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Atrocity exhibition: Crisis in Ukraine and its insights for educational developers

Virendra Mistry, Liverpool Hope University

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has had a catastrophic impact in terms of civilian casualties and the devastation of its cultural and social infrastructure. Communities have been broken and people have been forced to flee their homes with many seeking safety and protection in other countries. As universities in the UK prepared for a new academic year, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) verified a total of 6114 civilian deaths; of this number, 390 were children (2 October 2022). Speaking via video link at Universities UK International's (UUKi) 2022 conference, Ukraine's minister for education and science, Serhiy Shkarlet, informed delegates that over 2000 education institutions had been damaged and 284 completely destroyed. The World Bank (August 2022) estimated the cost of recovery and reconstruction in Ukraine amounted to $349 billion.

This article highlights initiatives that have been developed to support Ukraine. Educational developers' work has been connected with many activities that have assisted students and staff to continue their learning and teaching in very extreme and traumatic circumstances. This article invites readers to consider how the war – and trauma in general – could be reinterpreted as institutions and teaching practice gravitate towards a more 'therapeutic' model and 'compassionate pedagogy' after two years' disruption by Covid-19. The article concludes by inviting readers to reflect on how emotions are considered in educational development.

Sector response

> *'Many female staff have left [the university] and are trying to do what work they can from a distance. Many male staff are fighting.'* (The Guardian, 14 May 2022)

Soon after the first Russian airstrikes, missiles and ground force incursions into Ukraine on 24 February 2022, UK university and student leaders strongly condemned the act and offered solidarity to the people of Ukraine. This universal condemnation mirrored statements set out by several national governments, NGOs, faith groups, learned societies, plus major bodies like the UN General Assembly and International Court of Justice. When, on 4 March 2022, the Russian Union of Rectors (the heads of over 260 HE institutions) signed a statement unequivocally supporting Moscow's actions, many UK universities swiftly reviewed their ties with Russia and, as international sanctions took hold, several annulled memoranda of understanding, ceased research projects and cancelled bilateral agreements.

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In the early weeks of the invasion, UK universities geared wellbeing services and pastoral support to all affected. HESA data shows that there were 870 Ukrainian students at UK HE institutions in 2020/21, but others are also impacted. As raised in UUK's July 2022 statement on Ukraine, many Russian students and academics who publicly criticised Moscow's 'special operation' did so at great personal peril.

Examining the initial university statements, the invasion brought about key changes to some institutional policy and direction. For example, the executive board of the University of Birmingham formally applied to be a University of Sanctuary, while Anglia Ruskin University announced a commitment to join the Council for At-Risk Academics (CARA), pledging to help academics able to arrive in the UK or by remotely supporting teaching staff and students in Ukraine. Institutional and students' union-led fundraising activities, co-ordinated vigils for peace in April (#StandWithUkraine), sector assistance with the Home Office's three visa schemes (Family, Sponsorship and Extension), new Sanctuary Scholarships, renewed engagement with the Student Action for Refugees (STAR) network and Refugee Education UK, credit recognition and transfer, accommodation help, the setting up of donation and collection points and student finance assistance, were also key examples of compassion and support.

To consider this connectivity in a little more context, Ukraine's engagement with UK HE (and Europe in general) took a decisive turn in 2014 when its parliament, the Rada, agreed to a comprehensive reform package that strengthened Ukraine's alignment with the Bologna Process and new standards for quality assurance. As Ukraine pivoted from a structure that, in the British Council's estimation, had been unreformed since Soviet times (Williams, 2015), the Ukrainian government focused on: reforming the number of disciplines and specialisms taught in universities; reducing the number of institutions (from 802 to 317); improving governance and enhancing reputation. These developments therefore prepared Ukraine to engage more purposefully in European programmes and with international partners. Perhaps the most visible expression of this is in the Association Agreement Ukraine signed with the EU to participate in the Horizon 2020 programme (2014-2020). This cultural direction came about at a time when Ukraine grappled to support thousands of internally displaced refugees (IDRs) following Russia's annexation of Crimea and the full evacuation of 16 universities in Donetsk and Luhansk, just three months prior to the Rada's agreement on HE reform.

From a teaching and learning perspective, Ukraine's engagement with other significant initiatives involving UK partners also merits consideration. For instance, the British Council's Creative Spark programme (2018-2023) to support Ukraine (plus six nations in Central Asia and the South Caucasus) develop entrepreneurship and enterprise skills for students and young entrepreneurs. The programme has been a significant lever in the development of online English language learning, but also more bespoke teaching and learning, developed and delivered by Anglia Ruskin, Bedfordshire, Cardiff Metropolitan, Coventry, Kingston, Portsmouth, Reading and Southampton universities. As Russia's invasion continued, a University of Bedfordshire Creative Spark academic reflected:

> *'We are humbled by the motivation and dedication of all the Ukraine participants and by their determination to not let the Russian invasion affect their professional development. By engaging in the training webinars, they are becoming the future leaders in promoting and developing the future of social entrepreneurship in Ukraine.'* (University of Bedfordshire, news briefing, 7 July 2022)

This display of resilience – framed within evolving and collegial relationships – has influenced new initiatives, with sentiments echoed in similar statements of hope:

> *'There is much to learn from West Ukraine National University (WUNU), not just academically, but from their community's incredible show*

of resilience and determination to continue overseeing the education of thousands under such terrible circumstances.' (De Montfort University, news briefing on twinning with WUNU, 20 September 2022)

Prior to 2022/23, the UK government made available funds to support 'twinning' with Ukrainian universities for a minimum of five years. Spearheaded by the Cormack Consulting Group – specialists in HE partnerships − and UUKi, over seventy partnerships have been established (see Table 1). In broad terms, UK universities engaged in the programme pledged to help rebuild campuses and buildings physically damaged and to offer mental health support. These are mutually beneficial partnerships, aligning institutional specialisms and thereby creating the opportunities for long-term joint activity, and a shared purpose is the connective tissue in many adjacent actions. Building on collaborative work between SCONUL, the wider library community (including the Chartered Institute for Library and Information Professionals and the Archives and Records Association), Research Libraries UK and Jisc, remote institutional resource access has been made available to help support student learning and researchers in Ukraine, develop cultural exchange and preserve valuable Ukrainian archives, including rare book collections.

A report by Eurydice (2022), the network of Erasmus+ countries, noted that most Ukrainian HE students continued their education within Ukraine. Therefore, engagement with online UK university modules has been a key feature of learning for several students. In addition, online summer schools have provided students with an opportunity to catch up on their learning as well as connect with other international students. #TwinForHope UK institutions have also been able to gain a first-hand understanding of the challenges faced by their counterparts: for example, Abertay students participated in an online lecture delivered from Simon Kuznets Kharkiv National University of Economics, on the economic costs of war.

#TwinForHope has facilitated limited − but important − face-to-face encounters. For instance, the University of Cambridge, working with Kharkiv National Medical University, granted seven-week placements for twenty students at hospitals in Cambridgeshire; nine students from Dnipro State Medical University were offered a six-week placement with Dundee's School of Medicine. Such placements naturally highlight Ukraine's immediate requirement for medical knowledge and specialist skills.

An emotional turn

Glancing through the list of Ukrainian institutions in Table 1, it may be natural to glaze over place names that have become familiar (or infamous) in 2022 and, in turn, the experiences that are now part of a fast-evolving catalogue of trauma. The World Bank (2022) confirmed the total destruction of four universities, with a further 38 severely damaged. Mariupol State University twinned with the University of Hull − resumed teaching at a new base in Kyiv in a building loaned to them by Kyiv National University of Construction and Architecture; Mariupol, on the Black Sea coast, was besieged for 83 days from March to May 2022, before eventually succumbing to Russian and pro-Russian forces.

Emotions play a significant role in education and educational developers are familiar with the interplay between cognitive, affective, motivational and behavioural factors in teaching and learning. As the sector emerges from a global pandemic, the emotional and situational factors may be more apparent in the analyses of these relationships (Mistry, 2021). It is a theme that has been seized on by the Department for Education when, in June 2022, it appointed a Student Support Champion in England (Professor Edward Peck, Vice-Chancellor of Nottingham Trent University), and earmarked funds to improve mental health support at universities. This also builds on the work of charities like Student Minds, whose Mental Health Charter takes a holistic and connected approach.

Programmes like #TwinForHope can feed into a continuing narrative − kick-started by the pandemic − centreing on a more compassionate pedagogy and the embedding of wellbeing in the curriculum. From these complex constellations follow valid questions as to how different levels of emotion interrelate. As the pandemic also underlined, what we feel depends not only on the stimulus, but also on the situation in which we perceive the stimulus. Stimuli and emotions should not be assessed and evaluated separately, but as part of narrative patterns in which spaces can be animated by different voices − student-centred and giving fortitude to the most vulnerable and marginalised.

Coda

Following Kalush Orchestra's triumph in Turin, and the continuing crisis in Ukraine, the European Broadcasting Union invited the UK to host the 2023 Eurovision Song Contest. Liverpool was chosen as the venue to host the Contest 'on behalf of the people of Ukraine'. It is a decision that adds further substance to Liverpool's recent history as a European Capital of Culture in 2008 and, moreover, as a City of Sanctuary since 2012.

The University of Liverpool is one of the two large universities with a stated 'civic' mission at the very heart of the city. In July 2022, its International Summer School enabled 80 Ukrainian students to engage in online learning and refine their critical thinking on key global challenges. As reported by the university's press office, Natalia Volnushkina, one of four students able to attend the summer school in person, marvelled at the opportunity to meet and connect with other international students also in attendance. This camaraderie is a symbolic but not insignificant personal experience: it is a story of connectedness and hope.

Abertay/Simon Kuznets Kharkiv National U. of Economics - **Aberystwyth**/Odessa National Economic U. - **Anglia Ruskin**/Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National U.- **Bangor**/Khmelnytskyi National U. - **Bath**/Luhansk Taras Shevchenko National U. - **Bath Spa**/Academician Stepan Demianchuk International U. of Economics & Humanities - **Bedfordshire**/National U. of Ukraine on Physical Education & Sport - **Birmingham**/Ivan Franko National U. of Lviv - **Bishop Grosseteste**/Drohobych Ivan Franko State Pedagogical U. - **Bristol**/Kharkiv Aviation Institute - **Cambridge**/Kharkiv National Medical U.- **Canterbury Christ Church**/Open International U. for Human Development - **Cardiff**/National U. Zaporizhzhia Polytechnic - **Cardiff Medical**/Zaporizhzhia State Medical U. - **Cardiff Metropolitan**/H.S.Skovoroda Kharkiv National Pedagogical U. - **Central Lancashire**/Uzhhorod National U. - **De Montfort**/West Ukrainian National U. - **Derby**/Kharkiv Polytechnic Institute - **Dundee**/Dnipro State Medical U. - **Durham**/Zaporizhzhia National U. - **East Anglia**/Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National U. - **East London**/Cherkasy State Technological U. - **Edge Hill**/Yaroslav Mudryi National Law U. - **Edinburgh**/Taras Shevchenko National U. of Kyiv - **Exeter**/King Danilo U. - **Glasgow**/National U. of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. & Poltava State Medical U. - **Glasgow Medical**/Danylo Halytsky Lviv National Medical U. - **Glasgow Caledonian**/State Tax U. of the Ministry of Finance of Ukraine - **Glasgow School of Art**/Lviv National Academy of Arts - **Greenwich**/Bohdan Khmelnytsky National U. of Cherkasy - **Harper Adams**/Odessa National U. of Technology - **Hertfordshire**/U. of Customs & Finance - **Hull**/Mariupol State U. - **Kent**/Kherson State U. - **Lancaster**/Dnipro U. of Technology - **Leeds**/Kyiv National Economic U. - **Leicester**/Kremenchuk Mykhailo Otrohradskyi National U. & Poltava State Agrarian U. - **Lincoln**/Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National. U. - **Liverpool**/Sumy State U. - **London Metropolitan**/Yuri Kondratyuk Poltava Polytechnic - **London South Bank**/Ivano-Frankivsk National Technical U. of Oil & Gas - **Loughborough***/O.M. Beketov National. U. of Urban Economy in Kharkiv - **Manchester**/Ivan Horbachevsky Ternopil National. Medical U. - **Newcastle**/National U. of Water & Environmental Engineering - **Nottingham**/Ukrainian Catholic U. - **Nottingham Trent**/Lviv Polytechnic National U. - **Plymouth**/State U. of Infrastructure & Technologies & Kherson State Maritime Academy - **Open**/Horlivka Institute for Foreign Languages of State HE Institution, Donbas State Pedagogical U. - **Portsmouth**/Odessa Polytechnic National U. - **Queen Mary Medical**/Odessa National. Medical U. - **Queen's Belfast**/Borys Grinchenko Kyiv U. - **Queen's Belfast Medical**/Shupyk National Healthcare U. of Ukraine - **Reading***/National U. of Life & Environmental Sciences of Ukraine - **Roehampton**/Bohdan Khmelnytsky National University of Cherkasy - **Royal Agricultural**/Sumy Agrarian U. - **Royal Holloway**/Volodymyr Dahl East Ukrainian National. U. - **Royal Veterinary College***/Stepan Gzhytskyi National U. of Veterinary Medicine & Biotechnologies of Lviv - **St.Andrews**/National U. of Ostroh Academy - **St.George's**/Ivano-Frankivsk National Medical U. - **St. Mary's**/Dnipro Humanitarian U. - **Sheffield**/Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute - **Sheffield Hallam**/Kyiv National U. of Technologies & Design - **Sussex**/Oles Honchar Dnipro National U. - **Swansea**/Petro Mohyla Black Sea National U. - **The Arts London**/National Academy of Fine Arts & Architecture - **Warwick**/Kharkiv National U. of Radio Electronics - **Wolverhampton**/Nizhyn Mykola Gogol State U. - **Worcester**/Kremenets Pedagogical Academy of Taras Shevchenko & Ternopil V. Hnatiuk National Pedagogical U. - **Wrexham Glyndŵr**/Chernihiv Polytechnic National U. - **York**/V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National. U.

Table 1 UK/Ukraine #TwinForHope partnerships (denotes [UK] membership of the Ukrainian Global University)*

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The learning landscape: Reflections on an evolving terrain of complexity

Cathy Minett-Smith, University of the West of England

Introduction

The teaching and learning landscape in higher education (HE) is constantly evolving, never more so than in recent years. Whilst it might feel like a state of perpetual motion, are there enduring themes that transcend the immediate context and, if so, what are the implications for those leading learning and teaching in higher education?

I have been leading learning and teaching in higher education for over 20 years at both university and school level. A mathematician by training, I have been in the Business School environment for most of my career. Consequently, I have strong connections with the Chartered Association of Business Schools (CABS) who run a Leaders in Learning and Teaching Development (LLTD) Programme. I completed this programme in 2008, have been a regular speaker on it since and now lead the programme. Continuity of involvement over 15 years with changing cohorts of participants and speakers has created an interesting opportunity to reflect on the enduring themes and challenges that have persisted across this period, irrespective of the immediate focus or crisis in the sector. My reflections are structured into three sections in this article: my perceptions of the fixed points in the landscape, the themes that are creating shifting sands, and the associated potential implications for leadership.

Fixed points in the landscape

Fixed points in the landscape or in maps are vital navigational aids. They are immovable, irrespective of any storm that may be spiralling around them, and keep the traveller on course. Student engagement, staff engagement, and defining and rewarding teaching excellence have been enduring but evolving themes.

Student engagement

The key challenge has remained constant: how do we encourage all students to engage? In particular, how do we reach and influence the behaviours of the students who appear not to be engaged. The concept of a spectrum of engagement profiles from super-engagers to dis-engaged appears not to have changed. Similarly, the spectrum of activity where we hope to see engagement has not changed that much: formal learning sessions, professional support opportunities and extracurricular activities. However, there has been a seismic shift in the locations of engagement with an increase in online forums, both formal and informal, and increasing collaborative learning experiences with partners locally and internationally.

The tracking and measuring of engagement, supported by advancing technology, has mushroomed during the 15 years with all the associated ethical challenges. A clash of institutional cultures emerges in some quite heated debates about the extent to which student engagement and movements should be monitored, how that data should or could be used and how transparent that is to students. All universities can generate vast quantities of data measuring aspects of the student's interaction with the university both online and on campus. Relying on these observations 'is a crude means of understanding the complexity of how students learn and engage' (Macfarlane, 2017). Universities need to be bold enough to define what appropriate engagement means to them and why. In the absence of that, participants on this programme had genuine concerns relating to the rise of a performative understanding of engagement driving a monitoring relationship between tutors and students. This often conflicts with their values of higher education learning aligned with interrogating knowledge in an environment that values autonomy. This leads to concerns that an engagement measurement culture might be damaging the very essence of the relationships that are at the heart of learning.

Staff engagement

Throughout the last 15 years, participants have identified the challenge to get all staff to engage with teaching and learning developments, reflecting that they often work with the same group of enthusiasts. Leading systemic change in teaching and learning can be frustrating when it is not a priority for some staff. The engagement challenge is not linked with resistance, rather a context of competing pressures and teaching development stubbornly continuing to be perceived as the poor relation to research. The rationale for change is not always clearly communicated or expected, with colleagues understandably therefore continuing with an approach that has always worked for them. Hence, pushing for change can threaten their very identity as teachers in higher education. The underestimation of the time and space required to develop practice is a connected persisting theme across the fifteen years. The Covid-19 years were a marked exception to this with recognition across the sector of necessity driving more systemic adoption of technology to support learning. Unsurprisingly, therefore, leaders of learning and teaching have reflected that they made significant progress during the lockdown with agenda aligned with embedding and making appropriate use of technology in learning (Jessop *et al*., 2021). However, the wholesale institutional effort and time invested to achieve this is a lesson well worth noting.

Recognising and rewarding teaching

Despite significant strides in the sector to value, recognise and reward colleagues who prioritise teaching and learning development, it is still perceived to be the poor relation to research. The infrastructure and evidence base for impactful research is well established whilst that for teaching and learning is still maturing. Participants over the years have reflected that, whilst their institutions have progression routes to professorial titles in learning and teaching, successful candidates are in the minority compared to the more traditional research route. Most universities have established schemes to support evidencing excellence in teaching such as fellowship of AdvanceHE. It is harder to find examples of institutions that have a robust, evidential requirement for continuing professional development in teaching which is an expectation in many other professions. The Certified Business and Management Educator developed and offered by the CABS is an example of what can be done in this space. (You can find a link to this in the resources section at the end of this article.) Furthermore, the identity of professor does not always resonate with those who have chosen to specialise in teaching and learning. This is particularly the case if they have chosen to enter the profession from industry and often don't see themselves as academics at all. Possibly there is still work to be done to demystify the term and reclaim a definition of academic as someone who is interested in and excelling at scholarly pursuit, with appropriate, and arguably evolving, characteristics of what that looks like in the teaching and learning space.

Shifting sands

The teaching and learning landscape constantly shifts and reforms as it adapts to societal and political changes. This in and of itself is no bad thing, we should be constantly reflecting and adapting practices to ensure their relevance. The question then is more one of whether the sector has struck the right balance of the need for and speed of change. Unhelpfully, conversations around learning in higher education are often broken down into functional parts that are discussed discretely: employability, assessment, online, in the classroom *etc*. Within this article I have focused consideration on four themes that are contributing to the shifting sands beneath us: we are working within a highly regulated sector with associated increases in metrics; technological advances in both the teaching space and how we support, manage and interact with students; concepts of partnership; and the management of team teaching with the associated theme of the casualisation of teaching contracts. None of these themes, or the previous fixed points, work in isolation – each can and does affect others.

Regulation and metrics

There is no space in this article to go into an historical consideration of the rise of regulation in the HE sector from Robbins (1963), to Dearing (1997) and beyond, with many of us remembering various iterations of subject reviews and quality audits. The monitoring of an increasing range of metrics has been a characteristic feature of the last 15 years. When I completed the LLTD programme in 2008, the NSS was relatively new, having launched in 2005, and not all universities were paying that much attention to it. Fast forward to the introduction of the Office for Students (OfS) and the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) in 2017, which, with associated league tables, mean that metrics are now a strategic priority.

The list of outcomes and measures by which HE is evaluated is extensive and increasing, including student satisfaction, awarding gaps, progression and continuation, grade inflation, widening participation, wellbeing, sustainability, graduate outcomes and value for money, to name but a few. In many cases the policies around these appear contradictory rather than harmonious, which creates obvious tensions in teaching and learning development; for example, reducing the awarding gap whilst also protecting grade inflation, or providing flexibility in learning whilst positioning value for money in narratives aligned with time spent in the classroom. Providing clarity of direction in such a complex and high-stakes policy environment is challenging at all levels. For the practitioner on the ground leading a module it can sometimes feel like an impossible ask. However, there are genuine opportunities for universities to boldly position themselves in respect of the learning experience they offer and why.

Technology

HE should be at the cutting edge of technology and preparing students for a future that demands confidence and agility in digital spaces. Ironically, universities themselves struggle with clunky technology bolt-ons and various legacy systems that don't integrate well. The result is usually a disjointed student experience often creating the very real potential for the most vulnerable to get caught in the gaps. Similarly, tutors sometimes struggle to introduce new technologies into the learning experience if they are not supported within the university. Nevertheless, I have witnessed a helpful shift in the conversation from 'what can this technology do' to 'what do we need technology to do' which is fundamental to creating a coherent learning experience.

The increased application of social media is a good example of some of the complexities. In recent years, conversations about social media in the learning context have revealed diametrically opposed viewpoints. Some express concern about the erosion of the boundary between university and private life, for both staff and students, whilst others value the opportunities to meet students where they are at, creating a sense of connection and belonging to the university.

Undoubtedly, technology will transform the learning landscape in ways that we cannot even begin to imagine. To genuinely make the most of the potential requires universities to radically rethink processes such as timetabling, the lexicon of learning and the administrative processes that underpin student learning.

Partnership

Students as partners is not a new phenomenon. It has, however, intensified during the last 15 years fuelled by an expectation of partnership from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA, 2018). Consequently, case studies of student partnership in quality assurance, curriculum development, learning design and assessment design choices proliferate in the sector, with ideas of student partnership becoming conflated with engagement and student voice. At the same time, colleagues are reflecting on the challenges of engaging students in development activities and the difficulty in recruiting students into formalised roles such as student representatives or the required student roles in quality processes. The lack of structured incentivisation or payment models across the sector, linked with appropriately rewarding different forms of partnership, has injected an ethical dimension into the conversation, linked to whether there is genuine equality of opportunity for the different demographics of students. Whilst student partnership is a useful approach to addressing student engagement, they are not one and the same thing, with Healey *et al*. (2014) arguing that 'all student partnership is engagement but not all engagement is partnership'. Developing an understanding of 'what is being formed through engagement' (Kehm *et al.*, 2019) provides a more nuanced context for partnership that can be used to address the inherent ethical challenges.

Team teaching and the casualisation of teaching contracts

Team teaching is a necessity in business schools to cope with large classes, complex international module delivery patterns and a pressured working environment. Increased reliance on hourly paid lecturers can create a lack of stability in teaching teams, hampering efforts to collegially develop and evaluate modules (Minett-Smith and Davis, 2019). The burden of student support and interaction outside of the scheduled teaching similarly often rests on the shoulders of a reduced number of permanent staff. Exact measures of how much teaching is delivered through hourly paid colleagues is not easy to determine, however, a UCU report in 2018 estimated that 25% of UG teaching is being delivered by hourly paid staff with this rising to 50% in some pre-92 universities. Hourly paid colleagues are vital members of teaching teams; they often work in industry, are enthused about sharing their experience through teaching and hence bring valuable insights into the learning experience. However, delivering effective and coherent learning experiences is about more than staffing the timetable. The need to balance flexibility and agility with requirements to deliver on metric-driven institutional expectations relating to quality is creating a leadership puzzle that has intensified in recent years.

Implications

As I reflect on the changing landscape over the last 15 years, I am reassured that my reflections have led me to conclude that the constants in this landscape are as they should be: what it means to teach well and the centrality of ensuring staff and student engagement to create and sustain thriving learning communities of curiosity. What has radically changed during this time is the complexity of the context within which this takes place, including the political positioning of students, regulatory demands, technological developments and a changing staff base. This melting pot creates multiple, and often apparently conflicting, demands.

To be effective in this landscape, leaders of learning and teaching need to possess complex thinking mindsets and complexity leadership management skills (Clarke, 2013). Watermeyer *et al*. (2022) make the point that the 'burdens of complexity weigh heavily' and that the sector should reassess its understanding of leadership in this complex and changing landscape.

I would also argue that this burden of complexity and leadership skill is needed at all levels of the organisation, not just from those in senior leadership positions. Module leaders, often who have had limited experience of or training in leadership, are expected to provide teaching, learning and assessment leadership for large, complex and changing teaching teams (Minett-Smith and Davis, 2019). These teams are often hybrid in nature including colleagues from professional services at key points within a module's delivery, colleagues at local and international partner locations and often students themselves. To succeed, the module leader needs to be adept at choreographing and directing a complex dance of learning. Module outcomes are rarely attributable to the efforts of an individual and are more likely to be a result of effective and complementary team approaches to learning. This should make us question what excellence in teaching means or indeed whether excellence is the correct thing to strive for. Frameworks of expertise arguably align better with team approaches and the need for agility in designing effective learning experiences (King, 2022).

Students are not, and never have been, passive recipients of teaching. However, they too are juggling multiple demands including working, caring responsibilities and commuting. The current narrative of value for money being aligned with time spent in the classroom is not conducive to supporting either staff or students to cope with complexity. Hence we are witnessing a helpful shift away from focusing on teaching to focus more on learning. Learning is arguably harder to define than teaching with multiple definitions of what it means to learn (Barron *et al*, 2015). Consequently, a focus on learning generates genuine opportunities for universities to create distinctive identities relating to how students will learn with them rather than how they will be taught.

In conclusion, whilst we may sometimes feel unsettled by the constantly shifting landscape of learning, the main constant is the people who constitute the curious, dynamic learning communities in HE. We have to care enough about the discipline, the staff who are passionate about it and the students who have chosen to study it, to choose to reinvest in supporting the relationships that enable learning to flourish. These are the fixed points of reference that guide our way as the landscape around us shifts and evolves.

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Reimagining reflective practice: Personalising reflective practice to meet students' needs

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Introduction

Reflective practice is a key focus of any initial teacher education (ITE) programme throughout the world (Buschor and Kamm, 2015; McGarr *et al*., 2019), a view supported by Tabachnick and Zeichner (2002, p. 13), who state that 'there is not a single teacher educator who does not claim to produce reflective practitioners'. Transitioning from the role of an in-service teacher to a teacher educator was a challenging experience for both of us, and supporting pre-service teachers with their reflective practice work was an area where we were keen to develop our own practice. We also noted that each colleague approached reflective practice in a different way, meaning there was a lack of consistency in how our colleagues were developing students' practice in this area. Some tutors gave their students a series of set questions which they had to respond to, whilst others encouraged their group to reflect on any area of their practice that they felt warranted improvement, without any form of structure or guidance. There were others who appeared to have their students evaluate lessons rather than reflect upon them. When we asked colleagues for input regarding this area, responses amongst the group were vague and inconsistent. It was obvious that our colleagues saw reflection as an aspect of the course that must be done, appearing to take student reflection for granted. For the first two years we copied the approach of one colleague who appeared to have put more thought into this area. However, during the year we realised that the students' reflective work was poor and that only a few had made progress. The problem was, we did not know what to do in relation to improving our approach and students' practice in this area. We began to read around the area and the more we read, the more we realised we knew little about reflection. Therefore, we needed to find out more about reflective practice and so decided that this taken-for-granted, much maligned, but frequently mandated area had to be investigated (McFlynn, 2020).

Baseline assessment

Using Larrivee's (2008) reflective framework (see Figure 1) which categorises reflective work into one of four areas – pre-reflection, surface reflection, pedagogical reflection and critical reflection – we analysed a sample of forty reflective accounts from our 2017-18 cohort.

Sixteen were categorised as pre-reflective and twenty-four as surface level, highlighting that our students were demonstrating low levels of reflection. We presented this information to our colleagues during a staff development session, emphasising the need for us as a course team to improve practice in this area. Our next step was to survey our PGCE cohort so that we could gain an insight into their perceptions of reflective practice. Three key messages emerged:

1. The majority (84%) of students recognised the value of reflective practice
2. Just under 50% viewed it as time consuming and repetitive
3. 40% wanted more support and guidance.

Based on student feedback and our ongoing scholarship in this area, we devised new approaches for the next academic year (2018-19). During the first half (6 weeks) of the students' first teaching practice, students were encouraged to make use of Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (1998) (see Figure 2) which provided a clear structure regarding how they might frame their reflective work.

Level 1. Pre-reflection At this level the teacher interprets classroom situations without thoughtful connection to other events or circumstances. The teacher's orientation is reactive, believing that situational contingencies are beyond the teacher's control. Beliefs and positions about teaching practices are generalized and not supported with evidence from experience, theory, or research. The teacher's perspective is undifferentiated and general regarding the needs of learners.	***Level 2. Surface reflection*** At this level the teacher's examination of teaching methods is confined to tactical issues concerning how best to achieve predefined objectives and standards. Beliefs and positions about teaching practices are supported with evidence from experience, not theory or research. The teacher's view of learners is somewhat differentiated, acknowledging the need to accommodate learner differences.	***Level 3. Pedagogical reflection*** At this level the teacher is constantly thinking about how teaching practices are affecting students' learning and how to enhance learning experiences. The teacher's goal is continuously improving practice and reaching all students. Reflection is guided by a pedagogical conceptual framework. Beliefs and positions about teaching are specific and supported by evidence from experience, as well as being grounded in theory or research. The teacher's view of teaching and learning is multidimensional, connecting events within a broader framework	***Level 4. Critical reflection*** .At this level the teacher is engaged in ongoing reflection and critical inquiry concerning teaching actions as well as thinking processes. The teacher holds up both philosophical ideologies and teaching practices for continuous examination and verification. The teacher consciously considers how personal beliefs and values, assumptions, family imprinting, and cultural conditioning may impact on students. The critically reflective teacher is concerned with promoting democratic ideals and weighs the ethical and social implications of classroom practices.

Figure 1 Larrivee's Reflective Framework

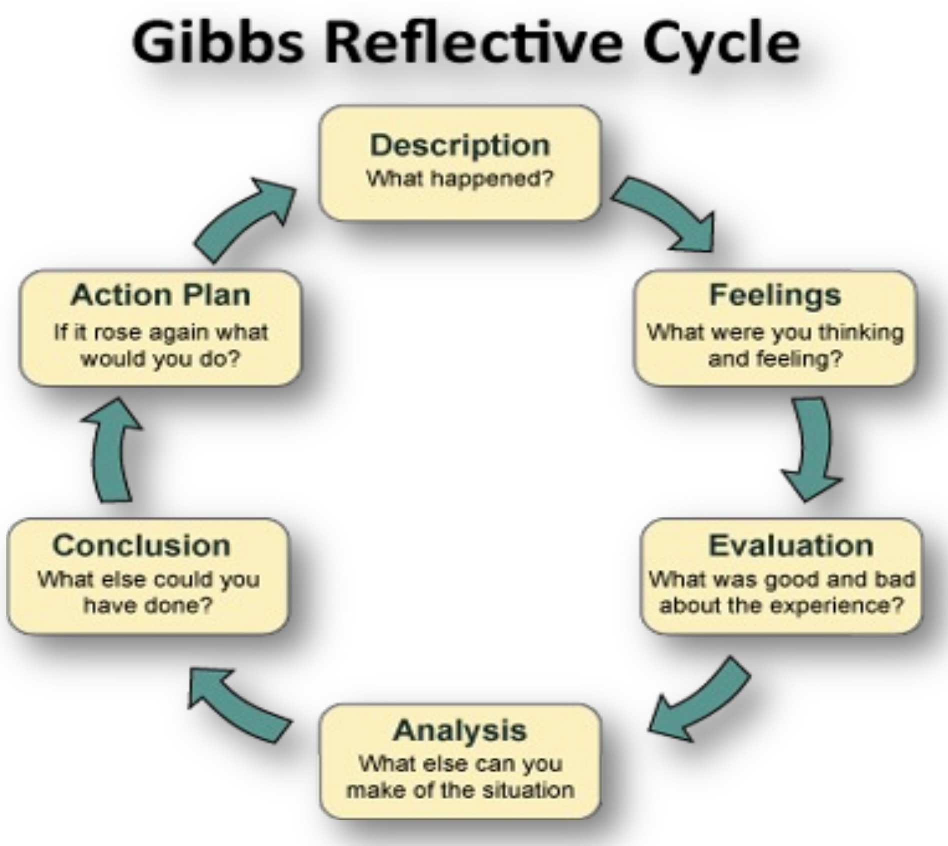

Figure 2 Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (1998)

The students were expected to share these reflections with their subject group and tutor via an online discussion board, with the aim of creating collaborative approaches to reflection. At the end of week 6, students were asked for feedback on how these approaches were impacting their practice. The students reported that they found written reflections tedious, and in some cases, individuals admitted to fabricating reflections to meet course requirements. One student's comment reflected the views of about 40% of the group, stating:

> *'Writing weekly reflections can be very tedious and I spend so much time worrying about my spelling and grammar, that it becomes an exercise focused on my writing as opposed to reflection. I find talking about my teaching to be much easier and more accurate as to what I'm actually thinking.'*

At this point, we felt it necessary to emphasise that we only wanted authentic reflections and that if they are in a position where they feel they have to fabricate information so as to complete the weekly reflection task, we would prefer that they did not submit a reflection. Some of our colleagues were reluctant to introduce what they felt was an 'optional' approach to reflective practice, but we felt it was necessary in an attempt to convince students that we only wanted honest reflections. To provide flexibility regarding how students recorded their reflections, we introduced audio-recorded and video-recorded reflections. For audio-recorded reflections, students were encouraged to utilise the 'video recorder' app and expected to share their reflection with their course tutor and one other student (since the audio-recorded reflections could not be shared via the online discussion board). For video-recorded reflections, the students simply used the camera on their phone or iPad to video record their reflection and again were encouraged to share this with their course tutor and one other student. Therefore, for the remainder of this placement, students had the choice to either write, audio record or video record their reflections, thus moving towards a personalised approach to reflective practice. To help structure their reflections, students could use Gibbs' reflective framework, or they were free to use their own structure.

End of placement 1 survey

In our normal end of placement survey, we included a section on reflective practice. In response to whether or not reflective practice had helped them improve their practice, 68 out of 71 stated 'yes', with just 3 students stating 'no'. In response to their preferred mode of recording their reflections, 30 preferred written, 33 preferred audio recording and 8 preferred video recording. Commenting on their preferred choice, the following comments are representative of the group's views:

> *'I liked audio recording my reflections as it was so much easier to talk through my thinking on key lessons or emerging issues as opposed to writing them down. It was also a lot faster – I had my weekly audio reflections done in about 3-4 minutes whereas a written one took me about 20-25 minutes.'*

> *'I actually prefer writing my reflections. I know audio and video took less time but I like getting my thoughts down on paper as it helps structure my thoughts.'*

> *'I like using video as I can show my resources and samples of pupil work as I think it helps to give a real sense of context.'*

A key theme emerging from the feedback was the high number of students who referred to the importance of having a post-lesson feedback discussion with their teacher-mentor immediately after the lesson, and that quite often this instant feedback had the most impact on their thinking about their teaching and pupil learning. Based on the importance the students were attaching to post-lesson discussion and our ongoing reading around the area of peer review, we decided to introduce peer review as another approach to developing our students' reflective practice skills for placement 2.

Placement 2

For this placement, students still had the option of writing, audio recording or video recording their reflections and engaging with the process of peer review. To maximise the potential benefits to be gained from the peer review process, it was decided that all subject groups received a session on lesson observation and how to conduct a post-lesson feedback session. Students were encouraged to peer review a subject peer, but if circumstances did not permit this to happen (due to distance from peer's school, timetabling coordination), then they were encouraged to peer review a student from any other subject. Each PGCE student undertook the role of reviewer and reviewee, meaning they observed one lesson and had their own teaching observed. Another feature of the peer review process was the opportunity for students to observe their peer in a school which belongs to a different religious denomination to the school they were teaching in, since most students choose placement schools based on their religious background (*i.e.* Roman Catholic or Protestant). When acting as the reviewer, the students observed the lesson, completed the observation report form (the same form as tutors complete when doing observations), and led the post-lesson feedback discussion. Once the lesson was taught, the reviewee completed their lesson plan annotation which involved evaluating the lesson. Once completed, they then engaged with the peer feedback session. During this feedback session, the reviewee was to take notes on key issues emerging from the discussion which would then be the basis for his/her peer review lesson reflection. Upon completion, the reviewee would send the reflection to their course tutor.

Feedback via the end of placement 2 survey showed that students continued to value the choice they had regarding how to record their reflections. In relation to peer review, 79 students out of 84 engaged with this process. 58 students *strongly agreed* that the peer review process allowed them to reflect more deeply on their lesson, 17 students *agreed* that the process allowed them to reflect more deeply on their lesson, and just 4 students stated they were *neutral* as to whether the peer review process allowed them to reflect more deeply or not. The following qualitative comments provided an overview of the feedback:

'I really enjoyed the peer review session and it was just nice to be able to have the time to sit down and discuss the lesson with xxxxxx as we normally complete our lesson annotation and move on to the next lesson, but having the dedicated time to actually discuss various parts of the lesson was really beneficial for me.'

'The feedback discussion after the peer review lesson was really enjoyable as it felt very much like a two-way process rather than just sitting there listening to feedback from a tutor, it was different as you felt like equals in the process.'

'I was a little apprehensive about having my lesson observed but I must admit that it turned out to be one of the most positive experiences of the course. The feedback discussion was great and really made me think about particular aspects of my teaching. Observing xxxxxx's lesson was also a great experience and made me think about my own practice as he did certain things that I was then able to use in my own lessons.'

'I must admit I liked the peer review process, but I am not so sure that it actually made me reflect more deeply as I think I was aware of most of the things xxxxxxx said, so I may possibly have reflected on these points anyway. However, observing his practice was probably more beneficial as I picked up wee tips that I then brought back to my lessons.'

As expected, there were some teething issues with the peer review process. For example, some schools did not provide enough time for the post-lesson discussion whilst two students noted that their reviewer was quite negative with their feedback and that the collaborative discussion which they expected did not materialise. These points were taken on board to ensure that the process could be improved in order to maximise student learning.

2019-20

For the following academic year, we made further additions to our reflective practice approaches. Based on the emphasis that students placed on post-lesson discussions with teacher-mentors, we encouraged students (with teacher-mentor permission) to audio record these discussions using their phones. The students could then listen to these discussions to help them with their weekly reflections. The end of placement 1 survey (January 2020) reported that students found this approach to be extremely beneficial for their practice, with all 65 students who utilised this approach stating that they found it either *very useful* or *useful* for helping them to reflect on their practice.

Covid-19 and beyond

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the disruption that this brought to PGCE school placements for the remainder of 19/20 and the 20/21 academic year, we had limited opportunity to continue our work in this area. During 2021-22, students had the same choices regarding written reflections, audio-recorded and video-recorded reflections. Due to the threat of Covid-19, peer review was not implemented. Students were also encouraged to audio record mentor feedback when and where appropriate. Similar to the 2019-20 cohort, the feedback via the end of placement surveys highlighted that many students benefited greatly from this approach.

Team reflections and learning

Leading this change has been a challenging but rewarding experience for the lead team member. Initiating change and securing commitment from more established and experienced team members was difficult to begin with, but pivotal to securing this commitment was the impact of the student voice combined with presentation of research evidence. This comment from a team member reflects the views of the more experienced group members:

'I was a little reluctant to start making wholesale changes to our reflective practice work but the student feedback really made me and the others take stock of where we were and combined with xxxx'x ongoing work in this area, I did realise that it was important to address this issue.'

New staff have joined the team recently and leading them on this journey has also presented challenges, challenging in the sense that they are trying to come to terms with the transition from teacher to teacher educator and thus they have required more support. However, they have embraced these new approaches and brought high levels of enthusiasm which has energised the team. The additional support and direction through peer-led engagement with education technology provided a vehicle for adoption of and opportunities to embed these reflective approaches without significant technical challenges.

Conclusions

Offering our students choice regarding how they engage with reflective practice has been a worthwhile development, creating a reflective practice menu that allows us to cater for the learning needs of our diverse student cohorts. The improvement in this area has been noted by the chief external examiner for the course, who stated:

'There was also a marked improvement in students' reflective practice, both in terms of students' perceptions of it and the quality of their outcomes. I am aware that the course director has been leading in this aspect of the programme for a few years now so I would like to commend him particularly, but also the whole programme team for a concerted and united approach here. Many examiners saw examples of deep and probing reflections that, again, was clearly influencing their practice, and it was also commented that students were given flexibility on how they approached this, therefore allowing them to personalise this crucial aspect of their work.' (EE, 2021)

We will continue to utilise student feedback and our own research in this area to refine and develop our reflective practice work. A most recent development has been the dissemination of our practice across other schools in the University, where one of the schools is piloting the use of the peer review process with their students during professional practice placements.

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In defence of 'knowledge'

Graham Gibbs

It is hard to imagine David Baume's sceptical conception of the value of 'knowledge' endearing him to academics – in any discipline, let alone Organic Chemistry ('Literacies, fluencies and academic practices', *Educational Developments,* 23.3). Carl Rogers wrote that the English word 'knowledge' came from the Greek word 'gnosi' (meaning knowing, mastery, cognition and awareness) and the Ancient Norse word 'leika', (meaning 'sport' or 'to have sport with'), so that a knowledgeable person is one who can play with ideas. The notion that 'knowledge' is just dead facts is, I suspect, not shared by many people in higher education. It is a straw man.

But even in its narrow meaning it is much more important within educational development than Baume argues. One of my persistent frustrations with educational developers, in many countries, was that sometimes they simply did not know their subject. They often had a limited knowledge of alternative teaching practices and regimes outside their own immediate context, of how teaching and learning differs between disciplines, and of empirical evidence about what works best in what circumstances, and about the levers that are known to make the most difference to learning. They can end up being effective facilitators of the implementation of educational policies that have no empirical basis and that are unlikely to be helpful in many, or even any, of the different contexts across the University. In my work I felt I needed to be able to say things like 'I can give examples of that from University X or discipline Y' or 'The evidence suggests that will not work very well' or 'An alternative way of looking at that is...' (and provide a helpfully more powerful theoretical perspective).

For example, there was a committee debate at the University of Oxford, responding to vocal students' demands that their tutorial essays should be given a mark as well as the usual oral and written feedback. The discussion rambled around inconclusively until I said (in summary), 'The evidence here is that of the three conditions – only marks, marks and feedback, only feedback – the one that leads to most learning is feedback only, without marks. This is because… If the problem is that students do not understand criteria, that can be solved in the following ways'. End of debate. The committee expected me to be able to make interventions of this kind. You cannot do that on the basis of 'literacy' or 'capability' without knowledge.

If you do not have enough knowledge to do this, then your educational development practice is going to be strictly limited and you will have to fall back on educational development *processes*, devoid of content.

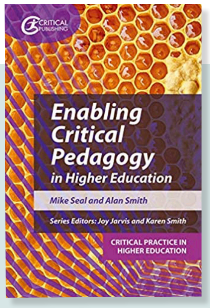
Experts need to know more than their clients do. Baume may be right about the importance of also knowing how to make this knowledge useful to the client, but without the knowledge you can hardly get started.

Graham Gibbs retired from his position as Director of the Oxford Learning Institute, University of Oxford, in 2007.

Book Review

Enabling Critical Pedagogy in Higher Education

by Mike Seal and Alan Smith
St Albans: Critical Publishing, 2021
ISBN 9781914171093



Enabling Critical Pedagogy in Higher Education sets out to introduce critical pedagogy to higher education practitioners in a way that is practical, clear and actionable. The aims of the book are to:

- Provide a comprehensive introduction to enabling critical pedagogy in higher education
- Explore the theoretical debates and tensions entailed in such an endeavour
- Give practical examples of enabling critical pedagogy at an institutional level
- Outline the conditions for critical pedagogy to be able to flourish within higher education institutions. (p. 3)

The authors are mindful from the beginning of the various barriers which may make critical pedagogy a seemingly difficult approach to take in a world that is so regulated by quality assurance and benchmarking processes, increasingly understood as a product in a consumer society. The book – which is in truth a critical pedagogy manifesto for HE practitioners – is therefore organised in a way which helps those with a sketchy or peripheral knowledge of critical pedagogy to question, reflect and modify their practice, from the wider curriculum level, down to their individual classroom practice in lectures and small-group teaching.

Chapter 1 stands on the shoulders of Paulo Freire and Henry Giroux to offer an introduction to critical pedagogy which is scholarly but at the same time accessible. This is done within the context of higher education, with the aims of critical pedagogy being made relevant to HE practice (pp. 6-8).

Chapter 2 discusses critical pedagogy and the curriculum, focusing especially on ideas of co-creation (which are linked to Bovill and Wolmer's recent work on the topic). Importantly, Seal and Smith discuss QA processes not as a straitjacket, but as processes which can be used creatively to offer a more authentic curriculum. Notions of power are discussed in this chapter, especially with regards to the impact of students' prior schooling, as well as disciplinary 'histories' pre-determining how things are done. Chapter 3 focuses on assessment, examining the coexistence of critical pedagogy with assessment. The authors offer problem-based and authentic assessment as ways in which assessment can offer a more critical outcome, offering examples and advice for assessment flexibility and co-creation. Chapter 4 discusses critical pedagogy in the teaching and learning arena (be it in-person or online), focusing on the problems with existing norms in a number of settings (lectures, tutor groups, seminars), offering examples and ideas for deconstructing these. Chapter 5 discusses critical pedagogy in contexts outside the classroom, the 'in-between' spaces as the authors define them. Such spaces are often informal, or go beyond institutional boundaries. Chapter 6 focuses on critical pedagogy at the institutional and sector levels, discussing opportunities (and challenges) for work at the strategic level. Finally, Chapter 7 concludes the volume with a discussion of the future of critical pedagogy in HE.

The book delivers what it promises. The chapters are structured in a way which raises key questions in each topic for practitioners to address, offering a step-by-step guide. It also offers examples for the reader to consider. It offers educational developers who wish to introduce critical pedagogy to curriculum teams and individuals a practical and practicable guide, which is at the same time solidly grounded in relevant and up-to-date scholarship. Seal and Smith situate their work within the post-pandemic world of a neoliberal education which fosters a culture of individualism and material success. Their work offers ideas, inspiration – and hope – in subverting and challenging this system. The reader is left with a number of actions, but also questions: how do I approach critical pedagogy in different disciplines, some of which (particularly in accredited and regulated subjects such as Law or some STEM subjects, for example) are where curricula are even more controlled? Time for an edited volume perhaps?

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Promoting confident assessment

Rachel Forsyth, Lund University, Sweden

What's wrong with assessment?

On the one hand, nothing. Students are being set assignment tasks, which are being graded; the machinery for managing university assignments functions pretty well in most institutions; and assignments look pretty similar from one university to another. Most students leave university with an approved qualification, and then most get what the government considers to be 'good' jobs. Nothing to see here.

On the other hand, quite a lot. Students are very stressed by assessment; staff often feel overwhelmed by marking expectations; governments and the media are regularly concerned about standards and comparability between institutions and countries; employers sometimes say that graduates are leaving higher education with inadequate skills; there is increasing evidence of students using sophisticated cheating methods to gain unfair advantage; and there is an increasing base of research to show that the grading of open-ended questions of the kind regularly used in higher education lacks validity and reliability.

Only 69% of UK students say they are satisfied with their assessment (NSS, 2022), a figure which has been stubbornly resistant to improvement across the sector, and one which is consistently lower than most other aspects of their experience which the NSS asks about, except for the question about learning communities (NSS, 2022). The NSS could be a red herring; it only asks about marking and feedback, and we know from qualitative analysis that students are much more concerned about assessment information and design.

In the media there are annual complaints about grade inflation/dumbing down/low quality degrees/structural barriers to progression/fill in your own assessment-related pearl-clutching. This phenomenon is particularly challenging for academic developers, as the thought of having an assessment improvement labelled as dumbing down or woke in the national press makes university leaders very risk-averse. Creative and innovative teaching practices may attract praise, but there is a nervousness about experimentation in assessment in higher education which manifests itself at both an individual and institutional level. You need a great deal of confidence to explain why changes to assessment tasks or structures are justified.

What can academic developers do?

Providing the conditions for change in assessment is exactly where academic developers can make things better. We can play an active role in building assessment confidence and assessment literacy, not just with novice teachers, but with experts and, crucially, with the many colleagues across professional services who work with the processes and procedures which govern complex, open-ended assessments in higher education: disability services, learner development specialists, quality assurance teams, examination managers and appeal panels, to name some of the critical services which contribute to successful assessments.

So, are we doing this? Let's imagine this is a workshop (it is Ed Devs, I want us to be in a comfortable space). Think about the courses offered to novice teachers in your institution. Maybe you've designed them, maybe you teach on them, maybe you are involved in their assessment. How much time is genuinely spent on talking about assessment in those courses? And, at the risk of breaking every rule of plain English writing, how much of your PGC assessment assesses teacher competence in student assessment? In my experience of excellent PGCs at UK universities, either through teaching or external examining, assessment planning and management does not take up much time on the course – maybe 20%, at most. Even if this much of participant time is spent on assessment, the content is likely to be mostly top tips for marking and giving feedback, with little time spent on assessment design. In terms of assessing teacher competence in student assessment, I haven't seen an assignment in which novice teachers are actually judged on their marking and feedback as part of their initial teaching courses, and it isn't a core skill in the UK Apprenticeship Standard for Academic Professionals (Institute for Apprenticeships, 2018).

I could well just have led a very sheltered life, though, as it is a key part of the UK Professional Standards Framework (Higher Education Academy, 2011) to demonstrate that you can 'assess and give feedback to learners'. Maybe novice teachers aren't just demonstrating that they've done it in their Fellowship of the HEA portfolios and assessments, but are having a full peer discussion about it, in the way suggested by Aldred, McCabe and Powell in a previous issue of Ed Devs (2021). I look forward to the correspondence telling me exactly where and how this is done well, so that we can socialise this good practice further.

When I first started teaching about assessment on a PGC and asked novice teachers how they felt about assessment, I was concerned about the negative language they used, so I started keeping track of it. 70% used words linked to anxiety such as 'stressful' and 'worrying'. This pattern was repeated year after year, and I wasn't sure my input was making things better. At best, I was putting a sticking plaster over their problem by giving them some confidence in their marking and feedback techniques. This didn't address any of the possible problems with inaccessible or inequitable assessment design, difficult-to-interpret marking criteria, academic dishonesty, or misalignment with learning outcomes.

Before I alienate the entire Ed Devs readership, this is not a criticism of PGC courses. I have been on PGC programme teams and I know that it is impossible to fit in everything else that seems imperative: basic lesson planning, peer observation, reflective practice; and then there are bound to be university priorities around inclusion and sustainability which must somehow be squeezed into the curriculum, without making the course so long that nobody sticks with it till the end. My point here is that the usual contents of a PGC aren't enough to ensure that those colleagues really develop confidence in assessment, and so there is a danger that assessment practice gets stuck in a rut, without the challenges indicated in the earlier part of this piece being addressed.

I'd like to suggest a simple manifesto which could slot into a PGC or similar course without too much extra work. It means shifting the current focus slightly: from passively marking and giving feedback to actively incorporating assessment into all course planning; from feeling anxious about assessment to owning the process; from accepting assessment myths to challenging dominant practices.

The assessment life cycle

I'm going to hang the suggestions around a simplified version of the assessment life cycle. As part of a long-ago Jisc-supported project, it was developed to neutralise discussion about assessment (Figure 1). Its genesis was in the finding that assessment management was quite fragmented in our institution, so that people took responsibility for different parts of the process, and didn't think they could influence any other parts. This made systemic change very difficult.

The example I've already used in this piece is that novice teachers only focused on marking and feedback, without understanding that they needed to consider assessment while they were teaching, or that they could have input into the design of assignment tasks, marking criteria, or feedback procedures. Another is that information services colleagues set up digital submission systems without accounting for specific requirements such as staggered groupwork presentations or automatic extensions due to disabilities, which led to complex workarounds which could potentially introduce errors to grade processing.

We designed the assessment life cycle to provide a framework for looking at each task as an activity which had been selected by teaching staff to be the best fit to the module learning outcomes, rather than as a generic process which needed to fit into a set of existing procedures. It focuses attention on the task as a whole, with numerous people contributing to its successful outcomes and discussing this together. The intention was that it was also pedagogically neutral, to allow discussion of processes and requirements that were consistent across any method, size, or level of assessment.

Figure 1 Simplified assessment lifecycle (adapted by Ben Davies and Stephen Powell from Forsyth et al., 2015)

Myth-busting

There are a few things that you have to let go of in order to reset thinking on assessment. Many UK readers of this magazine will have participated in the Advance HE Professional Development Course for External Examiners, which spends a half day undermining every fact you may have thought you knew about assessment judgements, and then a second half day explaining how to work with this troubling situation. Effectively, the course demonstrates what has been found in much research on academic judgement of student work: that standards are socially constructed and that we need to calibrate ourselves with others working in the same discipline, discussing what we mean by outstanding work and minimum standards.

In having these discussions, we also need to be prepared to challenge myths which may have been passed down through generations of teachers in time-honoured oral tradition, but of which there is no documentary trace. It is a good thing that new members of staff are briefed about assessment by colleagues; it is an essential part of developing an effective teaching community which identifies and maintains academic standards. The potential pitfall is that deeply held beliefs may be handed down from generation to generation of teachers without being questioned. As is so often the case with an oral tradition, the information may have taken on a mythical quality: 'you must set an essay for this module', or 'you must use this feedback sheet', or 'every module must be assessed with 60% coursework and 40% exam', to take some anodyne examples. Meanwhile, some of those myths may be incompatible with maintaining standards: actual regulations may have changed without coming to the attention of all teachers, the beliefs have become confused or embellished in the telling, students may now be coming to the course with a different set of previous qualifications or experiences, or the expectations of employers have been updated.

Myth-busting around assessment is challenging. If everyone around you believes that essays are the only permitted way to assess the students on your programme, then you will find it difficult to make headway with your radical proposal to replace one essay with a work-based project. You need to be very certain of your own reasons for change.

One helpful element here is that assessment is having a moment, in terms of research. The volume of good quality studies which have been published in the last ten years is impressive. The snag is synthesis: I'm genuinely interested in this, and I struggle to keep up with it. How does this translate into the classroom or the day to day work of the academic developer? How do we use this research to support confident assessment? What follows is an attempt to provide a few simple ideas to pass on for each stage of the assessment life cycle.

Tips for the whole life cycle

Setting the task

You can set colleagues free from anxiety about rules by giving them four simple questions about their assignment task. If the academic developer or another peer reviewer can answer 'yes' to these four questions about any assignment task, then it is probably going to work:

1. Validity: Does it let students demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes?
2. Manageability: Will it be straightforward to mark, give feedback and moderate?
3. Clarity: Will students understand what to do?
4. Satisfaction: Will I look forward to marking it?

There is no need for extra rules about the type of task, or how large it should be. Encourage colleagues to think of an engaging and useful task first, and then work out the details. Trust them to know what will work best for their students in their discipline.

There is clearly detail to be filled in in order to create a coherent and usable assignment brief, including sound and usable marking criteria, and an actionable feedback plan, but it's important to start with a task which feels right.

Supporting: Otherwise known as teaching

If you want a real rule, it is a requirement that any publication about assessment design must contain this quote from Boud (1995, p. 35): 'Students can, with difficulty, escape from the effects of poor teaching, they cannot (by definition if they want to graduate) escape the effects of poor assessment.' You could reverse this phrase to say that a badly designed assessment will make a course difficult to teach. Encourage colleagues to think about the assignment task all the time, normalise discussion about the assessment throughout the module, show the links between what you are teaching and students' own work on the task. This connection is very obvious to the teacher, but may be less so to a student. Before you all shout into your cornflakes, I don't believe that higher education is all about assessment, but I do think that assessment can reflect what higher education is about – I certainly have no objection to Newman's (1907) suggestion that 'a habit of mind is formed which lasts through life, of which the attributes are, freedom, equitableness, calmness, moderation, and wisdom'. If the assignment task is to support this development, then it needs to be fully integrated into the teaching.

Marking

I have to assume that good criteria have been written at stage 1 of the assessment lifecycle, setting the assignment. If we are talking about tips for marking, I only really have three:

1. Believe in yourself – your colleagues and your students trust you to make judgements about the student work, so you can safely trust yourself
2. Make a marking plan at the beginning of the academic year – sounds obvious, but you only have to log in to Twitter around marking times to see that people are often overwhelmed. Encourage colleagues to make a plan which doesn't just take into account the submission date and the date marks are required, but when moderation must happen, how many other teachers are marking, how many submissions you have to mark, how long each one will take, how many can be marked per day (taking into account the need for breaks and other work being done at the same time), how many late submissions are likely (due to mitigating circumstances, or accommodations for disabilities), and what is the last date they will arrive. Adding these factors will result in a realistic estimate of the number of days needed
3. Include treats in the marking plan – it is sustained, pressured, activity, making judgements on other people's professional work, and colleagues need to acknowledge the challenge of this work by recognising the need for personal reward as well as sensible pace.

Feedback

As with marking, a good feedback strategy will have been included in stage 1 of the life cycle – it needs to be both manageable and actionable. Reviews of feedback studies show that there is no magical ideal structure for feedback, as teachers, students, relationships, and subject contexts vary so much. Students' ability to act on feedback is complex and dependent on their understanding of its purposes and the provision of clear routes to act on it. Embedding discussion of the feedback students will get throughout stage 2 (teaching) will help them to prepare themselves to use it:

1. Focus on a small number of actions students can take: keep the feedback brief
2. Do say if an aspect of the submission was very effective, or if it added nothing to the work, and explain why, in measured tones. If praise or criticism is very strong in tone, students are likely to focus on these statements rather than the proposed actions
3. Don't use hedging language: it can be misinterpreted. If you have advice, make it clear
4. Only comment on those aspects of the assignment which were relevant to the assessment. For instance, you may realise that students have put in a lot of effort, but this isn't being assessed, and won't be reflected in the grades, so it isn't helpful to acknowledge it here
5. Do use language which links back to the assignment task and which is consistent with the grade the student received. In suggesting actions, you can use phrases from the marking rubric for a higher band.

Reflection

This can be a challenge: the best time to carry out a thorough review of an assignment task is immediately after a marking period, towards the end of the assessment life cycle, but this may be the time that colleagues are least likely to want to do it. As an academic developer, you could organise reflection workshops to encourage this. There are some serious questions to be asked about how many students passed, whether the range of marks was what people expected, and so on, but you can also celebrate student work by asking what was the most exciting/impressive/unusual/creative thing students did on this task, and what teachers were most proud of. You can ask about things people would definitely not do again, and what they would recommend to everyone. Normalise systematic review and reflection. You can link this to peer observation and review, teaching portfolios, and applications for Senior Fellowship of the HEA.

The promotion bit

There is much more about this in R. Forsyth, *Confident Assessment in Higher Education*, published by Sage.

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Effective virtual learning environments: The students' perspective

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Background

In 2020 and 2021 we co-led two research projects, one centring on students' experiences of lockdown, the other on academic staff experiences of lockdown. Both explored which aspects of online teaching staff and students wanted to carry with them back to campus teaching. Pertinent to the current article, we discovered two things: first, that our students have extremely varied educational experiences, which can be explained by the fact that they often take modules across several departments in the Faculty; and second, that the virtual learning environment (VLE) was absolutely key to their experiences and what they wanted to see improved and used more/better in the future.

From a staff point of view, we therefore wanted to design a project for 2022-3 that would have the potential to significantly impact how teaching staff use UCL's VLE, Moodle. We opted for a student-staff partnership model, which would bring several advantages to the project: it would ensure broad student representation and thus centre the students' voices and perspectives; and by enabling students to discuss their experiences with their peers, we would also be able to access experiences and viewpoints which might otherwise have gone unnoticed.

Student-staff partnership

ChangeMakers is UCL's flagship initiative to support students and staff working in partnership to improve the student experience, usually through small-scale enhancement projects. Student-staff partnerships play a crucial role in shaping education by combining student voice, ideas and action alongside the expertise and perspectives of staff in a relationship centred around reciprocity and respect (Cook-Sather *et al*., 2014).

ChangeMakers projects are usually conducted at departmental or faculty level, aiming to provide greater insights into the student experience or piloting changes the project teams would like to see. Teams apply for funding and there is a panel of staff and students who review applications, give feedback and make decisions on which projects go ahead. For all projects, students are paid a stipend, and there is funding available for things like incentivising surveys and focus groups, piloting events or hosting collaborative workshops through which staff and students can work through key challenges together.

In spring 2022, we received £1200 funding from ChangeMakers to explore our proposed research. As briefly outlined, we knew we wanted to learn more about how students experience the VLE, but beside that we wanted the project to be undertaken in partnership with a range of students from the faculty.

Sending out a call for student partners led to seven students applying, and while we had initially only advertised for five roles, we were able to fund all seven. This allowed for a team of students who were at different stages of their degrees, and who represented a range of departments (Table 1).

Name	*Department*	*UG/PGT*
Gabriella Linney	School of European Languages, Culture and Society	UG, 1st year
Jiatong Tu	Centre for Multidisciplinary and Intercultural Inquiry	PGT

Name	Department	UG/PGT
Kate Helena Buckman	English	UG, 2nd year
Katie Townsend	Centre for Multidisciplinary and Intercultural Inquiry	PGT
Marta Ramio Comalat	English	PGT
Nadia Claudie Julie Golotchoglou	School of Slavonic and East European Studies	UG, 2nd year
Tiffany Noel Chan	Arts and Sciences	UG, 2nd year

Table 1 Student partners

All students were paid £150, except for Nadia who was paid £300 to act as team leader, which involved her keeping track of the progress, collating data across the team, and being responsible for a first draft of the write-up of the results.

Designing the research project

In the first meeting, we discussed what student-staff partnership can mean, focusing on the idea that we bring different types of lived experiences and expertise, and emphasising the importance of ensuring a voice for all of us (Gourlay, L. *et al*., 2021). We also discussed how we could resolve any potential conflict, informing students they could contact one of the staff involved if needed, and giving them the contact details for the Vice-Dean Education in case they felt there were issues that included the staff partners (though, luckily, no such problems arose).

We then began discussing what the project could focus on. This was a very open process with everybody contributing ideas and commenting on the ideas of others. In the end, we agreed on three connected questions:

1. What makes students want to engage with Moodle?
2. What in Moodle supports students' learning effectively?
3. What 'wows' students in Moodle?

The students felt that these questions would make sense to their peers and allow for a range of answers and suggestions, which could be actioned by academic staff leading into the next academic year. We did discuss whether we would also want to know more about what students do not like about Moodle, but in the end we decided on a positive framing: as we all agreed, it is often easy to point out the flaws of a system – and we have plenty of evidence from other sources about what students dislike. However, as we wanted the research to inspire academics, we concurred that a positive framing would be more effective.

An inclusive approach to data collection

As staff we have an obligation to ensure we work inclusively, but it was actually the students who started conversations about how we could ensure their peers had the opportunity to participate. They suggested that we could collect data in a number of ways, even if this would make the analytical process somewhat messier. This meant that each student researcher collected data from their peers in three ways, but always working around the same questions. In the end, the research team collected data from 100 students across the faculty (Table 2).

Method of data collection	Number of responses
Online questionnaire	33
Short interviews	45
Focus groups	22

Table 2 Methods of data collection

The questions asked varied somewhat, but generally they focused on:

1. What comes to mind when you think of a good/excellent Moodle site?
2. What types of Moodle activities do you find most useful in supporting your learning?
3. What kind of Moodle structure works best for you (divided by week, topic, theme *etc.*)?
4. Can you name a module code or title where Moodle has been used particularly well?

Each student collected data and analysed it independently. Question 1 was analysed thematically; questions 2 and 3 by ranking the responses; and responses to question 4 were used to compile a list of modules for later analysis (not included in this research). Once each student had completed their analysis, they met as a group to discuss their findings. The results of that meeting form the basis for the findings and recommendations outlined in the next section.

Findings and recommendations

The data contained an incredible amount of detail that cannot be included here, but, somewhat surprisingly, the students all identified two main trends. We will group the first findings under the heading 'clarity' and the second one under 'appetite for activities'.

Clarity

The most significant finding from our study is that students seek 'clarity' in their modules in the VLE. However, this does not mean they desire uniformity. They do not, for instance, explicitly request an institutional, faculty or even departmental template for the VLE. Rather, they want the modules' VLE to be internally coherent and clear. This is important as this means individual tutors can, to an extent, add their own personal touch to the VLE, be creative and innovative, without fearing that students cannot navigate it.

So, what did students mean by clarity? Four areas were often mentioned when this was discussed:

1. Well-organised structure
2. Consistency
3. Sign-posting
4. Accessibility.

Some examples of what this might mean are:

- Everything on a module page should be deliberate and of use to the current student cohort (*i.e.* legacy documents should be removed or located in specific places and marked appropriately)
- If organising VLE by week, include calendar dates in titles along with Week 1, Reading Week, *etc*.
- Use consistent naming conventions for all documents. Avoid default strings of numbers
- Ensure assessment details and in-boxes are clearly signposted, and are not hidden in weekly content, e.g. by using a specific Assessment section, prominent at the top of the page
- Make the module handbook clearly available in the VLE, and ensure it is up to date
- Ensure files and activities are meaningful and accessible.

While some students did mention that accessibility was important for people with disabilities, others saw accessible practices as important to all students. Ensuring files were stored in an accessible format, for instance, allowed them to work with them as they preferred: highlighting PDFs, having papers read out loud, watching videos at different speeds, turning the volume down and utilising subtitles, were all mentioned.

One area that was often touched upon when discussing clarity and consistency was digital reading lists. Students mentioned that these were useful when used appropriately. To address the problems that some students mentioned when discussing reading lists, the student and staff researchers came up with a list of recommendations for staff responsible for this area:

- Use the institutional online reading list tool to ensure students access the correct versions of resources, and to keep the library informed of current module requirements and use statistics
- Use links to university databases, rather than downloading papers and uploading the PDFs
- Mark reading and resources as core/essential and optional/further as appropriate
- Work with a subject librarian to check the accessibility of essential PDFs and documents in your course, and ensure the most appropriate versions are used.

The overall plea for 'clarity' encompasses all these elements: students do not necessarily use the language of accessibility, or inclusive design, but they repeatedly seek understanding around the course contents. Knowing the intention around the inclusion of a paper, for example, allows them to plan how to interact with it. There may be elements of the shift to 'Emergency Remote Teaching' which exacerbated this need for additional explanation and context. It is worth remembering that for some courses in the Faculty, this required an extremely rapid move to VLE use that neither academics nor students had had significant experience with. However, with the use of the VLE firmly cemented into Faculty practice, prioritising the intentionality of resources and the meaningful flow of the presentation of the course is undoubtedly in the interests of students and academics alike (Cronin, 2022).

Appetite for activities

We should acknowledge that this area of our study was less uniform than the previous section. Students had very different experiences with activities in Moodle, and sometimes from the questionnaires it was not clear whether a student was writing about having experienced an activity or about the potential benefit of experiencing it in the future. With this caveat, our data did suggest some patterns.

The most useful finding was that students generally expressed a lot of interest in activities, something that was particularly clear in the interviews and focus groups. The types of activities students thought interesting were varied but included glossaries, flashcards, forums for 'burning questions', peer-to-peer forums, quizzes and, indeed, almost all possible types of activity in the locale of Moodle.

The data show that students who had little experience of the activities were keen to be exposed to them, and those who had experienced them in their modules mostly found them helpful and motivating. No student found them annoying, superficial or antithetical to their discipline, as long as they were optional and an extra part of their studies, supplementing core readings and multimedia resources. This suggests that staff should consider implementing some varied digital activities in their modules, even if they only serve to reinforce surface learning.

Of particular note is the way students discussed the Quiz activity in Moodle. In formative assessment, where final scores did not actively contribute to grades, students found quizzes useful, and even fun. When used for summative assessment, however, students tended to dislike them, citing a sense of pressure and anxiety. Whilst our data can't be said to offer a complete picture of the student view of this modality, it offers one of several clear examples that any activity held in the VLE must be appropriately scaffolded, and suggests that further research into the student experience of the Quiz both as formative and summative exercise would be a useful endeavour.

Conclusion of findings

What we find interesting about our findings and recommendations is that they are not necessarily particularly difficult to implement, and, if followed, they would target key areas that students care about. Whilst some time would have to be pre-emptively dedicated to implementation to achieve this clarity and consistency, once a basic template for the module is in place, it should be relatively straightforward to maintain. These findings are consistent with many across digital education showing that strategic, up-front investment of time offers long-term benefits for both students and staff. However, this 'spike' in workload needs to be appropriately scaffolded into academic workload, further emphasising the need for this type of robust, student-focused justification (Gregory and Lodge, 2015).

Reflections on the student-staff partnership

This article is not about student-staff partnerships *per se*, but we wanted to add a section where we reflected on this aspect as it was central to the project. From a staff point of view, working with students was an advantage right from the beginning: students took responsibility and were very engaged in shaping the project. This was particularly clear when we began working on the questions for the research, which they piloted before refining them, ensuring the use of language was clear to them and their peers. Owing to the nature of this project, the student researchers were also able to draw on their own experiences and their own ideas; there was no attempt to separate the data and the researchers' own experiences. While this can be seen as a weakness in some cases – for instance in terms of making it difficult to quantify the results – for a project like this we believe it was rather a strength which gave space to the voices of *all* students participating.

Once findings were collected, we held a further focus group meeting with our researchers, encouraging them to draw on these experiences and reflect further on the conversations they had whilst carrying out their research. While our staff roles are centred on the professional language of teaching and learning, and digital education, the student voices were very directly related to personal experience, and rarely made use of the theoretical language and structures used to discuss these areas institutionally. This focus group helped us to ensure that our resulting recommendations were sufficiently grounded in both our students' voice and robust digital pedagogies.

Two of the students volunteered to present the research at the RAISE conference (Researching, Advancing and Inspiring Student Engagement) in 2022. Their participation, which was funded by the Faculty, was a key milestone for both students as this was the first time they presented at an academic conference. One of the two, who is interested in pursuing a PhD, described this as a 'fulfilling and empowering experience to continue and pursue my goals as a student and professional'. She also reflected on how 'Students as Producers' (a term used at the University of Lincoln) chimed with her own experience of working as part of UCL ChangeMakers, and how this experience has made her think about how staff and students can work collaboratively to 'form student communities to enhance engagement'.

Consequences of the research for academic practice and faculty development

The timing of this research meant that the data was relevant and actionable for the start of the academic year 2022/23. With our students having discussed Moodle at the level of individual modules, we were able to pinpoint Module Leads, a recognised role at UCL, as those we might best address, not only with the results of the research but with suggestions for the implementation of our recommendations.

The first of these sessions took in a student-led presentation of our results. This enabled the FLTL to directly address the recommendations arising, and allowed for the creation of a blog containing recordings of the presentation, and links to further resource and support. The clarity of the results, and the fact that they were consistent with our previous research projects, allows us to align our practices and set clear goals for our colleagues. Our intention is not to limit their creativity and content in the VLE, but to maximise its visibility and effective use.

These are also what we see as important take-home messages for colleagues at other universities. While we all use different VLEs, we share similar ambitions for how our colleagues could use them and how our students interact with them. Students do not want sameness, but they do want to be able to navigate a space that is set up in a way that supports them and their learning journeys. They are also curious, and interested, and want us to try out the options that exist in the VLE, giving them opportunities for exciting and creative digital interactions in teaching, learning and assessment.

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Student engagement: Reflections on the 2022 RAISE conference

Lia Blaj-Ward, Nottingham Trent University

My journey towards the Researching, Advancing and Inspiring Student Engagement (RAISE) 2022 Conference started two years before, when I joined an online RAISE reading group to discuss 'the future of student engagement', a chapter taken from Lowe and El Hakim's (2020) *A Handbook for Student Engagement in Higher Education*. I made detailed notes about different forms of student engagement. At that stage, student-staff partnership was a relatively new concept for me. I was particularly interested in 'students as pedagogic consultants' (Healey and Healey, 2019). I was aware of potential barriers from the discussion of Matthews *et al.* (2019) on how educational developers can facilitate student-staff partnerships as well as engaging directly in partnership work. I was curious whether some of these barriers would lift as a result of the pandemic (Green, 2020); whether the value of students' input and expertise as co-creators of learning experiences would be more readily appreciated in a pandemic-transformed context; and whether belonging would be enhanced for all (students and staff), through more collaborative and less hierarchical working relationships. RAISE 2022 offered reassurance that student engagement through partnership and meaningful representation was still very much on the agenda, as a way of exploring solutions to challenges that the pandemic has surfaced and amplified.

A brief reflection on barriers and boundaries

A train line runs through the middle of Lincoln's Brayford Pool campus, the venue for RAISE 2022 and the setting for *A Manifesto for the 21st Century University* (Stuart and Shutt, 2019). This physical barrier can emphasise permeability and interaction between universities and the communities they serve – a useful reminder that barriers are not always bad things. They can also encourage people to find alternative routes, more imaginative responses to challenges. I had an impromptu learning conversation with the person standing next to me at the barrier. Informal, serendipitous learning conversations are a valuable part of 21st-century university experiences, particularly when these conversations cross role, functional and discipline boundaries.

At RAISE 2022, students, educational developers, academics and colleagues with a range of roles, departmental affiliations and discipline backgrounds shared insights into student engagement from different but equally valuable vantage points. Everyone belonged. Hierarchy was noticeably absent. Students' expertise in being students was valued through their inclusion as organisers, as keynote speakers and as session presenters. RAISE 2022 created a safe in-person meeting space in which all participants were encouraged to share and reflect on how their learning conversations contribute to institutional change-making. Echoing Peseta *et al.* (2021), participants were invited to metaphorically 'dance with power' in the university, to recognise the power they have and explore ways to put it to good use.

Conference programme overview

The conference paid tribute to 'Student as Producer' (Neary and Winn, 2009), an approach adopted by Lincoln. The opening plenary re-affirmed its value and currency, unpacking ways in which the student as producer (and author) mindset was reflected in the 'body language' of the institution – through direct reference in strategy documents and in formal quality assurance and enhancement procedures (e.g., specific questions in external examiner report templates). The theoretical underpinnings and pedagogic enactment of the approach were laid open to scrutiny, with an emphasis on the notion of 'dissensus' and critical discussion. This could create discomfort initially but is a prerequisite for more holistic and inclusive understanding, leading to actual meaningful change. In Neary's words, 'Student as Producer seeks to restore the original purpose of the modern university, as a scholarly and intellectual project with significant real world practical applications' (Neary, 2020, p. 27). This description appears to take the concept a step further from an earlier focus on undergraduate study and the aim of rebalancing the relationship between teaching and research. RAISE 2022 embraced a generous and broadly encompassing interpretation of research, expanded production beyond the undergraduate curriculum, and included more than just students and academics in the discussion about collaborative learning relationships.

Papers, workshops and Pecha Kuchas covered a range of topics, clustered towards the partnership end of Lowe and Bols' (2020, p. 272) map of student engagement, and were fairly well balanced between representation and cooperation. Examples of topics included: insights from the first year of a doctoral research project on architectural design and post-pandemic university spaces; student activism and emotional labour; student-led careers fairs and employer engagement; highlights from a Wonkhe/Pearson report on belonging and inclusion; student engagement on quality assurance panels; using appreciative inquiry to increase engagement on part-time distance learning programmes; doctoral research inductions designed with mental health and wellbeing at the centre and enhancing assessment and feedback through student-staff collaboration. The sessions reflected the richness of learning ecosystems and the variety of opportunities to engage students in the co-creation of academic learning and broader university experiences.

Conference highlight #1: Partnerships to enhance assessment

Flattening hierarchies, reducing power differentials and levelling-up the playing field are recurring themes in the literature on student engagement and student-staff co-creation in higher education, and they were very much present in the practice shared at RAISE 2022. Assessment is an area where power lies most firmly with academics and, where applicable, with standard-setting professional bodies. Summative assessment gatekeeps, it focuses students' attention and guides where they spend the most energy in the curriculum. While final summative decisions on assessed work are made by experts and carefully moderated to ensure standards are upheld, the learning journeys that students undertake towards that final point offer ample scope for partnership work, to ensure that learning is scaffolded in the most appropriate way, and there is scope for some of the summative components to be designed and decided by students themselves.

Amici-Dargan and Ilmari's workshop expanded on Evans' (2020) Equity-Agency-Transparency framework and offered a range of examples of student-staff partnership in assessment, with students influencing assessment design and the development of assessment literacy. The educational enhancement initiatives with regard to student-staff co-creation of assessment may, however, be limited by rigid quality assurance procedures and policies. As the workshop participants reflected, these allow very little scope for changes coming out of student-staff conversations to be actioned promptly to benefit the student cohort that suggested them. Introducing more agile quality assurance processes will not necessarily detract from the rigour of the assessment but would potentially enhance the student experience.

Conference highlight #2: Engaging students as reverse mentors

Rachael O'Connor's student-staff reverse mentoring scheme at the University of Leeds reflected on the contribution that students make to learning and development in universities more broadly. Rachael invited students who identified as under-represented to co-create the scheme and take up roles mentoring university staff. Going beyond usual EDI categories and definitions of under-representation meant a richer perspective on how to enhance belonging. In her talk, Rachael signposted an article she had published on a similar project designed to 'alter students' views of their experiences at University, recognising the strengths of such experience, contributing to positive self-development' (O'Connor, 2022, p. 111). She also notes, however, that 'reverse' and 'mentoring' 'may not be the most appropriate labels' (p. 123), because they do not fully capture reciprocity in learning or fully acknowledge expertise on both sides. This resonates with a learning experience I had in 2020 (Blaj-Ward and Hanley, 2020): I used the label 'reverse mentoring' at the time, because I was (presumably) the more experienced academic, but my student mentor (postgraduate, Product Design) was the one who had extensive knowledge of design thinking and substantial ability to empathise in a learning situation, to work out when concepts become too complicated and how to pace his mentee through an activity.

Conference highlight #3: Student-led careers fairs

Learning experiences at university need to prepare students as thoroughly as possible for a world that is changing at a pace and in a direction that is increasingly more difficult to anticipate. Strudwick and McCarron's paper on student-led employment fairs spotlighted a space with ample, yet untapped potential for student-staff co-creation. In the example they shared, students were given a leadership role to engage with employers. They created a learning experience, adjacent to and informed by the taught curriculum. They were supported by a range of professionals, academic or otherwise, connecting academic learning in the university to the world beyond the campus walls. Strudwick and McCarron's paper contained an implicit invitation to create conditions for all stakeholders in learning experiences, within and outside a campus, to be included in conversations about learning at university and beyond. While the pace and direction of change may be difficult to anticipate, university learning experiences designed with students for students are more likely to equip them to tackle change and challenges in ways that are beneficial to all.

A closing note

RAISE 2022 reaffirmed that student engagement through partnership, co-creation and representation generates value for students, universities and communities and is continuing to create positive impact in a pandemic-transformed world. It echoed the ethos of the host university, demonstrating commitment to integrating professionally and demographically diverse voices into the programme. It offered a timely reminder that permeability can be achieved when the university 'removes barriers to interaction, both within the institution and beyond it' (Stuart and Shutt, 2019), building on pockets of good practice and viewing permeability as a whole-of-institution endeavour. Given the core of their role, educational developers have valuable expertise in contributing to the renegotiation of any barriers.

The priorities for student engagement are: co-creation of sustainable, authentic, inclusive assessment (Bovill *et al*., 2021; Boud and Ajjawi, 2019); inclusion of students as legitimate contributors to the 'joint enterprise' of educational development (Sutherland, 2018); and making more substantial use of partners in the wider community. Designing assessment tasks with components that not only have value for individual student learning but also include an immediate tangible intervention with an impact in the community (on campus and beyond) is one way to connect these priorities. Educational developers are well placed to make priorities happen and to catalyse a strong sense of connection and belonging in permeable university communities.

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White Water Writers: How research-based interventions can lead to real world change

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White Water Writers (WWW) is an innovative educational intervention. We give groups of people the opportunity to collaboratively write and publish their own full-length novel in just one week. The project has a demonstrable positive impact on participants' literacy, soft skills, and aspiration. We have recently been 'highly commended' in the Emerald International Real Impact Awards for mobilising research into impact. In this piece we describe WWW in more detail, discuss the research which underlies it, and reflect on our experiences to make recommendations for others who are developing research-based interventions.

White Water Writers process

White Water Writers (WWW) is an educational innovation based on psychological research. Our participants work as a group of 8-10 people to collaboratively write and publish their own novel in just five days. The participants plan their novel on Monday. They develop the plot and characters and plan the chapters of their novel. Each participant takes control of a character, so each has an important area of responsibility for the novel. On Tuesday and Wednesday, participants write their novel using specialised software. They begin by producing bullet points which give extra detail on what happens in each chapter. They then flesh out these bullet points to produce the text. On Thursday, the participants proofread their novel, checking for spelling and punctuation errors and issues with the plot. On Friday, they complete a final check of the novel and create the blurb, author biographies *etc*. We have professional illustrators produce the cover of the novel based on a description from the participants. The book is placed for sale online. Authors receive reviews of their work and people can purchase copies of their novel, with any profits being split between the authors to keep or donate to charity. We also host a book-signing event where we present authors with professionally printed copies of their work. At this, they do a reading from the novel and friends and family can have their books signed by the authors.

We have facilitated more than 2000 people to become authors through the project thanks to funding from a range of sources, including Higher Horizons, SHINE, the Ernest Cooke Trust, UnLtd, HEFCE, Keele University and the University of Glasgow. Our participants have included diverse groups including sibling groups of children in hospices, the Prince's Trust and with young and adult offenders. In addition, we have worked with looked-after young people, children with SEND, young people aged from 8-18 and university students.

Why did we develop WWW?

White Water Writers was developed to raise literacy, soft skills and to increase expectations of success. We know that 'professional and academic success in all disciplines depends, at least in part, upon writing skills' (Cho and Schunn, 2007, p. 409). However, by age 11 years, around 20% of pupils underperform in writing, spelling, grammar and punctuation (Department for Education, 2018). Furthermore, only 50% of young people report enjoying writing (Clark and Teravainen, 2017). Upon entering university around 61% of teachers report that students have never produced work which is longer than five pages, so they have not had enough practice to develop sophisticated writing skills (Sanoff, 2006). These challenges with writing skills and enjoyment persist into university where students may show no significant improvements in writing quality over their time at university (Levelle, 2003). Therefore, a key aim of our intervention was to raise both writing skills but also enjoyment of writing. We reasoned that the best way to do this was to develop a writing task which would be engaging.

It is recognised that soft skills, such as teamwork, are vital for educational and workplace success. For example, the OECD model (2016) has skills, knowledge and attitudes intertwining to develop competencies which are required for success. However, students are often not given enough opportunity to develop these skills in educational settings. This may be because a focus on skills can be seen as 'distracting' or 'dumbing down' from traditional content knowledge, and the term 'soft skills' can be seen as further diminishing their importance (Lucas, 2019). Therefore, while skills should be considered a vital component of education, they are often the 'dispositions or capabilities known to be important in life (which) are not assessed at all' (Lucas, 2022). As what gets measured tends to get taught it is vital to rethink how we can teach skills. Thus, a second aim of WWW was to help participants to develop skills such as teamwork, communication and time management. These are all built into the intervention to give participants the opportunity to develop them. In addition, after the project we debrief with participants and discuss with them the skills they have developed to help them reflect on their progress.

Additionally, we wanted to help participants experience the thrill of successfully achieving a challenging goal. It is interesting that it is often stated that young people have low aspirations. However, there is a difference between aspirations and expectations. Aspirations are what one wishes to achieve, and expectations are what one realistically expects to achieve (Reynolds and Pemberton, 2001). Aspirations may be idealistic and may not reflect realities (Marjoribanks, 1998), while expectations may be more realistic. Therefore, a student may have high aspirations, for example, wanting to attend university, but they may have low expectations as they know that few people from their area attend university. In WWW, we aim to help them to achieve a very challenging goal, of becoming a published author in just one week. This is a goal that many of our participants do not expect to achieve. However, to date, every group has achieved this goal. We hope that this achievement will help to raise both their aspirations and their expectations of their future success.

Therefore, WWW aimed to raise literacy, soft skills and expectations of success in our participants. In order to do this, we used the research literature to design elements of the intervention. This gave us confidence that the intervention had a good chance of success. This was also important as while there is increasing emphasis on documenting the impact that our research is having, there is very limited evidence that research is creating any impact outside the academy (Bhattacharyya *et al*., 2009). Creating a project which would be effective and engaging was a key motivation for us. In the next section we outline the theory behind WWW.

The theory behind WWW

A key underlying theory providing the foundation for WWW is self-determination theory. According to Deci and Ryan (2000) feelings of autonomy, competence and relatedness foster motivation and engagement in learners. Autonomy is the need for us to have control over our actions and behaviours. It involves having choices and being able to make decisions. In WWW, we foster autonomy by giving the participants full control over every element of the text. They design the characters, develop the plot, produce and even proofread all the text. This gives them a strong sense of control and that the novel is really 'theirs'. This can be challenging for our writers as in the initial stages of the project they often look to the facilitators or teachers/tutors to tell them if they are on the right track. However, we do not offer feedback on the work and encourage them to speak to the other writers. Over time, they self-manage more and need very little guidance and support.

Competence is the feeling that we have the skills we need to complete a task. A learner who feels competent feels a sense of mastery over the environment. In WWW, we foster a sense of competence by ensuring that there is a good fit between learner skills and the task. We do this by scaffolding the process carefully. At the beginning of the week, we set clear tasks with time limits. For example, we may give students 15 minutes to design a character on their own and then ask them to share their ideas with the group. Each task is short and achievable. Even with the writing, we ask participants to create 10 bullet points of things which happen in a chapter. They then write about 100 words expanding on each bullet point. This makes the intimidating task of writing a full-length novel more achievable.

Relatedness is feeling connected and attached to others as well as experiencing a sense of belonging to a group. In WWW, we foster relatedness by creating an inclusive and positive learning environment, avoiding competition between learners, and using collaborative activities. We make it clear from the outset that the novel is a group endeavour and while each person 'owns' a character, nobody owns text or plotlines. Participants are dependent on each other to achieve a goal which could not be achieved alone. All writers produce text, but all have their text read and edited by others. This creates a sense of the team working together, and over time they learn more about their own and other's skills. Our research also shows that over time they feel more positive about their group members and talk about not needing to be best friends with others to work with them effectively.

Considerations in developing and implementing novel interventions

One of the first issues faced in developing an innovation like WWW is funding. Our experience has taught us that funding is available, but we have needed to look beyond sources which we might have usually targeted. We have found that universities often have small grants available to set up outreach or student engagement activities. These are a good way to trial an innovation and to benefit from the contacts and expertise of student experience, outreach, access and widening-participation teams. In addition, charities and other organisations have funded WWW. We found that these funders were interested when we had more evidence for the efficacy of WWW. In writing bids for charities, it was important to explore their guidance notes and to target our writing to their style and aims. These were often very different ways of writing and different emphases compared to research councils. Where there was an option to discuss the project or to write a short summary before committing to the full application, we found this invaluable in helping us to target our project to their goals and aims and really understand what they were looking for.

One of the key lessons we have learned from developing WWW is that when you develop something which is innovative and more of a 'leap' than a 'step' forward, it can take time to build trust in the project. When we first started WWW, many schools and groups did not believe that it would work, or even if they did, that it could be successful with their learners. This was especially challenging for WWW as we needed people to be off timetable and with us for a full week, which was seen as being risky. We found that it was important to build relationships with people rather than between organisations. Spending time having discussions with teachers and key staff whose remit allowed them to make decisions about commissioning projects was important to understand their concerns and to build trust.

In the early stages, we did not have evidence of the efficacy of the intervention. We found that having a clear vision of what the intervention would entail and being able to give some suggestion that it was likely to be effective was important for us gaining people's trust. We also began by trialling WWW with groups where it was more likely to be successful, such as university students and college students, before working with groups where it may have been more likely to fail, such as younger pupils and those with lower literacy. As time went on, collecting as much evidence of our impact as we could, including testimonials from pupils and staff and more formal qualitative and quantitative data, was helpful in building a case for larger pots of money and working with more diverse groups. We also found that once schools and universities had participated once, they generally wanted to work with us again and that they discussed the project with other educators, and this helped the project to grow more quickly than us approaching each organisation.

We also believe that it is important to know which elements of the project are negotiable for you and which are not. Many times, we have been asked if WWW could run as an after-school club, or for a few hours a week rather than an intensive week-long project. We do not want to take this route for many reasons, for example, using this model, participants would be likely to forget the storyline in between sessions, miss sessions and then be unhappy with the direction the plot went. We also believe that the intensity of producing a book in such a short period of time means that motivation and engagement remain high, and the sense of achievement in reaching a challenging goal in such a short period is important. Therefore, this is not something we can negotiate on. However, when schools have asked if we can offer the programme in four rather than five days due to bank holiday weeks, we have been able to accommodate this. Furthermore, we have modified the programme in a variety of ways to make it accessible for learners with SEND and lower literacy and have worked with educators to make sure WWW meets their needs. Thus, it is important to have a clear idea of which elements of the project cannot be modified without having a detrimental impact, but to offer flexibility where you can in order to meet each group's needs and to ensure the project can engage as many people as possible.

Consider the broader impacts of your project

While WWW was originally designed to raise literacy, soft skills and aspirations, it has developed to help raise a range of skills. For example, we have run WWW with several groups in universities, including undergraduate students from a variety of courses, undergraduate students who were studying Creative Writing and postgraduate students from the School of Education. In these projects, WWW was used as an experiential learning activity to raise students' skills, boost their CV and increase their employability. We have also run the project online with two groups of students from Tokyo University of Pharmacy and Life Science who produced a novel in English, which is their second language. The aim of this project was to increase their skills and confidence in communicating in English, as well as to give them the experience of producing a novel. In addition, students have been involved in WWW as facilitators, helping others to write their own novels. This has helped them develop their skills in working with diverse groups of people and many have continued on to careers in teaching and youth work. Therefore, once an intervention is established, it is possible to consider how it can be adapted to help participants develop different skills.

WWW has also developed into a novel research method. By giving our participants autonomy over the content of their novels we have been able to use their books to learn more about what they think about different topics. Some of our recent novels have explored what it is to be human, how the pandemic has impacted life, societal inequality and how people cope with the end of the world. As the plots are fully developed by our authors, they allow us to explore their views on these important topics. Therefore, while this was not the original intention of the project, we have also developed a novel method to research our authors' views on important topics. We have used this research method to explore our authors' views on climate change as part of COP26. Therefore, we suggest that others consider ways that their projects may be adapted or edited beyond their original conception and scope to achieve broader reach and impact.

Conclusion

While there is increasing emphasis on documenting the impact that our research is having, there is very limited evidence that research is creating any impact outside the academy (Bhattacharyya *et al*., 2009). Research-based interventions such as WWW allow us to take the knowledge we have and apply it to effect real-world change. We had a strong theoretical basis for WWW and believed that it could be effective, but the only way to find out was to actually trial it with a group of participants. Therefore, we suggest that if people have an idea, even if it seems somewhat audacious (like writing a full-length novel in a week), that it is worth running it to see what happens. As Pepler notes, 'sparks fly at the interface of science and practice that ignite new questions, new methods, new interpretations, and new directions' (2016, p. 44). Therefore, working with learners to create evidence-based interventions can be a positive way to effect real-world change.

If you would like to trial WWW in your university or setting or learn more, please contact the author at Yvonne.skipper@glasgow.ac.uk.

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Finding their voice: Embedding dialogue into the PgCert

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The PgCert Teaching and Supporting Learning in HE at Edinburgh Napier University (ENU) is a professionally accredited, Master's-level programme designed for early career academics who are new or less experienced in teaching and/or supporting learning.

As a direct consequence of the positive impact of dialogues in ENU's experiential route to Fellowship, a dialogic approach was embedded in the revalidated PgCert from September 2021. Like the experiential route, dialogue permeates the programme, designed into the learning experience through the use of multi-disciplinary peer groups sustained throughout the programme. Each peer group has a designated tutor who acts as a point of contact and who models evidence-based practice as members are invited to share, and critically reflect on, their emergent practice. The tutor seeks out learning moments in the group to build confidence and challenge thinking through the exchange of alternative perspectives, thus promoting critical reflection and ongoing professional development (see Graham, 2022a, 'Contexts of difference') focused back through to the student (their students') learning experiences.

A dialogic approach

In addition to being a pedagogic approach which sustains through the programme, summatively assessed dialogues have also been adopted into the student learning experience and take place at the close of Module 1 and Module 3, professional recognition points for Associate Fellow and Fellow, respectively. Each dialogue is planned using a framework contextualised by peer group tutors, with key points emanating from the student's personal teaching development report which provides the means to scaffold the conversation so it is tailored to their context, whilst embedding an assessment decision against a benchmark standard, *i.e.* the UKPSF. Figure 1 illustrates a contextualised dialogue frame suggesting areas for discussion provided by tutors.

The primary aim of summative dialogue is to facilitate a conversation with a purpose; to stimulate a meaningful discussion of colleagues' practice wherein they can articulate its effectiveness and demonstrate the alignment of their practice against the relevant UKPSF descriptors. We view, and are able to promote to our students, these dialogic assessments as authentic by design, encouraging and supporting early career academics to speak to their practice (Smart *et al*., 2019), thereby developing their academic identity (Graham, 2022b; Smart *et al*., 2021).

Both within the peer groups and more formally by means of the summative assessment, dialogues support the inclusive intent of the programme and its commitment to a relational pedagogical approach to teaching and supporting learning (Gravett *et al*., 2021).

Focusing on the summative dialogic assessment, feedback has been overwhelmingly powerfully positive from all parties – student participants, reviewers and the external examiner. Figure 2 shows feedback from the AFHEA dialogues with students stating the dialogue was 'enjoyable' and 'constructive', with one describing their experience in more detail:

> *'The professional dialogue was enjoyable, and felt really supportive. Talking about my teaching practice really helped me to identify what is good, and which areas require development.'*

Students highlighted the dialogue as providing an opportunity to share their thinking about practice and get feedback on this, an opportunity to reflect on their practice with one claiming reviewers' feedback in the dialogue provided validation of their thinking and practice.

Dialogues have also highlighted gaps in practice for some and areas on which to focus their professional development, providing helpful feed-forward for early career academics in a confidential, supportive setting with experienced practitioners.

Such an innovative assessment approach – supported and enabled by the peer groups – comes with both challenges and advantages; challenges relate to resource, administration and supporting student participants in preparing for the dialogue, while advantages include genuine interaction with participants and opportunities for reciprocal learning.

Challenges and rewards

Resourcing the summatively assessed dialogues is a particular challenge as we have to recruit reviewers who hold SFHEA (our decision to ensure parity with the experiential route) and also support the experiential route to Fellowship. Organisation and administration in setting up dialogues and scheduling these for circa 50 students to run across 10 days is a challenge but is achievable. Prior to this is the resource needed to conduct mock dialogues designed to enable preparation and to support colleagues' formative learning.

The advantages, however, outweigh the challenges of adopting a dialogic approach. Interacting with and getting to know participants and learning about their practice are rewarding for peer group tutors and for reviewers. It offers the opportunity for reciprocal learning, highly valued by all participants. The dialogic assessment itself invites students to share and explain their thinking, its development and the application of their learning to practice in an environment which values their contribution to their own students' learning experience.

We posit that this dialogic pedagogical and assessment approach is inclusive, authentic and innovative, helping the PgCert realise the University's ambitions related to staff development through achieving professional recognition while learning and sharing excellent pedagogic practices (Edinburgh Napier University, 2020).

PgCert TSL – Module 1 – Professional Dialogue: STUDENT NAME
Dialogue Frame (AFHEA)

Q1: What is your role in teaching/supporting learning at Napier, and who are your learners?

Q2: Can you select something from your Report / Context page 'of which you are proud' to share with us?

Student Specific Questions

How does teaching / support for learning feature in your practice? (A2)	Please populate with key points from Personal Teaching Report or gaps to address *Present: co-teaching, challenges of working with flipped class model and UGs in self-directed learning – worth asking for expansion on solution implemented to support learners.* *Missing: evaluation – how successful was this support to students? How do you know?*
How do you create effective learning environments and support students? (A4)	Please populate with key points from Personal Teaching Report or gaps to address *Present: PDT role, supportive student-centred approach to stimulate critical reflection – attempted PDT group meeting and reflection on challenges. Practice facilitator role and creation of quality practice learning enviros – worth expansion on how undertaken and challenges this brings*
On reflection, what have you learned from the concepts encountered in the first three topics and the peer group critique?	Please populate with key points from Personal Teaching Report or gaps to address *Present: discusses social constructivism and critical pedagogy reflecting on these in relation to nursing education.* *Missing: a little more on how these concepts have impacted their thinking and individual practice – any changes?*
How do you see yourself implementing inclusion in your practice, presently and in the future? (V1 & V2)	Please populate with key points from Personal Teaching Report or gaps to address *Present: Fully addressed with considered analysis of own inclusive practices (and the need for more) with reference to UDL literature. Very good point re need for intervention related to clinical areas.*

How else are you currently engaging in Continuing Professional Development (CPD) or plan to engage in CPD in the future, in addition to the PgCert?	Please populate with key points from Personal Teaching Report or gaps to address *Present: Comprehensive list of relevant activities* *Missing: any additional CPD alongside PgCert – worth asking what else they do informally.*

Penultimate Q: What have you got from the module one/studies on the PgCert so far?

Final Q: Is there something you wanted to tell us about that you haven't had the chance to?

Figure 1 Example of dialogue framework

Figure 2 Participant feedback

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News from the Educational Developments Editors

We would like to thank **Karen Arm**, who has stepped down through pressure of work, and **Alan Wright**, our Canadian colleague who has retired, for their service over the years to Educational Developments magazine.

If you are interested in publishing and would like to join this committee, we are inviting short (500 words max) expressions of interest, to be sent to the SEDA office by the end of February. We have four planning meetings a year, currently on Zoom, we are very open to applications from beyond the UK, and anyone on the committee would be happy to discuss the details with you.

SEDA News

SEDA Research and Evaluation Small Grants: Applications for one of the 5x£1000 awards must be in by the 27th February – the details are on the website.

SEDA Fellowships: The 2023 cohort for FSEDA will be working between March and September. If you are thinking of participating, please use the Professional Development web pages to help plan your involvement. Details of this year's arrangement will follow.

Student Partnership Impact Award: Keep your eyes on the SEDA website for the details of the Student Impact Partnership Award – with the JISC, it is a new and exciting development which will be accepting applications in March.

SEDA Spring Conference: Save the date: 19 May 2023, for the SEDA face-to-face Spring Conference.