for them to experience informal activities and formative tasks can help build clearer expectations of what is required. Whilst most are conversant with video-chat and social-networking tools to communicate with friends and family, it became apparent during Covid and the shift to online learning that students needed guidance and encouragement to interact in what to many were new digital spaces.

Some useful activities:

- *Ground-rules* – Ask each group to come up with their own set of rules they want to adopt. Then ask one person from each group to share these with the class. Whilst there may be overlaps, there is often something one group can learn from another.
- *Use of emoticons* – Encouraging the use of the tools that can display emotions is important. Online it is much harder to see the visual cues we take for granted when face to face. This is especially important where students choose not to turn on their camera. Running through the various options that are available is helpful.
- *Breakout rooms* – Plan some informal activities or have a practice-run before sending students into a breakout room. Students who don't know each other can find this activity initially

quite intimidating. Show them how they can use the chat, turn on their mics and camera.

- *Rotating team roles* – Taking turns to take the role of leader can help students to take responsibility for motivating their group. This could also be applied to other roles e.g. spokesperson, notetaker.
- *Reflection* – Asking students to record a 1-2 minute video about how they feel their groupwork is going. This could include prompts such as: what did they enjoy, what didn't work so well, what would they do differently.

Ensuring groupwork is inclusive

Groupwork can help students to forge relationships, connect with peers outside of their immediate friendship groups, and develop valuable skills.

However, for some students it can present additional barriers and anxiety. This can be due to several factors. Our student population is diverse and includes many under-represented groups. When thinking about diversity we need to consider international students and those with a disclosed/undisclosed disability, but also diversity because of age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, first generation, socio-economic status, commuter, carer responsibilities. When students undertake groupwork it is not always evident to their peers how their individual experience, culture or situation can present barriers and make them feel isolated.

Pelech *et al.* (2017) acknowledge the complexities of individual identity and go on to say that 'in order for all members to be treated equally their individuality must be accepted and respected'. Frykedal and Chiriack (2018) recommend that 'participation as inclusion requires respectful, mutual relationships in the groups and active listening to each other's statements'. Developing positive relationships with both peers and members of staff are cited as supportive to successful groupwork learning. Disrupting friendship circles can have an adverse effect (Gibson *et al.*, 2016).

The number of students with a known disability has increased by 36% since 2014/15. In 2018/19, 308,000 higher education students said that they had a disability of some kind, representing 6.2% of all home students. Much of this increase has been in those reporting a mental health condition. McPherson *et al.* (2019) highlight that students with disabilities benefit from advance information which not only goes some way to reduce anxiety, but also gives them time to arrange for any support needed to enable them to take part in groupwork activities.

Fuller *et al.* (2007) encourage educators to consider the social model of disability where the focus is on the barriers rather than on an individual's impairment. Building considerations of inclusivity and accessibility into curriculum design is also recommended practice from the Office for Students. Assistive technology can benefit all students, e.g.

captions, recording assessment briefs, collaborative documents (Hubble and Bolton, 2020).

With or without a continued impact from the pandemic, one likely constant in HE will be a trend towards more heterogeneous cohorts and a desire from both employers and governments for graduates who are capable of working effectively in diverse groups. Modern graduates are expected to be able to navigate complex cultural, demographic and political landscapes without causing upset, and ensure smooth, professional communication even when personal values and lived

experiences vary quite significantly within the same working group.

The UNESCO report (2013) highlights a number of key capacities (developed by Deardoff) that aid intercultural competence: respect for others, an awareness of self-identify, seeing from others’ perspectives, listening, adaptation, relationship-building and cultural humility.

These factors, though focused on intercultural fluency, have practical utility in considering diversity more generally. They can provide another useful framework to prepare students

for groupwork and to construct a practical foundation for building an inclusive learning space that respects differences in culture, gender/sex, sexuality, age, race, disability and religion. Preparatory work could, for example, include case study analysis of problematic intra-group interactions where difference might be a significant factor; or involve a series of short discussions using Deardoff’s capacities as a reference tool. Following these activities, students could then develop/construct their ground-rules with these key factors in mind. Table 3 offers suggestions for possible discussion prompts.

| Key capacity | Discussion question(s) |
|-----------------------|---|
| Respect for others | Can you think of someone you admire and why you admire that person? Do you have to agree with/like someone to work effectively with them? |
| Self-awareness | Make a list of some categories/groups that you belong to – try to think big (nationality, gender) and small (local groups). What makes you unique? |
| Others’ perspectives | Is it hard to see something from someone else’s point of view? Can you think of some examples to explain your answer? |
| Listening | What is listening and how do you know someone is? What are barriers to listening? |
| Adaptation | Do you behave differently in different circumstances? Why? |
| Relationship-building | Is it easier to communicate with someone you know? Why? |
| Cultural humility | What are the world’s most popular types/dishes of food? Does your favourite feature? Is your favourite the same as the ‘national dish’ of your country? |

Table 3 Possible discussion prompts

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Active, inclusive and immersive: Using Course Design Intensives with course teams to rethink the curriculum across an institution

Andrew Middleton, Simon Pratt-Adams and Julian Priddle, Anglia Ruskin University

Introduction

A change in Education Strategy and the introduction of the Active Curriculum Framework at Anglia Ruskin University in 2019 demanded a suitable development response capable of resetting the learning paradigm in all undergraduate courses. In this article, we discuss the change programme we led as academic developers from the University's central educational development unit, Anglia Learning and Teaching. The Course Design Intensive model (Benfield, 2008) provided us with a sound starting point. We discuss how we adapted it to meet the different contexts in the 33 CDI events we led and how we have continued to develop and apply it to new development challenges and opportunities.

The ARU context

Anglia Ruskin had proposed significant changes to curriculum design in its current Education Strategy. The development of the Active Curriculum Framework created a tool to enable these changes to be made. It committed the University to the wholesale adoption of active learning, alongside commitments to integrating employability and sustainability within the taught curriculum. The framework also established inclusivity, and the development of academic literacies and independent learning as outcomes of the learning experience. Adoption of this framework by all undergraduate courses necessitated a radical approach to curriculum enhancement.

The Course Design Intensive

Evaluation of Course Design Intensives (CDIs) highlights the fantastic opportunity they provide as time is taken away from day-to-day business to work with like-minded colleagues in a focused way (Benfield, 2008). CDIs have been used for some time across the sector for curriculum enhancement at scale. They are holistic development environments well

suited for developing common teaching philosophies. They also allow participants to look beyond knowledge-based outcomes towards the development of students' personal and professional dispositions. Dempster *et al.* (2012) argue:

'Curriculum development approaches should enable the sharing of practice and some level of enactment and review of innovative design ideas. Team-based curriculum development approaches are more likely than individually oriented ones to achieve such aims.' (p.136)

Typically, CDIs are run by a skilled facilitator external to the course team. They take the form of immersive development events bookended by pre-engagement and post-event meetings which provide further support for the course teams as they seek approval. In the pre-engagement phase, time is used to clarify with course teams what the method involves and to initiate diagnostic activities that help to focus the minds of course team members, while furnishing the CDI facilitator with details about the team, their context, and capabilities.

CDIs are team-based immersive design workshops which are usually run over two non-consecutive days. Facilitators design the events so that they bring several course teams together and this affords the benefits of a multidisciplinary development environment. While course teams have the rare opportunity to work as one on their actual design challenges for much of the time, working in the same place as other course teams increases the authenticity of the event by creating an unusual form of public exposure that fosters their sense of common identity.

Course teams are asked to share their practice and thinking with others as they are taken through design challenges while,

at the same time, they are collectively exposed to the other experiences and alternative ways of thinking in the room. In this way, course teams serve as inspirational and critical friends to each other. As the teams consider new approaches to delivering their course, the CDI format allows serendipitous connections to be made within and across teams, as well as with the developers leading the design event.

Course Design Intensives at Anglia Ruskin University

ARU’s principle-based Active Curriculum Framework enables course teams to design innovative, context-specific curricula in response to the uncertainties and the ‘supercomplexity’ affecting higher education (Barnett, 2000).

Although the Active Curriculum is ultimately delivered at a module level, our use of the CDI format has ensured that the development of good practice is considered, consistent and coherent, so that it results in a strategic course-focused design. In this way, connections made through the design activity are inherently student-centred.

The framework’s principles have allowed us to engage participants in exploring ways of transforming the learning experience. Its eight dimensions set out the scope for development and establish the design challenge for teams:

- Students as partners/co-creators
- Technology-enhanced learning and teaching
- Intellectually stimulating and challenging
- Creative and applied learning
- Inspiring research and inquiry-based education
- Authentic and engaging assessment
- Co- and extra-curricular learning
- Real world and work opportunities.

In response to ARU’s strategic ambition, we adapted the CDI method, ensuring it worked well as a process for all undergraduate course contexts. CDIs create an active and supportive development space; however, it is critical to ensure all participants engage positively as co-creators. Our engagement strategy began before the first workshop activity by running a diagnostic assessment activity with each course team.

Diagnostic

Our aim was to ensure that the method, as well as the content covered in each CDI event, was optimised for each course’s context. To achieve this, the lead developer for each CDI met with the course team prior to their event to explain the method and clarify expectations for their engagement in it.

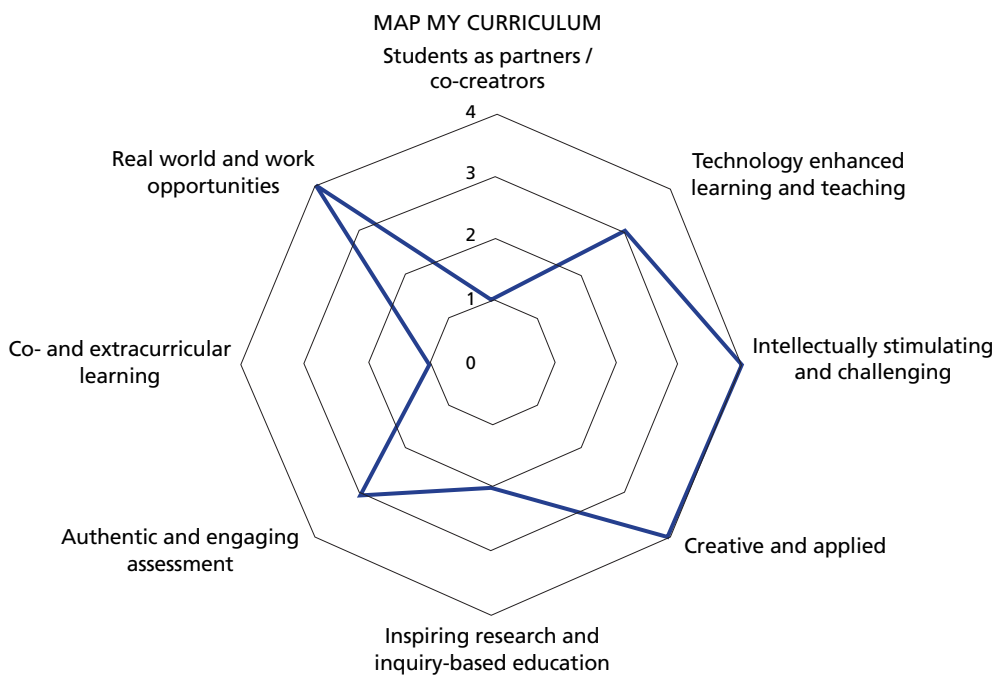


Figure 1 Diagnostic radar diagram

Following this initiation meeting, course teams were asked to undertake a diagnostic activity in which they had to rate their capabilities against the eight strategic dimensions of the Active Curriculum Framework. The diagnostic took the form of a spreadsheet matrix incorporating a four-point scale of ‘Beginning’, ‘Developing’, ‘Developed’, and ‘Outstanding’. Using the scale, along with brief descriptions for each criterion, teams were asked to discuss and describe their current confidence against each dimension. This generated a self-assessment report for the team which included the production of a radar diagram (see Figure 1).

The diagram made visible areas needing improvement. Using a diagnostic as the first team activity proved to be an effective way of bringing team members on board, while the report helped us, as facilitators, to understand their strengths and identify development priorities.

Excellent student-centred practices were evident in most courses, and while we were fairly sure that evidence of strengths was often a reflection of exceptional practices within the team, our aim was to create a positive development environment to establish these as the norm. CDIs, like active

learning itself, are inherently conversational and it was imperative that we expanded upon the best of practices. Rather than ignore these strengths to focus exclusively on areas of general weakness, we set about building team confidence by celebrating strengths and using them to benchmark their success in other areas.

In the CDI events, everything we did needed to model and demonstrate the value of good active, inclusive and collaborative practice. We knew that our own methods, as developers, would be scrutinised and, along with the tools and activities we devised, our facilitation of focused design conversations had to be impeccable.

Alternative CDI models

Three distinct approaches shaped the planning, implementation, and delivery of CDIs across the institution:

- *Full CDI*: two non-consecutive whole-day workshops with developmental work in the intervening period (this follows the format for the original CDI at Oxford Brookes described by Benfield (2008)). Multiple course teams are able to participate in the same CDI event
- *'CDI-lite'*: where the faculty was confident in the course team's ability and methods, a single three-hour workshop was undertaken. This has some similarities with the University College London ABC hands-on curriculum workshop (Young and Perovic, 2016)
- *Bespoke approaches*: where course teams are already undertaking curriculum enhancement, including involving professional bodies in preparation for (re) accreditation, CDI-type interventions are incorporated as and when needed.

In all modes, the initial focus was on the 'big ideas' or high-level thinking about the course, sometimes referred to as the 'backward design' approach (Mihans *et al.*, 2008; Bovill *et al.*, 2011). An over-reliance on theory was avoided to allow course teams to focus on practice and pragmatic developments rather than complexities.

Stakeholder engagement in the CDI campaign

The main CDI 'campaign' was mostly carried out over a period of about six months, although a few courses worked outside that window.

Importantly, rather than a top-down, managerial model, the initiative took a collaborative, whole team approach (Ellis *et al.*, 2015). It demonstrated how course design is best when it is properly integrative and collaborative, rather than an isolated, individualistic task (Khan and Law, 2015), echoing aspects of Lave and Wenger's (1991) Community of Practice in which a co-operative discourse becomes mutually beneficial (Stewart *et al.*, 2016). Such an approach promotes authentic participation through conversations and open discussions. Approximately 400 people took part in the 33 CDIs, with some people being involved in more than one event.

Full engagement of the entire course team and the investment of time during the workshops was crucial for the success of the CDIs (Brown Wilson and Slade, 2019). When

the extended course team attended for the duration, the CDIs created a space for deep and meaningful discussion. However, the degree of ownership over the CDIs varied across all faculties, with greatest engagement evident in workshops where the faculty staff had worked closely with the developers to implement their own bespoke versions of the CDI.

In our approach, as with Benfield (2008), we sought to involve multiple course teams working alongside each other in each event to gain the benefits of exchange and serendipity. For each team, we also sought to involve a range of associate stakeholders.

There were typically three academic developers per workshop, from a pool of six, who facilitated and supported the process. As Arthur (2016) points out, the role of the academic developer varies according to the specific community of practice. Their role includes facilitation, building networks, as well as providing expertise for each of the dimensions.

Working as a team, we shared our experience as we supported the programme of workshops, developed new resources, and deployed new approaches as we encountered new situations. We developed a rapport and occasionally, in session, we would huddle to assess and redirect proceedings to ensure that useful detours were followed, and questions and dilemmas were dealt with *in situ* where possible.

Associate CDI participants bring their own expertise, perspectives and energy and their presence can help to heighten the principle of public exposure mentioned earlier and help to set expectations for the course team to perform. In addition to the CDI facilitators, other people with pedagogic expertise frequently attended the CDI events including faculty Academic Leads for Employability, faculty Directors of LTA, and learning technologists. We also encouraged the course teams to invite colleagues from professional services, including Academic Registry, the Library and Employability Services, as well as inviting Students' Union representatives, current students, alumni, employers, and representatives from professional bodies.

In some cases, the associate guests outnumbered the course team members. This became a problem, however, because the CDIs were most effective when everyone in the room was on task, all the time. Over time, we learnt that we needed to limit the number of guests to manage the situation and ensure course team members were properly challenged and given the space they needed. Where there were too many associates, the intensity in the room could be lost due to the off-task conversations happening around its perimeters.

A key strategic element of the ARU approach to CDIs was to involve student representatives throughout the developmental process, and to work with the support of the Students' Union. The student voice is often disregarded or considered subordinate in the pedagogical planning and design process with involvement normally in quality assurance processes, or limited to individualised feedback (Carey, 2013; Bovill *et al.*, 2016). There is a danger that student participation is viewed as merely 'paying lip-service' rather than part of a genuine dialogue, where the student voice is both heard and valued

in the co-design of curricula (Bovill *et al.*, 2011; Carey, 2013; Bovill, 2014).

At its best, the CDI process represented a strong example of the institution working in partnership with students as serious agents readily accepting responsibility for improving the learning experience. Planning the CDIs to accommodate student involvement was difficult, however, and levels of participation varied. Nonetheless, when students did attend, they not only made meaningful contributions that would have been otherwise overlooked, their contributions carried weight and brought out the best in the academics who were keen to hear feedback and take ideas on board.

In one event a widely diverse group of students took part. The mix of age, ethnicity, and mode of study influenced how the key aims of the CDI could be discussed. Consideration of assessment planning, timetables, independent learning, and student engagement benefited from the diversity of their experiences. Although most student participants were undergraduates, one postgraduate student – previously an undergraduate on the course – became an excellent sounding board for the course team.

Design activities

In the typical two-day model, CDIs involved the course teams working through a set of structured collaborative activities. As facilitators, we used a range of design devices, sometimes visual and playful and sometimes detailed and descriptive, to help the course teams consider their course from various perspectives. On Day 1, teams developed: a course rationale; a ‘whole student profile’; a collective re-working of their course learning outcomes; alternative course structures to consider inter-module connectivity and student journeys; and a course assessment strategy. Following this, with space between events designed in for reflection, Day 2 involved the course teams considering and making commitments to: detailed modular structures; specific learning, teaching and assessment approaches; and the building of learning activities and resourcing.

Approval

All undergraduate courses that took part in the CDI workshops went through the University course (re-)approval process. This outcome was a tangible end goal for course teams, although approval criteria had not been published prior to the CDI campaign.

It was important for the University to ensure the approval criteria and the Active Curriculum Framework were aligned. Consequently, as CDI facilitators and developers, we worked with the Academic Registry to co-design the institutional approval criteria. Subsequently, the criteria have been adopted as the standard institutional guidance.

Moving forward – From CDIs to CEIs

In 2020, following the approval of courses, the Anglia Learning and Teaching team was again asked to devise a University-wide curriculum development programme. Building upon the CDIs, our challenge this time was to facilitate a series of six deeper conversations amongst course team members around priority University enhancement themes through a programme of Course Enhancement

Intensives (CEIs).

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic meant our plans for the CEIs had to be revised and we moved the whole development programme online at short notice. We were acutely aware that a substantial CPD programme was the last thing many academic staff wanted given their own immediate needs to get off campus. We had to be sensitive, realistic, and useful. It was no longer appropriate to deliver day-long sessions and we were forced to rethink what was important in our ‘intensive’ course-focused approach. Our approach was to facilitate course team conversations through simple online stimulus activities, underpinned by rich multimedia resource bases.

The programme targeted all academic staff, many of whom had minimal experience of teaching online. We used Microsoft Teams, which was new to everyone, and academic colleagues were keen to experience it as a learning environment for the first time. Again, it was critical that we modelled excellent practice as we had done with the CDIs.

While we adopted a flipped approach, we knew that not everyone would have engaged with the pre-learning materials. However, by using a light-touch conversational method, we were able to elicit informed thinking and expand upon this. Our stimulus activities were kept simple: chat-based word generation games, and prioritisation, sorting, and categorisation activities, for example, were enough to develop team-wide curiosity around the topics and encourage participation. Co-creation activities in collaborative Word documents proved effective and were valued as strategies academic participants could reuse in their own online teaching.

The use of intense, accessible and straightforward stimulus activities, underpinned by online resources, suggests that the CEIs offer a way forward for targeting course teams in the future.

Conclusion

Still in blended mode, the developer team is now involved in facilitating the creation of a whole new curriculum for the development of the University’s ARU Peterborough initiative. We have just over three months to take 15 courses through to approval, half of which are clean-slate developments. Again, this has focused our minds on the critical dimensions of the CDI approach:

- Create design intensity through the facilitation of rich design conversations
- Use stimulus activities to work with multi-stakeholder teams
- Define student and graduate profiles and plot out their anticipated learning journey as a starting point for design
- Take a principle-based and evidence-informed approach to ensure design activities are accessible, credible, confident, imaginative, and useful.

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Developing online learning through the pandemic: Digitally enabled approaches to student and staff peer support within a distributed university

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As the sudden impact of COVID-19 was upon us in March 2020, and the education sector as a whole went into emergency contingencies including the 'pivot to online', the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) was met with a number of specific challenges. Some, including supporting the initial move to fully online learning and teaching, were challenges we shared in common with almost every other university, college and school in the sector. Others were related to our own

context. One key challenge included our staff and students being part-way through the first year of using a new Virtual Learning Environment. Another significant challenge lay in finding ways to support teaching staff to provide both a consistency in online student support provision, as well as meeting their own specific learning and teaching needs, in a university that comprises multiple partner institutions spread throughout an expansive geographic area.

In this article, which complements a webinar for the SEDA Winter Special held in December 2020, we explore a number of the digitally-enabled approaches to student and staff peer support that we introduced as a means to address these challenges. This includes implementing an approach to online mentoring circles that has proven to be valuable in facilitating distance peer-peer support amongst staff who are seeking to further develop their online educational practices.

A distributed and networked context in a time of change

UHI is a geographically and digitally distributed university that is the UK's only tertiary university, providing access to further and higher education across a region approximately the size of Belgium. The university comprises thirteen Academic Partners, and offers programmes of study through a range of modes that includes site-specific delivery (e.g. marine science in Oban, archaeology in Orkney), online delivery (increasing at postgraduate level), and networked delivery. The university's model of networked delivery is particularly important, and allows our higher education students to undertake their studies from home, their nearest campus, or one of the university's seventy-plus regional study centres, regardless of where within the UHI network their programme is being delivered from and regardless of where within the Highlands and Islands they themselves reside.

Blended learning and teaching

approaches are central to educational practice at the university and are supported through a combination of synchronous online learning and teaching, face-to-face and 'in the field' activities, and asynchronous and synchronous engagement through the university's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), Brightspace. The university moved to Brightspace in the academic year 2019/20. Staff and students were part-way through the first year of using, and still becoming accustomed to, the new VLE, when the pandemic necessitated the rapid move to fully online learning and teaching. The university was also in the process of transitioning from one particular set of synchronous technologies for learning and teaching to another. In combination, these factors naturally had important implications concerning the extent to which the collective use of the VLE, and associated technologies for learning and teaching, was at a robust enough stage of development across all levels and areas of the curriculum to form a basis for responding to COVID.

A values-based approach to enhancement and technology-enhanced learning

Brightspace was chosen as the university's new VLE primarily on the extent to which it aligned with and would enable the further implementation of the university's Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy. The strategy was designed through consultation and collaboration with staff and students across the Academic Partners that comprise the university, to provide a 'common language' for how good practice in learning and teaching is developed, shared and recognised across the university.

At the centre of the strategy are twelve Learning and Teaching Enhancement Values (Figure 1). The strategy and the values, which are linked to illustrative exemplars of how they may be used in practice, are now well embedded in programme design and approval processes and in professional



Figure 1 Learning and Teaching Enhancement Values

development and recognition provision.

To support the move to the new VLE, the university developed a set of 'Benchmarks for the Use of Technology in Learning and Teaching'. Drawing upon evidence-based examples and an established, widely used framework for designing technology-enhanced learning, the benchmarks defined three 'categories' of usage for the new VLE

and associated technologies. These ranged from 'Threshold' through to 'Developed' and 'Exemplar'. The Threshold definition was based on establishing within online unit and module spaces an 'Active and creative use of technology', thus embedding that particular value from the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy. Similarly, the Developed and Exemplar

dimensions of the benchmarks were predicated on the further embedding of the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Values in technology-enhanced learning and teaching, rather than being defined by the type, number or range of VLE features or other technologies being used.

The university had undertaken initial work, largely through the Educational

Development Unit and Learning and Teaching Academy, to support staff in transitioning to the new VLE to at least implement the requirements for the Threshold dimension of the benchmarks. The Threshold dimension combined the aforementioned focus on active and creative use of technology with the standard course information and materials that students would reasonably expect to find online. However, as characterised by the overall ethos of the benchmarks, which are intended as developmental not prescriptive, staff had full autonomy over what exactly they would choose to implement by way of active and creative use of technology. This did, however, mean that learning and teaching practice using the new VLE was still in maturation when COVID-19 struck.

COVID-19 readiness and framing an immediate response

The depth of experience in networked and blended learning delivery at the university, which has been a hallmark of practice and a critical enabler for the education the university provides across the region, contributed to UHI having existing capacity to respond to COVID-19 and the ‘pivot to online’ in certain key respects. This included the existing familiarity that all staff and the vast majority of students have in using synchronous technologies (such as videoconferencing and virtual classroom platforms) to engage with one another. It also included the familiarity of studying at a distance from peers and tutors, which would apply to many students on networked programmes (who may be individuals or in small cohorts on a different campus to where their programme is delivered from).

With the above in mind, the leap to be made in moving from blended and particularly networked delivery to fully online learning may have been a shorter one, in limited respects, for some continuing UHI students in comparison to peers at other universities. However,

it was still the case that very few of our continuing or new students for 2020/21 had self-selected to study fully online, the main exception being continuing and new distance learners for a small number of online postgraduate programmes. The challenges of needing to switch to studying fully online in March 2020, from home and with no prospect of campus attendance or face-to-face engagement with at least some peers, were very significant then – as they were for students new to the university in September 2020, the vast majority of whom, at the time of writing, remain studying fully online.

In a similar vein to the student body, very few staff were used to teaching fully online as opposed to a blended or networked mode of delivery that featured varying but still significant levels of campus-based or ‘in the field’ activity. The main exception here being those staff who teach on fully online programmes, although much of this teaching would normally be undertaken from on-campus.

Taking all of this into consideration, the preoccupation in framing an immediate response to supporting staff and students to make the rapid transition online was to provide a clear basis and basic set of resources for establishing a consistency in online learning and student support within units and modules, and one which could be very easily implemented.

Supporting the student transition to online learning

To support the student transition to online learning, colleagues from the university’s Educational Development Unit and Learning and Teaching Academy, which work closely together in several key areas, began to establish contingency guidelines including a set of ‘Recommended Activities’ that:

- Could be implemented easily

across all unit and module spaces in the VLE

- Gave balanced and blended opportunities to engage synchronously and asynchronously, both formally and informally, with a focus on effective ‘cohort’ support
- Would support and make transparent the work students were doing to begin self-organising in their own online spaces outside the VLE (recognising that the VLE itself is usually based on a modular structure that does not easily allow students to self-organise online).

The ‘Recommended Activities’ that were subsequently devised within the Learning and Teaching Academy emphasised ‘simple but effective’ online interventions that included:

- Creating a ‘Questions Forum’ discussion board for students to ask general questions related to their studies, assignments or online contingency arrangements, and for which answers from the tutor would be there for the whole cohort to see
- Creating a discussion board titled ‘Social Announcements’, which students could use to communicate with one another, and to provide peers with information about other online spaces where they had begun congregating to support each other socially in lockdown
- Establishing at least one Virtual Office Hours drop-in session for students each week, using whichever university-endorsed synchronous technology the tutor was comfortable using.

For each of these activities, we produced simple guidance including re-purposable text that could be easily tailored by staff to establish the activity online, within the VLE (Figure 2).

Social Announcements

Create a discussion board titled ‘Social Announcements’ and which students can use to communicate with one another. We suggest using a variation on the text below as the introductory message to the Social Announcements discussion board.

During the period when our teaching and learning activities will be online, please use the Social Announcements discussion board to share social announcements or updates with your fellow students. This could include general social discussion, but please also post announcements relating to the social media spaces or platforms (e.g. Facebook groups, WhatsApp) where you can be found or are gathering while teaching and learning is taking place online.

Figure 2 Re-purposable text for the Social Announcements discussion board

Digitally-distributed approaches to educational and professional development

Given the digitally and geographically distributed nature of UHI, the university's approaches to educational and professional development for academics and other educational practitioners have also been configured for blended, networked and online engagement. Prior to COVID-19 the university, primarily through the Learning and Teaching Academy, had a well-established programme of online webinars and symposia, covering a wide range of topics and issues in learning and teaching, and educational scholarship and research. Opportunities for colleagues to meaningfully engage online in predominantly face-to-face events, including the Learning and Teaching Conference, have also been offered as standard. Traditional approaches to engage staff in professional development and mentoring opportunities, which typically involve face-to-face facilitated sessions and meetings, are not possible to offer in an equitable or cost-effective way within geographically and digitally distributed universities such as UHI. It is therefore important that staff are able to access professional development and mentoring opportunities from their own campus, college or home, and from a range of devices including laptops, tablets and phones.

When designing professional development and mentoring programmes for geographically dispersed practitioners, educational developers need to consider the technologies and approaches that will help to develop a sense of community, common goal, reflection, and peer interaction (Campbell, 2016), and which do not put participants at a disadvantage because they are not attending in person. Furthermore, colleagues engaging in professional development are often time-poor, as they certainly were in making the rapid move to fully online teaching, and so, using technology and approaches that are familiar and accessible to all participants is critically important, as is providing professional development opportunities that enhance and develop practice through the use of technologies that staff can or should be using in

their own teaching. In terms of online professional development at UHI, this has included using technologies such as Skype for Business, Microsoft Teams and Webex Teams to offer synchronous participation in a range of the aforementioned activities, and including an online 'Digital Education Week' in early 2018 that introduced the forthcoming new VLE and provided opportunities to explore other current and emerging technologies being used for learning and teaching at the university.

The university also harnesses a range of technologies to enable distributed engagement in our institution's Advance HE professional recognition scheme and in the University Mentoring Scheme. While mentoring facilitated online is perhaps less spontaneous than where it is enabled face-to-face, it can also be more focused and driven. As Homitz and Berge (2008) observe, the 'distance factor often allows participants to express themselves more freely than in face-to-face communication. This often provides a more honest, open, and reflective learning environment where... mentoring pairs can explore their values, feelings, and objectives more freely' (p. 330).

COVID-19 and identifying the professional development gap

When COVID-19 hit, the university very quickly went into lockdown, teaching moved online and there was a great deal of administrative, logistical and other information being sent through the university's communication channels to offer guidance and support on a range of matters.

Recognising the potential for information overload, and for colleagues to potentially feel overwhelmed, the Learning and Teaching Academy considered the ways in which it could support colleagues effectively in the initial weeks of COVID-19. The initial guidance and 'Recommended Activities' described above, and other information relating to matters including migrating large-group teaching online, had successfully been offered by the Educational Development Unit and the Learning and Teaching Academy. In addition, an initial series of themed webinars and drop-in Q&A sessions relating to moving online were positively received.

However, in working with colleagues in the initial move to online teaching and learning, we recognised that there may be benefits and value in establishing a confidential space that was informal but developmental, where colleagues could discuss in a group the challenges they personally were facing, and that went beyond either an information or a Q&A session. The idea of 'mentoring circles' to support colleagues was put forward. Furthermore, the idea of the 'coffee' meeting to encourage colleagues to consider attending the mentoring circle meetings as time for themselves, and a time that would be informal and discursive, was seen as another important dimension of support. Darwin and Palmer (2009) undertook an evaluation of mentoring circles at the University of Adelaide and found participants spoke of the benefits, including the mitigation of loneliness and the 'need for activities such as this as departmental tea rooms have been removed where once these discussions could have taken place'. As mentioned by one participant in their study, and particularly pertinent to moving to online teaching in the context of a distributed university, a key benefit was 'knowing you were not alone' (p. 132).

Designing and implementing an online approach to mentoring circles

Within higher education institutions mentoring has become an established and efficient approach to harnessing the experience and expertise of staff through mentoring colleagues, usually in a one-to-one partnership, for professional development, professional recognition, supporting the development of early career/and under-represented groups, and the enhancement of academic practice and research. The role of the mentor is considered to be both skills based and psychosocial, through providing professional development support and offering encouragement, confidence, emotional and listening support (Allen *et al.*, 2004). A meta-synthesis review of mentoring research (Castanheira, 2016) found that benefits to taking part in mentoring for teachers, principals and higher education staff included increased networking and problem-solving skills, job satisfaction, greater organisational awareness and increased self-confidence.

The UHI's University Mentoring Scheme, in its current form, has been operating since October 2017. The scheme has four mentoring strands in the areas of Professional Recognition, Learning and Teaching Enhancement, Scholarship Development, and Research. Prior to the mentoring circles being offered at the onset of COVID-19, mentoring had been carried out through one-to-one partnerships rather than in small groups. Group mentoring in Higher Education is relatively rare and the research literature limited in scope and guidance.

A call for mentors to support the online mentoring circles was circulated through both the mentoring scheme membership and to colleagues who held HEA Fellowship and so had been engaged in mentoring as a mentee and/or mentor through the universities' Advance HE scheme. Three topics were identified as the focus of the first mentoring circles, based on the experience that the mentors who volunteered had in online learning and teaching. These comprised: (i) connecting our learners by building social and emotional presence; (ii) designing activities for active and interactive online learning; and (iii) formative and summative coursework and assessment in Brightspace. There were two or three mentors per topic and participant numbers were kept below ten so that all participants had the opportunity to contribute

to the discussion and explore their own practice as 'mentees'. The aforementioned Darwin and Palmer study (2009) found that mentoring circle groups of between eight and thirteen were manageable and that cross-disciplinary participation was beneficial. Mentors for the UHI online mentoring circles saw colleagues from six of the university's Academic Partners, and from subject areas including applied music, education, engineering, business, and history, with mentee participants from across the multiple colleges and subject disciplines.

Recognising that colleagues were particularly time-poor during the pandemic, the mentoring circle meetings were designed to be one hour in length with two meetings per topic to encourage colleagues to develop, implement and report back on enhancements to their online practice. Prior to the first meeting it was expected that mentees would spend a few minutes reading the 'Meet our Mentors' section on the mentoring circle webpages. Then, in the first meeting for each topic, mentors would spend 5-10 minutes providing an overview of their experience before the session was opened to group discussion, with that discussion led by the participants themselves.

Within UHI, colleagues who are engaged in professional development and mentoring activities are supported to become familiar with the

synchronous technologies they will use in mentoring through: (i) their own engagement in institutional technologies used in learning and teaching; (ii) through having been mentored online themselves (for mentors); and (iii) through having attended mentoring briefing and CPD sessions. This approach supports capacity building for delivering and supporting professional development and mentoring opportunities through the synchronous and other technologies at the university. It is a rationale that was applied to the design of the initial mentoring circles in the hope and anticipation that some of the initial mentees would return as mentors, thereby increasing capacity in mentoring circles to respond to the continued challenges of teaching and supporting students online within, through and beyond the pandemic.

The mentoring circles were facilitated by the colleagues who lead each of the aforementioned strands in the University Mentoring Scheme, to provide an experienced steer in encouraging contributions from all participants, summarising main themes and identifying actions for mentees to take forward into their own practice and subsequently report back on at the second meeting. Once all the mentoring meetings had finished, a short survey was sent to all mentors and participants, with the evaluative feedback received very positive in relation to approach and format (Figure 3).

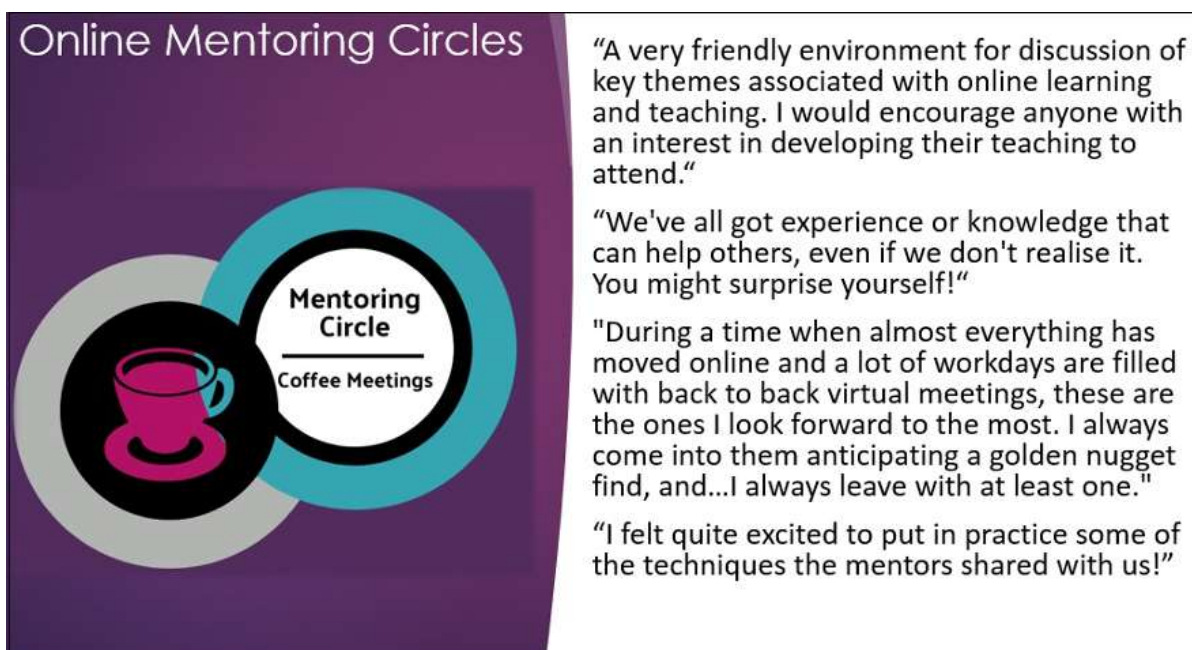


Figure 3 Selection of feedback comments following the first online mentoring circles

Moving forward

As we look ahead, we are now actively planning for how we continue to develop and diversify our digitally-enabled approaches to supporting students and staff to engage with and support each other online, both within and looking beyond the pandemic. The online mentoring circles in particular have added a new and significant dimension to how we approach professional and educational development in our digitally and geographically distributed university context. At the time of writing a second series of online mentoring circles is underway and, recognising the benefits of the mentoring circles beyond UHI, colleagues from other institutions are now also taking part.

Further information about the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy, Benchmarks for the Use of Technology in

Learning and Teaching, and professional development including mentoring and mentoring circles, can be found at <https://www.uhi.ac.uk/en/learning-and-teaching-academy/>.

Guidance for staff in moving to fully online teaching, including the Recommended Activities discussed, can be found at <https://www.uhi.ac.uk/en/educational-development-unit/>.

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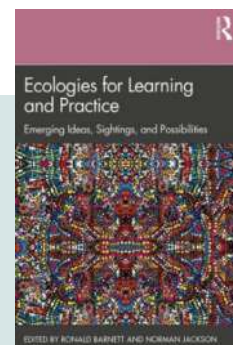
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Book Review

Ecologies for Learning and Practice: Emerging Ideas, Sightings, and Possibilities

Edited by Ronald Barnett and Norman Jackson
Routledge, 2020

ISBN: 9781138496880



In June 2020, the award-winning actor, Sir Mark Rylance, was interviewed on television to talk about the open letter that he and other supporters sent to the Government urging it to put environmental sustainability at the centre of its cultural renewal strategy following the devastating impact that the response to the COVID-19 pandemic had had on the creative and performing arts. The letter was sent by the green arts charity, *Julie's Bicycle*, to culture secretary Oliver Dowden. In discussing the letter, Sir Mark stated that the pandemic had necessarily led to some new thinking, some new questions, and he asked 'what story are we now going to tell?' And so it is with staff and educational development. The SEDA Jiscmail List is one of many that have addressed the question of what the future now looks like for higher

education in general, and staff and educational developers in particular. The world has shifted on its axis and we are also asking – 'what story are we now going to tell?'.

Ecologies for Learning and Practice: emerging ideas, sightings, and possibilities, edited by Ronald Barnett and Norman Jackson, may well be an answer to that question. With fourteen chapters covering the conceptual basis of learning ecologies, a number of case studies and a discussion of what it all means in practice, it is not possible to do justice to the compelling nature and scope of this text. It is clear that there are variations in what is meant by learning ecologies and, as Jackson and Barnett propose in their introduction, 'The act of learning is an ecological phenomenon that brings forth new meanings and

understandings of the world and of one's own being and identity in and with the world' (page 1). There are different variations on what is meant by 'learning ecology' throughout the text and, in many ways, any definition is still emergent. It is useful to look at how Norman Jackson has defined the

nature and scope of learning ecologies in the following diagram (Figure 1) which describes the inter-relationships between individuals, their environments, their learning opportunities, the resources available to them and so on.

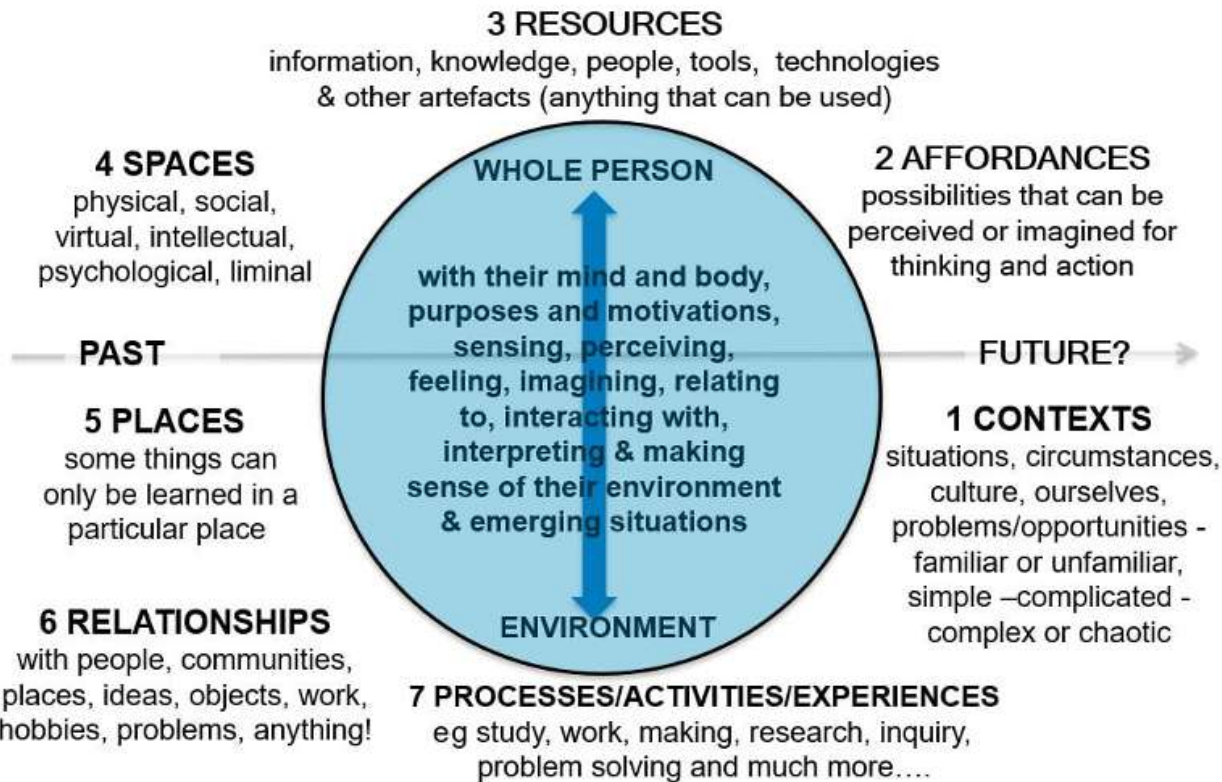
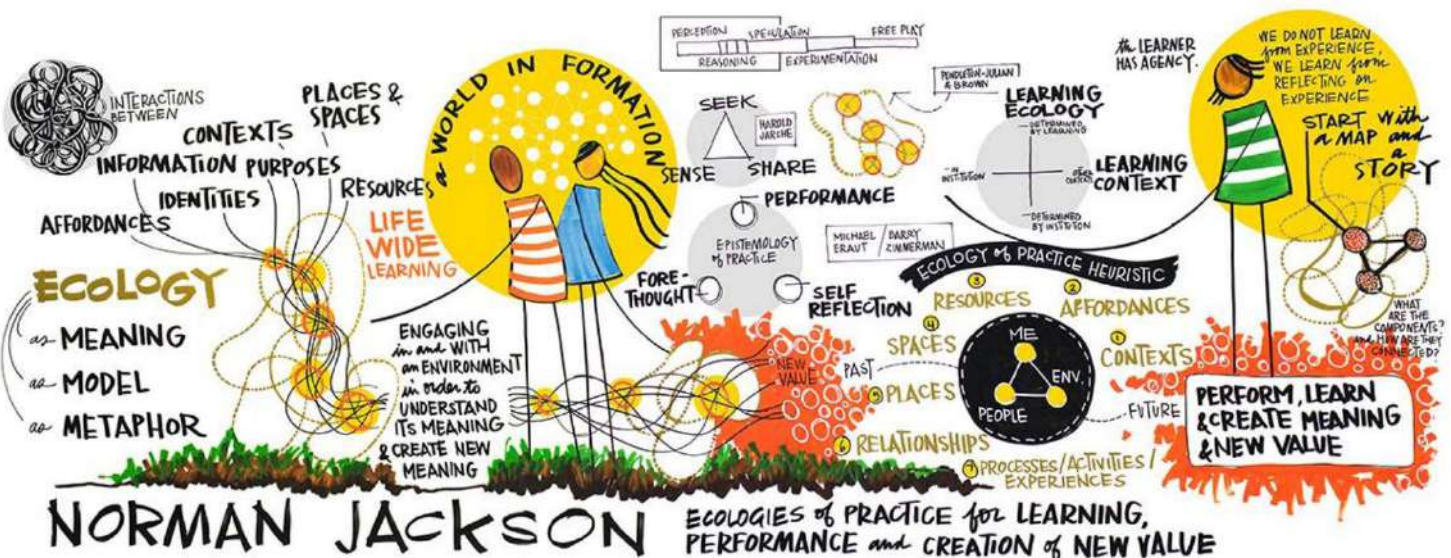


Figure 1 Learning and practice ecology (page 86)

This framework is useful but does not necessarily represent the qualities that are an essential part of learning ecologies; a separate diagram (Figure 2), taken from Jackson's Learning

Ecologies website, better portrays the creative and dynamic elements of learning ecologies.



learning innovations laboratory | October 23-24, 2019 | Cambridge, MA
Fall Gathering | Ecologies of Learning in a Transforming World

Graphic Facilitation by depict.

Figure 2 Ecologies of Learning in a Transforming World

For Gillian Judson, a powerful metaphor for understanding the dynamic of learning ecologies is that of weaving, where learning is more than a set of relationships (including a relationship with place and with nature), but also includes

a sense of agency and the relationship between agency and structure in learning is a theme found throughout the text (Chapter 2, 'Weaving ecologies for learning: Engaging imagination in place-based education').

Also to be found throughout the text is a concern with values. Obviously writing before the pandemic, Arjen E. J. Wals states:

'...we live in a time where false truths go viral, trust in science and government is eroding, and global systemic dysfunction is rampant.' (p. 62)

A focus on learning ecologies, argues Wals, provides the possibility for addressing this global dysfunction. A conceptual underpinning for learning ecologies is also developed in this text. Maggi Savin-Baden, for example, explores the notion of students' liminal states leading to transformation. One of the remarks often heard following the release from 'lockdown' during the pandemic is that there is a renewed consideration of 'place'. This consideration of place is also central to learning ecologies as Keri Facer *et al.* describe in their discussion of 'learning by walking about' (Chapter 13, 'Learning in the cat's cradle: Weaving learning ecologies in the city').

In the Epilogue to the text, Barnett and Jackson suggest the six themes that they consider to be most important. These include the important characteristic of learning ecologies of making connections. They also stress the ways in which learning ecologies entail an interplay between agency and structure. They similarly stress that learning ecologies are very practical in their nature – that this aspect of learning ecologies is a matter of *practical venturing*.

So, there are many strands of thinking about learning ecologies in this collection that raise questions as well as provide answers – the story is just beginning.

Figures 1 and 2 are reproduced with the kind permission of Professor Norman Jackson – see <http://www.learningecologies.uk/>.

Steve Outram is a Higher Education Researcher and Consultant.

Talking about disability or ticking the box? A study of Equality and Diversity training in UK Higher Education

Martha Kember, University of Hull

Introduction

This article presents extracts from a doctoral study which explored how, if at all, Equality and Diversity (E&D) training in UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) represents the voices and lived experience of disabled people. Article 1 of the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) includes the principle that people with an impairment have 'full and effective participation and inclusion in society on an equal basis with others' (United Nations, 2006, p. 5) and UK HEIs have a specific duty, framed by the Equality Act (2010), to promote equality and diversity. The Act requires universities to have due regard to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between 'persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it' (Equality Act, 2010, s149). HEIs were the subject of the National Association for Mental Health (Mind) inquiry (1999) which highlighted the need for increased awareness and understanding of people with a disability through training.

Studies suggest that, despite legislation, HEIs 'under-support, under-represent and marginalise the voices of disabled people' (Kikabhai, 2018, p. 176), and adopt 'practices which work to the disadvantage of disabled people' (Barnes, 1995, p. 66). Brown and Leigh (2018, p. 987) write of an 'internalised ableism' in a sector which is simply 'ticking the box' through the delivery of E&D training.

Aims and questions

The goal of my research was to understand whether the portrayal of disabled people in E&D training offered by UK HEIs reflected their lived experience.

The research asked these questions:

1. What is the nature and purpose of E&D training in HE and how is it defined and delivered?
2. How, if at all, does E&D training for staff employed in HEIs provide space to explore the lived experience of disabled people?
3. What level of engagement do

learning and development professionals in HEIs have with disabled people when designing E&D training?

4. What are the perceptions of disabled people towards the way they are portrayed in E&D training in UK HEIs?

Approach to the study

This study was medium in scale, with participants drawn from staff development practitioners, academics and professional services staff in HE. The study (Figure 1) adopted a 'multi-method' approach (Gilbert and Stoneman, 2016, p. 126) which comprised an online survey, training workshop observations from which collages were created, and semi-structured interviews with members of the Disabled Staff Network (DSN). The online survey was sent to 107 HEIs with responses received from 22 staff development forum (SDF) members, 20.5% of the available sample. Invitations were subsequently received to observe four E&D training events hosted by institutions in the North East.

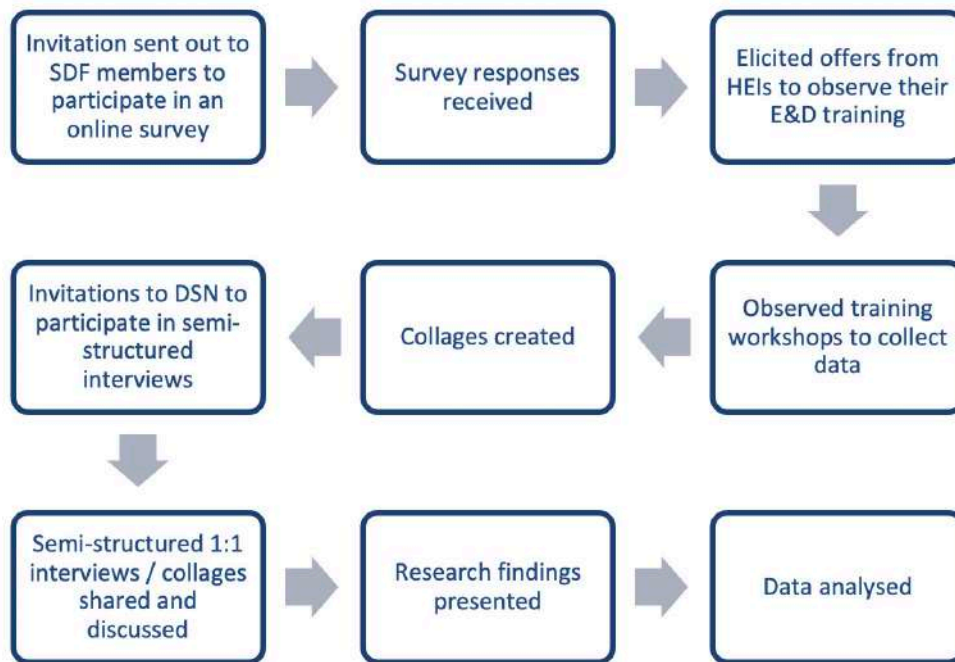


Figure 1 The research phases

The collages, created following each observation, provided a partial visual representation of the images, text, language, stories and metaphors used by both facilitators and participants at the training workshops. The study culminated in four semi-structured interviews with staff from the DSN. Interview participants were invited to bring a personal object to the interview which described how they felt about their impairment. The objects provided an opportunity for hearing valuable personal accounts of each participant’s experience of being disabled, and created a useful segue from which to explore the collages. These interviews, while small in number, were rich in their exploration of the lived experience of disabled people and enabled an in-depth analysis of views.

Survey responses

From the 10 SDF regions, responses were received from Scottish and English HEIs. 54.5% (n=12) of respondents identified as working in institutions of between 501-2999 staff, with 18.2% (n=4) in HEIs of between 3000-3999. Institutions with less than 500 staff were represented by just one respondent, while 22.7% (n=5) identified as working in an HEI with more than 4000 staff.

In considering the purpose of E&D training all respondents agreed that it was to raise awareness with 20 of 22 stating it was to comply with legislation.

Furthermore, 81.8% (n=18) noted the drive to embed cultures of inclusivity on campuses with one respondent suggesting: ‘The ambition [in providing E&D training] is to influence culture’.

In response to the question ‘Which area is responsible for the governance of E&D training at your institution?’, the range of views suggest ownership being shared across a range of functions, most prominently Human Resources and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion teams.

Setting targets

Respondents were asked whether E&D training was mandatory (Figure 2) and, if so, whether this was for all staff or for named categories, for example academic or professional services staff. 81.8% (n=18) of respondents stated

training was mandatory and, of these, 100% (n=18) identified this as being for all categories of staff. The 18.18% (n=4) of HEIs who stated that E&D training was not mandatory were those where staff numbers were between 500-2999. While 18.2% (n=4) of respondents stated their HEI had not established a specific target, 54.5% (n=12) had set targets of between 75-100% of staff completing training. A further 22.7% (n=5) of respondents were unable to provide a response, suggesting the data was not readily available or that targets had either not been established or were not communicated to staff. 45.5% (n=10) indicated that staff were required to refresh their training while 54.5% (n=12) confirmed that staff were not required to do so.

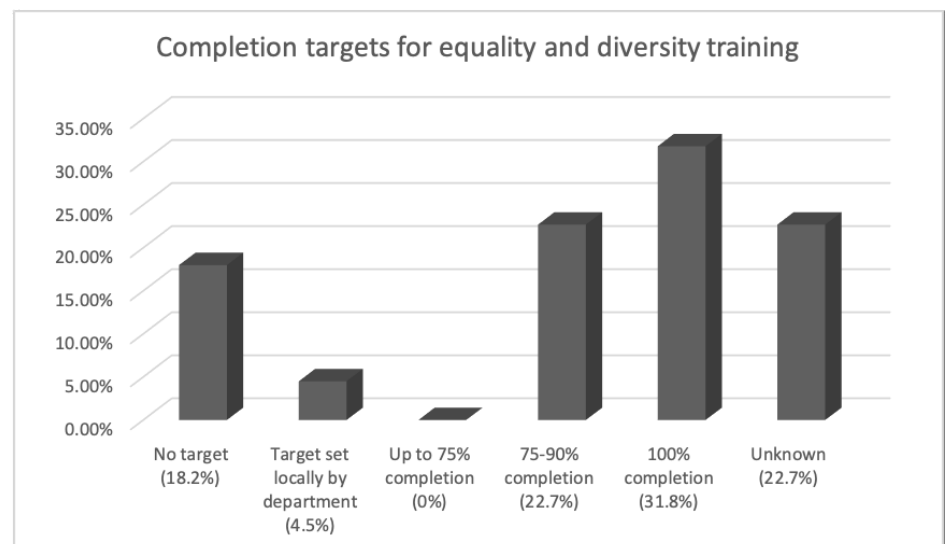


Figure 2 HEI completion targets for E&D training

It was interesting to note of those HEIs which had established a target of 100% completion (n=7) only two had achieved their goal. Of the respondents in this group one indicated that they did not know how many staff had completed the training with

28.5% (n=2) indicating completion rates in their HEIs of less than 50%. When comparing these completion rates with the institutional purpose of E&D training, results indicate that, of 90.9% (n=20) of HEIs who stated the purpose was to comply with

legislation, 30% (n=6) were not able to access completion data in order to demonstrate levels of compliance. Furthermore, 20% (n=4) reported E&D training completion rates among staff of less than 50% with 15% (n=3) reporting rates of up to 75% (Figure 3).

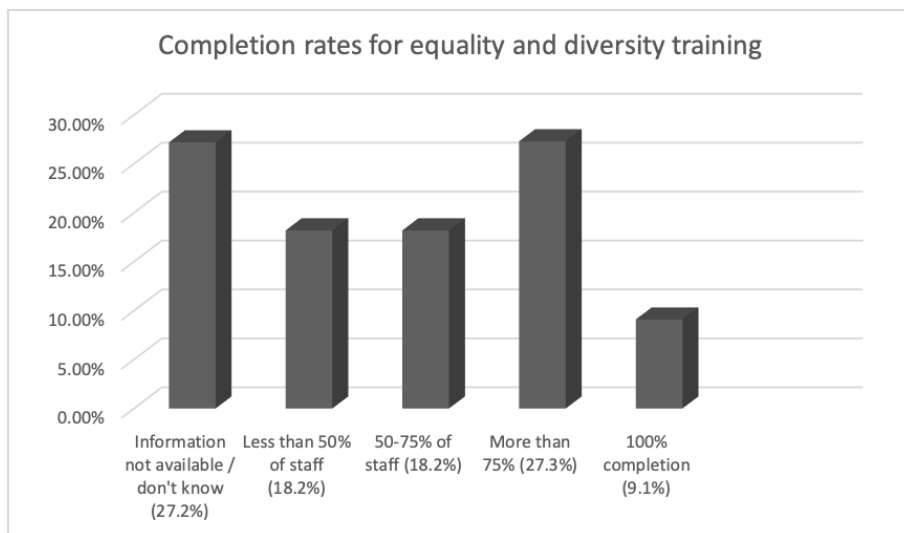


Figure 3 HEI completion rates for E&D training

Design and delivery of E&D training

The most frequently employed delivery method of E&D training is online courses used by 95.5% (n=21) of respondents. Alternative delivery methods include workshops, chosen by 77.3% (n=17), with 18.2% (n=4) using quizzes, 9.1% (n=2) facilitating drama-based learning environments and one institution using contextualised simulations. Alternative methods included:

- 'Facilitated Action Learning Sets'
- 'Group Coaching Conversations'
- 'Ad hoc training is provided, e.g. when the new Transgender inclusion policy was launched, training was provided across the institution'
- 'Voluntary training courses for staff to support disabled students including mental health issues'
- 'We deliver "Building Disability Confidence" training to educate staff on adjustments that can be made and the impact of this on staff and students'
- 'Autism, dyspraxia and ADHD specific training focusing upon

supporting staff in providing reasonable adjustments'.

The survey asked about who was involved in the delivery of each form of training, as in Figure 4. Online courses were excluded from this question as, once designed and made available, they require no face-to-face involvement from a facilitator. In the case of drama-based training, both HEIs which had identified this as a delivery method said that an external expert was solely responsible for delivery. The sole HEI which had earlier stated they facilitated contextualised simulations said delivery was shared with an internal expert, while other forms of delivery, including

workshops and quizzes, required the collaborative involvement of a range of internal and external experts:

- 'Collaborative responsibility between Equality, Diversity & Inclusion and Learning & Development for design of training. Learning and Development are responsible for the delivery of it'
- 'E-learning materials tailored for the University in partnership with HR'
- 'Our People and Culture and Professional Development teams deliver this work'.



Figure 4 Individuals involved in the delivery of E&D training

Insights from disabled people were considered with the question 'To what extent, if any, are disabled people involved in the design of your equality and diversity training?'. 33.3% (n=7) noted no involvement while 47.6% (n=10) sought views of people with impairments through local networks. One respondent stated they invited people with impairments to pilot activity in order to gain their views, and four HEIs provided additional information about how people with impairments were involved:

- 'The EDI team are proactive in seeking input from other professionals and colleagues'
- 'Designed by an external facilitator with a disability'
- 'Training is delivered by a social enterprise who engage with those who have lived experience of disability'
- 'Specific impairment-related training is sometimes developed and delivered by people with that impairment (i.e. Deaf Awareness).'

The content of facilitated training events was explored with respondents being asked 'to what extent, if at all, is discussion about the lived experience of disabled people included in your E&D training?'. 13.6% (n=3) stated their training provided no opportunity for discussion while 45.5% (n=10) of respondents indicated they encouraged open discussions about the lived experience of all individuals. 22.7% (n=5) actively encouraged open discussion specifically around the lived experience of disabled people, with the remaining 18.1% (n=4) saying that discussion was invited but was limited in scope.

Training workshop observations

The training workshops took place between 13 November 2018 and 5 March 2019 and were attended by staff, both academic and professional, from each host HEI. While each workshop differed in respect to learning outcomes, some being generally related to the Equality Act 2010 and others specifically designed to raise awareness of disability-related issues, the core focus for each was that of E&D

in HE. The four workshops included some opportunity for discussion and for questions to be posed by the audience. Two of the workshops invited audience participation in the form of short quizzes, one involved a short role play and another included two short video clips. The events ranged in duration from two to four hours and attracted audiences of between six and eighteen participants. The facilitators were professional and academic experts drawn from the respective institution's learning and development, E&D and disability services departments.

Each workshop included space for discussion focused on participant experience of working, learning and engaging with disabled people. The conversations ranged from how to adjust working practice and the physical environment to enable disabled people to participate in work, study and social life, to participants sharing stories of their own life experience and discussing the currency of language associated with impairment. Contributions from participants and facilitators with regard to accommodating different needs included:

- 'When you've met one person with autism then you've met one person with autism...everyone's lived experience is different' (Female, facilitator)
- 'But we can't afford to make adjustments' (Female, academic)
- 'I freaked out when I knew I had a student with a visual impairment' (Female, academic)
- 'Giving information in advance

spoils the didactic path of the lecture I'm giving' (Female, academic)

- 'Adapting your teaching to facilitate learning' (Female, academic)
- 'When you exclude someone because of their disability it leads to feelings of isolation, anger, frustration and sadness' (Female, facilitator)
- '[Making an adjustment provides] personal independence' (Male, academic).

A range of visual images, embedded in the collages, an example of which can be seen in Figure 5, were taken directly from the presentation materials designed by the event facilitators. Three distinct categories of images were used across the various training events. Firstly, those which were added to Microsoft® Powerpoint slides as visual aids to enhance the narrative and add variety to the presentation materials. These included images of a wheelchair-user at a desk, in a stylised group of people and a wheelchair at the foot of a flight of stairs. The second category of images included a paper tree and a promotional poster for an art installation, both images being used to promote and celebrate the work of disabled people. Thirdly, images were used which represent organisations or campaigns linked to, or supportive of, equality, diversity and disability. An example is the green ribbon with sunflowers, the symbol adopted by many UK airports which provide lanyards to passengers with hidden disabilities who wish to indicate they require assistance.

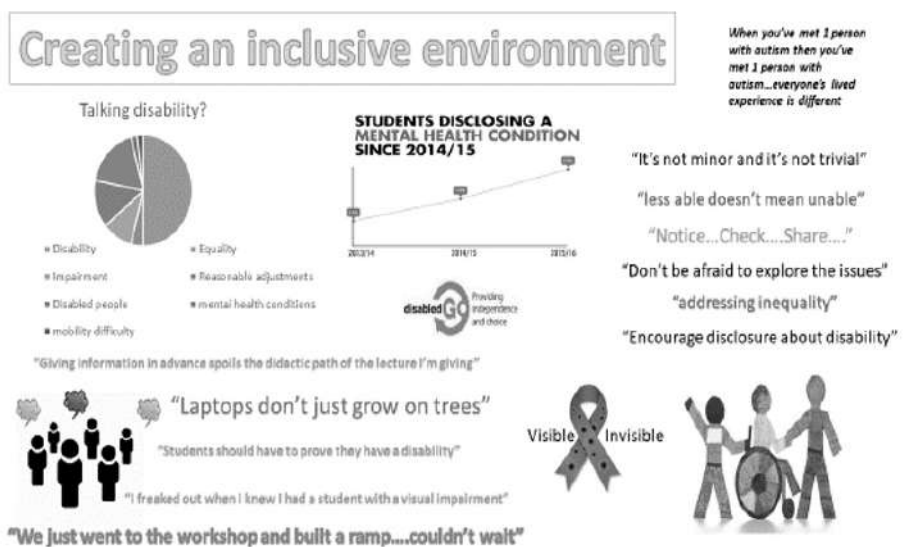


Figure 5 Collage created following one HEI workshop observation ©Martha Kember 2020

Talking to disabled people

Each interviewee was asked the same series of questions, with follow-up questions posed, as appropriate, to guide the conversation, and was invited to view and discuss the four collages which had been created following the training workshop observations. The first question was designed to open up a conversation about the language associated with disability, with each participant being asked how they defined themselves. In response participants said:

- *'Probably as a strong person. I always think there is someone worse off than me. I've never really looked at it as a disability, I just say I've got a long-term condition. If you have something that's wrong with you, if you want to call it that, you're slightly different in some way'* (Participant a)
- *'I have a specific learning difference, I don't say impairment, I don't say disability, I say difference because I don't feel impaired'* (Participant b)
- *'I want to regard myself as a politicised self-identified disabled person, disability is part of my political affiliation it's not necessarily a kind of description of any impairments I have'* (Participant c)
- *'For me it's what I am, I don't feel particularly strongly, I'm not ill'* (Participant d).

In defining themselves individuals also talked about how language was a factor in the way society viewed disabled people. Participants commented on how the language of disability was used in daily life:

- *'If I was filling in a form I would have to tick "disabled"'* (Participant b)
- *'I'm very happy to tick boxes to say I am a disabled person'* (Participant c)
- *'Disability can be a label. I think the words disabled and impaired are labels. It's not a conscious thing, you see someone in a wheelchair and then label them as disabled but the person in the wheelchair may not see it that way'* (Participant a)

- *'You need to differentiate between the physical difference or malfunction or deformity or whatever it is. Impairment is a rather better way of talking about that'* (Participant c).

The personal objects that participants had brought with them led to participants describing how their disability, whether physical or neurodiverse, shaped their view of the world, defined their lives, their politics and their relationships with others. These discussions were, without exception, positive, with participants not simply accepting their disability but drawing strength from it:

- *'Because it's a part of you, I don't think of it as being any different, it's enabling'* (Participant a: drawing attention to a metronome and the passage of time, in that her disability was a constant in her life)
- *'I make connections that other people might not make. I think that enables creativity within my thinking'* (Participant b: a reference to the digital images which helped her to describe the way in which her cognitive function enabled alternative thinking)
- *'You do live in this slightly different world and you see things and interpret things differently'* (Participant d: referring to a toy animal which she used to describe how her perception of the world was framed).

Conclusions and recommendations for practitioners

The study highlighted an increasing tension between statutory compliance and training effectiveness. The increasingly competitive HE landscape (Stevenson et al., 2014) being shown to compound the 'tick-box' (Brown and Leigh, 2018, p. 987) nature of E&D training. Secondly, the study revealed that the most effective forms of delivery – drama-based training, contextualised simulations and the inclusion of guest speakers in training events – are those which are becoming less likely to be offered given their cost and complexity. The study raises important questions about the suitability and sustainability of online courses as a single method of delivery, a conundrum

for broader consideration and application across the sector.

The study also found that academic staff in UK HEIs are more likely to engage in optional E&D training which provides practical solutions for teaching-related activity than that which is mandatory and generic in content.

The study identified evidence of a direct link between the confidence of the facilitator and the maturity of dialogue from the audience when invited to engage in stimulating, relevant and contentious conversation. Where facilitation confidence is low, the evidence is that workshop participants, whose level of understanding is mixed and whose views may be ill-informed, are unlikely to learn much, if anything, about the lived experience of those with impairments. Of particular concern is that a facilitator with low confidence is less likely to contradict or dispel inaccurate representations of impairment when expressed by one or more workshop participants.

As staff development practitioners in institutions which publicly promote equality and inclusion, social responsibility and ethical integrity, through our published mission and values statements, we should be leading the way in terms of inclusion and zero tolerance of discrimination in all its forms. While confined to the exploration of the lived experience of disabled people, the study raises questions about how disability is linked with gender, age, class or ethnicity, be that from the perspective of research participants, facilitators of training or those attending training events.

I hope that for the professional staff development community my research provides an opportunity to consider our own practice and to enhance E&D training activities which are both useful and transformative.

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Supporting student mental health and wellbeing with Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Kevin L. Merry, De Montfort University

Introduction

The proportion of UK Higher Education (HE) students disclosing a mental health and wellbeing (MH&W) issue to their university has increased five-fold over the last decade (Hubble *et al.*, 2019), becoming a priority area for student support services within universities. However, despite the known increases in MH&W disclosures, the extent of MH&W problems among the student population is likely to be larger than currently understood. For example, several recent surveys have indicated considerably higher rates of MH&W issues among students than those disclosed to universities (Thorley, 2017; Pereira *et al.*, 2018), suggesting that many students do not come forward in search of support when experiencing problems related to MH&W. Subsequently, it has been suggested that student MH&W is currently in ‘crisis’ (Hubble *et al.*, 2019).

The consequences of worsening MH&W on students may include poor engagement, academic failure, withdrawal from education, weak career prospects and in some circumstances, suicide (Thorley, 2017, Hubble *et al.*, 2019). Despite the seriousness of MH&W conditions among students, the availability of support within universities is a cause for concern, largely because institutional support services have experienced significant increases in the demand for MH&W support in recent years (Hubble *et al.*, 2019). As such, recent interest has developed in the potential for supporting student MH&W in a proactive fashion through the construction of curricula that espouse positive MH&W behaviours.

Supporting wellbeing through curriculum development

At De Montfort University (DMU), curricula are developed in accordance with Universal Design for Learning (UDL), ensuring that learning, teaching and assessment practices reflect the three principles of UDL (Figure 1):

1. Multiple means of representation, providing students with a variety of ways of acquiring information via learning resources
2. Multiple means of engagement, considering students’

interests and learning preferences ensuring that they are appropriately challenged and thus motivated to learn

3. Multiple means of action and expression, allowing students with alternative ways to demonstrate their understanding (Davies *et al.*, 2013).



Figure 1 The three principles of Universal Design for Learning

Since DMU is one of the most diverse institutions in the UK, with more than half of its students possessing a BAME heritage and approximately one-fifth of its students declaring themselves disabled, the original mission of UDL was as a means of enabling effective learning among the University’s diverse body of students. However, due to the emergence of the MH&W crisis in UK HE, the remit of UDL at DMU has broadened to include supporting positive MH&W outcomes among students.

Importance of UDL to wellbeing

As an instructional paradigm, UDL emphasises the inclusion of all students in the learning process (McGuire *et al.*, 2006). Inclusion in a learning context can be subdivided into *academic inclusion* and *social inclusion*. Academic inclusion is characterised by the full and equal participation of students in all academic activities with their peers, as part of their engagement with classroom learning processes and the wider curriculum (Katz, 2012). By contrast, social inclusion is defined by the level of interaction students experience with peers, and the opportunity to develop a sense of belonging and acceptance within the learning community. Acceptance in this regard occurs through positive interaction with peers and teachers, and engagement with on-programme and extracurricular activities (Specht and Young, 2010).

Both academic and social inclusion are critical to supporting positive MH&W outcomes among students (Katz, 2013). However, social inclusion, in particular, appears to be important in supporting positive MH&W. For example,

social inclusion is reported to contribute to a positive self-concept among students, and is critical to supporting their emotional and social wellbeing. Improved emotional and social wellbeing is said to result from improvements in several other important constructs related to positive emotional states including resilience, mental health, citizenship, academic motivation and academic achievement (Wotherspoon, 2002; Zins and Elias, 2006; Brock *et al.*, 2008; Specht and Young, 2010). UDL has shown to be one of the best instructional paradigms to facilitate both academic and social inclusion in students (McGuire *et al.*, 2006; Katz, 2013).

A UDL-designed curriculum also provides students with greater flexibility, and social presence, supporting the development of an internal locus of control toward learning (Kumar and Wideman, 2014). An internal locus of control means that students perceive that they have greater ownership over their learning, which leads to reduced stress, increased confidence, and increased academic success (Kumar and Wideman, 2014). Stress can have a negative impact on learning. For example, it can affect the ability to make rational judgments (Keinan, 1987), which can lead to activities such as academic dishonesty, failure and dropout (Wideman, 2011). As such, UDL-designed curricula have the potential to positively impact upon student MH&W by facilitating academic and social inclusion, as well as supporting stress reduction through an enhanced internal locus of control and self-regulation of learning (McGuire *et al.*, 2006; Katz, 2013), highlighting the potential importance of UDL to student wellbeing.

Several educational development initiatives support the development of UDL curricula at DMU. Chief among them is the CUTLAS (Creating Universal Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategies) learning design methodology (Merry, 2019). CUTLAS is a team-based approach to curriculum design that supports the development of constructively aligned (Biggs, 1996) courses underpinned by the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles. Course teams, in collaboration with other key stakeholders such as learning technology staff, academic librarians, quality officers, employers, wellbeing staff and of course students, come together to collaboratively design UDL-enhanced courses, reflecting the skills, interests, needs and assets of the students they are designed for. Hence, CUTLAS has become central to ensuring that the wellbeing benefits of UDL are part of courses at the point at which they are designed.

The Three Block Model of UDL

To more effectively embed MH&W considerations into the course design process, elements of the ‘Three-Block-Model’ of UDL (Katz, 2012, 2013) (Figure 2) are being utilised at DMU to further support student MH&W outcomes. The Three Block Model of UDL expands the traditional focus of UDL on instructional differentiation to further explore the social practices of the classroom.

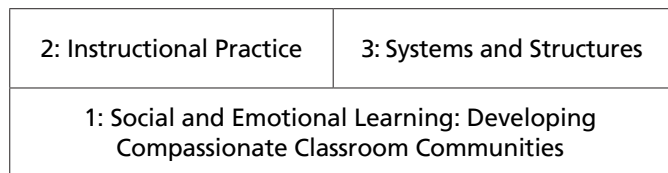


Figure 2 The Three Block Model of Universal Design for Learning

The first block focuses on the social and emotional aspects of learning (Katz, 2013), and includes the construction of compassionate learning communities in which all students feel safe, valued, and have a sense of belonging to their learning environment. To facilitate social inclusion, students are supported in developing self-concept, respect for others, and an understanding of the importance of inclusivity in the classroom (Katz, 2013).

The second block focuses on implementing the UDL principles as part of an instructional framework that includes the curriculum, and the learning environment, ensuring that differentiated learning opportunities exist to address learner variability (Rose and Meyer, 2002; Burgstahler, 2008). The model emphasises mastery over learning with scaffolding through collaboration and differentiated processes. Regular feedback and ongoing assessment for learning are included to develop mastery via formative feedback (Katz, 2013).

The third block focuses on structural, organisational and systematic changes required to create truly inclusive and accessible learning institutions. Included in the third block are budgetary concerns, staffing, policy, leadership, collaborative practice, quality assurance and enhancement processes, service delivery models, and the continuing professional development of teaching staff (Katz, 2013).

Since adopting UDL as its instructional paradigm in 2015, the emphasis of DMU’s strategic UDL initiatives has primarily focused on the operationalisation of blocks two and three of the Three Block Model, and this has largely supported the development of academic inclusion within classrooms and as part of curricula across the University through initiatives like CUTLAS. However, an area which has remained underdeveloped since DMU adopted UDL has been the development of social inclusion within the student learning experience. As such, recent thinking in relation to DMU’s UDL staff development journey has included a need to shift toward block one of the Three Block Model, concentrating more greatly on the social and emotional aspects of learning, and the development of compassionate learning communities for the purposes of increasing social inclusion in the student learning experience. Development of the self-concept, respect for others, and importance of inclusivity that is so critical to social and emotional learning, and so crucial to the development of social inclusion, is currently being explored via the linkage between DMU’s existing UDL developments and several other important strategic initiatives.

Decolonising DMU

Following its successful Freedom to Achieve (FtA) initiative which successfully closed the BAME attainment gap by ~5% in 40 pilot programmes, the institution has now launched its ‘Decolonising DMU’ initiative, which sees the work of FtA extended to all programmes across the University. However, Decolonising DMU stretches far beyond the curriculum, acknowledging that there are broader factors which impact on the attainment of BAME students, including the place and space of study, those who teach and support students and those in positions of power, and influence.

Decolonising DMU encourages staff and students to examine the everyday norms of university life to identify and eliminate

systems, structures and behaviours that create disadvantage for ethnic minorities. The aim is that BAME students will be able to see themselves, their identity, image, history and story reflected in every aspect of their learning journey, thus enabling them to succeed. As such, the work of Decolonising DMU could be critical to developing the self-concept, respect for others, and inclusivity upon which social and emotional learning is based, and is likely to represent a significant step toward increased social inclusion in the learning journey of DMU students.

Decolonising DMU is now mapped against the entire academic staff training and development offer, including all UDL offerings. Specifically, the academic development team incorporates Decolonising DMU into their work in the following ways:

- Champion Decolonising DMU and its central cause
- Raise awareness of the BAME attainment gap
- Support staff reflection in relation to what Decolonising DMU may look like in their classroom/curriculum
- Support staff practice in relation to developing decolonised learning and teaching practices and curriculum design

- Support the Decolonising DMU community of practice
- Work with and support key Decolonising DMU stakeholders to ensure a consolidated message around Decolonising DMU and its aims.

Education for Sustainable Development

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development represents a blueprint for ensuring the peace and prosperity of the people and planet both now and in the future. Adopted by all United Nations member states in 2015, at the heart of the agenda are its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The aim of the SDGs is to achieve transformative social and environmental changes for the benefit of people and the planet, including working to reduce poverty, promoting gender equality, caring for ecosystems, helping create economic prosperity for all, and much more. DMU has included the SDGs as part of its Strategic Plan and is using them to inform and develop teaching, research and other important activities across the University, through its Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Initiative. The ESD initiative will adopt and be influenced by the Earth Charter principles, several of which have been identified as being potentially important for the development of social and emotional learning (Table 1).

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| <p><i>Earth Charter Principles</i></p> <p><i>Respect and Care for the Community of Life</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect Earth and life in all its diversity • Care for the community of life with understanding, compassion and love • Build democratic societies that are just, participatory, sustainable and peaceful <p><i>Social and Economic Justice</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that economic activities and institutions at all levels promote human development in an equitable and sustainable manner • Affirm gender equality and equity as prerequisites to sustainable development and ensure universal access to education, health care and economic opportunity • Uphold the right of all, without discrimination, to a natural and social environment supportive of human dignity, bodily health and spiritual wellbeing, with special attention to the rights of indigenous peoples and minorities <p><i>Democracy, Nonviolence, and Peace</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen democratic institutions at all levels, and provide transparency and accountability in governance, inclusive participation in decision-making, and access to justice • Integrate into formal education and lifelong learning the knowledge, values and skills needed for a sustainable way of life • Treat all living beings with respect and consideration • Promote a culture of tolerance, nonviolence and peace |
|---|

Table 1 Earth Charter principles important to developing social and emotional learning

The ESD initiative is now part of CUTLAS with the addition of an SDGs ‘look and feel’ activity as part of the creation of a course ‘blueprint’, which occurs during Part 1 of the CUTLAS Designing stage (Table 2). The activity requires the

stakeholders creating the course to decide which SDGs most closely align with the design and outcomes of their module or course, ensuring that the appropriate SDGs are embedded into the course from the design phase.

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| <p><i>Pre-CUTLAS – Defining</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme team complete CUTLAS request document, describing learners, providing feedback and defining purpose and agreeing aims of the CUTLAS <p><i>CUTLAS Workshop – Designing</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part 1: Blueprint – includes mission, look and feel, SDGs, learning outcomes, assessments constructive alignment and end in mind • Part 2: Storyboard – create a visual representation of the module or programme paying particular attention to Engagement, Representation and Action and Expression • Assigning building tasks from storyboard to each team member <p><i>Creating CUTLAS – Building</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building the module or programme – programme team commits to creating activities from the storyboard, testing, modifying as required • Review of build by CUTLAS facilitators, training needs identified, modification of activities/resources following feedback, reflection on process <p><i>Post-CUTLAS – Reviewing</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Testing on learners and colleagues not involved in the module or programme |
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Table 2 The four broad steps in the CUTLAS process

#HealthyDMU

#HealthyDMU represents a broad programme of extra-curricular activities aimed at supporting student MH&W. It is based on a whole university approach to student health and wellbeing that proactively embeds holistic health and wellbeing behaviours into the student journey. #HealthyDMU is underpinned by the principle that health, wellbeing and academic outcomes are inextricably linked. Students access the programme via a designated ‘#HealthyDMU Hub’ which provides quick access to booking appointments, activities and hints and tips about supporting positive MH&W. Accompanying the ‘#HealthyDMU Hub’ is the ‘#HealthyDMU Staff Toolkit’, a designated online space for staff to gain advice, support and resources for supporting student MH&W. #HealthyDMU is underpinned by six principles summarised in Table 3.

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|--|
| <p><i>#HealthyDMU Principles</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Healthy DMU, a whole university approach to student health and wellbeing 2. Embedding health-promoting & wellbeing behaviours within the normative culture at DMU 3. Reduce student health and wellbeing inequalities 4. Creating the opportunity for all students to reach their full potential 5. Promoting understanding of the close connection between health and wellbeing outcomes and academic outcomes 6. A proactive approach to student skills and development |
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Table 3 The #HealthyDMU principles

Since #HealthyDMU is about embedding holistic health and wellbeing behaviours into the student journey and the idea that health, wellbeing and academic outcomes are inextricably

linked, it is also embedded within the CUTLAS process. For example, when designing modules or courses, stakeholders are required to consider some of the following points:

- Student collaboration and co-creation of content, skills, outcomes and assessments
- Consideration of how social and emotional competencies and resilience can be developed
- Promotion of a positive learning environment where mistakes are embraced for their potential to support learning
- Consideration of how students can frequently experience success, receive praise and positive reinforcement
- How an appreciation of equality, diversity and inclusion can be developed among students
- Opportunities for peer learning and peer support
- Signposting toward and engagement with important extra-curricular activities aimed at supporting MH&W.

Conclusion

Since adopting UDL as its instructional paradigm in 2015, DMU has striven to increase the level of academic inclusion experienced by students as part of their learning journey by emphasising blocks two and three of the Three Block Model of UDL (Katz, 2012). Recently, due to the centrality

of the student MH&W crisis currently being experienced by many institutions across UK HE, there has been a need to concentrate more on block one of the model, and develop opportunities for social and emotional learning through the development of compassionate classroom communities. Such work is currently being undertaken through the linking of existing work that forms part of the UDL staff development offer such as CUTLAS, and other critical strategic initiatives aimed at supporting equality, diversity, inclusion and the development of bonded, compassionate learning communities.

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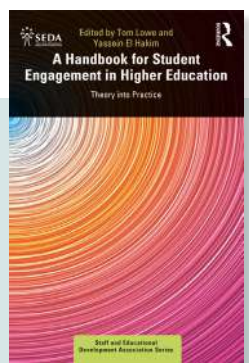
Book Review

A Handbook For Student Engagement in Higher Education: Theory Into Practice

Edited by Tom Lowe and Yassein El Hakim (2020)

Routledge, 2020

ISBN 9780367085490



Keeping students engaged in their learning experience has never been a more important task. With higher education students tackling studying in extraordinary circumstances, this text provides valuable examples of how to ensure students are fully engaged throughout their studies. There are a

multitude of educational texts discussing general student engagement, but this text is a focused exploration of engagement within higher education and how organisations can ensure this is taking place. It includes a variety of topics from different voices ranging from lecturers to students themselves, giving a voice to

those at the heart of the subject matter.

The text effectively explores how student engagement has developed in recent history whilst also discussing current issues within higher education, including marketisation of the sector. It is separated into four parts dealing

with various elements of student engagement, from international perspectives to models of student engagement in practice. Key practices from a variety of institutions both in the UK and abroad are discussed, exploring the importance of sharing good practice from institutions around the world.

Lowe and El Hakim explore current student engagement practice, such as student coaches and student representation, whilst also reiterating the importance of expanding these practices to include learners within their own learning experience. This includes incorporating more student-led projects which enables the text's key message of students leading change which creates 'transformative learning experiences for both the students and leaders of institutions/organizations' (p. 35).

Throughout the book, suggestions on how to undertake further student

engagement are made to ensure that students are not simply treated as consumers. Yet there are also discussions on how there is no such thing as 'set forms' of student engagement and the importance of embracing learners' individual needs. But one key message is promoted: the importance of collaborative work between staff and students.

It is noted how including 'students in the process of developing education brings learners into the conversation, enabling them to contribute to the process of making education more accessible, its practices more inclusive and the learning more engaging' (p. 4). This staff-student collaboration is key to forming student engagement and this book inspires outstanding practice to ensure students are an integral part of the teaching process.

The book also deals with the

importance of enhancing students' growth mindset leading to students furthering their own learning (p. 55) and how establishments can foster learners' independence. It argues that simply using student voice is not enough and that students need to be involved in meaningful ways in every part of their education to enable change and to improve learning for all.

Readers are left with a powerful message of how students and staff are a partnership and a community in which both students and staff construct the learning environment, and how creating a democratic approach to education should be our goal as educationalists.

Beth Easton is a Lecturer in Education at Wirral Metropolitan College in partnership with the University of Central Lancashire, and is in the final year of her PhD.

Who are we reading and listening to? A reflection on the most recent edited collection on Student Engagement in Educational Developments

Yaz El Hakim and Tom Lowe, University of Winchester

This year we were delighted to publish as part of the SEDA Series *A Handbook for Student Engagement in Higher Education: theory into practice* (Lowe and El Hakim, 2020), where we drew together a collection of twenty-four chapters on engaging students in educational developments activities.

In the six years since Professor Colin Bryson's previous SEDA Series book *Understanding and Developing Student Engagement in Higher Education* (2014), a sector focus on Student Engagement has been retained, even in the face of considerable policy movement towards value for money, students as consumers and a focus on student outcomes.

We were interested to reflect at this stage on the chapters of our book which drew together numerous thought leaders and practitioners, and ask the question 'who are we reading, and who are we listening to?'. This short paper reports on an analysis of our combined referenced list, and may be helpful for those beginning their journey of reading around student engagement in educational developments, as well as being a reflection for those members of the community in the last two decades.

The spread over the years

The first question we asked was 'what was the spread of

the 509 publications cited across the edited collection?'. As a disclaimer, please take this with quite a pinch of salt, considering that the authors were writing between the years 2017 and 2019. But the question can still indicate trends. Publication dates of 2020 were excluded from the analysis as all the chapters were submitted in 2019. There are some lone publications for years pre-1980 such as Feldman and Newcomb (1969), Bandura (1973) and Freire (1977). There are bubbles of activity in the 80s (e.g. Astin, 1984; Chickering and Gamson, 1987) and in the 00s (e.g. Coates, 2006; Bryson and Hand, 2007). As highlighted in Figure 1 (overleaf), there is a general increase in publications from 2008 with around 11 publications cited, which explodes from 2013 onwards to 30+ publications.

Top 10 keywords in publication titles

The second thought we addressed was which keywords figured in the titles of the papers cited. Of course, 'Education' won at 373, followed by 'Higher Education' at 243. 'Learning' came third at 143. 'Engagement' (132, fourth) outnumbered 'Student Engagement' (98, sixth) with 'Teaching' coming fifth at 117. Other top-cited words included 'Partnership' (88, seventh), 'Development' (62, eighth), 'Change' (45, ninth) and finally 'Students as' (41, tenth).

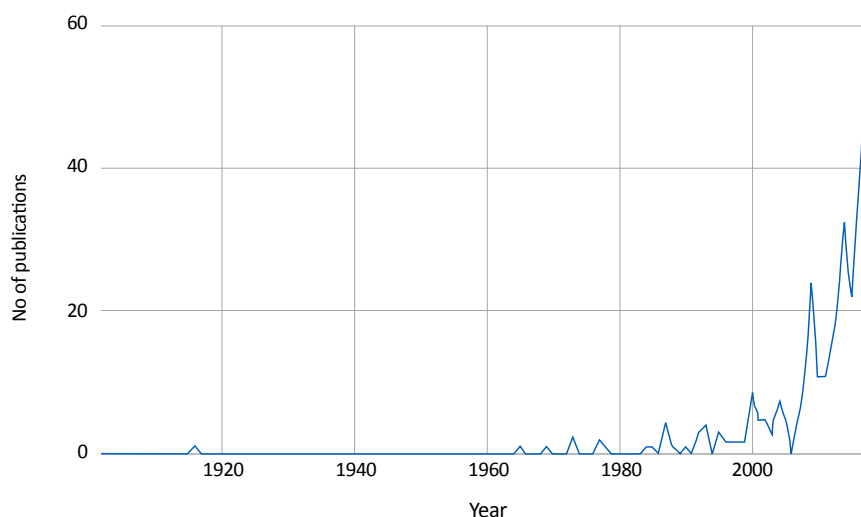


Figure 1 Frequency of publications date by year

Who are we listening to?

The next question related to the authors we are listening to, not only reading but citing. We hoped that this analysis would showcase who has inspired and which works are regularly cited as possibly the seminal texts on student engagement. We decided not to include any papers from the University of Winchester and Winchester Student Union, as the citations in the introduction and concluding chapters heavily relied on the story of Winchester's work.

The top five authors were Professor Alison Cook-Sather (39), Professor Peter Felten (33) and Dr Catherine Bovill (31), with their works all being cited on over thirty occasions. Interestingly, these three authors wrote a book together on co-creating learning and teaching (2014) and have each, both before and subsequently, extensively published on students as partners. The second batch of authors follow two more leading figures in students as partners and student engagement, Professor Colin Bryson (24) and Professor Mick Healey (23). Anyone who has attended a RAISE, ISSOTL or SEDA conference in the last ten years will certainly know these names as not only prominent authors, but also prominent speakers and facilitators in the sector.

Most cited papers

Finally, the question loomed over which papers were most cited in the edited collection, again remembering the limitation of our community who contributed to the work. Coming top in this collection, two papers received eleven citations. These were Cook-Sather, Bovill and Felten's (2014) book *Engaging Students as Partners in Learning and Teaching: a guide for faculty*, which offers a starting guide for beginning to work with students in educational development in partnership. Complementary to this work is the Higher Education Academy's (HEA) sponsored framework for students as partners by Healey, Flint, and Harrington (2014). The third most cited was the 2017 Mercer-Mapstone *et al.* literature of students as partners in higher education, receiving seven citations, closely followed by Matthews' vision article (2016) endorsing partnership as a way of working in educational development, receiving six citations. With five citations, Bovill and colleagues' (2010) research article on 'Experiences of learning through collaborative

evaluation from a Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Education' followed, along with the previous SEDA-edited collection on Student Engagement by Bryson (2014). Then the numbers and frequency increased dramatically with five papers receiving four citations (Dunne and Zanstra, 2011; Marquis *et al.*, 2016; NUS, 2012; Trowler, 2010; and Vouri, 2014), which colleagues will all recognise as seminal works for inspiring or critically reflecting on Student Engagement in Higher Education.

Student engagement in educational developments has continued to be in the higher education spotlight, perhaps because it is a catch-all term that represents so many forms of engagement. During COVID-19, student engagement is being discussed widely in relation to online engagement. Yet much of this edited book focused on in-person engagements, for students to input, have their voice heard and work in partnership with in educational developments projects.

Student engagement is perhaps travelling with the history of educational development, along for the ride in the peaks and dips ahead (good and bad). We hope this review sparks discussion in local contexts with an initial review of the expanding place of student engagement in higher education.

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SEDA News

ICED 2022

The International Consortium for Educational Development has announced that the 2022 Conference will be in Denmark – theme: Educational Developments and the Future of Education – dates and details to follow.

SEDA Spring Conference 2021

SEDA will be holding its Spring Conference online across 2 days on Thursday 6th and Friday 7th May 2021. Opening with a keynote from **David Kernohan** (Wonkhe) this conference will provide opportunities to reflect, discuss and share lessons learned from the teaching approaches adopted during this academic year and discuss their implications and potential applications, and their most likely consequences, for post-pandemic educational change.

£75 for SEDA members and undergraduate students and £145 for non-members.

Tickets from <https://sedaspringconf2021.eventbrite.co.uk>

SEDA Workshops

Managing the metrics: What can academic developers do?

Two workshops, on 16th March and 29th March 2021, 1pm-2pm

Based on the new SEDA Paper, *Our Days are Numbered: metrics, managerialism and academic development*, in each of these workshops we will hear from educational developers who contributed case studies to the publication. They will

share with us what their strategies have been in making the most of metrics in their institutions. We will learn how developers on the ground are moving beyond coping with the demands of metrification to adopting more constructive approaches to data.

These workshops should give you practical ideas for approaching metrics constructively in the future, and for thinking about how to implement a range of approaches in your own context.

Each workshop: £10 for SEDA members (£20 for non-members). With the Paper: £30 for SEDA members (£40 for non-members).

Tickets from: <https://managingthemetrics.eventbrite.co.uk>

Celebrating HE programme leaders: Practical wisdom for HE leaders, educational developers and programme leaders

Thursday 29th April 2021 – 2-3.45pm

Based on the SEDA Special 39 – *Supporting Programme Leaders and Programme Leadership* – and the Programme Leaders Toolkit, this workshop will celebrate programme leadership whilst at the same time outline evidence-based practical wisdom which HE leaders, educational developers and programme leaders may use to enhance programme leadership at their host institutions. Join the conversation as we 're-imagine' and reframe programme leadership as the career-enhancing, rewarding role it can and should be.

£15 for SEDA members (£30 for non-members)

Tickets from: <https://celebratingheprogrammeleaders.eventbrite.co.uk>