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## Collaboration in Higher Education: Theorising Co-Creation for Inclusive Learning and Teaching Praxis

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PHD

**Collaboration in Higher Education: Theorising Co-Creation for Inclusive Learning and Teaching Praxis**

Abegglen, Sandra

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# Collaboration in Higher Education: Theorising Co-Creation for Inclusive Learning and Teaching Praxis

Abegglen, Sandra

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**UNIVERSITY OF  
PLYMOUTH**

**COLLABORATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION:  
THEORISING CO-CREATION FOR INCLUSIVE LEARNING AND  
TEACHING PRACTICE**

by

**SANDRA ABEGGLEN**

A thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth  
in partial fulfilment for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

School of Society and Culture

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## Author's Declaration

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Doctoral College Quality Sub-Committee.

Work submitted for this research degree at the University of Plymouth has not formed part of any other degree either at the University of Plymouth or at another establishment.

This thesis has been proofread by a third party; no factual changes or additions or amendments to the argument were made as a result of this process.

Grants received: see Appendix, *Impact*

Publications: see Appendix, *Complete list of publications*

Presentation at conferences: see Appendix, *Complete list of talks, presentations & workshops*

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Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Alley', with a stylized flourish at the end.

## Abstract

### **Collaboration in Higher Education: Theorising Co-creation for Inclusive Learning and Teaching Praxis**

**Sandra Abegglen**

In the last ten years UK Higher Education has undergone radical processes of reconstruction by focusing on output and value for money, thereby reinforcing the myth of meritocracy. Together with still prevalent notions of developmental learning and pyramidal teaching, this has heightened a culture of individualism. Despite an ostensible emphasis on partnership, isolation and ‘silo-isation’ are evident today with lecturers and students experiencing increased pressure to produce and perform alone, leading to little time for thinking and doing together. This situation was exacerbated by COVID-19 with social distancing measures and remote instruction, which have further increased workloads and loneliness, accompanied by technological developments that have driven us apart (rather than bringing us together). This thesis challenges the dominant education narratives of managerialism, elitism, and individualism, and argues for collaboration as a transgressive, emancipatory practice based on collaborative research and writing.

The work presented in this thesis exemplifies the characteristics of collaborative academic work and the possibilities of working collaboratively. This includes case studies about a much-needed shift from the teaching of ‘skills’ to the fostering of literacies through dialogic, embodied, and ludic learning and teaching approaches – practices that foster the inclusion of all, including those from a widening participation background. The thesis

mobilises the concept of third space, described by Homi K Bhabha, an Indian-British scholar and theorist, as a place of opportunity, to characterise and connect examples and arguments, and to make an original claim about collaboration as a fundamental element of education. This grounds the thesis at the intersection of theory and praxis, with teaching and learning at the core.

The thesis, in its entirety, presents a coherent and robust argument for collaboration as a way forward to create a more inclusive academia. It offers a significant contribution to the field of education with practical examples and inputs on how to connect individuals and institutions with each other and the wider society. There is a need to reimagine what education is and what universities could be in these supercomplex, competitive, silo-ised times. What is proposed is the creation of collaborative third spaces, both physical and metaphorical, that allow people to come together – to be with – and to dialogically co-create knowledge: a sustainable ecology of collaborative Higher Education praxis. This requires an ethic of openness that values and does not just tolerate others – an education that puts the humans and the humane at the centre.

*Keywords:* collaboration, third space, supercomplexity, openness, inclusion, higher education

# Contents

Copyright Statement .....	1
Acknowledgments .....	5
Author’s Declaration .....	7
Abstract.....	8
Contents .....	10
List of Tables .....	12
Preface .....	13
PART I.....	14
1. Introduction .....	15
1.1 UK Higher Education and Widening Participation .....	16
1.2 Intersectionality and Diversity .....	20
1.3 Glossary of Key Concepts and Terms .....	22
1.4 Positionality Statement .....	26
1.5 ‘Coming to Know’ .....	28
1.6 Thesis Context and Structure .....	30
2. The Body of Works Selected.....	33
2.1 List of Selected Works.....	34
2.2 Co-authorship.....	38
2.3 Open Access Publishing .....	39
3. Summary and Significance of Selected Works .....	41
3.1 Selected Works Grouped According to Themes.....	42
3.2 Description of Themes.....	44
Theme 1: Higher Education Isolation and Silo-isation .....	44
Theme 2: Co-created Academic Spaces.....	46
Theme 3: Creative Pedagogy for Community-Building .....	48
3.3 Summary of Selected Works .....	50
Theme 1 Publications .....	50
Theme 2 Publications .....	54
Theme 3 Publications .....	57

4. Contribution to Knowledge .....	61
4.1 What’s Problematic.....	62
4.2 What Collaboration can do for the Education Community .....	66
4.3 The Tensions of Collaboration.....	69
Within the Neoliberal Academy.....	69
Working Collaboratively Across/With Difference .....	70
4.4 An Argument for an Education System Beyond Meritocracy .....	71
4.5 What’s Next .....	73
References .....	75
PART II .....	90
APPENDIX .....	i
Copyright Permissions .....	ii
Complete List of Publications.....	xxii
Complete List of Talks, Presentations & Workshops.....	xxxii
Impact .....	xxxvii

## List of Tables

Table 1: Selected publications grouped according to themes.....	38
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## Preface

It is a form of respect, wherever we live, to find out whose traditional territory we are on and honour the stewards of the place.

Thus, currently living and working in Calgary, I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the traditional territories of the peoples of the Treaty 7 region in Southern Alberta, which include the Blackfoot Confederacy (comprised of the Siksika, the Piikani, and the Kainai First Nations), the Tsuut'ina First Nation, and the Stoney Nakoda (including Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Goodstoney First Nations). The City of Calgary is also home to the Métis Nation of Alberta Region III.

If we take territorial acknowledgements like this as an act of alliance and practice of reconciliation, they can build connections. It is in this spirit that I would like to forge a better understanding of the historical and ongoing processes of colonialism, while paying respect to the people, past, present, and future, who are caring for the land that I now call home – to move forward in a good way.

As pointed out by the First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2006/2007: “Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story” and thus, “Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities.”

## PART I

# 1. Introduction

We live in a world that feels accelerated, presenting itself as connected yet becoming increasingly divided.

We've entered an era characterised by the twin forces of speed and instability, in which a superabundance of potential threats ... is matched by a dearth of time in which to process them. It's impossible to keep up, and far too alarming to look away. Thanks to the accelerating effects of social media, it's begun to seem as if the social landscape is shifting at such a rate that thinking, the act of making sense, is permanently balked. It's increasingly difficult to distinguish real danger from rumours, speculations, conspiracy theories and deliberate lies, a process the spread of coronavirus around the globe has only intensified. Logging into Twitter or following the rolling news has meant being trapped in a spin-cycle of hypervigilant anxiety (Laing, 2020).

This thesis reflects on the value of the collective in a supercomplex world (Abegglen, Burns, Maier et al., 2020b – *Supercomplexity*). It offers a distinctive contribution to the current thinking and debate about collaboration in Higher Education (HE) and its application for positive social change. It builds on prior outputs, namely 14 co-written publications, published in the last five years, 2019-2023. The focus is on co-creation, identified as a powerful tool for shared action, and defined by the Oxford Learner's Dictionary (2023) dictionary as

[*uncountable, countable*] the act of working with another person or group of people to create or produce something.

The thesis proposes collaboration as a central element of education: a means for social integration. It argues for and models in practice, through the co-written works, co-creation as a transgressive, emancipatory (pedagogical) practice while challenging the dominant education narratives of managerialism, elitism, and individualism (see, for example, Giroux, 2019; Deem & Brehony, 2005; Sandel, 2000).

The works presented exemplify the characteristics of collaborative academic work and the possibilities of working collaboratively in an embodied fashion. This includes case studies that

illustrate a much-needed shift from the teaching of ‘skills’ needed for business to the fostering of agency and literacies through dialogic and ludic teaching and learning approaches. This grounds the thesis at the intersection of theory and praxis, with research and pedagogy grounded in practical application at the core.

This chapter ‘sets the scene’ and introduces key issues and concepts that are relevant for the thesis and its arguments. A section that outlines the author’s positionality, ‘where I am coming from’, is provided to clarify not only the position adopted within the selected research projects and writings but also the arguments augmented within this thesis. A disposition of openness and reflexiveness is a prerequisite for inclusive scholarship – and collaborative academic work. In that sense, this first chapter provides deeper insights into the emergence of this thesis – an opening of what is proposed.

## 1.1 UK Higher Education and Widening Participation

HE in the UK occupies contested ground – in 1992 former polytechnics were invited to become universities, and in 1994 the Russell Group formed, when 16 research-intensive universities came together to protect their status and privilege. Successive authors, for example Gert Biesta (2010, 2006), who raises important questions about education, pedagogy, and communal responsibility, have since argued that those at the margins of society, whilst ostensibly welcomed into universities, have been systematically kept at the margins. The widening participation (WP) agenda,<sup>3</sup> as initially emphasised in The Dearing Report from 1997, played

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<sup>3</sup> The WP agenda refers to the efforts to address discrepancies in the take-up of HE opportunities by underrepresented groups – students that come from lower income families and working-class backgrounds, but also those from ethnic/racial minority groups, particular sex and genders, and with additional (dis)abilities. In this thesis, the term is also used to refer to lecturers from under-represented groups aiming to take up academic positions in HE beyond casual contracts and adjunct roles.

a pivotal role in igniting various WP initiatives and policies throughout the UK. While on the surface positive, this agenda, coupled with a neoliberal perspective, which advocates the liberation of individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within a framework marked by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade (Harvey, 2005), has fostered an environment that, instead of embracing the ‘non-traditional student’ and the unique ‘cultural capital’<sup>4</sup> they bring to education, strives to ‘fix’ them and make them conform as contributors to the neoliberal socio-economic system (Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2015 – *Voices from the margins*; and also Abegglen, Burns, Middlebrook et al., 2020 – *Outsiders looking in?*). Similarly, lecturers from non-traditional backgrounds, rather than being integrated into the education system, are often kept at the margins with casual, low-paid contracts that offer little to no prospect for a permanent position or promotion, and that contain heavy teaching loads, severely limiting the time for joint research and writing (Department for Opportunities, 2022). This creates an isolating ‘outsider experience’ that often fuels shame (see, for example, Burnell Reilly, 2023, who presents a collection of autoethnographies written by working-class education professionals).

More recently digital technology has started to play an outsized part in the dynamics of university life. It was brought vividly into focus by the pivot to online teaching, learning and assessment during the COVID-19 lockdowns and has since grown in influence. Despite the noisy claims to the contrary, education fuelled by digital technology has become even more ‘divided’ – and lonely – despite widening access to learning (see, for example, the study by Bu et al., 2020, which points out that being a student emerged as a high-risk factor for loneliness during lockdown, especially for those coming from low-income households). While digital

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<sup>4</sup> This is a term coined and described by Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron in 1977 (see Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; and also Bourdieu, 1986) to articulate the disparities that emerge among individuals and collectives as a consequence of variations in educational opportunities, familial origins, professional pursuits, and financial resources, creating advantages and functioning as a marker of an individual’s standing within a community or society. In my work, it is a central concept that is used to explore working-class experiences – and to articulate educational inequalities.

technology/the Internet started with a big dream to connect the world (Hern, 2019), these machines and machine systems appear to drive us apart. Despite most of us now being digitally connected, there are reports (see, for example, Chatterjee, 2018) of a public (health) crisis, one that is characterised by elevated levels of social isolation as well as increased rates of stress, mental illnesses, and antisocial behaviours. There appears to be a growing detachment from the world and society, an enhanced individualism.

With an increased focus on the individual and an increased individualisation, we see a world emerging that seeks to value inclusion but fails to escape the epistemological and ideological constraints that promote the silo. Consequently, there is ‘talk’ about the emergence of an asocial society – and even the development of a new underclass. For example, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Canada (Policy Horizons, 2018) has identified the emerging asocial society as one of sixteen future, global challenges through its Imagining Canada’s Future initiative – with a growing number of people, especially young people, feeling socially and emotionally displaced: the new underclass.

Arguably, whilst this is a portrait of a supercomplex and dynamic system (Abegglen Burns, Maier et al., 2020a – *Global university, local issues*), what has not changed is that formal education is a major site – both physically as a space and intellectually as an ideal – where social problems are located (Bustillos & Abegglen, 2021 – *Issues of gender, ‘race’ and social class in education*). This has major consequences for the way we conceptualise and practise education, and especially the opportunities we create (or deny) for WP students and lecturers. With policies and politics normalising the corporatisation of HE and its inhabitants, programmes and courses are now fetishising choice whereby ‘less is more’ and ‘value for money’ is weaponised as a legitimate tool to ‘select’ and ‘control’ (Gill, 2023). Only the supposedly best ones are meant to go to university and succeed: the elite. This means that universities continue

to be exclusive and exclusionary gatekeepers rather than inclusive gateways that create opportunity.<sup>5</sup>

The shift of universities from being institutions of higher learning fostering the production and dissemination of knowledge to businesses that need to deliver a cost-effective service has transformed educational relations. Despite an ostensible emphasis on partnership, isolation and silo-isation are evident. For example, students' loneliness has grown in severity in recent years (Jeffreys & Clarke, 2022), and so has that of academics (Sibai et al., 2019). This has also impacted on students' and lecturers' sense of belonging, especially for those that are already at the margins of society, for example, the racialised student (Currant, 2020; Mitchell, 2021) and the working-class academic (Shukie, 2022). A "hyper-individualized education" (Willingham & Daniel, 2022) has emerged that values the individual only as far as they positively contribute to a neoliberal agenda and can be 'traded' in the market. Despite inclusion efforts, this leaves out those that are not naturally familiar with the neoliberal HE game as well as those that cannot keep up (for various reasons). Those individuals are then judged as lacking self-efficacy or some other deficit characteristic rather than there being any acknowledgement of systemic causes.

This calls for a radical yet practically grounded reimagination of HE to create more inclusive academia. This thesis focuses on collaboration as a central element for inclusive community building – to create a renewed sense of collegiality in HE for shared co-creation: a political-pedagogical endeavour that understands liberation/emancipation as necessarily concerning both the self and social transformation through dialogical praxis, to transcend the oppressive, repressive, and exploitative structures in the neoliberal HE market context.

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Connell, 2013, who outlines how competition has crept, and indeed, been deliberately introduced, into the education system.

## 1.2 Intersectionality and Diversity

Intersectionality in education refers to the understanding and consideration of how social categorisations such as race, disability, gender, and others intersect and interact to shape individual experiences and outcomes within educational settings (Ingram et al., 2023; Scott, 2014). The concept of intersectionality acknowledges that students and educators have multiple, overlapping, lively and dynamic identities that socially position them, and that can lead to unique advantages or disadvantages. For example, Crenshaw (2017) describes how those with certain social identities are affected by interlocking systems of power that marginalise them. Thus, in the context of widening participation in HE, recognising intersectionality is crucial for understanding the multifaceted identities of students and the challenges they face in the modern university. The intersecting identities shape students' access, success, and sense of belonging. For example, a student who is the first one in their family to go to university, identifies as a woman, and is Black may face compounded challenges that differ significantly from those encountered by peers who share none or only one of these identities. Consequently, understanding these intersections is key to developing an inclusive HE system that addresses the unique needs of these students, and advocates for active inclusion and participation of all students.

Yosso's Cultural Wealth Model (2005) provides a framework for recognising and valuing the diverse forms of capital that students from marginalised communities bring to HE. The model identifies six forms of capital:

1. Aspirational Capital (Yosso, 2005, pp. 77-78): The resilience and determination shown by diverse students to succeed, despite challenging circumstances and experiences.



Their “ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers”.

2. Linguistic Capital (Yosso, 2005, pp. 78-79): The various language skills and communication abilities that diverse students develop through their cultural experiences. This enables different modes of expression and cross-cultural understanding.
3. Familial Capital (Yosso, 2005, p. 78): The cultural knowledge and sense of community derived from family and extended networks. This enables diverse students to form and maintain healthy connections and showcase a commitment to others.
4. Social Capital (Yosso, 2005, pp. 79-80): The networks of people and community resources that provide support and assistance. Leveraging these networks can help diverse students navigate institutional structures and access opportunities.
5. Navigational Capital (Yosso, 2005, p. 80): The skills and abilities to maneuver through social institutions, including educational settings, which may not have been designed with diverse students in mind. This includes the capacity to overcome systemic barriers and advocate for oneself.
6. Resistant Capital (Yosso, 2005, pp. 80-81): “those knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality”. This form of capital emphasises the strenght to drive social change and promote justice with body, mind, and spirit.

By embracing students multifaceted identities and various (and ‘different’) forms of capital (Yosso, 2005), HE institutions can begin shifting their focus from a deficit perspective, which views diverse students as lacking, to an asset-based perspective that values the strengths and

contributions these students bring. For widening participation efforts to be effective, this change of perspective is essential (Pasque et al., 2010; Byrd et al., 2019). Thus, programs aimed at widening participation must not just acknowledge diversity but actively celebrate diversity. This includes an attitudinal shift towards understanding and valuing all students, and the strengths they have and bring – a levelling of the educational playing field (Mayor & Briant, 2023).

### 1.3 Glossary of Key Concepts and Terms

This section introduces key concepts and terms that are crucial for understanding this thesis and the selected publications. These definitions, which are presented in alphabetical order, provide a personalised perspective on each idea, emphasising my interpretations within the context of educational studies. It is important to note that this glossary is not exhaustive, and many of these essential concepts are explored in greater depth within the thesis.

**Academic literacies:** In 1998, Mary Lea and Brian Street reinvigorated the debate on ‘what it means to be academically literate’ with their paper titled *Student writing in higher education*. In the paper, they outline the contrasting expectations, interpretations and conceptualisations of academic writing and adduce a taxonomy of approaches: describing first a mechanistic study skills model where the student is deemed to be deficient and in need of remediation via staged ‘skills’ development; moving through a ‘third way’ model of academic socialisation where the student is a learner, but essentially a passive one; and culminating in an academic literacies model, which sees the student as having agency in a politicised HE landscape (Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2019 – *It’s learning development, Jim*). Because the academic literacies model takes account of the importance of issues of identity and the institutional relationships of power and authority that surround, and are embedded within, diverse student practices across the university, it is often promoted as an alternative to the remedial, extra- or co-curricular ‘skills’ support offered to non-traditional students (Hilsdon, Malone & Syska, 2019; Hilsdon, Syska, Hagyard et al., 2019): a holistic and inclusive learning and teaching approach that enables students to find their own voice. Because of its

inclusivity, the approach underpins my teaching as an embodiment of a pedagogy which sees learners – all learners – as active co-constructors of knowledge.

**‘Being With’:** In *Being singular plural*, Jean-Luc Nancy (2000) attempts to rethink community and the very idea of the social in a way that does not ground these ideas in the individual subject or subjectivity. He argues that ‘being’ is always ‘being with’, that ‘I’ is not prior to ‘we’, and that existence is essentially co-existence. Being occurs simultaneously singly and plurally. This means, according to Nancy (2000, p. 2), that thinking is a matter of thinking with: “There is no meaning if meaning is not shared, and not because there would be an ultimate or first signification that all beings have in common, but because meaning is itself the sharing of Being”. Hence, ‘being with’ serves as a pivotal concept in my work, forming the foundation for my ideas and arguments regarding collaboration as a fundamental component of an inclusive, co-created education.

**Collaboration and Co-creation:** Collaboration is the dynamic process wherein individuals or groups join forces, pooling their ideas, resources, and endeavors to attain a mutually advantageous outcome (Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2023b – *Introduction*; Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2021c – *Editorial*). Within the context of HE, this thesis contends that collaboration empowers lecturers and students to reach shared learning objectives, co-create the curriculum, and confront educational disparities. Furthermore, it nurtures qualities such as a sense of belonging and agency among WP students and lectures. Such collaboration hinges upon openness, dialogue, and an atmosphere of receptivity, effectively crafting a co-created third space that fosters inclusivity in both ‘being’ and ‘becoming’. Thus, in this thesis, collaboration is proposed as a general relational philosophy and ethic, while co-creation is seen as a more specific pedagogical approach based on my interpretation of Nancy’s (2000, 1991) work.

**Deficit Model:** The deficit model in education is an approach or perspective that focuses on identifying and addressing the perceived deficiencies or shortcomings of students, particularly in terms of their knowledge, skills, or abilities (Artze-Vega & Delgado, 2019). It assumes that students who are not meeting certain educational standards or expectations have deficits in their learning that need to be remedied. The model often places the blame on students themselves or their backgrounds, rather than considering external factors such as curriculum design, teaching methods, or socio-economic conditions that may be contributing to their difficulties. This is highlighted in many of my writings, for example, Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2015 – *Voices from the margins*; and also Abegglen, Burns, Middlebrook et al., 2020 – *Outsiders looking in?*.

**Inclusion:** In my work, inclusion refers to the practice of ensuring that all students, regardless of their background, abilities, and/or differences, are provided with equitable opportunities to learn and participate in various aspects of education (Abegglen & Neuhaus, 2021 – *Diversity and inclusion in the design studio*; Bustillos & Abegglen, 2021 – *Issues of gender, ‘race’ and social class in education*). The complexity of putting such ideas into practice is highlighted in this thesis. A critical analysis is proposed of how the WP agenda is enacted and of how WP students are supported in a neoliberal (education) context that often prioritises competition over collaboration. The

thesis proposes the (creative) use of third space (Bhabha, 2004) opportunities to support connection. The ultimate goal is to create an educational environment where every individual has the chance to thrive and reach their full potential.

**Isolation and Silo-isation:** These ideas are both central to my thesis and are used to form the argument as to why a more connected education is required. Isolation refers to the state of being separated or cut off from others, typically resulting in physical or emotional solitude and a lack of social interaction or connection – creating an asocial society (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, 2021). Silo-isation refers to the practice of segregating or isolating information, resources, or departments within universities, leading to limited communication and collaboration, and the inefficiency of information flow across different parts of the institution – a “hyper-individualized education” (Willingham & Daniel, 2022).

**Managerialism:** Managerialism is an approach that applies private-sector business principles to public and non-profit organisations, including universities, with a focus on efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and outcomes (Deem & Brehony, 2005). From my perspective and in the context of my work, a managerialist approach means that management procedures often take precedence over the intended outcomes, prioritising adherence to the procedure itself over achieving the initial goals. In essence, management becomes an end in itself, overshadowing the pursuit of ethically considered objectives.

**Meritocracy:** This is a system where success and progress are determined by an individual’s skills and accomplishments. However, while this implies equal opportunities for all, it frequently neglects systemic disparities and privileges linked to factors like family income, social status, or connections (Young, 1958). As argued by scholars like Bloodworth (2016), in the realm of education, the ‘myth of meritocracy’ often results in an unequal educational landscape, making it more challenging for students from disadvantaged backgrounds to excel academically and gain access to the same opportunities as their more privileged peers.

**Neoliberalism:** This is an economic and political ideology that underpins our time. It advocates limited government intervention in the economy, deregulation, free-market capitalism, privatisation, and a focus on individual self-interest and competition with often devastating consequences for those at the margins of society. As Harvey (2005) outlines, neoliberalism inevitably ties in ideas that are neoconservative – ones that aim to wrestle back control over things. This is why, in HE, we see on the one hand a market that diverts control away from central government and at the same time a centralised ‘curriculum’ for many subject areas, which aims to wrestle control back.

**Non-traditional Students:** In HE, there is a diverse group of individuals who do not conform to the traditional model of full-time, recent secondary school graduates. This includes students from low-income backgrounds, individuals from minority ethnic or racial groups, those with unique gender identities and orientations, mature students, individuals with disabilities, part-time students, and those who are returning to

education after an extended hiatus. These students are considered non-traditional (see, for example, Reay, 2015, who outlines what it means to be “outsiders on the inside”). Throughout this thesis, the term is used interchangeably with ‘widening participation’, referring to university students who deviate from or expand beyond the conventional educational path, especially those from working-class backgrounds.

**Openness:** In this thesis, the term openness encompasses both a personal inclination characterised by a willingness and receptivity to new ideas, experiences, information, or perspectives, and an institutional approach devoid of barriers or restrictions that impede access or participation. Promoted is an educational model and inclusive teaching (Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2023a; 2021a – *Collaboration in higher education*), requiring a deep shift toward openness and sustainability. Collaboration becomes the core of education, a move beyond individuality and competition.

**Play and Creativity:** I argue that play and creativity enable more than a ‘traditional’, transmissive lecture (Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2021b – *Dialogic montage*; Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2020 – *Montage, DaDa and the Dalek*; Sinfield, Burns, & Abegglen, 2019 – *Exploration*). Play is disruptive, transgressive – and joyful (Huizinga, 1949; Winnicott, 1971). It can transcend the normative, and challenge developmental notions of teaching and learning. Thus, play can liberate especially those traditionally unwelcome in HE such that even within formal academic settings they might experience their learning differently, more positively.

**Supercomplexity:** This is a concept in which systems, problems, or situations become exceedingly intricate and difficult to understand due to the interplay of numerous factors, making traditional solutions or approaches less effective. According to Barnett (2000a, 2000b, 2004), in the context of the ‘modern’ university, the primary pedagogical objective is not merely transmitting knowledge but cultivating students’ abilities tailored to the demands of supercomplexity, fostering a creative knowing in situ. Consequently, I argue, we can no longer view students as a homogenous or easily categorisable group; instead, we must recognise their diverse knowledge, life experiences, and individual perspectives – acknowledging their inherent supercomplexity (Abegglen, Burns, Maier et al., 2020b – *Supercomplexity*).

**Third Space:** In the context of Homi K. Bhabha's (2004) postcolonial theory, the ‘third space’ refers to a conceptual framework that challenges binary categorisations and explores the complex, hybrid, and often ambivalent nature of cultural identities in a postcolonial world. Bhabha's notion of the third space suggests that when different cultures or identities come into contact, they create a new and dynamic space that is neither fully one culture nor the other. This space is characterised by ambiguity and the potential for transformation. It is the collective third space

where everything comes together . . . subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history (Soja, 1996, p. 57).

It is this space, the in-between space, that is regarded as central in this thesis to form connections and relationships – to build a more collaborative HE.

#### 1.4 Positionality Statement

The work presented in this thesis, and the arguments made, have emerged over the last 18 years, since I first entered academia in 2005 as an assistant researcher. Since then, I have worked in various institutions in different countries (Switzerland, Germany, the United Kingdom, Canada), occupying different roles and positions: sessional instructor, senior lecturer, programme leader and most recently, researcher focusing on learning and teaching in the hybrid context.

I come from a working-class background, and am the first, and so far, still the only one from my family, to go to university. My journey into and through academia has been a struggle against negative expectations and outside projections of my potential life narrative. Up to the date when I decided to finally undertake a PhD, these negative presumptions dominated my options and decision-making. I had to ‘fight’ for my place in HE and hence I feel a strong connection to individuals who are facing similar challenges, particularly WP students and outsider academics. These are the individuals who are often excluded from and not embraced within the academic world. While it is possible that all students and academics encounter similar challenges, it is likely even more pronounced for these specific groups.

Over time, my experiences have undergone a transformation, especially since being granted a more permanent position. Yet, there are values that are deeply important to me and which I have carried with me all this time. My unwavering commitment revolves around inclusion and

empowering all students to reach their full potential, anchored in creative pedagogy and integrative, empowering teaching methods. My aspiration is for all students to be welcomed into the academy for exactly who they are on arrival. This means empowering students to build upon their existing knowledge and experiences and allowing them to take an active role in their own learning. It involves crafting sessions that are not only relevant and engaging but also open. I wholeheartedly embrace the potency of peer learning and peer support for the students I work with, recognising its benefits for lecturers as well. I believe in breaking down boundaries, fostering inter-, multi-, and cross-disciplinary teaching and learning, and nurturing a sense of “communal collaboration” (Fielding & Moss, 2010).

During my 18 years in academia, universities have also changed. There have been some positive developments, for example gestures and moves towards inclusivity and accessibility (for example, more open talk about diversity and decolonisation). There are however areas that have suffered greatly in terms of inclusivity. In my case, this may be best illustrated with the disappearance of a physical place to work: beginning with the move from an individual office to a shared office and then hot-desking, accompanied by the dissolving of the shared staff room and kitchen in favour of large chain-operated coffee shops with limited seating for paying customers only. For me, as a working-class academic, relying on open places to meet colleagues and students, this development has had a detrimental effect. I feel more excluded than ever – and apparently so do my outsider colleagues and WP students. While universities pay lip service to partnership working, opportunities to work with others have become few and far between. There is no place – nor time – to meet with others. Hence, in my work I argue for a different, more co-created academia: universities that do not just value collegiality, but actively foster community and co-creation.

While my story is distinct and singular, it nevertheless reflects the story of our time. Whilst the efforts to open-up universities to WP students like me initially appeared promising, the subsequent commodification and marketisation of HE, with a myopic focus on questionable meritocracy (Reay, 2020), has created something different altogether. We now have precarious roles and positions, characterised by heavy workloads and hot-desking. These roles favour technocratic and pedagogical approaches that prioritise the concept of ‘value for money’, with students bearing higher fees than ever before. There is a strong emphasis on competition and individual achievement, further altering the educational landscape towards the privileged individual. These are challenging times for the working-class student – and working-class academic.

### 1.5 ‘Coming to Know’

How has my thinking and research, as presented in this thesis and the selected works, evolved? Two key methodological ideas are employed here to frame the ‘coming to know’ or learning process. These are often classified under action research (Lewin, 1946)<sup>6</sup>: ‘doing’ (or taking action) and ‘reflecting’. This dynamic and iterative process involves a cycle aimed at enhancing practice and fostering continuous improvement. Within this methodology, practitioners actively engage in their work environment, implement changes, and systematically reflect on the outcomes to refine their strategies. This reflective practice not only deepens understanding but also encourages innovation and responsiveness to real-world challenges. By integrating theory and practice, action research empowers educators to develop and test new approaches,

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<sup>6</sup> Lewin (1946, pp. 35-38) described action research as “a comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action and research leading to social action” that uses “a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action and fact-finding about the result of the action”.



ensuring that their work is both practically relevant and grounded in rigorous inquiry. The primary goal is to ensure the work has a tangible and positive impact in the 'classroom' with students and hence developing practical strategies that can be integrated into everyday teaching practices is a priority.

One method used extensively in the context of this thesis is collaborative writing, serving as a powerful tool for my inquiry in action. As demonstrated by scholars like Ken Gale (Gale & Bowstead, 2013; Gale & Wyatt, 2017), collaborative writing can significantly enhance thinking and practice, allowing for deeper reflection and more innovative approaches. Through this method, I engage in research through writing, continually evolving my ideas and methods. As the writing happens in a dialogic exchange, the research emerges differently according to partners and situations. As Gale (Gale & Bowstead, 2013, pp. 2-3) states:

If you're in some group, some assemblage, where you're engaged in discussion, you're considering the way forward, offering a concept, or a conceptualisation, is likely to be some kind of 'line of flight', it's a movement from one place to another, it's taking thinking in another direction, it's exploring the possibility that thought doesn't have to be trapped or enclosed within a particular concept or setting, it's linked to the figure of the 'rhizome' because, as you know, rhizomes exist in a subterranean sense but [they] pop nodes up all over the place and those nodes can be seen to represent new ideas, new ways of thinking, new affects, new ethical sensitivities or whatever.

As an example, in collaborative writing is often unclear who has written what, as these pieces emerge organically, worked on jointly, in partnership. Similarly, ideas may change over time as thoughts and words are adapted. This process involves openness to each other and each other's contributions, with meaning emerging within the collaboration through back-and-forth exchanges and assemblages of thinking. This collaborative process in action and on action not only strengthens the quality of my work but also demonstrates my dedication to contributing to the collective advancement of educational practices. Through these efforts, I position myself as a knowledgeable and credible voice in the field, continually evolving and adapting to better serve students and educators alike, in an active exchange with others.

Collaboration is not just a concept I advocate; it is a practice I embody. By working with and through others, we can achieve more significant and meaningful outcomes. My thesis aims to exemplify this collaborative spirit, demonstrating the value and impact of collective efforts in educational practice.

## 1.6 Thesis Context and Structure

This thesis sits within a broader context of academic research in the fascinating world of education (Pokorny & Warren, 2021). Although the notion of education has taxed the minds of philosophers since Plato and Socrates, Education Studies, the study of education as a distinctive academic discipline (Biesta, 2015), is relatively new. It took root in the early 2000s, mainly in post-1992 universities,<sup>7</sup> which had been centres for teacher training, but quickly gained academic credibility (see Ward, 2020). Education Studies is concerned with all aspects of education from understanding how people develop and learn, and the nature of knowledge and ways of knowing and teaching, to the understanding of educational processes and procedures and their social, cultural, historical, and political contexts.

Education studies as a subject ... asks us to question what education is, who it is for, who controls it and why – essentially, to think critically about every aspect of education and the societal and political structures it sits within (Bartlett & Burton, 2020, p. 3).

It builds on other disciplines – Psychology, Sociology, Philosophy, History and Economics, to name the most important – and as such is regarded as an interdisciplinary field of study, yet one that is a discipline in its own right (QAA, 2019; and also Biesta, 2015).

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<sup>7</sup> Post-1992 Universities: Former polytechnical colleges that sought and were granted university status through the 'Further and Higher Education Act 1992'. The Act was created with the goal of removing the distinction between universities and colleges.

This thesis builds upon the interdisciplinary nature of Education Studies, drawing upon prior published works/research that delve into the inequities and injustices that are pervasive in academia while advocating for more inclusive approaches. It acknowledges education as a transformative and socio-political endeavour, recognising that teaching and learning are inherently non-neutral and imbued with ethical considerations. From this perspective, education emerges as a dynamic arena where both individual identity and societal constructs are shaped – a social process that can either empower individuals or stifle their potential. Consequently, this thesis is infused with a fervent commitment to educational justice, a commitment brought to life through illustrative case studies and personal experiences. As Freire (1970, p. 39) states:

The more radical the person is, the more fully he or she enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he or she can transform it. This individual is not afraid to confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled. This person is not afraid to meet the people or to enter into a dialogue with them. This person does not consider himself or herself the proprietor of history or of all people, or the liberator of the oppressed; but he or she does commit himself or herself, within history, to fight at their side.

Thus, the intention of this thesis is not to be ‘neutral’ but to see and promote education as a possibility for a more inclusive, co-created academia.

The thesis contributes to knowledge and practice in the following areas:

- Creating a framework to better understand how collaboration can foster a more inclusive and socially just academia by establishing key qualities that characterise inclusive collaboration.
- Identifying processes and procedures that enable (or hinder) academic collaboration in HE.
- Outlining curriculum design characteristics and teaching approaches that support co-creation in the classroom, especially for WP students and outsider academics.

The thesis is divided into two parts: Part I consists of four chapters, discussing the works selected and the arguments made, and outlining an original argumentation and contribution to the field of education. Part II provides copies of the works on which the thesis builds. The Appendix provides further insights into the academic work undertaken, including a full list of publications and an overview of presentations given and research grants received as well as an outline of the impact of my work. Copyright statements for the works not available open access are also provided.

I recommend that readers engage first with Part I of the thesis, where the originality, significance and rigour of my research and arguments is demonstrated, before delving into the original works presented in Part II and the additional information provided in the Appendix.

## 2. The Body of Works Selected

For the PhD on the Basis of Prior Published Works in Education 14 co-written publications have been selected: one book, two edited books, one edited journal, four book chapters, and six journal articles. The works were written over the last five years, 2019-2023, in different contexts and for different audiences. They have been published in reputable journals and with acknowledged publishing houses. The selected publications have all been peer-reviewed, and copies are available in the public domain and are traceable through ordinary catalogues, abstracts, and citation indices. As outlined in the QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications,<sup>8</sup> criteria for level 8, the publications are based on original research and, together, expand on existing knowledge in the field of education, providing new understandings. They demonstrate my ability to conceptualise, design and implement research for action, and to develop new ideas and approaches at the forefront of the discipline of Education Studies (Biesta, 2015).

The extent of the selected publications is estimated to be equivalent to a standard Doctor of Philosophy in Education thesis, both in volume and content. Together the works exhibit a substantial, coherent, and original contribution to the discipline of educational studies.

The selected publications have not previously or simultaneously been submitted for another degree or emanated from research conducted for another degree.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/qualifications-frameworks>

Copies of all selected publications are included in Part 2 of this thesis. In the Appendix, you will find a full list of works published along with an overview of presentations, workshops and talks delivered, as well as details on grants and awards received, and the impact made.

In the following, an overview of the selected publications is given, together with notes on co-authorship and open access publishing, which are both essential concepts underpinning the body of work selected and the arguments put forward.

## 2.1 List of Selected Works

The publications selected for the PhD, grouped according to year of publication, in descending order, are as follows:

### 2023

#### **Collaboration in higher education: A new ecology of practice** [edited book]

Abegglen, S., Burns, T., & Sinfield, S. (Eds.) (2023a). *Collaboration in higher education: A new ecology of practice*. Bloomsbury.

ISBN: 9781350334052 (hardback)

Open Access: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350334083>

Contribution: 1/3<sup>9</sup>

#### Introduction [chapter]

Abegglen, S., Burns, T., & Sinfield, S. (2023b). Introduction: Why collaborate? In S. Abegglen, T. Burns & S. Sinfield (Eds.). *Collaboration in higher education: A new ecology of practice* (pp. 1-6). Bloomsbury.

Contribution: 1/3

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<sup>9</sup> The listed contribution for each publication indicates the estimated percentage of my contribution, which is equal for most outputs written with co-authors.

**Designing educational futures: Imagine a collaborative Bloom** [journal article]

Abegglen, S., Burns, T., Heller, R., & Sinfield, S. (2023). Designing educational futures: Imagine a collaborative Bloom. *Postdigital Science and Education*.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s42438-023-00393-w>

Contribution: 1/4

2022

**Partnership working: Opening doors – crossing thresholds** [journal article]

Abegglen, S., Burns, T., Griffiths, O., Myhre, M., & Sinfield, S. (2022). Partnership working: Opening doors – crossing thresholds. *International Journal for Students as Partners*, 6(1), 153-159.  
<https://doi.org/10.15173/ijasp.v6i1.4738>

Contribution: 1/5

2021

**Supporting student writing and other modes of learning and assessment: A staff guide** [book]

Abegglen, S., Burns, T., & Sinfield, S., (2021d). *Supporting student writing and other modes of learning and assessment: A staff guide*. PRISM.  
<https://prism.ucalgary.ca/handle/1880/113457>

Contribution: 1/3

**Diversity and inclusion in the design studio** [book chapter]

Abegglen, S., & Neuhaus, F. (2021). Diversity and inclusion in the design studio. In: M. Arcellana-Panlilio & P. Dyjur (Eds.), *Incorporating universal design for learning in disciplinary contexts in higher education* (pp. 22-26). Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning Guide Series, University of Calgary.  
<https://taylorinstitute.ucalgary.ca/resources/incorporating-universal-design-for-learning-in-disciplinary-contexts-in-higher-education-guide>

Contribution: 1/2

**Issues of gender, ‘race’ and social class in education** [book chapter]

Bustillos, J., & Abegglen, S. (2021, 2nd ed.). Issues of gender, ‘race’ and social class in education. In: S. Isaacs (Ed.), *Social problems in the UK: An introduction* (pp. 86-110). Routledge.  
ISBN: 9780367404314 (hardback), 9780367404321 (softcover), 9780429356124 (e)

Contribution: 1/3

**Collaboration in higher education: Partnering with students, colleagues and external stakeholders** [edited journal]

Abegglen, S., Burns, T., & Sinfield, S. (Eds.) (2021a). Collaboration in higher education: Partnering with students, colleagues and external stakeholders. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*. Special Issue, 18(7).  
<https://ro.uow.edu.au/jutlp/vol18/iss7/>

Contribution: 1/3

Editorial [article]

Abegglen, S., Burns, T., & Sinfield, S. (2021c). Editorial: Collaboration in higher education: Partnering with students, colleagues and external stakeholders. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, 18(7), 1-6.  
<https://doi.org/10.53761/1.18.7.01>

Contribution: 1/3

**Dialogic montage: Reflecting on playful practice in higher education** [journal article]

Abegglen, S., Burns, T., & Sinfield, S. (2021b). Dialogic montage: Reflecting on playful practice in higher education. *Journal of Play in Adulthood*, 3(2), 82-95.  
<https://doi.org/10.5920/jpa.843>

Contribution: 1/3

**2020**

**Understanding education and economics: Key debates and critical perspectives** [edited book]

Bustillos Morales, J. A., & Abegglen, S. (Eds.) (2020b). *Understanding education and economics: Key debates and critical perspectives*. Routledge.  
ISBN: 9780367074654 (hardback), 9780367074661 (softcover), 9780429020933 (e)

Contribution: 1/3

Introduction [chapter]

Bustillos Morales, J. A., & Abegglen, S. (2020a). Introduction: How can we make sense of the influence of economics in education? In J.A. Bustillos Morales & S. Abegglen, (Eds.) (2020). *Understanding education and economics: Key debates and critical perspectives* (pp. 1-11). Routledge.

Contribution: 1/3



**Global university, local issues: Taking a creative and humane approach to learning and teaching** [book chapter]

Abegglen, S., Burns, T., Maier, S., & Sinfield, S. (2020a). Global university, local issues: Taking a creative and humane approach to learning and teaching. In: E. Sengupta, P. Blessinger & M. Makhanya (Eds.), *Improving classroom engagement and international development programs: International perspectives on humanizing higher education* (Innovations in Higher Education Teaching and Learning, Vol. 27) (pp. 75-91). Emerald Publishing Limited.

ISBN: 978-1-83909-473-6 (hardback), 978-1-83909-472-9 (e), ISSN: 2055-3641

<https://doi.org/10.1108/S2055-364120200000027007>

Contribution: 1/4

**Supercomplexity: Acknowledging students' lives in the 21st century university** [journal article]

Abegglen, S., Burns, T., Maier, S., & Sinfield, S. (2020b). Supercomplexity: Acknowledging students' lives in the 21st century university. *Innovative Practice in Higher Education*, 4(1), 20-38.

<https://journals.staffs.ac.uk/index.php/ipihe/article/view/52>

Contribution: 1/4

**Montage, DaDa and the Dalek: The game of meaning in higher education** [journal article]

Abegglen, S. Burns, T., & Sinfield, S. (2020). Montage, DaDa and the Dalek: The game of meaning in higher education. *International Journal of Management and Applied Research*, 7(3), 224-239.

<https://doi.org/10.18646/2056.73.20-016>

Contribution: 1/3

**2019**

**Exploration: Becoming playful – the power of a ludic module** [book chapter]

Sinfield, S., Burns, T., & Abegglen, S. (2019). Exploration: Becoming playful – the power of a ludic module. In: A. James & C. Nerantzi (Eds.), *The power of play in higher education: Creativity in tertiary learning* (pp. 23-31). Palgrave Macmillan.

ISBN: 978-3-319-95779-1 (hardback), 978-3-319-95780-7 (e)

Contribution: 1/4

**It's learning development, Jim – but not as we know it: Academic literacies in third-space** [journal article]

Abegglen, S., Burns, T., & Sinfield, S. (2019). It's learning development, Jim – but not as we know it: academic literacies in third-space. *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education*, 15.

<https://journal.aldinhe.ac.uk/index.php/jldhe/article/view/500>

Contribution: 1/3

## 2.2 Co-authorship

The selection of works expresses my commitment to the principle of collaboration in HE and is therefore rooted in the tradition of co-created and co-written output. Collective writing, the process of producing a written work as a group resulting in the co-authorship of a text by more than one writer, aims to contribute to diversity rather than replicate uniformity (Peters et al., 2021a). Thus, collaborative writing in academia is considered a heterodoxic approach to writing. In most disciplines, including the social sciences/humanities, the gold standard is still the single authored monograph, especially for tenure and promotion, because it is regarded as an example of personal achievement and research excellence (Shaw et al., 2022). Collaborative writing has a different ethic: it subverts the idea of individual brilliance. It requires the authors to work closely together, to be involved in all stages of the writing process, and to share responsibility for and ownership of the entire text produced (Ede & Lunsford, 1990; Storch, 2019). This means that the writing emerges between rather than from one another – as a coming together (Magnusson, 2021), as a method of inquiry (Gale & Bowstead, 2013; Speedy & Wyatt, 2014), as a means of knowledge production and dissemination (Peters et al., 2021b), and as a process of learning (Murray, 1972). Thus, collaborative writing offers its own kind of generativity, which helps develop new insights and understandings. As Jandrić et al. (2022) noted, “Collective writing is a continuous struggle for meaning-making.” It is an assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1993) of ideas, thoughts, methods and theories, and experimentation of

the people involved. As such, collaborative writing is not only a critique of the expertise (and hence knowledge) as being an essentialised, objective feature of individuals (rather than situated in the context of people's relationship) but also of the notion of (neoliberal) individualised meritocracy; it is a means of democratising knowledge and research – a distributed network of scholarly communications and outputs (Peters et al. 2021b). Hence, collaborative writing exemplifies the qualities of collaborative academic practice that I am advocating for in my work – and in this thesis: collaboration as a sustainable ecology of HE praxis.

### 2.3 Open Access Publishing

Most of the works selected for this thesis are available Open Access. “Open Access is the free, immediate, online availability of research articles [works] coupled with the rights to use these articles [works] fully in the digital environment” (Libraries & Cultural Resources, 2023). For the other works, copyright permissions are included (see Appendix, *Copyright permissions*).

The fact that most of my publications are available Open Access, under a Creative Commons Licence,<sup>10</sup> is not a coincidence. Open scholarship is very much part of my collaborative work ethic (as is collaborative writing). I regard unrestricted and free access to knowledge as an essential part of an inclusive, co-created HE. Learning, teaching, and research materials that have been released under an open licence support not only universal access to knowledge, but also the reduction of the ‘academic divide’. As stated in the first international normative

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<sup>10</sup> <https://creativecommons.org/>

instrument adopted by the UNESCO's General Conference at its 40<sup>th</sup> session, the *Recommendation on Open Educational Resources (OER)* (UNESCO, 2019):

*Recognizing* that, in building inclusive knowledge societies, Open Educational Resources (OER) can support quality education that is equitable, inclusive, open and participatory as well as enhance academic freedom and professional autonomy of teachers by widening the scope of materials available for teaching and learning.

This means that Open Access publications support a participatory education where diverse educational institutions, academics and students can come together – as a Community of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). As such, open access publishing is more than a means to distribute scholarly materials but a praxis that fosters collective enquiry. This ethic is reflected in my selected publications – and in my arguments.

### 3. Summary and Significance of Selected Works

The selected publications can be loosely divided into three themes: (1) Higher Education Isolation and Silo-isation, (2) Co-created Academic Spaces, and (3) Creative Pedagogy for Community-Building. Together these three themes not only organise the selected writings but also allow for the formation of new connections. The result is an interweaving of arguments towards a sustainable ecology of collaboration in HE. The emerging claim has the potential to transform praxis in ways that benefit everyone involved, especially those at the ‘margins’, the outsider student and academic – towards a more inclusive education.

First, the chapter gives an overview of the selected publications grouped according to the three themes. Second, the three themes, under which the selected publications are grouped, are outlined, providing a framework not only for understanding the works selected but also the emerging narrative. Finally, an overview of each publication selected is provided, demonstrating the originality of the arguments made not just in each work but in the body of literature as a whole.

Note: The chosen works were published during a period of significant global transformation, marked by the rise of COVID-19, the rapid advancement of educational technology, including AI, and a renewed debate on the importance of degrees and formal education,<sup>11</sup> particularly for WP students. On a more personal level, this period involved relocating from the UK to Canada, transitioning from a lecturing role to a research position, and becoming part of a new learning

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<sup>11</sup> In July 2023, the UK government announced that it wants to impose limits on student numbers for university courses that do not provide “good outcomes”, namely does degrees that have high dropout rates or a low proportion of students going on to professional jobs with high earnings (<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-66216005>).

and teaching community. Yet, the chosen body of work is primarily centred around the UK, specifically England, and reflects a pre-pandemic perspective. This is because most of the writings emerged before the COVID-19 pandemic (although some of them were published only after) and are based on my experiences teaching underrepresented students, researching ‘outsider’ experiences, and addressing exclusionary practices, often in collaboration with working-class colleagues. This means that the works and arguments presented must be ‘read’ in the context of a Euro-centric education system where socio-cultural processes and structures claim to be inclusive but nurture an ever-increasing, isolating divide (see also Chapter 1, *Introduction*).

### 3.1 Selected Works Grouped According to Themes

The following table provides an overview of the selected publications grouped according to the three themes:

Theme	Selected Publications
[1] Higher Education Isolation and Silo-isation	<p>[Book Chapter]            Bustillos, J., &amp; Abegglen, S. (2021, 2nd ed.). Issues of gender, ‘race’ and social class in education. In: Isaacs, S. (Ed.), <i>Social problems in the UK: An introduction</i> (pp. 86-110). Routledge.</p> <p>[Edited Book]            Bustillos Morales, J. A., &amp; Abegglen, S. (Eds.) (2020b). <i>Understanding education and economics: Key debates and critical perspectives</i>. Routledge.</p> <p>[book chapter]            Bustillos Morales, J. A., &amp; Abegglen, S. (2020a). Introduction: How can we make sense of the influence of economics in education? In J.A. Bustillos Morales &amp; S. Abegglen, (Eds.) (2020). <i>Understanding education and economics: Key debates and critical perspectives</i> (pp. 1-11). Routledge.</p> <p>[Book Chapter]            Abegglen, S., Burns, T., Maier, S., &amp; Sinfield, S. (2020a). Global university, local issues: Taking a creative and humane approach to learning and teaching. In: E. Sengupta, P. Blessinger &amp; M. Makhanya (Eds.), <i>Improving classroom engagement and international</i></p>

	<p><i>development programs: International perspectives on humanizing higher education</i> (Innovations in Higher Education Teaching and Learning, Vol. 27) (pp. 75-91). Emerald Publishing Limited.</p> <p>[Journal Article] Abegglen, S., Burns, T., Maier, S., &amp; Sinfield, S. (2020b). Supercomplexity: Acknowledging students' lives in the 21st century university. <i>Innovative Practice in Higher Education</i>, 4(1), 20-38.</p>
[2] Co-created Academic Spaces	<p>[Edited Book] Abegglen, S., Burns, T., &amp; Sinfield, S. (Eds.) (2023a). <i>Collaboration in higher education: A new ecology of practice</i>. Bloomsbury.</p> <p>[Book Chapter] Abegglen, S., Burns, T., &amp; Sinfield, S. (2023b). Introduction: Why collaborate? In S. Abegglen, T. Burns &amp; S. Sinfield (Eds.). <i>Collaboration in higher education: A new ecology of practice</i> (pp. 1-6). Bloomsbury.</p> <p>[Journal Article] Abegglen, S., Burns, T., Heller, R., &amp; Sinfield, S. (2023). Designing educational futures: Imagine a collaborative Bloom. <i>Postdigital Science and Education</i>.</p> <p>[Edited Journal] Abegglen, S., Burns, T., &amp; Sinfield, S. (Eds.) (2021a). Collaboration in higher education: Partnering with students, colleagues and external stakeholders. <i>Journal of University Teaching &amp; Learning Practice</i>. Special Issue, 18(7).</p> <p>[Journal Article] Abegglen, S., Burns, T., &amp; Sinfield, S. (2021c). Editorial: Collaboration in higher education: Partnering with students, colleagues and external stakeholders. <i>Journal of University Teaching &amp; Learning Practice</i>, 18(7), 1-6.</p> <p>[Journal Article] Abegglen, S., Burns, T., Griffiths, O., Myhre, M., &amp; Sinfield, S. (2022). Partnership working: Opening doors – crossing thresholds. <i>International Journal for Students as Partners</i>, 6(1), 153-159.</p> <p>[Book Chapter] Abegglen, S., &amp; Neuhaus, F. (2021). Diversity and inclusion in the design studio. In: M. Arcellana-Panlilio &amp; P. Dyjur (Eds.), <i>Incorporating universal design for learning in disciplinary contexts in higher education</i> (pp. 22-26). Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning Guide Series, University of Calgary.</p>
[3] Creative Pedagogy for Community-Building	<p>[Book] Abegglen, S., Burns, T., &amp; Sinfield, S., (2021d). <i>Supporting student writing and other modes of learning and assessment: A staff guide</i>. PRISM.</p> <p>[Journal Article] Abegglen, S., Burns, T., &amp; Sinfield, S. (2021b). Dialogic montage: Reflecting on playful practice in higher education. <i>Journal of Play in Adulthood</i>, 3(2), 82-95.</p> <p>[Journal Article] Abegglen, S. Burns, T., &amp; Sinfield, S. (2020). Montage, DaDa and the Dalek: The game of meaning in higher education. <i>International Journal of Management and Applied Research</i>, 7(3), 224-239.</p>

	<p>[Journal Article]  Abegglen, S., Burns, T., &amp; Sinfield, S. (2019). It's learning development, Jim – but not as we know it: academic literacies in third-space. <i>Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education</i>, 15.</p> <p>[Book Chapter]  Sinfield, S., Burns, T., &amp; Abegglen, S. (2019). Exploration: Becoming playful – the power of a ludic module. In: A. James &amp; C. Nerantzi (Eds.), <i>The power of play in higher education: Creativity in tertiary learning</i> (pp. 23-31). Palgrave Macmillan.</p>
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Table 1: Selected publications grouped according to themes.

### 3.2 Description of Themes

The three themes – (1) Higher Education Isolation and Silo-isation, (2) Co-created Academic Spaces, and (3) Creative Pedagogy for Community-Building – are not finite categories. They provide a framing that helps form the argument for collaboration as a sustainable ecology of HE praxis – and demonstrates its originality. In the following, each theme is introduced.

#### Theme 1: Higher Education Isolation and Silo-isation

The works presented under the theme ‘Higher Education Isolation and Silo-isation’ examine current educational narratives and practices and map the processes and procedures that exclude and thus are exclusionary. The selected writings highlight how closely education and economics have become intertwined, and how economic ideologies, in particular neoliberalism, have co-opted teaching and learning to serve economic goals, and thus are excluding. Educational inequalities regarding gender, ‘race’ and social class are spotlighted, with an acknowledgement of wider social inequalities such as those related to sexuality, age, and dis/ability. The selected works argue that currently, in HE, too many are excluded, ‘othered’ and/or labelled as deficient. Thus, from the point of view of challenging such inequalities, it becomes imperative that a more



inclusive and humane education is created where students and lecturers, especially those of a WP background, are valued for their rich, lived lives and ‘worldly’ experiences in order to afford them the opportunity to become academic more on their own terms. Although the UK Government has promoted a WP agenda since The Dearing Report (1997), formally known as the reports of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, this has had little effect to date, as pointed out by scholars such as Diane Reay and Gill Crozier,<sup>12</sup> who are both noted for their study of work-class experiences and educational inequalities in the UK. The stratification of the UK education system has also been acknowledged by intergovernmental organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to be unjust and socially divisive: “According to the OECD, British schools are some of the most socially segregated in the developing world” (Bloodworth, 2016, p. 81). From the top down, the system favours already privileged groups, those with enhanced social, cultural, and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). This creates a segregated education, with little prospect for change. As pointed out by the Office for Students (2020), the independent regulator of HE in England:

Young people from the most advantaged areas of England are currently over six times as likely to attend one of the most selective universities – including Oxford, Cambridge and other members of the Russell Group – as those from the most disadvantaged areas, and this gap has hardly changed despite a significant expansion in the number of university places available.

The selected publications highlight the isolation and silo-isation resulting from these ideologies, processes, and procedures, proposing an education that offers ‘authentic’ inclusion, especially for students and lecturers at the margins, those at the edges of academia and society. The creation of (counter) stories to open the nooks and crannies, the cracks and crevices (Deleuze

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example, their joint article that attempts to understand the challenges working-class students in a first-class HE institution face: Reay, D., Crozier, G., & Clayton, J. (2009). 'Strangers in Paradise?': Working-class students in elite universities. *Sociology*, 43(6), 1103-1121. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038509345700> – and also, Reay’s article that scrutinises working-class students’ experiences of elite HE through the lens of Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus, capitals and field: Reay, D. (2021). The working classes and higher education: Meritoratic fallacies of upward mobility in the United Kingdom. *European Journal of Education*, 56(1), 53-64. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12438>

& Guattari, 1993), that build “third spaces” (Bhabha, 2004) for inclusive being, doing and becoming is proposed; spaces that see learning and teaching as a connecting practice – enabling personal, collective, and social growth.

The works are:

- Bustillos, J., & Abegglen, S. (2021, 2nd ed.). Issues of gender, ‘race’ and social class in education. In: Isaacs, S. (Ed.), *Social problems in the UK: An introduction* (pp. 86-110). Routledge.
- Bustillos Morales, J. A., & Abegglen, S. (Eds.) (2020b). *Understanding education and economics: Key debates and critical perspectives*. Routledge.
- Abegglen, S., Burns, T., Maier, S., & Sinfield, S. (2020a). Global university, local issues: Taking a creative and humane approach to learning and teaching. In: E. Sengupta, P. Blessinger & M. Makhanya (Eds.), *Improving classroom engagement and international development programs: International perspectives on humanizing higher education* (Innovations in Higher Education Teaching and Learning, Vol. 27) (pp. 75-91). Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Abegglen, S., Burns, T., Maier, S., & Sinfield, S. (2020b). Supercomplexity: Acknowledging students’ lives in the 21st century university. *Innovative Practice in Higher Education*, 4(1), 20-38.

Theme 2: Co-created Academic Spaces

Moving on from exclusion and separation to inclusion and connection, the second set of selected works comprises the theme of educational collaboration and co-creation. Building on the arguments presented in the first theme, what is emphasised is the importance of rediscovering the power of ‘the collective’ to co-create spaces of voice and hope in an HE that

has become ever more individualistic, competitive and managerialist. The notion that humans are social, inter-dependent beings striving to connect and be with one another is at the heart of the argument (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2023) – the “being with” (Nancy, 2000).

Together we construct, structure and restructure the stories that build the larger narratives of who we are, what we do and how we live, act and behave as people, professionals and larger communities (Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2021c – *Editorial*).

The fact that ‘we’ are academia, a socio-historical collective pursuing research, teaching, learning and scholarship through formal and informal exchanges, is highlighted. The selected works argue that a renewed focus on collegiality has the power to create those “backstage moments” (Abegglen, Burns, Griffiths et al., 2022 – *Partnership working*) where lecturers and students can come together to build practices based on shared values. Case studies are presented to illustrate how lecturers, students and those in affiliated teaching and learning positions can work together, non-competitively, within and across institutions, and with external stakeholders. It is argued that more of these spaces are needed where those involved in education can co-create – not as a comfortable enclosure in a pre-existing group but as an exposure to each other that would preserve the ‘I’ and its freedom in an open mode of imagining community as neither a project of fusion nor production but a passion for inclusive sharing (Nancy, 1991; 2000). This means that the works presented under this theme position themselves in opposition, and as providing alternatives, to the individualistic and alienating culture that dominates HE under the neoliberal gaze. Emerging from this are not only suggestions on how to navigate the existing HE landscape, but also inputs on how to create spaces that can help create more inclusive communities – and more inclusive teaching and learning practices.

The works are:

- Abegglen, S., Burns, T., & Sinfield, S. (Eds.) (2023a). *Collaboration in higher education: A new ecology of practice*. Bloomsbury.

- Abegglen, S., Burns, T., Heller, R., & Sinfield, S. (2023). Designing educational futures: Imagine a collaborative Bloom. *Postdigital Science and Education*.
- Abegglen, S., Burns, T., & Sinfield, S. (Eds.) (2021a). Collaboration in higher education: Partnering with students, colleagues and external stakeholders. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*. Special Issue, 18(7).
- Abegglen, S., Burns, T., Griffiths, O., Myhre, M., & Sinfield, S. (2022). Partnership working: Opening doors – crossing thresholds. *International Journal for Students as Partners*, 6(1), 153-159.
- Abegglen, S., & Neuhaus, F. (2021). Diversity and inclusion in the design studio. In: M. Arcellana-Panlilio & P. Dyjur (Eds.), *Incorporating universal design for learning in disciplinary contexts in higher education* (pp. 22-26). Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning Guide Series, University of Calgary.

### Theme 3: Creative Pedagogy for Community-Building

Building on co-creation, the selected works presented under the third theme explore how collaboration can be creatively fostered in educational settings to build community. The focus is on a relationship-centred pedagogy (Healey et al., 2016) where lecturers and students co-develop, co-design and co-deliver the curriculum. It has been argued by scholars (see, for example, Forbes & Thomas, 2022; Huizinga, 1949; James, 2022; James & Nerantzi, 2019; Nørgård et al., 2021; Nørgård et al., 2017; Quinn, 2019; Winnicott, 1971) that creative, playful, multimodal practice is transgressive (hooks, 1994) – and joyful. It breaks the ‘ice’, builds connections, bonds people – it stimulates, relaxes, and enthuses – it revives a love of learning and teaching. Thus, presented in the included writings are HE pedagogies that utilise playful, creative, and empowering methods and methodologies; pedagogies that foster the development of literacies (Lea & Street, 1998) rather than skills. Based on personal stories, the examples

outline a praxis that develops students as active, confident, and “response-able” citizens (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2023). The same praxis supports lecturers to re-frame their teaching approaches and attitudes in positive and inclusive ways. Hence, the selected works argue for creativity as a way forward towards a more equal education:

Creative pedagogies have a huge part to play in offering a different lens; as does the decolonisation of curricula practices. As educators in positions of power and authority, no matter how ‘nice’ we are, we still grade their work; it is for us to frame their efforts within a wider social justice platform, giving a voice to all of the students in our care, not just the privileged ones (Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2021d, p. 6 – *Supporting student writing and other modes of learning and assessment*).

There is value in building creative connections for learning, within and between individuals, because this practice allows for addressing barriers, isolation, and exclusion. Thus, the works selected propose a creative education that supports lecturers and students to forge new connections in a playful manner; an education that creatively fosters collaboration for inclusive learning.

The works are:

- Abegglen, S., Burns, T., & Sinfield, S., (2021d). *Supporting student writing and other modes of learning and assessment: A staff guide*. PRISM.
- Abegglen, S., Burns, T., & Sinfield, S. (2021b). Dialogic montage: Reflecting on playful practice in higher education. *Journal of Play in Adulthood*, 3(2), 82-95.
- Abegglen, S. Burns, T., & Sinfield, S. (2020). Montage, DaDa and the Dalek: The game of meaning in higher education. *International Journal of Management and Applied Research*, 7(3), 224-239.
- Abegglen, S., Burns, T., & Sinfield, S. (2019). It’s learning development, Jim – but not as we know it: academic literacies in third-space. *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education*, 15.

- Sinfield, S., Burns, T., & Abegglen, S. (2019). Exploration: Becoming playful – the power of a ludic module. In: A. James & C. Nerantzi (Eds.), *The power of play in higher education: Creativity in tertiary learning* (pp. 23-31). Palgrave Macmillan.

### 3.3 Summary of Selected Works

In the following, the selected works are briefly summarised with the goal of expanding on the rationale for the themes and to provide a detailed description of the body of each theme. The emphasis is on the arguments presented in each work and the connection of the individual arguments in each theme. Emerging from this is a larger argument that advocates collaboration as an ontological and ethical perspective fostering a sustainable, connected ecology of HE teaching and learning.

#### Theme 1 Publications

*Understanding education and economics: Key debates and critical perspectives* (Bustillos Morales & Abegglen, 2020b) critically explores and analyses the current state of HE through the lens of social constructionism (Burr, 2003), which takes a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge. Highlighted are some of the ways in which education and schooling have become entangled with economic imperatives and interests. The purpose of the book is to assist lecturers and students to think critically about education, schools, and schooling, and to consider how educational institutions are influenced by societal changes, including the development of a market-driven mindset that promises meritocracy. Important questions about the future of education are posed to promote reflection.

The question is where this might lead us in the future, respectively, which educational futures are going to be imaginable with this economic logic and how we can help ourselves and others to think outside of it (Bustillos Morales & Abegglen, 2020a, p. 6 – *Introduction*).

As such, the book not only offers a framework for discussing and analysing how economic interests define and shape the nature and purpose of education, but also opens possibilities to imagine a different, more inclusive HE, especially if taken-for-granted neoliberal ideologies are challenged. As Ward (2020, xii) states in the *Series editor's preface*: “This book, one of the first to bring together a series of economic perspectives on education, is essential reading.”

*Issues of gender, 'race' and social class in education* (Bustillos & Abegglen, 2021) homes in on the discussion on inequalities. The chapter, drawing upon the disciplines of Sociology, Social Policy, Education Studies, and Health Studies, highlights the socio-cultural inequalities that exist in education. Schooling is presented as an important site where these inequalities not only manifest themselves and are rendered visible but are also reproduced and even enhanced.

As Connell (1993, p. 27) notes:

Education systems are busy institutions. They are vibrantly involved in the production of social hierarchies. They select and exclude their own clients; they expand credentialed labour markets; they produce and disseminate particular kinds of knowledge to particular users.

The chapter presents a compelling argument for addressing educational inequalities through proactive policy measures while acknowledging the intricate nature of the challenges involved and the multifaceted nature of education itself. What makes this argument particularly novel is its call for a comprehensive approach that takes into account the intersectionality of various forms of inequality. It highlights how these interconnections affect individuals in unique and complex ways. This underscores the importance of delving deeper into educational inequalities to fully comprehend the underlying structures and mechanisms that sustain exclusionary educational practices. A critical analysis is proposed of how social problems are constructed in

education as part of a wider socio-political agenda that often prioritises ‘competition’ over ‘inclusion’ – the unfortunate rationing of educational opportunity (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000) – with gender, ‘race’ and social class as markers of and for exclusion. As such, the chapter serves as a powerful call to action, emphasising the urgent need to address educational inequalities to build a more inclusive and equitable education system – and society.

*Global university, local issues: Taking a creative and humane approach to learning and teaching* (Abegglen, Burns, Maier et al., 2020a) employs a case study to champion a transformative approach to education that harnesses the power of dialogue and creativity within a competitive, isolating global-local (glocal) HE environment. By drawing from select principles of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2011), and by embracing the dialogic concept put forth by Bakhtin (1981), this work seeks to instigate more inclusive, equitable, and socially just teaching and learning practices:

...a pedagogy that gives people the opportunity to be in a democratic exchange with each other, teachers and students working in partnership, creating education for emancipatory action (Abegglen, Burns, Maier et al., 2020a, p. 82 – *Global university, local issues*).

At its core, this proposition urges us to embrace one another for who we are, emphasising a human-centred approach where individuals engage as equals. This stands in stark contrast to the prevailing ‘medical model,’ which often pigeonholes students as either ‘ready’ for HE or in need of ‘fixing’ and being ‘brought up to speed’ for successful academic and professional pursuits. In parallel, the suggested approach is not to ‘train’ educators to become more inclusive, but rather to provide them with opportunities for collegial development and co-creation. This supports an academic praxis that empowers both students and educators – a democratic education (Dewey, 1916) that accommodates diversity and enables participants to shape their academic journey together (rather than conforming to a predetermined model of Bourgeois acceptability).



*Supercomplexity: Acknowledging students' lives in the 21st century university* (Abegglen, Burns, Maier et al., 2020b) builds on the concepts and arguments developed by Roland Barnett (2000a, 2000b, 2004; and also Barnett & Hallam, 1999) at the turn of the millennium. Barnett clearly thinks in line with those philosophers who reject the static identity and favour 'becoming' instead. In fact, it is 'becoming' that especially bears its mark on his conceptualisations. It is because of this concept that Barnett is able to forgo stability and embrace the movement and changes. The article explores whether Barnett's work (2000a, 2000b, 2004), especially his social philosophy of the university, could help us re-frame how we talk about WP students in order that these new conversations change perceptions and thus change praxis. After criticising the current state of HE, the article proposes the use of third space opportunities (Bhabha, 2004; and also Lefebvre, 1991; Soja, 1996) to foster inclusion:

...it is the 'inter' – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *inbetween* space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture. ...and by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves (Bhabha, 2004, p. 56).

In particular, the work argues that the use of third spaces allows us "...to re-frame the very way we view and inhabit our world and the way that world is approached and represented through educational praxis and language" (Abegglen, Burns, Maier et al., 2020b, p. 25 – *Supercomplexity*). This introduces an ontological shift that fully acknowledges students' individuality and their particular ways of being and becoming – their supercomplexity. What emerges from this is a call to actively harness in-between, third space, opportunities – the interstices between colliding cultures (Bhabha, 2004) – to activate the liberatory potential of education.

The co-edited Special Issue *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice Collaboration in higher education: Partnering with students, colleagues and external stakeholders* (Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2021a) showcases the cross-boundary partnership work undertaken by lecturers, students, staff and HE institutions across the globe. The case studies presented build on practical experiences, empirical research data, and personal and collective reflections. Together, they embody refreshed notions of collegiality and collaboration in academia that support inclusive models of co-creation. In the Special Issue *Editorial* (Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2021c, p. 1), a broader adoption of praxes that allow for positive cooperation both in and outside the context of universities is proposed because “...there is a need to develop programs and courses that better welcome and ‘hold’, sustain and support both those that are learning and those that are teaching”. What is envisioned is an academia that enables the formation of an inclusive Community of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in which individuals can become, together, by “being with” (Nancy, 2000) – in other words, a more humane education to which collaboration is central. As such, the Special Issue is a unique publication in that it not only demonstrates the centrality of relationships to collaboration but also envisions collaboration as an underlying principle of inclusive teaching and learning.

*Collaboration in higher education: A new ecology of practice* (Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2023a) further articulates and exemplifies the value of collaboration in HE. It showcases the potential of a co-created academia that facilitates humane third spaces in which all lecturers, students and staff can participate and contribute equally. Over 30 case studies from 100 diverse contributors that embrace partnership and value collegiality are presented in the different chapters, framed by an extended introduction (Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2023b – *Introduction*) that outlines how we might develop collaboration as a new ecology of practice.

The themes that are discussed in the different chapters include: staff collaboration to enhance teaching and learning, students as partners, collaborations with stakeholders, creative and digital partnerships, decolonising relationships, partnerships for social justice, and reflections on collaboration. As such the book speaks to the necessity of fostering existing partnerships and of creating opportunities for new connections – inter-, cross, and multi-disciplinary – between lecturers, students and staff, and with external stakeholders. The book in and of itself, as a co-created publication, demonstrates that it is possible to bring diverse people together. As Buckley (2023) writes in her review of the book:

If we understand collaboration to be two or more people brought into relation with each other, then that group is bounded by social connections and the emotional responses that entails, creating a sense of structure and belonging [Ahmed, 2014]. That process and its outcomes are illustrated to great effect in this new and comprehensive volume.

*Designing educational futures: Imagine a collaborative Bloom* (Abegglen, Burns, Heller et al., 2023) reflects on Richard Heller’s (2022a, 2022b) proposal to create a “New Bloom” that moves away from a pyramidal taxonomy towards a more fluid, organic model of education with collaboration at its heart. The speculative article explores what it would mean for education if collaboration were indeed to become a central element of conceptualisation and praxis. It suggests that if individuals were to continuously and across all levels “work or share with others” (Heller, 2022b), this would transform three areas: (a) the creation of knowledge, (b) the development of educational resources to capture and disseminate this knowledge, and (c) the institution itself – its ethos and culture. More importantly, however, it would allow for creating a more empowering education – an education in which individuals acquire relative control of the education process and procedures, based on a sense of generosity towards the other.

*Partnership working: Opening doors – crossing thresholds* (Abegglen, Burns, Griffiths et al., 2022) reflects on academic collaboration from a personal perspective. The various and diverse connections between the five authors, as colleagues, lecturers, students, staff and coaches, are

used to explore the relationship between partnership, pedagogy, and practice in the academy. What is promoted is an educational model of emergence and openness that allows for more authentic collaboration as well as more inclusive teaching and learning. Intimate academic collaboration is presented as a way to reduce the corporatist and exclusivist pressures in HE – and an opportunity to instead create a positive connection, especially for “outsiders” (Becker, 1963). The “backstage spaces” are highlighted (Abegglen, Burns, Griffiths et al., 2022 – *Partnership working*), literally, the in-between places of the university – the corridors, lifts, and stairs – and metaphorically, the partnerships and friendships that provide a sense of belonging in the academy. The central argument presented is that: “In education there must be mutual respect, care and commitment for learning to happen” (Abegglen, Burns, Griffiths, et al., 2022, p. 157 – *Partnership working*) – a reconciling and ‘ensouling’ of education.

The argument for respect, care and commitment is developed in the guide *Incorporating Universal Design for Learning in disciplinary contexts in higher education* (Arcellana-Panlilio & Dyjur, 2021) where educational leaders and teaching award recipients demonstrate how the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) can be applied across disciplines to support student learning and success. In our co-written chapter *Diversity and inclusion in the design studio* (Abegglen & Neuhaus, 2021), two case studies on inclusive, collaborative teaching are presented that cover multiple means of engagement, multiple means of representation and multiple means of action. Building on notions of connection, a diverse instructor/researcher team delivered two interdisciplinary graduate design studios, modelling cross-disciplinary and -cultural partnership working: the advanced design studio course ‘Interchange: Cross Culture Approaches to Design’ and the urban design studio course ‘Kuniya’.<sup>13</sup>

...both studio courses could be described as a ‘socially active environment of experimentation’ [Ioannou, 2018] where students learnt by doing and thinking in a

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<sup>13</sup> For this work, the team was awarded the Team Teaching Award 2020 by the University of Calgary.

constant exchange with others – a collaborative endeavour (Abegglen & Neuhaus, 2021, p. 23 – *Diversity and inclusion in the design studio*).

Recommendations are made to enable others to embrace UDL in their teaching, and to support and foster collaboration and exchange across disciplines and cultures for learning. This includes the move from a ‘third person perspective’ to an in-person community discourse. Thus, both studio courses had a strong emphasis on teamwork, asking students to work in groups of various sizes, to jointly develop their projects and to collaborate on tasks for assignments. The teaching team modelled this practice by sharing responsibilities and duties – and through active collaboration with external stakeholders: Indigenous Elders, design professionals, developers, planners, and community and city representatives.

Theme 3 Publications

*Dialogic montage: Reflecting on playful practice in higher education* (Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2021b) provides a joint reflection on playful and creative HE practice through the making of collages. The argument presented is two-fold. First, playful practice is inclusive and empowering because it strengthens the individual while simultaneously enabling a connection with peers, and the larger social and academic community. As Winnicott (1971) states, it is in play and only in play that we are fiercely ourselves – and are hence able to connect. Second, creative methodologies such as collages disrupt normative and performative practices enabling an honest but suitably supercomplex dialogue about learning, teaching, and research. The ‘embodied doing’ (Dewey, 1938; Gibbs, 1988; Kolb, 1984), mediated by the visuals produced, provides a shared space for thinking and writing, differently, namely, a joint educational reflection that enables connection. As such, the article presents a unique extension of conventional academic practice: a creative and playful conversation through visual means about the value of collaboration.

*Montage, DaDa and the Dalek: The game of meaning in higher education* (Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2020) offers a case study of how play (Huizinga, 1949; James, 2022; Winnicott, 1971) can be integrated into teaching and how it can motivate lecturers to undertake continuous professional development with the aim of adapting their practice. The article promotes specific methods and methodologies that enable all learners to evolve and transform as they co-construct their knowledge in ludic ways. This includes the idea of “visualising to learn” (Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2020 – *Montage, DaDa and the Dalek*). The text is illustrated with images of representations that instructors attending the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (PGCert) course and the Masters in Learning and Teaching Higher Education (MALTHE) at London Metropolitan University made of themselves, their students, and HE systems. The images, in a novel way, illustrate not only the opportunities and challenges of playful pedagogies but the potential of shared practice.

Teachers – as do students – have personalities and lives that consist of so much more than their learning and teaching selves. How can one use personal traits, responsibilities and interests in a professional context? We definitely suggest that looking at oneself and reflecting on the different aspects of education is a starting point – making visual what normally stays hidden and untold (Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2020, p. 234 – *Montage, DaDa and the Dalek*).

*It's learning development, Jim – but not as we know it: Academic literacies in third-space* (Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2019) represents a bold departure from the conventional understanding of academic literacies, as initially expounded by Lea and Street in their seminal work from 1998, *Student writing in higher education: An academic literacies approach*. This departure is rooted in personal experiences related to conceptualising and teaching a first-year, undergraduate Education Studies ‘Higher-Education-orientation’ module. The article challenges the conventional delivery of extra- and co-curricular ‘skills’ programmes, particularly for students categorised as ‘lacking’, ‘in need of catching up’, or ‘at risk’. Building upon Lea and Street’s groundwork, the article advocates a more rhizomatic approach, in the spirit of Deleuze and Guattari (1987). This approach promotes teaching that offers multiple,

non-hierarchical entry and exit points – a model of education that is open and welcoming, nurturing the creative and life-enhancing attributes of all learners. It seeks to develop essential knowledge-building strategies within the curriculum, collaboratively, rather than approaching this as a mere effort to fix deficits. In doing so, it encourages students to connect with themselves and others as active participants in their academic communities, fostering agency and purpose instead of passive socialisation. In essence, this work challenges the status quo, offering a compelling vision of teaching and learning that is more open and porous.

*Exploration: Becoming playful – the power of a ludic module* (Sinfield, Burns & Abegglen, 2019) is part of a collection (James & Nerantzi, 2019) in which a multitude of perspectives on play in HE are offered. The chapter summarises the playful work undertaken in *Becoming an Educationist*, a module that all first-year undergraduate Education Studies students at London Metropolitan University attend and for which I was the module convenor for several years. The module was completely reconceptualised as a provocative third space module designed to partially de-school (Illich, 1972) and un-school (Holt, 1976) participants so that they could see and experience education differently – their own – and ultimately that of the pupils and students they would go on to teach. Examples of how play was integrated into the module and the activities undertaken with students are reflected upon and discussed in detail. Ostensibly an unloved ‘skills module’, the students fed back that it was the most creative, the most challenging of all – and the one that allowed them to make sense of all the other modules, all the other teaching and learning. The chapter advocates that play and playful practice are essential for reconceiving teaching and learning, arguing that: “Learning is social, collective and embodied, and that there are different ways of learning, knowing and being...” (Sinfield, Burns & Abegglen, 2019, p. 30 – *Exploration*).

The final work selected for this theme, *Supporting student writing and other modes of learning and assessment: A staff guide* (Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2021d), both embodies and promotes ludic, creative and arts-based practice in teaching and learning. It invites readers, in the spirit of co-creation, to use and reuse its contents and materials. The central claim and practical and theoretical impetus of the guide is that we need to seed, foster, and embrace ‘writing to learn’, rather than ‘learning to write’. This simple claim is fundamentally disruptive of academics’ perceptions of the purpose of writing – seeing it essentially as a tool to assess rather than a process that both drives and involves the development of exploration, understanding, phronesis and mastery. The guide demonstrates that if lecturers ‘teach’ writing differently, more meaningfully, and in more engaging, interactive, and fun ways, student learning will be fostered, but more so, an initiation into and participation in wider professional and academic discourses will be enabled: “We write to process and communicate academic ideas, we write to become academic” (Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2021, p. 12 – *Supporting student writing and other modes of learning and assessment*). Thus, the text describes something more positive and complex than a skill to master for academic study and assessment: a creative initiation of students into their epistemic communities that gives them voice and agency.



## 4. Contribution to Knowledge

In this chapter, the original contribution made to education as a field and Education Studies as an academic discipline is highlighted by a synthesis of the arguments presented in the selected publications and outlined in the previous chapters. The synthesised argument builds on the emerging narrative from the themes of isolation and silo-isation, co-creation, creative pedagogy, and community – a proposal for collaboration as a sustainable ecology of inclusive HE praxis. In this context, ecology is defined as the vital connections between humans, their interactions with each other and their surroundings, and with the learning and teaching system they create (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2023; and also Lave & Wenger, 1991); a relational ontology that holds “...that relations pre-exist entities, subjects and objects, which only come into being through relationships” (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2023, p. 2). This relational ontology can be seen as like forest or marine ecosystems which only come into being as/through communities of plants, animals, microbes, and other organisms in interaction with each other, and the chemical and physical features of their environment; continuously building and rebuilding their habit through their relationships. Thus, the argument made spans from a narrow to a broad spatial, socio-cultural, and temporal scope; objective-material as well as perceived-symbolic – the relationships of humans with each other and the broader environment, and the structures and processes that emerge from these relationships. Education is an ecosystem where participants connect, and thus are equally important and need to be treated equally. As such, the contribution made by this thesis combines theory and praxis in novel ways, proposing collaboration as a distinct ontological position and ethical positioning – a vital force to consider social responsibility and to reconfigure educational inequalities. In this chapter, examples are included that provide concrete guidance on how to foster collaboration in the HE classroom for social justice. The recommendations are sustainable in the sense that the proposed praxis contributes

not just to a more inclusive university but also a more equitable education system: a quality education for all (see UN Sustainable Development Goals, Goal 4: Quality Education<sup>14</sup>).

#### 4.1 What's Problematic

While teaching and learning are activities of high complexity – organic, nonlinear, and emergent – the challenges boil down to a handful of essential problems. Formal education takes place in institutions, relies on continuous testing, and is increasingly geared towards a reductive notion of employability and employment (Abegglen, Burns, Maier et al., 2020a – *Global university, local issues*). HE institutions are themselves ‘classified’ based on competitive models of education (see the metrics of research and teaching excellence<sup>15</sup>). The constant measuring and comparing, and the jostling for league table positions, reflected too in other education sectors, has significantly denatured whatever critical, democratic, and creative education there was. Together with a market-driven, managerial mindset (Bustillos Morales & Abegglen 2020b – *Understanding education and economics*), this has created an unjust, excluding, and exclusive education system that at the same time is posed as inherently meritocratic. This means that despite longstanding WP efforts (The Dearing Report, 1997), young people, 18-20-year-olds, living in the most advantaged areas of England are still 6.24 times more likely to enter the most selective universities than those from the most disadvantaged areas (Office for Students, 2020). And, as highlighted in a recent research briefing by the House of Commons Library (Bolton & Lewis, 2023), those students from disadvantaged areas and backgrounds that make it into university are less likely to get ‘top

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/education/>

<sup>15</sup> Research Excellence Framework (REF): <https://www.ref.ac.uk/> - and Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF): <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/teaching/about-the-tef/>

grades' and thus are also less likely to end up in high-paying graduate jobs than those from privileged backgrounds. Statistically, only a few, the elite, succeed, in this increasingly competitive education game, because they are entering it with an advantage.

The implicit and explicit proposition of an exclusive education (Bustillos Morales & Abegglen, 2020a – *Introduction*) is shored up by hierarchical ideas about learning and teaching that are rooted in taxonomical notions of development (Bloom et al., 1956). We are 'sold' pyramids of supposedly increasing sophistication rather than a holistic vision of learning (Abegglen, Burns, Heller et al., 2023 – *Designing educational futures*). What is valued is the individualism of meritocracy, rather than the collectivism of a social view of education. There is a focus on personal achievement. "...a student progresses to the next lesson only after clearly demonstrating 'mastery' of the current lesson's material" (Norris & Soloway, 2015). This is not 'bad' in itself – there is nothing against students progressing and succeeding. But there is a problem with how this is enacted because these progressive learning, teaching and assessment approaches and taxonomical models are not accommodating. They model the elitist system they nurture – there is room for very few at the top. Hence, students either pass or fail; they "fit in" or "stand out" (Reay et al., 2009). It could therefore be argued that "...schooling embodies the dominant group's cultures as a starting position of privilege within schools" (Bustillos & Abegglen, 2021, p. 105 – *Issues of gender, 'race' and social class in education*).

Rather than operating as humane institutions with welcoming and compassionate agendas, universities focus on those that promise success, both in their selection as well as their support (e.g., many prestigious scholarships target those that excel). This constructed institutional ambition is stacked against those students who are not traditionally familiar with, and opposed to, the Bourgeois academy and notions of self (Gary Hall, 2021). These students are blamed for their own failure to achieve when in fact they are subject to wider systemic injustices. They are

seen “...as a typically problematic, essentially homogenous group with similar issues and deficiencies” (Abegglen, Burns, Maier et al., 2020b, p. 22 – *Supercomplexity*). They do not fit “the template” (Blundell & Abegglen, 2017). Consequently, they are often subject to corrective measures. They are asked to attend extra-and co-curricular classes to “fix their deficits” and bring them “up to speed” (Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2019 – *It’s learning development, Jim*). This means that a questionable model of development is superimposed on the curriculum in ways that turn students’ potential development into ‘norms’ that the system then negatively inscribes on them. Thus, the supposedly simple, rational decision to provide extra support (of course we want only the best for, and to help those, falling behind) has conflicting, non-simple and often devastating consequences: the WP student is further marginalised.

What emerges from this is a continued call to close so-called “Mickey Mouse degrees” (see Brockes, 2003 cited in Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2015 – *Voices from the Margins*; and more recently Morrison, 2023) not only because these degrees are argued not to provide value for money but also because it is said that WP students do not need to attend university. Studying apparently makes them “overeducated” and “overqualified” (see Chevalier, 2000). Rather than creating a kaleidoscope of possibilities, one single point of rationality has entered the prism of education creating a destructive rainbow of inequality. Isolation and silo-isation are only two of the direct implications this has in praxis (see Chapter 3 – 3.2 *Description of themes*, and 3.3 *Summary of selected works*) but are certainly the two that have specific ramifications on both the individual and the collective level.

Although we live in a time with strong tendencies to separate (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, 2021), there is an awareness of the need for a more inclusive education (Chzhen et al., 2018). However, recent policy moves towards greater inclusion can be challenged as in fact reinforcing the normative and unequal hierarchical structures of education

(Reay, 2021). Also, typically in the UK, inclusion focuses on ‘protected characteristics’ and fails to notice the inter-locking struggles of WP students and the supercomplexity of their lives, identities, and experiences (Abegglen, Burns, Maier et al., 2020b – *Supercomplexity*). This is at odds with UDL expectations (Abegglen & Neuhaus, 2021 – *Diversity and inclusion in the design studio*; and also Arcellana-Panlilio & Dyjur, 2021) – and contributes to the tendency to isolate and silo-ise. For example, whilst ‘intersectionality’ is bruited, working-class students are still mocked because of their accents (Parveen, 2020) while working-class ‘staff’ continue to be held back in their careers because of their background (University and College Union, 2022). Thus, outsider academics and students ‘exist’ in universities that are ranked low and questioned in terms of their value, which are often the very same institutions, the post-1992 universities, that are supposed to provide opportunity (Leathwood, 2004). This leads to an experience of multiple forms of discrimination – and shame (Shahjahan, 2019).

Consequently, talk about access, inclusion, and diversity in HE is often not more than rhetoric (Bustillos and Abegglen, 2021 – *Issues of gender, ‘race’ and social class in education*). Education has become a battleground where students, lecturers, and institutions, especially those at the margins, are stacked against each other and the institutions they inhabit. Richard Hall (2021; 2018) writes about the hopeless university and the alienated academic because

We are all subject to the market trends and demands and thus cannot escape the unforgiving pace of different economic realities that dominate the world (Bustillos Morales & Abegglen, 2020a, p. 1 – *Introduction*).

The embattled setting makes honest, ground-up collaboration increasingly difficult, if not impossible. Academics and students work – and stress – alone. If there is partnership working, it is mostly dictated from above, and based on compliance and audit requirements.

The nature of contemporary HE means it is increasingly difficult to find the time and space; the embodied and cognitive abilities; and consent to engage in critical collaboration or other forms of critical educational work (Asher, 2023, p. xxxiii).

Yet, there are glimmers of hope with people resisting the current practices and structures: working together, collaboratively, multi-, cross-, and interdisciplinary, within and across borders (Abegglen Burns & Sinfield, 2023a, 2021a – *Collaboration in Higher Education*). With and through their collaborative academic practice they are creating something more accessible and inclusive – a humane education.

#### 4.2 What Collaboration can do for the Education Community

This thesis puts forward the argument that collaboration enables an inclusive coming together. It creates the pockets for counter-stories to emerge that enable new, more inclusive narratives to form. I propose the use of ‘third space’ to foster honest, ground-up collaboration for inclusion (Abegglen Burns & Sinfield, 2023b; 2021b – *Collaboration in higher education*; and also Abegglen, Burns, Maier et al., 2020a – *Global university, local issues*). Bhabha (2004) refers in his work to the encounter of two social groups with different cultural traditions and potentials of power as a special kind of negotiation that takes place, a liminal space “...which gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation” (Rutherford, 1990, p. 211). It is in this ‘in-between’ space that prescribed cultural identities can be re-negotiated – a state of becoming (rather than being). It is a place that simultaneously ‘is’ and ‘is not’ – a continuous oscillation, everyone’s and no one’s place. Webster (2018) describes these spaces as places where the boundaries are fuzzy and malleable, which can hence expand and morph to accommodate the needs of all those involved as well as those of the broader public and emerging environment. As such, these places offer opportunities to challenge universalist, normative and exclusionary practices. Gutiérrez (2008, p. 148), in reference to Vygotsky (1978), talks about a particular zone of proximal development “...in which students begin to reconceive who they are and what they might be

able to accomplish academically and beyond”. I go a step further and argue that these places offer the opportunity for a broader re-framing of education and educational practices because there is liberatory potential in these spaces of collaboration, a solidarity that allows for a broader challenging of the repressive structures within which outsider students and academics operate. These are the “backstage spaces” (Abegglen, Burns, Griffiths et al., 2022 – *Partnership working*) in the academy, literally and metaphorically, that enable a coming together. These are places that are ‘occupied with’ – similar to Nancy’s (2000) notion of “being with”. Thus, it is in these in-between places where the negative striations of normative normal academic power relations can be swept away because participants occupy them together, on equal terms. Hence, to collaborate is to act with others (not on). It is social justice for and in action.

This requires an ethic of openness, a paradigmatic shift that goes beyond the simple adoption of collaborative work policies and strategies. It is a practice that must be introduced and collaboratively developed, and that requires sustainable cultivation. Collaboration becomes the defining element of what education is (Abegglen, Burns, Heller et al., 2023 – *Designing educational futures*) – a relational ontology (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2023), a coming together beyond individuality and competition. As such the collaborative approach proposed in this thesis is distinct from the reductionist, managerialist partnership models where power resides with the privileged elite and where they are often only operationalised in universities in response to questionable metrics (a poor proxy for authentic engagement) to enhance league table positions and repair reputations; collaboration as a mode and means to cross boundaries – and work across boundaries (Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2021a – *Editorial*). This means finding and using the elusive fissures and cracks that already exist within HE (despite its best efforts it is not a hegemony). It also means opening up new ones so that those at the academic margins can be heard, participate as actors and agents, and become academic more on their own terms (Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2019 – *It’s learning development, Jim*). This opening up

enables a gradual challenging (and changing) of an exclusive and exclusionary education system that isolates and thrives on creating silos, especially for the WP student and outsider academic, towards a more fluid, organic and sustainable ecology of HE praxis. Openness is a prerequisite for the latter: an abandonment of a neoliberal competitive approach to education (Bustillos Morales & Abegglen, 2020a – *Introduction*; Bustillos Morales, 2020b – *Understanding education and economics*), and reductionist ideas of what teaching and learning is and how it shall be enacted. This practice includes an acknowledgement that knowledge is the product of many (rather than few) and that academia is co-created. I therefore propose positioning collaboration as a central element in education (Abegglen, Burns, Heller et al., 2023 – *Designing educational futures*).

In particular, collaboration can transform three areas: (a) the co-creation of knowledge, (b) the co-development of the curriculum to capture and disseminate this knowledge and (c) the humanising of the institution and academy itself – the building of a more inclusive learning community. As a whole, this can positively influence education and the process of education itself. Rather than reinforcing elitist and hierarchical pyramids of knowledge, and developmental views of learning and teaching, we will need to incorporate collaboration into each part of the educational cycle; not as an alternative, nor as an extra, but for both elements to feature in conjunction. In the process, we will have to work collaboratively, with our students, with our colleagues, across disciplines, and institutions and wider publics, to co-create a curriculum that can address the supercomplex issues facing society that are ever present in our classrooms (Bustillos & Abegglen, 2021 – *Issues of gender, 'race' and social class in education*). This has the potential to balance the impact of meritocratic notions of competition (see “Against Competition” by Fielding, 2006), while maintaining high ambitions, quality standards and great experiences. Together, we can ‘create’ education and explore how educational outcomes can reflect and be relevant with and for communities rather than



individuals. The process will cycle back and encourage us to design processes that authentically value and acknowledge co-creation. This will allow us to not just imagine a more collaborative and liberatory education but to start facilitating sustainable collaborative cross-boundary working and pedagogical co-creation – a re-conceptualising of both learning and the creation of knowledge. Because we need the collective intelligence – and action – to address the challenges of the twenty-first century and beyond.

### 4.3 The Tensions of Collaboration

Collaboration, while immensely beneficial, is not without its challenges. Tensions manifest in various ways within the neoliberal academy and when working across or with differences, but also the difficulties are themselves productive and generate ongoing reciprocal dialogue, fostering deeper understanding and connection.

#### Within the Neoliberal Academy

In the context of the neoliberal academy, collaboration often clashes with the individualistic and competitive ethos that pervades HE institutions (Giroux, 2019; Deem & Brehony, 2005; Sandel, 2000). The pressure to publish, secure funding, and achieve individual recognition can create an environment where collaborative efforts are often seen as secondary to personal academic advancement (Shaw et al. 2022). This competitive atmosphere can undermine genuine collaboration, as colleagues may be hesitant to share ideas and resources freely, fearing that doing so might diminish their own prospects of success.

Furthermore, the audit culture prevalent in many academic institutions, with its emphasis on metrics and performance indicators can stifle the organic, exploratory nature of true collaborative work. Collaborative projects may be undervalued in academic evaluations such as the TEF and REF, leading to a lack of institutional support and recognition for collaborative endeavors. This misalignment between institutional rewards and the collaborative process can deter academics (and students) from engaging in meaningful partnerships, thereby perpetuating the cycle of competitive individualism.

#### Working Collaboratively Across/With Difference

Collaboration across and with differences presents its own set of challenges. When individuals with diverse backgrounds and from various disciplines come together, they bring varied perspectives, methodologies, and epistemologies into the collaboration. While this diversity enriches the collaborative process, it can lead to misunderstandings, disagreement, and conflicts. For example, differences in language, cultural norms, and disciplinary jargon can create barriers to effective communication and mutual understanding. Moreover, power dynamics often play a significant role in collaborative settings. Participants may have unequal access to resources, differing levels of institutional support, or varying degrees of influence within their academic communities. There are "...those that are listened to and those that are not; those that act and those that are acted upon (see Foucault, 1970)" (Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2023b – *Introduction*). These imbalances too, can lead to tensions and feelings of inequity, potentially hampering the collaborative process. Further, tensions might arise from the differing needs of the various bodies present in the classroom. For instance, some students may require more support than others, or adapted resources. These differences can create

challenges in aligning everyone's interests and ensuring equitable participation in the learning and teaching process.

Balancing these competing experiences, interests and needs requires ongoing negotiation and flexibility, demanding a high level of sensitivity and adaptability from all involved. This intricate process involves not only recognising and valuing each individual's unique contributions (Yosso, 2005) but also finding common ground to create a cohesive and inclusive learning environment. This includes addressing power asymmetries – a commitment to creating an inclusive and equitable environment where all voices are heard and valued. Within this, fostering a culture of reflection and exchange with clear structures to resolve conflicts is essential. Such structures can lead to more resilient and adaptive collaborations. Disagreement and misunderstandings are the norm, resolving them is what provides the energy to create a shared and better outcome. A first step is recognising and acknowledging the tensions of collaboration – and wider systemic issues in HE.

#### 4.4 An Argument for an Education System Beyond Meritocracy

The marketisation of education – including universities – has transformed educational relations (Department for Opportunities, 2022; Burnell Reilly, 2023; Connell, 2013; Gill, 2023; Harvey, 2005). While current trends such as 'students as partners' (see, for example, Healey et al., 2014) have been shown to enhance academic integration, skills development, and employability (see Smith, 2023), they often embody competitive ideas of education because these approaches, while foregrounding relationships, ultimately focus on 'effectiveness' – effectiveness in terms of student engagement, retention, and outcomes – and hence are often used to enhance

universities' position and positioning rather than community. For example, the current TEF awards utilise student satisfaction data from the National Student Survey (NSS, 2022), which includes questions on the student learning community: "I feel part of a community of staff and students", and "I have had the right opportunities to work with other students as part of my course". These are used to 'rank' universities and hence many universities now actively and deliberately promote students as partners in their institutions. However, what we need in these supercomplex, isolating times are approaches – in academia – and society – that go beyond meritocratic promotion. We need spaces and places to create and build, together; inclusive forms of teaching and learning that acknowledge the heteroglossia of teaching and learning, and those involved in education.

Freire (1970, p. 80) calls for the "resolution" of the "teacher-student contradiction" in what he calls "problem-posing education", whereby

Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student and students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but the one who is himself [sic] taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which they all grow.

Collaboration builds on this ethical position and positioning, the openness, as it acknowledges the individual beyond the individual. As such it can break isolation and silo-isation, utilising dialogue and the dialogic (Bakhtin, 1981). It allows multiple standpoints to be included in a democratic process – a collective coming together for inclusivity, community, and knowledge exchange. This involves taking risks (Biesta, 2015), especially as lecturers and students increasingly do not want to engage in this kind of inclusive pedagogy but want something worthwhile delivered for their money. However, the risks appear worth taking as education is about human beings – their connection with themselves, between them and their surroundings.

Within this, play and creativity provide concrete tools for doing things ‘differently’ (Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2021b – *Dialogic montage*) because playful and creative practice strengthens the individual while at the same time enabling connection. Play and creativity enable educators and learners to be open (Sinfield, Burns, T. & Abegglen, 2019 – *Exploration*) and thus give them the freedom (Huizinga, 1949) to experiment, to question and to connect: “...a place, ... where ideas and people are made welcome. It’s a zone of enchantment as well as resistance, and it’s open even now” (Laing, 2020). This is not ‘dumbed down’ teaching nor is it ‘dumbed down’ learning: this is “serious business” (Parr, 2014). It is a fundamental shift from ‘learning to connect’ to ‘connecting to learn’ (see also Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2021d – *Supporting student writing and other modes of learning and assessment* that argues for writing to learn; and also Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2020 – *Montage, DaDa and the Dalek* that proposes visualising to learn): Play and creativity as an emancipatory practice that connects – for an inclusive, collaborative HE – a rehumanising of education.

#### 4.5 What’s Next

The arguments made in this thesis indicate that changes are needed to policy and practice with implications for HE institutions and professionals as follows:

- A comprehensive assessment of existing (education) policies, such as the WP agenda, to mitigate unintentional reinforcement of competitive ideals and educational inequalities. This evaluation should prioritise inclusivity, steering away from a narrow focus on effectiveness metrics.
- Collaboration needs to be recognised as a transformative element, surpassing traditional managerialist partnership models. This involves embracing openness in knowledge co-

creation, curriculum development, and institutional humanisation; a paradigm shift towards collaborative frameworks and practices.

- Practical implementations of the thesis's propositions should be considered, including the establishment of physical and virtual spaces that allow for co-creation. These spaces can break isolation and silo-isation through ongoing dialogic engagement, cultivating an environment that transcends individual boundaries.
- The integration of play and creativity as educational tools should be formalised, acknowledging their potential to strengthen individuals while fostering connection.

A potential critique of the outlined suggestions could focus on their idealism and the practical challenges associated with implementing such transformative changes in the education system. Critics might argue that while advocating for inclusive approaches, the thesis does not provide concrete enough steps for universities and education professionals to follow. The emphasis on collaboration, 'third space', and breaking isolation through open, dialogic engagement might be seen as theoretical concepts that lack clear, operational guidelines. Yet, I argue through my selected works and co-writing, co-research, and co-teaching, that such a change is possible. In addition, my work has been recognised and supported widely (see Appendix, *Impact*), demonstrating interest in the suggested arguments and changes. For example, I received the Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence (CATE) in 2022 from Advance HE, and the Team Teaching Award 2020 from the University of Calgary. This attests to the feasibility and impact of adopting collaborative, inclusive educational practices for a humanised HE. While the move towards a more collaborative HE might play out differently in different places/contexts as it needs to respond to local issues, I argue and exemplify that such change is possible, specifically in the UK context where the work presented is rooted.

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## PART II

## Introduction: Why Collaborate?

Sandra Abegglen, Tom Burns and Sandra Sinfield

*We, the Editors of this book, would like to invite you, the reader, to take a moment before you delve into the pages of this collection to reflect on the context you are situated within. In CA, this includes the acknowledgement of Indigenous presence and land rights. In the UK, this means a recognition of a colonizing past. If we take these territorial acknowledgements as sites of reconciliation, they can be transformative acts that can bring people together. It is in this spirit that we would like to show honour and respect to those past, present and future – to move forward in a good way, co-creating together.*

### Welcome: Come on In

This collection articulates and demonstrates the value of collaboration in, through and beyond the university. The case studies included illuminate the opportunities and challenges of ‘real’ collaboration in action – with examples, contexts, methods and reflections to aid the reader with thinking through collaborative projects of their own. Our overarching narrative challenges the competitive, elitist and individualistic HE status quo whilst augmenting understanding of the potential of a collaborative university that facilitates the humane, ‘backstage’ and ‘third spaces’ in which all academics – staff, students and partners – can ‘be’ their authentic selves (Burns et al., 2019). Drawing on our own collegiate transgressive practice as ‘outsider’ academics (Walkerdine, 2020) who research and write together, we have gathered case studies that operate ‘against the grain’ to outline what might enable isolated and marginalized voices to be heard. There is liberatory potential in these spaces of solidarity, collaboration and trust – to challenge the repressive structures within which we work and study.

### Collaboration Stories

Academia is a Babel of voices and our stories are shaped by our diverse contexts – the urban, the rural, the national and international – that constitute our various ‘tribes’ (Roxå & Mårtensson, 2009). Within this ‘babble’, there are different ‘constellations’ of speakers (Benjamin in Gilloch, 2013): those who speak with authority and drive the

academic discourse; those that are listened to and those that are not; those that act and those that are acted upon (see Foucault, 1970). There are the authorized conversations that determine, surveil and manage disciplinary praxes, and the personal and informal conversations that occur when people work together; the emergent, phatic and messy conversations between faculty, students and partners especially at the 'margins' of our practice. These are the 'authentic' personal dialogues that allow for an 'educational imagination' (Eisner, 2001) to emerge: new 'Communities of Practice' (Lave & Wenger, 1991), new ways of seeing and doing. *Collaboration in Higher Education* embraces those stories that talk about the bringing together of people and institutions in education: collaborations between staff, between staff and students; collaborations between universities and with those outside academia.

As lecturers and workers in HE, collaborating and 'being with' (Nancy, 2000; Wise, 2022) our students and our colleagues create and sustain a more humane HE (Spence et al., 2022; see also *Foreword* by Gordon Asher and *Afterword* by Debbie Holley). Through conversation and dialogue we can create a pedagogy and practice of hope to explicitly challenge an individualistic, competitive, marketized HE driven by metrics, isolation and unfeasible workloads (Giroux, 2018). In our daily interactions (formal and informal) as academics – and as people – we are all constructing and restructuring the stories that build the larger narratives of who we are, what we do and how we live. We speak and we write and we become: '... language is the privileged medium in which we "make sense" of things ...' (Hall, 1997, 1). It is through our stories of collaborative practice that we construct meaning, ourselves and a more socially just HE. This collection brings together those voices, purposefully showcasing examples of what is possible when people come together and work in partnership.

Collegiality itself has power and value – as do the spaces it creates for those 'backstage' moments where 'talk in HE' and 'talk about HE' take place among academics, between students and academics, and between all of us involved in HE. These dialogic spaces (Bakhtin, 1981) are vital: for reflection, growth and the development of a humane and 'just' education in both theory and practice. It has never been more important to involve the heteroglossia in this dialogue: to listen to the voices of those of the margins, those experiencing the most 'churn' and most affected by our competitive, marketized conditions (Giroux, 2014). However, it is those very widening participation students, busy juggling their busy lives, alongside 'outsider' academics, with heavy teaching loads and precarious work contracts, that have little time or space for these vital conversations (Abegglan et al., 2020a). There is dwindling space and place for the trivia, the risky, the emergent and the creative: because staff rooms, student canteens and corridor benches have been lost; because personal workloads allow no time for these informal exchanges; because spaces and places for truly democratic collaborative and collegiate practice, those spaces and places where vulnerability is possible, always have to be fought for.

It is the collaborative venture and its 'backstage' conversations that amplify the voices of the marginalized (see Bhabha, 2004, for reflections on culture) that create spaces of coming together and of becoming. In this sense, and in this book, we seek to build hope and voice in a context which seeks to diminish both. *Collaboration in Higher Education* is collaborative talk that constitutes both transgressive behaviour



(hooks, 1994) and the opportunity for radical thought and action (Freire, 1970), in research and writing and also in teaching practice. We want to celebrate and promote what is often seen as ‘distracting’ anti-elitist practice – collaborative partnerships within and across the academic space. For it is ‘outsider talk’, that talk by those at the margins, that represents and enables a more empowered engagement in academia by those that would normally be sidelined or silenced. With this book we seek to create an epistemological space – an emergent ecology of collaborative practice – rhizomatic connections of stories, heritages, narratives and conversations, of and for ‘action’. We present diverse journeys within and towards the strange, mysterious and often hostile land of academia, a ‘mapping’ to better understand the ways in which together we can subvert the individualistic, authoritarian academy and seek out spaces for mutual support and solidarity.

### Backstage Conversations: Voices from the ‘Wings’

Collaboration in Higher Education offers over thirty case studies from 100 diverse contributors that are all boundary crossing and life affirming in one way or another: working across teams, across disciplines, across institutional and national borders, and across staff/student boundaries – and beyond. The case studies were selected to showcase variety and breadth. They are not systematic research papers but examples of ‘real’ practice. Thus the book acts as a reference source, mapping the terrain, offering thumbnail sketches and stories to navigate. As such we open with *Choose Your own Collaboration: An Adventure in Academic Time and Space* which mirrors the call to adventure and the myriad ways that you can successfully traverse the collaborative journey – and this book.

We follow with current case studies that explore how staff worked together on curriculum design and delivery across departments and disciplines to enhance student learning and success: *Staff Collaborations to Enhance Teaching and Learning*. The second set of case studies outlines how staff and students co-created together: *Students as Partners*. *Collaborations with Stakeholders* focuses on cross-institution collaboration where whole institutions and individuals have partnered up with external parties, and *Creative and Digital Partnerships* explores how partnerships were established within creative and virtual settings, and how these partnerships were supported and sustained to challenge dominant norms to achieve a common goal. The fifth set of case studies focuses on cross-boundary working: *Decolonising Relationships and Partnership for Social Justice*, where curriculum, pedagogy and practice are reimagined to create an inclusive and ‘socially just’ education. The sixth and final set of case studies helps us rethink relationships and connections to deterritorialize and humanize academia: *Reflections on Collaboration*.

Each set of case studies is introduced by us, the editors, to frame and contextualize the work presented, and to highlight key issues and opportunities of and for collaboration in a particular area. The case studies are further complemented by a *Foreword* and *Afterword* that provide additional, personal accounts of the power of collaborative practice and as such act as a further springboard for dialogue and thought.

The selected case studies and opening/closing commentaries are not prescriptive accounts but suggestions that will speak differently to different readers. Education and HE are in flux – no singular definition of collaboration – no one example – is totally paradigmatic. However, in this collection we argue that we do adequately cover the emergent terrain (including through and post-pandemic, Covid-19) of what is useful and generalizable to the reader's own context.

## Outro: Make Collaboration Fly

Every man, by nature, has an impulse toward a partnership with others.

(Aristotle in Duvall & Dotson, 1998, 1253a29)

Humans are social, inter-dependent beings, needing to be and communicate with each other to grow and develop, to create a sense of self and identity. As the 'new' HE context continues to exclude and sideline some voices and positions (for the UK, see, for example, Office for Students, 2022, latest 'crackdown'), as it constrains and removes spaces and places for formal collegiate practice and those crucial informal conversations between and among staff and students, we seek to amplify marginalized voices for hope. Together we have the opportunity to see ourselves in new lights, to construct new questions in the search for new answers, to tear down and rebuild our stories and narratives, and to create new worlds. Collaborative practice can make spaces and create places for academics, students and partners to raise their voices and find their authentic selves – to join (often more hostile) conversations in their respective academic, disciplinary and professional communities with power and agency.

With *Collaboration in Higher Education* we aim to work out loud, sharing and telling the stories of 'being with', to highlight the 'fissures and cracks' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987/2005) in the hegemony of academia that allow us to come together and co-create. Through our relations (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004) we acknowledge each other – and others – with compassion and empathy, and we challenge the characteristics of an increasingly individualistic and competitive academia.

Only if we embody emancipatory practice in all our work practices can we create 'safe' spaces for risky backstage conversations, to listen to those at the periphery and empower those from the margins to speak. We hope that in *Collaboration in Higher Education* we have created that trusted space that allows us to actively and attentively speak with and listen to each other, and subsequently to all our students and colleagues. Voices need to be heard, truly heard, before they can be engaged with and responded to.

In a supercomplex world (Abegglen et al., 2020b) with ever-increasing urgent challenges it is only 'authentic' conversation and collective action that can give voice to hope. In this collection, we celebrate the different partnerships created by our authors, where the very act of co-working, co-researching and co-writing creates a more humane and just academia.

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# Designing Educational Futures: Imagine a Collaborative Bloom

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## Abstract

This commentary is a working out loud of what a liberatory education might entail that builds on partnership and co-creation. Proposed is the addition of collaboration as a central element to education, to break individuality and hierarchy – for collective, socially just action. The prerequisites for this is openness – and the abandonment of the neoliberal competitive approach to education as well as the conscious development and use of Open EdTech for connection. Why? Because we need the collective intelligence to address the challenges of the twenty-first century and beyond.

**Keywords** Educational design · Collaboration · Co-production of knowledge · New Bloom · Widening participation · Educational futures · Non-elitist

## Introduction

Education and higher education (HE) are not autochthonous (sprung from the earth itself) but are designed — and have been designed over time — to suit various utilitarian purposes: to ‘civilise’ the population, to ‘school’ the public for employment, and to ‘socialise’ people into what are typically hierarchical and unjust societies. This article presents a collective envisioning, a sort of utopian thinking, of what designing a liberatory education system might entail. That is, a ‘working out loud’ of what it would take to create a system where all those involved in education come together, work together, and collaborate to create a non-individualistic and anti-elitist academia.

We are realists. The political, top-down aspect of HE set within a society that is capitalistic and competitive suggests that these educational changes and reframings are challenging. There are diverse contexts and diverse understandings with respect to collaboration itself. There are also individual attitudes and wishes: do people want to

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collaborate? Could they be persuaded? So, we are wondering: is the collaboration we propose — the cross-boundary co-creation — at all possible, or are we too idealistic? Yet, we are hopeful because we need ideals. Being idealistic and dreaming the impossible is important as it moves our thinking forward — and so this think-piece argues for a new collaborative Bloom to re-envision HE. The prerequisite for this, we propose, is openness — openness of thinking, openness of resources, openness of knowledge.

## The Issues with Education

*The problem:* Education takes place in institutions; relies on continuous testing; offers certificates and diplomas; aims for high paying, high status jobs (at least for some).

HE is specifically designed to get people ready for employment and to be socialised into an unjust society.

Education institutions are themselves graded using metrics of research and teaching excellence; part of a free-market meritocracy ideology; put individual success at the forefront; based on competitive models (within and between institutions); have difficulty accommodating the non-traditional student; driven by reflexes rather than science or rationality (Peters et al. 2020).

In line with popular narratives of what makes a ‘good education’ — and what makes a ‘good educator’ and a ‘good student’ — education has become closely aligned with schooling (Bustillos Morales and Abegglen 2020). Education happens in educational institutions, relies on continual testing, is rewarded with certificates and diplomas, and, finally, aims for high paying, high status jobs — at least for some. This includes the assessing and grading of the educational institutions themselves, with league tables defining ‘the best’, the Ivy League.

This ties in with larger socio-political language and action: research excellence, teaching excellence, free market, and meritocracy, which put individual success at the forefront, reinforcing the notion of competitiveness — and sophistry. Rather than directing educational resources to those in the most need, it becomes rational and morally right to direct those resources to those who are deemed already successful.

This can be further problematised if we look at the widening participation agenda — and the very little room that was made in HE to accommodate the new student (Ball 2017; Kayes 2022; Molinari 2022). Giddens (in Beck et al. 1994) argued that all people can be reflexive via knowledge institutions: we can all go to university now. However, the individualistic and ‘conformative’ nature of those institutions remains exclusionary (Hall 2021a, b) and can be destructive, especially to those ‘non-traditional’ students who are more collectivist or communitarian.

Academia dislocates and isolates the reviled ‘other’ from their community — and diminishes their strength. It diagnoses their ‘deficits’ (Smit 2012) and sends them off to extra-curricular units to be ‘fixed’. The problem is not in letting people in — but how we do that and especially how we accommodate those that we are letting in. How can we design something better, more imaginative, more creative, and collaborative?

*The question:* Can we create an education system that is non-individualistic and non-elitist, using collaboration?

## Further Challenges: The Modern Panopticon

*More of the problem:* Surveillance culture (managerialism) dominates the institutions; produces not only alienated students but also alienated academics who cannot find time to work across boundaries.

Limited ability/space to imagine, collaborate, offer care/compassion/humanising, and engage with community.

Richard Hall (2018, 2020, 2021a, b) particularly writes of a productivity and surveillance culture creating an ‘alienated academic’ and a ‘hopeless university’, where ‘coming together’ is further problematised by the isolation of faculty themselves. Battered by increasingly individualised narratives of accountability, instructors are driven by metrics over which they have no control: pushed to survey their students and surveyed constantly themselves, to check their pass rates, their student satisfaction scores, their engagement in requisite ‘training’ programmes.

The normalising of this managerialist surveillance culture in education leads to the appropriation of potentially liberating discourses (widening participation, student-centred, students as partners) for normative and performative purposes — seeded by moral panics and hysteria — and where in the end the marginalised are demonised. To such an extent that true, ground up collaboration is becoming increasingly difficult (Abegglén et al. 2022).

*The question:* In this climate of constant surveillance, measurement, and unfeasible workloads, how can we find the time to work across boundaries; across disciplines; across institutions; across the academy — and beyond? What kind of education can we create, together?

## The Benefits of Collaboration — or Why Collaborate?

There are many arguments for working together. Humans are social, inter-dependent beings who can achieve more collaboratively. Organisational collaboration within higher education institutions has been shown to enhance student learning (Kezar 2005), and there is considerable evidence that collaborative learning improves student outcomes (Armstrong 2015; Laal and Ghodsi 2012). Networks of universities may collaborate on research, and there are many examples of unlocking the power of collaboration for educational outcomes beyond the institution: faculty working with students, students working with other students and faculty, departments and schools working with other departments, schools, and external partners. Faculty and students co-producing learning — and knowledge, together (see Abegglén et al. 2021; Abegglén et al. 2023; Peters et al. 2021). And yet the pressures mean that

collaboration violates the usual norms in HE: people are encouraged to (over)work, research, and stress — alone.

In this context, how is it possible to create a HE that places true collaboration at its heart and makes space for truth and reconciliation, for the heteroglossia, for the people at the margins (those who experience the most churn) — a reimagining that allows us to move together to the centre? Co-production can be defined as ‘processes that iteratively bring together diverse groups and their ways of knowing and acting to create new knowledge and practices to transform societal outcomes’ (Wyborn et al. 2019). The collaborative co-production of knowledge is situated and dispersed — it allows multiple standpoints to be included in a democratic and dialogic process.

One mode of collaboratively producing academic knowledge is collective writing, a philosophical model that includes innovative methods of working together and of publication (Peters et al. 2021), helping to create, what could be termed as ‘knowledge socialism’ (Peters et al. 2020): peer production and other forms of collaboration and collective intelligence. On a technical level, we now have innovative systems for publishing research as pre-prints with open reviews such as Society (n.d.), and software and tools for joint writing. What’s missing is the full acknowledgement of this field of enquiry and practice — and the creation of a ‘work culture’ that supports co-creation.

*The question:* How can we support collaboration to facilitate collective cross-boundary working; the re-conceptualising of teaching, research, and writing — an education fit to address the challenges of the twenty-first century and beyond?

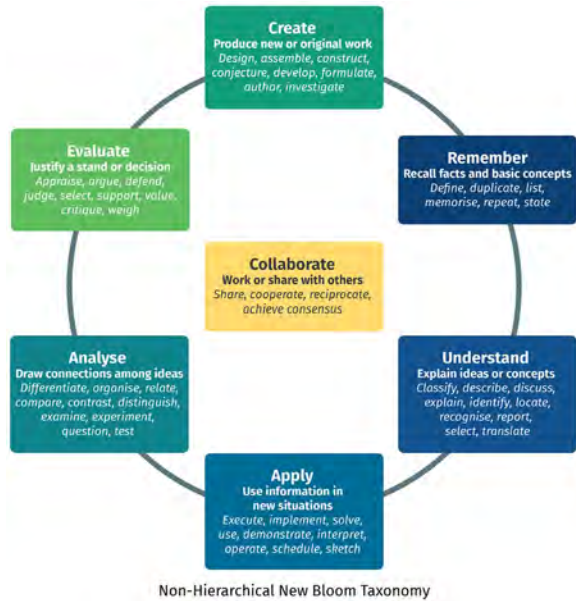
## An Imaginarium for Collaboration

*Bloom:* Building on Bloom’s original taxonomy (Bloom et al. 1956) and its revision (Krathwohl 2002), the collaborative Bloom (Heller 2022a) re-imagines the taxonomy of educational outcomes for a more shared non-hierarchical approach — to help co-creation of a new approach to education.

Imagining collaboration and using collaboration to feed imagination has power. Importantly, ‘the image [or imaginary – the vision] ... can travel where the body can’t. It migrates and strays, taking up permanent residence in the mind, revealing what – who – has been forcibly excluded from sight’ (Laing 2020a).

We have reimagined Bloom for a more shared vision: one where collaboration can break individuality and hierarchy that emphasises reflection, discussion, and collective action for inclusivity, diversity, and change. The new non-hierarchical version of the ‘Collaborative Bloom’ (Heller 2022a) (see Fig. 1) moves away from pyramidal taxonomy towards a more fluid, organic model of how a co-created education for learning could evolve. This new Bloom has collaboration at its heart, incorporating it into all the other components — from remember and understand to apply, analyse, evaluate, and create.

**Fig. 1** The non-hierarchical Bloom's Taxonomy (Heller 2022a)



*The question:* What are the prerequisites for this new collaborative model?

To make this new model work, with its dependence on collaboration, there are a number of prerequisites. First would be the abandonment of the neoliberal competitive approach to education. While universities compete with each other as a fundamental part of their business model, academics compete with each other, and education competes with research within institutions as a function of the reward systems under which they operate, true collaboration is not possible.

Second, and related to this, would be openness as a counter to privatisation. The Open Education Resources movement allows for sharing of educational materials and Open Education Practices offer the educational infrastructure to support the creation and adoption of these resources. We are getting used to the ways in which research publications can be published openly rather than behind paywalls, and it is time for educational practice to catch up. This includes the open sharing of pedagogical tools and approaches, the joint reflection and adaptation, the communal exchange of learning.

Third is the technology to allow for collaboration across institutional, social, and geographical boundaries. While open thinking is clearly the main prerequisite for collaboration, technology can help. Open EdTech (2022) is an example of the global development of a free and open educational platform which offers repositories for Open Educational Resources and proposes to include spaces for collaborative teaching and learning.

*The question:* What is it about collaboration that will ‘really’ address the problem? Can collaboration as a key educational method counter the competitive, individualised, and marketised education landscape?



## The Proposal

There is a need to rediscover the power of collaboration — to imagine education ‘differently’, for to see differently ‘can be a route to clarity ... a force of resistance and repair, providing new registers, new languages in which to think’ (Laing 2020b). Following Laing (2020a, b) and her resisting (creative) imaginaries, we have re-imagined Bloom, as circular, non-hierarchical — and with collaboration at the heart. This circular Bloom requires a paradigmatic, ontological, and epistemological shift that goes beyond a simple adoption of new work policies and strategies. Collaboration becomes the defining element of what education is — and how it works.

We propose that ‘adding’ collaboration as a central element to education can transform three areas: (a) co-creation of knowledge, (b) co-development of educational resources to capture and disseminate this knowledge, and (c) the humanising of the institution. All this should positively change education — and the process of education itself. If we follow the new collaborative Bloom, rather than reinforce an elitist and hierarchical pyramid of knowledge, we will need to explore how ‘collaborate’ can fit into each part of the educational cycle.

In the process, we will have to work collaboratively, with our students, with our colleagues, across disciplines and institutions, to co-create education. This will reduce the impact of competition and push managers to be more inclusive, as together we explore how educational outcomes can reflect and be relevant to communities rather than individuals: we will both imagine and enact alternatives. The process will also cycle back and encourage us to amend the collaborative Bloom to suit our own settings and priorities.

Thus, as Heller (2022b: 42) proposes: ‘We should start by adding collaboration as an important and measurable educational outcome as an attempt to change the culture within educational organisations’. This does not mean adding new policies and frameworks, targets and output measures, but designing processes that (truly) value and acknowledge co-creation.

The new, distributed Bloom allows us to imagine a more collaborative and liberatory education: to facilitate sustainable collaborative cross-boundary working, and the pedagogical co-creation and re-conceptualising of both learning and the creation of new knowledge. Because we need the collective intelligence — and action — to address the challenges of the twenty-first century and beyond.

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## REFLECTIVE ESSAY

**Partnership Working: Opening Doors—Crossing Thresholds**

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Any situation in which some men prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence; . . . to alienate humans from their own decision making is to change them into objects. (Freire, 1970, p. 85).

This reflective essay is an opportunity for five academics who have played various and complex roles in each other's lives and careers to explore some of the meanings of those collaborations. It highlights the way such collaborative efforts can push back on the corporatist and exclusivist pressures in higher education.

We, the authors of this essay, have been (and are) located in the United Kingdom in what is called a widening participation institution; that is, we reach out to and recruit those that do not normally experience a university education. We have heavy teaching loads with little or no time for collaborative endeavours even in our own institution, let alone collaborations that bridge those disciplinary and international borders across which we operate.

In this pressurised context, the five of us have worked together variously over time, and our relationships have changed and developed as we have interacted as students and lecturers, as students of lecturers and as colleagues. We now work together cross-institutionally and cross-continently. Fundamental to all of our working relationships is the notion of a pedagogy that treats the learner as a co-creator of knowledge and the tutor as a co-learner.

We used the method of "writing as inquiry" (Gale & Bowstead, 2013) to collaborate on, research, and surface the relationship between partnership, pedagogy, and practice in the academy. In this essay we outline the way that we have worked together as staff and students to create a partnership model in education that crosses traditional thresholds and allows for more authentic collaboration and more engaging teaching and learning.

**WHO WE ARE: THE POWER OF WORKING AND WRITING TOGETHER**

We, the authors of this reflective essay, are academics with very different, yet very similar histories. Our trajectories in and through academia have not been straightforward in that none of us has envisioned a career in academia: we have worked on building sites (Tom), been nurses (Maja and Sandra A.), Lab technicians (Sandra S.), and in care and support work

(Orion). We are educational nomads wandering through (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987/2005) already colonised academic space (Freire, 1970), not just encountering closed doors but having them shut in our faces. In this essay, we would like to unravel how our paths have crossed and what has emerged out of this. This section therefore lays out how we connect to each other before exploring in more depth what the collaborations have enabled and how the partnership model that we developed may be used by others.

Sandra S. and Tom work together at the Centre for Professional and Educational Development and teach on the Postgraduate Certificate (PGCert) and the Masters in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (MALTHE) courses for academic staff, with a special focus on praxes that ignite curiosity, harness creativity, and develop power and voice. At different points Sandra A., Orion, and Maja have all been students on that programme.

Sandra S. and Tom have also worked and taught together with Sandra A. in Education Studies where they developed an innovative partnership project: Peer Mentoring in Practice (PMiP) and Becoming an Educationist (Becoming) whereby students on PMiP were partnered in a mentoring relationship with Becoming students. Together they have reflected and published on this. Sandra A. left London Metropolitan University in 2018 and is now based at the University of Calgary (Canada) where she works on research projects that look at design studio practice and online teaching.

Sandra S. and Tom also worked with Orion and Maja when they were students working as success coaches, recruiting them to undertake qualitative research into student perceptions of university with Orion and Maja driving the creative process and disseminating their findings harnessing an innovative graphic novel format. When Maja and Orion took the PGCert programme, they simultaneously became students, associate lecturers, and colleagues, eventually becoming full time members of staff, who were recruited to be “change agents” in their schools with the grand task of improving the student experience of learning.

Together we navigate an education system that is elitist and hierarchical—entry to the academy is policed by various door keepers. Identity and “habitus” (a sense of feeling like you belong) are important, and the “outsider” academic and student do not feel automatically welcomed into these exclusionary spaces. Individualism and personal success is emphasised both in the classroom and in the valorised single-author text. However, the five of us together opened new doors, negotiating the academy through our varying partnerships and our evolving identities, our writing, and our pedagogic and academic practices developed and evolved.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, work and teaching has changed significantly for all of us, making it difficult to connect beyond the affordances of web conferencing. Yet, the call for papers for this journal brought the five of us together, providing an opportunity to reflect on what partnership means for us and our students while also working—and writing—together in a new configuration.

## PARTNERSHIP, SPACE AND POWER

In hostile academic environments, we argue that it is the connection to others, staff, and students, that sustains us both as human beings and as ethical practitioners; these relationships keep us grounded, dialogic, and open. As Orion describes when he returned to

university as a mature learner and first entered Sandra S. and Tom's office, being "invited in" forged a connection and built a positive identity:

Like a lighthouse beacon through the mist, unseen by other ships, it was the most inconspicuous doorway which led me to working with Sandra S. and Tom. Upon the stairwell door a laminated sign stated "staff only." I still remember vividly traversing through the university library past the cafe and its flumes of coffee drinkers and unwitting bystanders to that doorway. Like Alice looking down the rabbit hole, I was unaware of the journey ahead. I think I remember it well because I was purposeful and anxious, whereas previously, my return to university education as a mature student had been markedly aimless and disengaged. Eight years away from higher education had left me little more than a severed appendage - disconnected, sore, and jaded. The lift to the third floor (the location of Tom and Sandra's office), was arguably the beginning of my regeneration, of becoming whole again as a constituent part of an academic institution. Their door was open. I was welcomed into the conscious lifelong pursuit of understanding and discovery, the quintessence of higher education. By inviting me behind the scenes, through sharing of their physical and intellectual space and bestowing me with faith in my competency and knowledge through dialogue, Tom and Sandra S. opened up a terrain of possibilities which has led me to become a lecturer and an academic (albeit green) myself.

Similarly, Maja, when embarking on further/higher study, experienced the power of being allowed in, and, through that, was able to connect and grow:

I was dipping my feet into my doctoral studies on undocumented migrants access to healthcare when I was introduced to Tom and Sandra S. I had some experience already under my belt in qualitative nursing research but saw the opportunity to develop this further into the academic sphere. We started working together on our project looking into student experiences of their first year of study. We got invited into the realm of those who once only represented our tutors—they were now colleagues. To be invited in the hidden corridors of staff offices was exciting and empowering to me. It is something that crosses my mind often when I see students in my own office now. I am cognisant of the power dynamics between students and myself, as I have recently experienced both sides of that coin.

Partnership, or being able to connect with the other, allows for a re-constituting of (educational) space where even the academic and "staff-only" places can be turned into connective opportunities, rather than being excluding and dividing barriers. It is important that the educator, rather than acting as a gatekeeper, actively invites students to cross the academic threshold with power and agency—in reality and metaphorically. As Orion states,

Working with you both [ Sandra S. and Tom] in the past was like being invited into a community of practice which had immediate and long-term impacts on my own

academic and professional practice. I was a constituent part of the institution rather than a disengaged appendage.

Orion's experience shows that our identities are malleable and reciprocative, especially where power relations are in balance. If partnership is fostered, it upends the traditional power dynamic in education. The student re-conceptualises their sense of self, their journey, and their involvement in the university's processes and practices.

Our partnerships have enabled us to teach, research, and write together about our own practice and about practices that enable students to succeed. Authentic partnership can construct powerful action within the university setting. Our goal is that neither we nor our students lose ourselves to become "academic." This influences, informs, and shapes our pedagogy and practice—and thus in turn serves the humane and human interests of those we work with and our students.

### CROSSING THE THRESHOLD

Partnerships, true partnerships, are always novel and powerfully emerging; they are always being constituted and reconstituted. They can alter (our experience of) space itself—and place us differently within space. They create cracks and fissures pregnant with potential: the nomadic street fighting space of the academic outsider (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987/2005). We have found that our encounters in the "backstage" space, literally the corridors, lifts, and stairs of the university—and metaphorically in true partnerships between staff and staff and staff and students—create opportunities where we can enter dialogue. They can result in barriers being broken down in the creation of something more open and transparent. As Orion explained: "It felt powerful to be in that space."

If we approach partnership as something that happens in the classroom as well as alongside the curriculum, we can offer students the opportunity to conceptualise themselves as active constructors of education. As Orion says,

I do not teach students; I work with them as equal partners. Partnership working taught me the importance of the lecturer and student dynamic and how this can be harnessed to encourage student self-efficacy. As a lecturer teaching a social science subject, Health and Social Care BSc, I consciously use language to empower students and undercut the traditional power dynamics in higher education. As I begin to develop my own content and curriculum design, I am doing so by interrogating the traditional didactic model, attempting to reorientate my seminars away from the didactic towards the workshop. My workshops are akin to traditional design and technology lessons, where we all start from an equal footing (in regards to material and content) and begin to pick apart, probe, sculpt, and redesign health and social care issues through problematising and problem solving. This also informs my ideas around curriculum and assessment design as I attempt to find ways to welcome students over the threshold.

This brings true partnership into academia through dialogic pedagogy. In our teaching, we set challenging projects that ask students to build, create, and explore—and eventually to take over the running of the course itself. This is an approach designed to free the colonized

(Freire, 1970): a dialogic and powerful approach to learning and teaching through cooperation, collaboration, and cultural diversity.

#### THE PARTNERSHIP MODEL

As Freire (1970) argues, it is not enough for people to come together in dialogue in order to gain knowledge of their social reality; they must act together upon their environment in order to critically reflect upon their reality, and so transform it through further action and critical reflection: “Education must begin with the solution of the student-teacher contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students” (p. 53).

Our experience of partnership working achieved that as we came together to research and write together over time and across our differing identities and relationships. Partnership, as posited in this reflective essay, is an authentic activity that enables a more empowered engagement in academia by those that would normally be sidelined or silenced (potentially all the authors of this paper—and their students). Partnership as research and pedagogic practice opens the door to the “in-between spaces”—the “third spaces” (Bhabha, 2004; Gutiérrez, 2008)—that enhance trust and foster a sustainable ecology of collaboration and co-creation.

For all of us, partnership working has impacted our academic work and our classroom practice. It has meant creating spaces that allow us and our students to explore, to wrestle with emergent thoughts, and to play with ideas. What we attempt in the classroom is a de-schooling (Illich, 1970) and unschooling (Holt, 1977, 1981): shaking up notions of what counts as teaching, learning and assessment, not to further confuse or alienate students, but to conjure the very collaborative adventure that education can and should be. Orion summarized this well when he said: “Partnership gave me a well-spring of confidence in my own ability; more importantly, it began to provide me with a mechanism for self-efficacy. The process reorientated my perspective on the world around me; challenges became exciting opportunities.”

#### COLLABORATIVE SPACES FOR ACTION: WHAT WE RECOMMEND

In education there must be mutual respect, care, and commitment for learning to happen. All parties must cross thresholds together: “tutor and student . . . should not be seen as separate but as two halves of one dynamic system, each informing the other, ideally at every stage, with common understanding being shaped and constantly evolving within a community of practice” (Rust et al., 2005, p. 236).

We have worked together as staff and students and as staff and staff. We have researched and written together, including for this journal. Our collaborative practices have catalysed thought and enabled action: we have created open doors and crossed thresholds. We have seen what empowerment does—enabling the outsider student and academic to “be” (Nancy, 2000) more powerfully, act more powerfully, and to teach and write in more empowering ways. This is what our collaborative approach in its broader sense attempts to achieve: a more inclusive and collaborative academia.

We recommend that lecturers explore what a partnership model of research and pedagogy might afford them and what powerful positions such a model would enable them to create for—but importantly with—their own students.



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# Supporting Student Writing and Other Modes of Learning and Assessment. A Staff Guide

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# Supporting Student Writing



*and Other Modes of Learning and Assessment*



## A Staff Guide



**Sandra Abegglen**

University of Calgary

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**Sandra Sinfield**

London Metropolitan University

Designed by

**Veronica Piras**



# ***Supporting Student Writing***

## ***and Other Modes of Learning and Assessment***

**Supporting Student Writing and Other Modes of Learning and Assessment.  
A Staff Guide.**

Sandra Abegglen, Tom Burns and Sandra Sinfield

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Reflecting the authors' commitment to gender equality, gender specific terms, such as 'he' and 'she' are used intermittently throughout this book.

# ***Foreword: Debbie Holley***

Professor of Learning Innovation; Faculty of Health and Social Science;  
Bournemouth University

A hotly contested debate in Higher Education remains: where does the responsibility lie for the development of student writing? How clearly these inspirational authors place this responsibility with us – in our classrooms, labs, online spaces, tutorials, one-to-ones, large groups, small groups. Wherever our students are learning, they are writing, be it formatively, creatively, or summatively, often with pain, pressure and little support, but seldom for pleasure. If we are to actively engage our students with their learning, it has to be where they learn, not ‘over there’ to be fixed by a skills team, however dedicated, but within the framework of true emancipatory practice, where their writing frees them to articulate their authentic voice.

Creative pedagogies have a huge part to play in offering a different lens; as does the decolonisation of curricula practices. As educators in positions of power and authority, no matter how ‘nice’ we are, we still grade their work; it is for us to frame their efforts within a wider social justice platform, giving a voice to all of the students in our care, not just the privileged ones. This Guide, with its wonderful fluidity, design and colour offers us the tools and techniques to weave into our practice, whether we are anthropologists, sociologists, business professionals, designers or engineers. Enabling writing across the disciplines, the examples, resources and activities in this Guide lift off the pages to inspire, encourage and embolden us to embed writing as a practice in each and every context.

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# *This guide in a nutshell*

*"'I have been Foolish and Deluded,' said he,  
'And I am a Bear of No Brain at All.'  
'You're the Best Bear in All the World,' said Christopher  
Robin soothingly.  
'Am I?' said Pooh hopefully."  
(A. A. Milne, Winnie-the-Pooh)*



This Guide promotes writing-to-learn. Academic writing is a contested area that is tricky to navigate and master especially for newcomers. However, this does not need to be the case. We show that if instructors ‘teach’ writing differently, it can foster students’ learning. Academic writing is a process: we write to become academic. It is an initiation into and participation in wider professional and academic discourses. This Guide is an invitation to move beyond the ‘mechanics’ of writing - to make it meaningful, engaging, interactive and fun. If writing is appreciated as developmental - and appropriately supported - it automatically spurs students on to write their ‘best’.

The Guide has plenty of white space for the reader to take notes. There are also some special blank spaces that are indicated by the following symbol: 

The illustrations are intended to make the content of the Guide engage with the reader in a playful way, using bright block colours and shapes.

# Acknowledgments



With thanks to all participants at our Writing Workshop, Learning and Teaching Conference, LondonMet, July 2017, whose contributions and ideas have gone towards producing this resource.

Special acknowledgement goes to Veronica Piras, a Design student at LondonMet, who has worked creatively and joyously to bring a creative flair to the text layout - and whose illustrations have brought the text alive. We would also like to thank Timothy Donovan for his editorial insights on the text.

Further thanks go to the learning development community for the provision of inspiring conversations and new insights. This also applies to our colleagues who have helped us reflect on learning and teaching, and academic writing.

Finally, we would like to thank our families and friends for their understanding of our 'obsession' with writing.





# Contents

Foreword: Debbie Holley

This guide in a nutshell

Acknowledgments

1. INTRODUCTION	12
2. How to use this guide	14
2.1 Overview	16
3. Strategies to support or develop student writing	18
3.1 Introduction	18
3.2 Activities to help understand the assessment question	20
3.2.1 Brainstorming	21
3.2.2 Cluster Wall	23
3.2.3 Mind-map	24
3.2.4 Problem solving	25
3.2.5 Record and review	26
3.3 Writing development (pre-writing activities)	28
3.3.1 Collage	28
3.3.2 Post-its	30
3.3.3 Cornell Notes	31
3.3.4 Reading for writing	32
3.3.4.1 Textscrolls	33
3.3.4.2 Drawing to learn	36
3.3.5 Pre-writing posters	38
3.3.6 Relax and write	39

3.4 Writing activities and playful writing	40
3.4.1 Free write	41
3.4.2 Slow writing	43
3.4.3 Two minutes writing	44
3.4.5 Alternative assignments: Genre and re-genre	46
3.5 Online writing	48
3.5.1 The collective answer	49
3.5.2 Collaborative online poetry	50
3.5.3 Blogging and tweeting	51
3.5.4 Software tools and applications	52
3.6 Discussing writing - reflecting on writing	54
3.6.1 Peer review	56
3.6.2 Scrapbook	57
3.6.3 Journalling	58
3.6.4 The revision session	59
3.7 Writing activities to avoid	60
3.7.1 Do not: Set 'right answer' tasks	61
3.7.2 Do not: Give 'model answers'	62
3.7.3 Do not: Ask students to read out their writing in class	63
3.7.4 Do not: Use plagiarism and plagiarism software to threaten students	64



4. Writing across the curriculum	68
4.1 Introduction	69
4.2 A movement-based workshop	70
4.3 Overcoming writing blocks workshop	72
4.4 Using different writing 'voices'	74
4.5 The 'write to learn' year	75
4.6 Peer review and/or shut-up and write	76
4.7 Putting a small writing programme together	77
4.7.1 Reflective writing in action	78
4.7.2 Artful and slow writing	80
4.7.3 Writing workshop	80
4.7.4 Peer review and 'shut-up and write' workshop	82
4.7.5 Multimodal exhibition	83
5. Why do lecturers have to engage with academic writing?	86
5.1 Introduction	86
5.1.1 But writing can feel different	87
5.2 The threshold concepts of academic writing	91
5.3 Diversifying writing - and multimodal assessments	93
5.4 Allowing and fostering alternative voices - for study success	95
6. Conclusion and recommendations	98
7. Resources	100
8. References	108
8.1 Reference link list	112
9. Academic Staff Voices	116

# 1. INTRODUCTION



This academic staff Guide includes many activities for students that can help deconstruct writing and other assessment tasks (formal and informal) and develop students' learning. We outline a variety of writing and pre-writing activities, and a range of approaches, strategies and workshops, all of which have been designed to promote students' understanding of 'the point' of writing and assessment. We also outline activities to support writing and to foster writing habits.

We have developed this Guide following and in response to a Writing Workshop that we delivered at a Learning and Teaching Conference, held at our inner-city, UK post-1992 university. The workshop revealed not only that students struggle with writing but also that instructors struggle with 'teaching writing' meaningfully. Thus, in this Guide, we provide ideas about how to 'teach' academic writing. However, whilst that is the subject that many academics worry about the most, all of the activities here will be of use in de-constructing any assessment task that students face.

Academics worry that students 'don't write' or 'can't write' and wrestle with ways to help initiate students into this vital aspect of their various epistemic communities. 'Academic' writing describes something more tremulous than a range of skills to master - and it definitely describes something more positive and complex than written work produced only for assessment. The process of academic writing can free up thinking and ideas - and be an initiation into and participation in wider professional and academic discourses. We write to process and communicate academic ideas, we write to become academic.

This Guide is designed first and foremost to be 'practical' and useful. But in the process, we also consider key issues that surround academic writing in Higher Education.

We offer examples of how discipline staff, in all areas, as well as those engaged in learning or academic development, can support under- and postgraduate students with their writing. We want academic staff to feel enabled to move beyond a concern with the 'mechanics' of writing to address the anxieties and hopes experienced both by student 'newcomers' and prospective postgraduates when embarking on their journey to academic success.

We outline a range of activities that have emerged from recent innovative practice and research - and that can be adapted to the reader's own context. We have a section with suggestions and links for further reading, including web links that lead to (free) online activities that are useful for classroom practice. We explore the role that multimodal assessments, which are as challenging as traditional assessment, could play in extending students' learning. And, we conclude the Guide with a set of sessions that academics could put together that would constitute a creative programme to develop students' writing throughout the curriculum - and their development of self-efficacy throughout their study and into their professional career.

The list of examples and exercises provided in this Guide is not exhaustive or finite. Especially in these uncertain times, new ways of learning and teaching emerge, together with new software and web-based resources that are useful for students and instructors. Please feel free to share your ideas and resources with us via email - or as a *Take5 blogpost*.

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*Sandra, Tom and Sandra*



## 2. HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE



This Guide focuses on writing for learning - rather than learning to write. The activities that we suggest are all designed to help students deepen their learning through understanding the questions and the assessment challenges set. Outlining the key aspects of an assignment task helps students to understand assessment as learning, rather than focussing on assessment of learning. The activities 'break down' assignment questions and tasks, suggesting steps into writing - academically and for academia. Focusing on the question becomes a way for students to hone their ability to communicate, rather than attempting to find the right answer to please the tutor, or develop their 'literacy skills'. The activities are designed to develop students' interests and foster their strengths - setting them up for successful study.

We provide ideas on how instructors can best support their students, together with concrete examples and activities. The Guide is meant to be 'useful' - interactive and flexible - with (online) resources to explore and use. This means that readers are asked to 'dip' into the Guide where they think it makes sense to them, and their students. Activities can be adapted to suit particular cohorts and contexts. They should be chosen so they 'fit' with learners and their courses. This means that the activities, although fun, are provided for 'serious' learning. The activities are based on our and other people's experiences as well as more general research into learning, teaching, academic writing and study success.



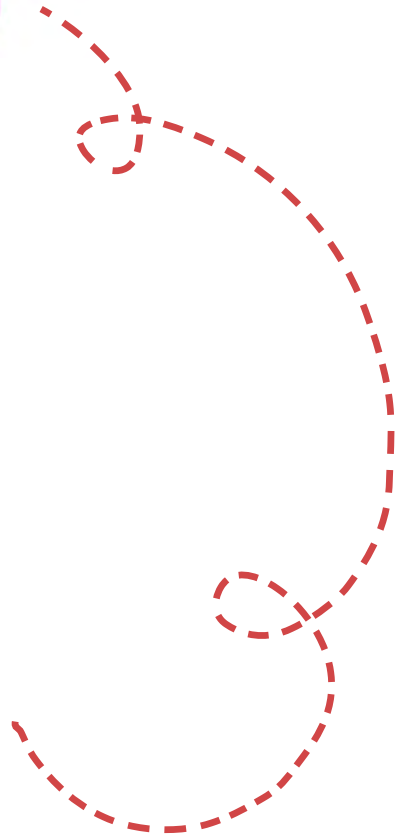
So please do:

- Use this Guide for your teaching - and your students' learning;
- Try the different activities, with your students - and adapt them if needed;
- Have fun - and enjoy the teaching of writing and setting of assignments; and
- Think about writing up your experiences - putting together a case study - and getting published on the topic.

## 2.1 Overview



The Guide begins with general ideas on how to introduce writing in the classroom (pre-writing activities) and goes on to deal with first, (tentative) writing activities and different means and modes of writing. It also provides ideas on how to ‘talk about’ writing - and what writing activities to avoid (to be set up for success). Next, the Guide talks about writing more generally, across the curriculum, with suggestions on how to ‘combine’ writing with other activities and make it an embodied part of learning. There are activities for students on how to use ‘different’ voices and tips for instructors on how to incorporate writing throughout the academic year. We include background information on why instructors need to engage with academic writing and what we mean by using writing successfully with a variety of learners. Finally, the Guide provides recommendations and further resources for those who want to take writing and assessment in their courses to the next level and those that want to do more background reading and research on the topic.



# 3. STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT OR DEVELOP STUDENT WRITING



## 3.1 Introduction

*"We fear things because we believe that we will not be able to do them well - we will not cope."*

*(Burns & Sinfield, 2016, pp. 35-36)*

With academic writing, typically the big issue for students is not the spelling, punctuation and grammar that many academics critique, but a fear of failure, of making mistakes and of 'looking like a fool'. There are several ways to tackle this that do not constitute a 'dumbing down' of writing - or learning. Rather our goal is to raise the challenge and the level of difficulty of the tasks that we set students, whilst supporting them in their achievement of those tasks (Angelo, 1993). When we set engaging and difficult challenges that intrigue students and spark their curiosity, performance in assessment is improved (Gossferich, 2016), and thus so are the outcomes of the learning overall.



Given 'student resistance' to writing, we have to convince students that they can surface their thinking through the written word. This is in opposition to the subliminal idea that you can only write what you already know - and that you ought to know the answer to a question the minute you see it. It builds on the idea of 'writing to learn' and that writing is a learning process that helps you 'think through' the ideas that you are encountering in your studies. First and foremost, we want to build students' confidence in the ability to 'say something' rather than to 'find' the answer that the instructor wants. So, this chapter is about introducing students to the notion of playing with ideas and playing with words while surfacing their thinking. It is also about discovering the joy of writing - and highlighting the things to avoid when writing or when embarking on writing tasks. This chapter details short activities to help students understand writing - and all assignment tasks - and set about productive study.

## ***3.2 Activities to help understand the assessment question***

The following activities can help students understand assignment tasks and questions. The activities can be undertaken in class with the students - face to face or online - so that they understand the assignment challenge they have been set as they deconstruct the questions and take cognisance of the criteria they must meet. Alternatively, they can be set as homework tasks so students can play with words and writing of their own accord.





## 3.2.1 Brainstorming

A brainstorm is an uncensored 'stream of consciousness' on a topic or on all the words in a Question (Q). At its most basic, it reveals that a Q is something to 'open up' - not to 'narrow down'. This process facilitates the generation and gathering of ideas and thoughts. It can be pen- and-paper-based or online.



**How to:**

The brainstorming process should reveal to students that a Q does not demand an immediate answer - but should spur thinking.

A good Q is generative:

- Present/display the whole assignment Q for whole group collaboration and discussion.
- As a class, identify the keywords or phrases in the Q - these are the topics that need to be addressed.
- In pairs or in small groups, students brainstorm those keywords - in a free and uncensored way. This demonstrates that you are not looking for a predetermined 'right answer' but are encouraging students to think for themselves.
- Connect keywords/phrases to taught sessions - past and to come.
- Connect to the Learning Outcomes (LO).
- Collect ideas - and discuss with the class.

The resultant big brainstorm-map of keywords/phrases-note should indicate many avenues to follow up with reading and research. The brainstorm can be refined through discussion into an assignment plan, indicating what ideas could be followed up and developed into a series of arguments for an essay, presentation or multimodal artefact.

## 3.2.2 Cluster Wall

Cluster walls involve students posting up their ideas on a Q - on post-its or digitally on smart boards/online platforms. This process helps with identifying themes and topics and with generating ideas for writing and research.



### **Top tip:**

Once finished, do not dismantle the cluster wall; students can add to it over time, perhaps labelling their contributions with their name and date, thus encouraging other students to add to them and develop ideas further.

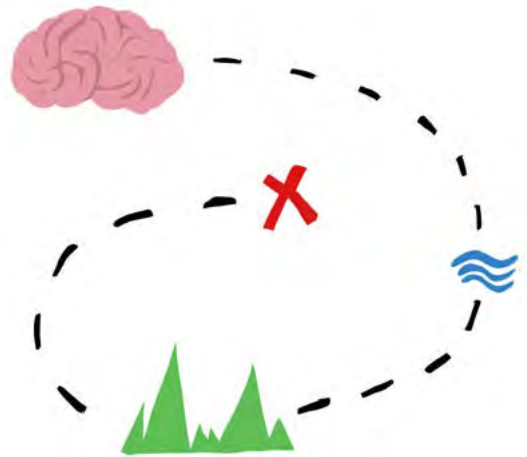


### **How to:**

- Put up the assignment task centrally on a large wall or on a smart board/online platform.
- Ask students to place notes around the Q - with ideas, theories, concepts and relevant literature.
- Check that students are not going off in completely the wrong direction.
- Provide inputs on how to explore the Q further.
- Students may also provide feedback to each other - posing further Q.

## 3.2.3 Mind-map

Mind-maps are visual techniques for structuring and organising thoughts and ideas - the Swiss Army Knife for the Brain (Rustler, 2012). Typically the key idea of a class essay is placed centrally - as with the 'stream of consciousness' brainstorm - but here new ideas are more deliberately branched off, one word at a time (viz. *How To Mind Map* - Tony Buzan). It is useful to use colour and pictures to bring the mind-map to life and make ideas and arguments visible.

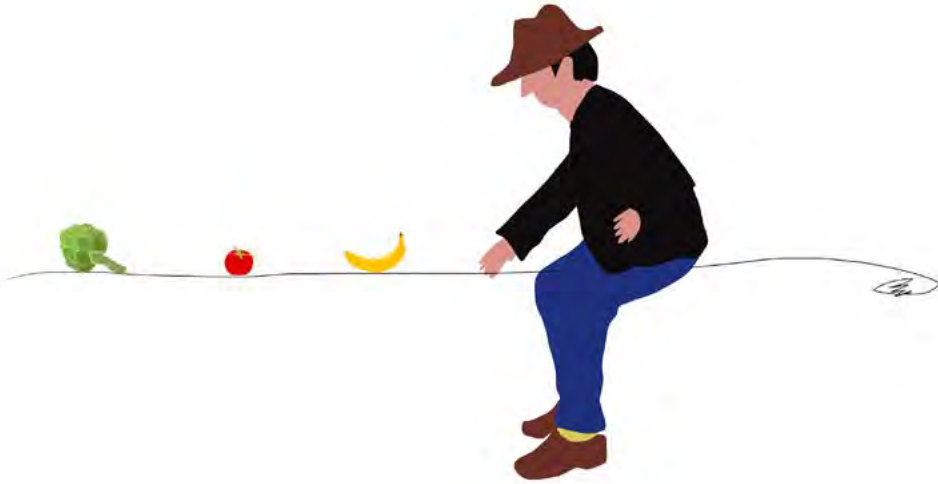


### **Top tip:**

The weekly mind-map:  
Each week, rather than you as tutor summarising the contents of a lecture, workshop or seminar, post a student-generated mind-map to the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) as class revision.



## 3.2.4 Problem solving



In pairs, students identify aspects of the module or course that for them have been the most problematic - or they identify parts of a Q they are unsure about. They then have to find out about that topic and teach the results of their research to their peers via a 30sec or one minute video.



### **Top tip:**

This activity could be used as an alternative assignment mode in itself.

(viz. *Upside Down*

*Academy initiatives:*

*Turning Teacher-Student*

*Roles Upside Down -*

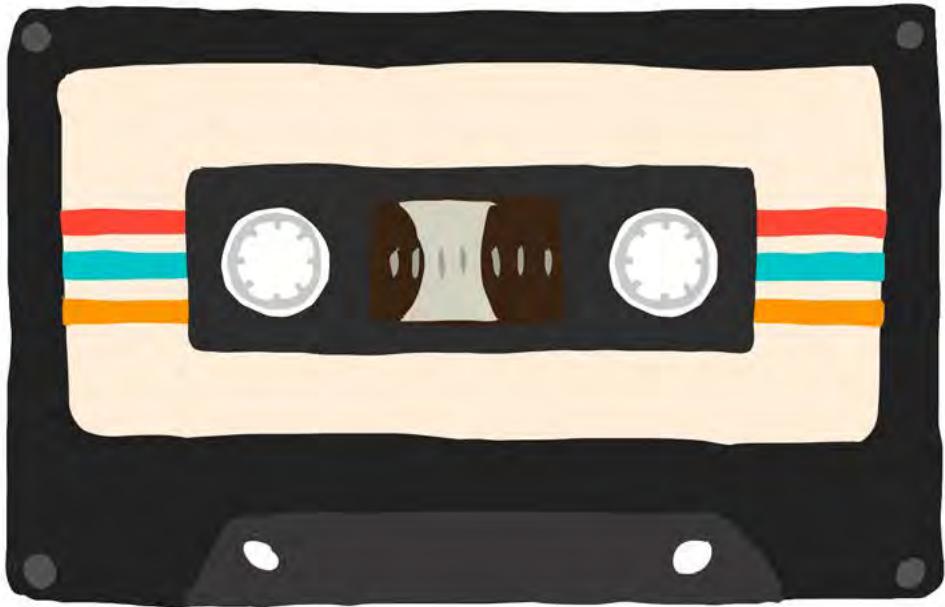
*MindShift*).

### **Extension:**

Deepen student knowledge further by requiring groups of students to 'teach' elements of the module or course to each other by researching, devising and running an interactive workshop for their peers. This helps them to take ownership of their learning as they develop their analytical and critical thinking and the ability to communicate effectively.

## 3.2.5 Record and review

Students debate the assessment task and Q: in pairs, students discuss what they know and don't know. Record the discussion and play it back and discuss ... link to different weeks of the module, different recommended reading, and the LO.





## 3.3 Writing development (pre-writing activities)

This section outlines activities that introduce students to writing, help them surface their ideas, and get them to tentatively formulate answers to Q set.



### 3.3.1 Collage

Collage-making can be a useful first step into academic writing; as a pre-writing activity it takes away the pressure to know the answer and write perfectly formed paragraphs. The production of a collage can reveal that answering a Q means exploring themes and ideas experimentally and playfully. The collage process makes visible how different themes or ideas are connected. It also allows students to see 'the bigger picture', and make connections between the Q, the LO and the themes and topics covered in class.



**Top tip:**

Make time for an activity like this so that students can get lost in the ‘flow’ of the task. Introduce collage-making early on in a course so that students enjoy and accept them. For example, in week one of our course, we ask students to make a collage of who they are. They then share in pairs and then move around the room sharing. It is a great ‘getting to know you’ activity as well as a useful thinking tool.



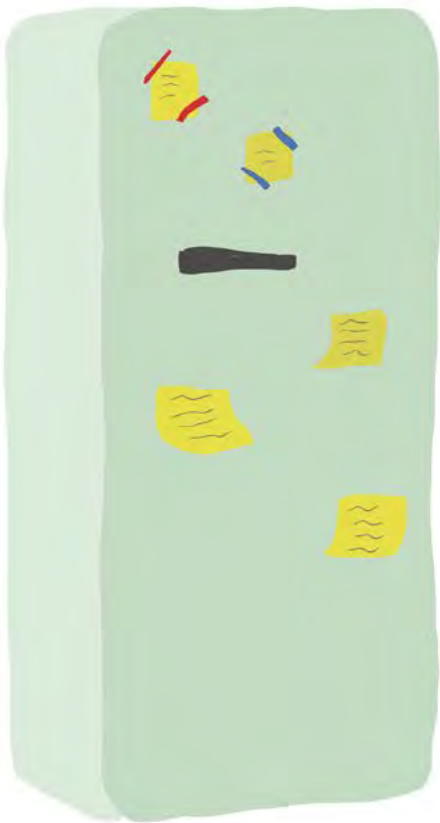
**How to:**

- Bring in magazines, scissors, glue and paper.
- Put up the Q and LO.
- Ask students to reflect on the Q and produce a collage that answers the Q for them - individually, in pairs or small groups.
- Remind students to review the LO, making sure they are also addressed.
- Invite students to share their collage, explaining what it shows and why it answers the Q. Alternatively, one group can show their collage to another – and they can say what they see in the picture - whilst the first group engages in ‘active listening’. The first group can then respond and a productive dialogue can ensue.
- Ask students to ‘write to’ their collage to see what essay ideas emerge.
- Ask students to reflect for themselves on how useful the collage process has been.



## 3.3.2 Post-its

Generally, post-its are a useful (and cheap) study tool that can encourage writing in the most minimalist way possible. Use them in class to encourage students to write down their thoughts, ideas, and arguments (viz. *Advice for Students: 20 Uses for a Post-it Note*).



**Top tip:**

Play with post-its by setting short and very short writing tasks: the six-, twenty- or forty-word essay. This is a powerful way of drafting and editing in a few words.

### 3.3.3 Cornell Notes

Further scaffold academic writing by asking students to produce Cornell Notes (viz. *The Learning Toolbox - Cornell Notes*). These notes are very 'active': with a recording stage, a summary stage and finally a 'using' stage. In this way their use can promote understanding, active and deep learning (Biggs, 1999) and develop regular academic writing.



#### **How to:**

The note-making paper is divided into three sections:

- One - is for brief notes made in class, which are as concise as possible.
- Two - is where the brief notes are reduced to key words, names, dates, theories and concepts.
- Three - is where the students then write sentences on: How I might use this in my assignment.

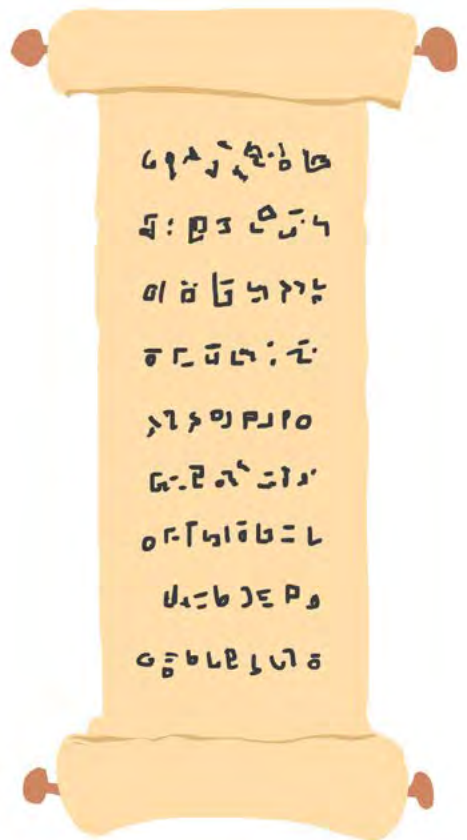
### 3.3.4 Reading for writing

It is not only academic writing that is challenging for students, academic reading is as well. Students often fail to perceive the point of reading, not connecting reading with thinking and writing processes. Typically, students passively read a physical or online text, alone and they encounter problems, alone. A good strategy for breaking down this isolation and for making overt links between reading and writing is to engage in collaborative reading in and out of class. Below we discuss textscrolls and 'drawing to learn' as engaging ways of reading and as a means for fostering 'reading to write'.



### 3.3.4.1 Textscrolls

A textscroll (Abegglen, Burns, Middlebrook & Sinfield, 2020) can be made by printing off a useful, pithy academic article or chapter on one side of A4 or A3 paper (we like A3 because the larger format appears less threatening and is more accessible). Sellotape the pages side-by-side so that the text becomes one long continuous scroll. Each text selected should have clear relevance to the assignment Q that students are working towards. Roll up each scroll and tie with a ribbon to give the text a flourish.



In class, give one scroll to each student group along with felt tip pens, highlighters and post-its. Each group is tasked with making sense of their scroll: reading the introduction and conclusion, the headers, the author, the date and so forth. Give the students time to overcome their initial reluctance and fear and to get hands-on with their text.

After a while, tell each group they have X amount of time to prepare a short presentation, saying how their text will help with the writing of their essay. At this point, students return to the text with even more purpose and they now experience in an embodied way the point of academic reading.

**Alternative:**

With an online class, rather than engage in collaborative reading with physical scrolls, you might like to set up Hypothes.is reading groups (*Hypothes.is*). Hypothes.is allows the collaborative reading and annotation of shared texts online. There is a tutorial on the site explaining how to use the application in your teaching.

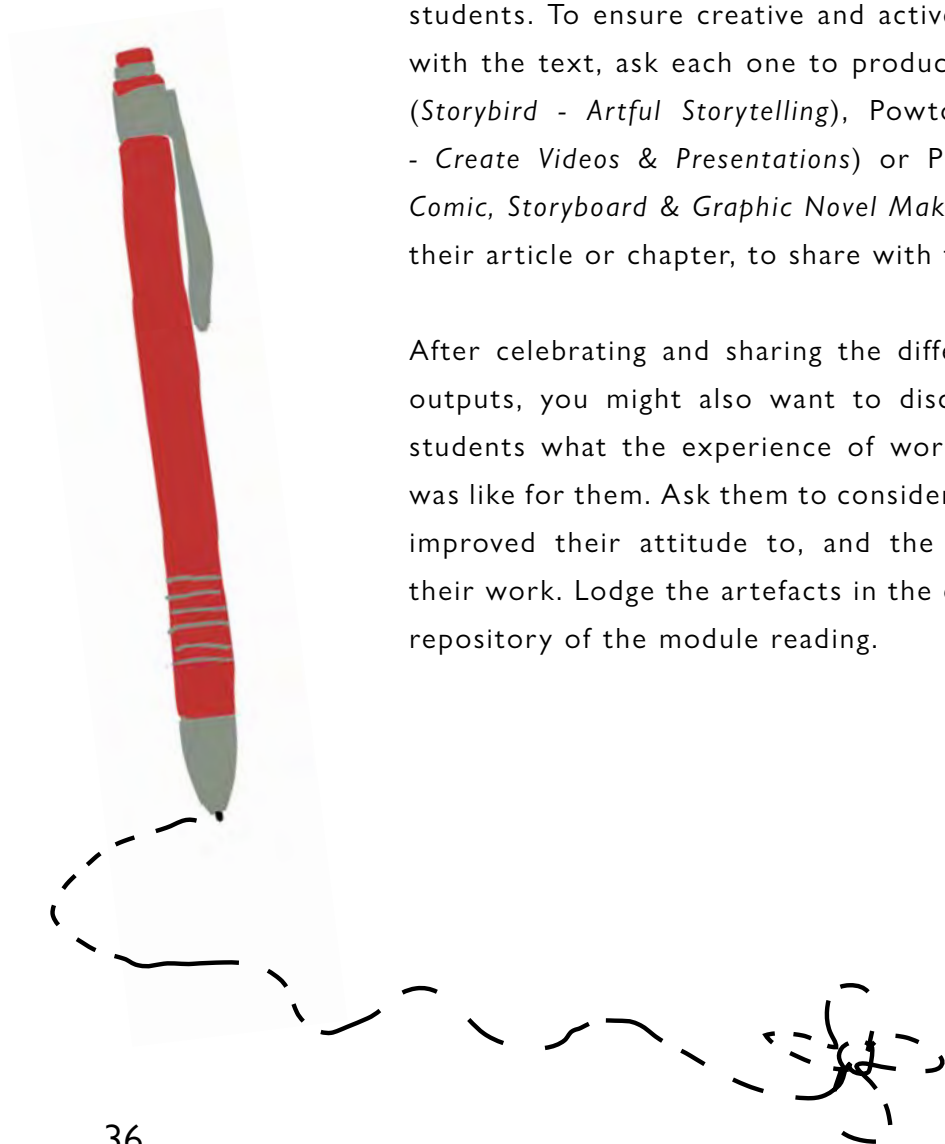


## 3.3.4.2 Drawing to learn

With textscrolls, a student group works collaboratively on a text. Here we suggest that you further emphasise the playful nature of text.

Allocate a key reading to individuals or groups of students. To ensure creative and active engagement with the text, ask each one to produce a Storybird (*Storybird - Artful Storytelling*), Powtoon (*Powtoon - Create Videos & Presentations*) or Pixton (*Pixton: Comic, Storyboard & Graphic Novel Maker*) version of their article or chapter, to share with the class.

After celebrating and sharing the different student outputs, you might also want to discuss with the students what the experience of working together was like for them. Ask them to consider if and how it improved their attitude to, and the outcomes of their work. Lodge the artefacts in the class VLE as a repository of the module reading.



**Extension:**

Rather than asking students to precis this or compare that in X number of words, ask them to produce a cartoon or animation that explains X to another student or their mum, dad, auntie, or niece. When working on this task, students should privilege visuals rather than words.

**Note:**

Nick Sousanis produced his PhD thesis as a graphic novel: *Unflattening - Spin, Weave & Cut*. He has also published an article in comic format: *Frames of Thought - Humanities Futures*.





### 3.3.5 Pre-writing posters

Ask the students to make a poster presentation (as if to the CEO, HoD, Editor or relevant other) on ideas/reading/research findings prior to writing the assignment. The selection and articulation of key ideas helps clarify thinking and reveals the necessity of ‘discourse markers’: hints and pointers that guide the audience, and that are equally useful in the written text.



**Extension:**

Rather than poster presentations, ask students to present their ideas as a 3D object, Cabinet of Curiosity, jigsaw puzzle or board game. These forms or genres provide a challenge to the students and their understanding deepens as they wrestle to communicate their ideas. Follow on writing is often improved as a result of the deeper engagement.

## 3.3.6 Relax and write



It can be really useful to help students relax and de-stress before writing and taking exams. Recommend that students take a walk in the park, meditate, do breathing exercises, declutter the mind and focus their energies. Walking in particular can be powerful, not just to relax and release ideas, but also to develop ideas (viz. *Walking Curriculum –imaginED*).



**Top tip:**

Start with a guided meditation, for example this one: *Guided Meditation: Centering Yourself*.

## 3.4 Writing activities and playful writing



The activities presented in this section target writing directly; however, rather than focusing on grammar, referencing or ‘academic integrity’, which are popular with academics but can prevent students’ active engagement with knowledge claims and arguments, these activities are designed to get the students writing and playing with their ideas (Sinfield, Burns & Abegglen, 2019).



### 3.4.1 *Free write*

Free writing is useful to capture initial ideas and thoughts. Writing freely on a topic can help students surface their ideas and get an idea of where an argument may evolve. Free writing gets students actually writing and if you do this regularly you set up a writing habit. You also set up a 'read - write - read more - write more' ethos - rather than a 'one-draft writing' approach.

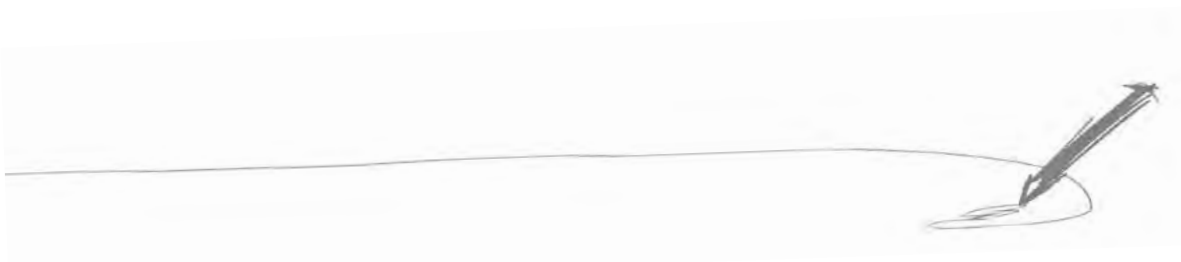
Encouraging students to write in this exploratory way can be life changing and many successful students have reported to us that it was the initial free writing activities that we did together that changed forever the way that they thought about and approached writing.



**Top tip:**

Free write early in the module. Where you do have assignments, undertake a ten minute free write on these in the very first week of the module. Ignore the gasps of horror. Get students to write in a sustained way, seriously considering what they already know about a topic and/or task before your module even starts. Review the writing in a light-hearted way, highlighting the ideas that emerge.

Discuss how this has set them up to make more sense of the module/course as a whole and, moreover, it shows that they have not come in 'empty'.



## 3.4.2 Slow writing



There is value not only in writing swiftly to surface ideas, but also in writing slowly to spend time with them (DeSalvo, 2014; Berg & Seeber, 2016). As an introduction activity, ask your students to find and sit for an hour with an artwork relevant to their assignment. The art can be in a gallery or a picture brought to class. As they sit with the work they can doodle or sketch - but they cannot answer their phones or surf the net. After the hour they must write no more or no less than 300 words on the artwork as it relates to the assignment. Typically they will have many more than 300 words to write and will have to edit down. This should reveal in an 'embodied' way that taking time to be with their ideas produces more writing than just rushing to words.



### **Top tip:**

Model slow writing -  
one step at a time:  
*Place-Based Poetry,*  
*Modeling One Revision at*  
*a Time.*

### 3.4.3 Two minutes writing

Ask students to write more and more often. Include short, timed writing tasks within lectures, seminars and workshops: summarising key arguments, capturing key Q, noting connections with other lectures or modules. Keep the writing time short but make it a regular feature of the teaching.



**Top tip:**

Remind students to keep a copy of their writing - as a build-up to a larger piece of writing.



## 3.4.4 Poetry and prose

Explicitly ask students to experiment with alternative forms of writing - providing an angle on an assessment or even an answer to a Q. For example, ask them to write a Haiku, a traditional Japanese poem, in answer to a Q. Haiku poems consist of three lines. The first and last lines of a Haiku have five syllables and the middle line has seven syllables. It is a very disciplined form and the challenge is for students to shape a concise answer in a really tight structure.

### **Variation:**

Story-words: Select keywords related to the subject and ask students to write not an essay but a story. This story can be fictional but it needs to make sense as a whole. The aim is to connect different ideas together, building up a narrative, which can be used to tackle assessments.





### 3.4.5 *Alternative assignments: Genre and re-genre*

Ask students to present their ideas not just in essay format but as video-essays, photo-essays, animations, pictures, poetry, prose... These genres are more engaging for students whilst also requiring many of the skills employed in academic writing: research, structuration and argumentation as well as revision and editing. Here are some examples from our own students: Finding creativity: *DigitalMe Project 2015*.

Altering the genre that we utilise (English, 2011) can prompt discussion on genre conventions, including the genres with which we usually ask students to engage: the essay, the reflective essay, the report, the journal etc. This can 'make strange' that which we academics take for granted and deepen students' understanding of the 'what, why and how' of the heuristic tasks we set. This can be extended to a consideration of assignment criteria and the affordances that different genres offer.

It might also be worth discussing with students which (pre-)writing/scaffolding activities suit certain writing forms. For example, the brainstorm and mind-map may better suit the report whereas the collage may best suit the essay as a discursive instrument.



**Variation:**

Ask students to represent their ideas in a genre other than the one they have already used. For example, ask them to represent their ideas as a TV show/film. This makes the form itself explicit (the sitcom, drama or action movie) and, as the students develop characters and follow plot conventions, they are encouraged to enjoy wrestling with the ideas and revealing what they have learned. This could be a great in-class revision activity.

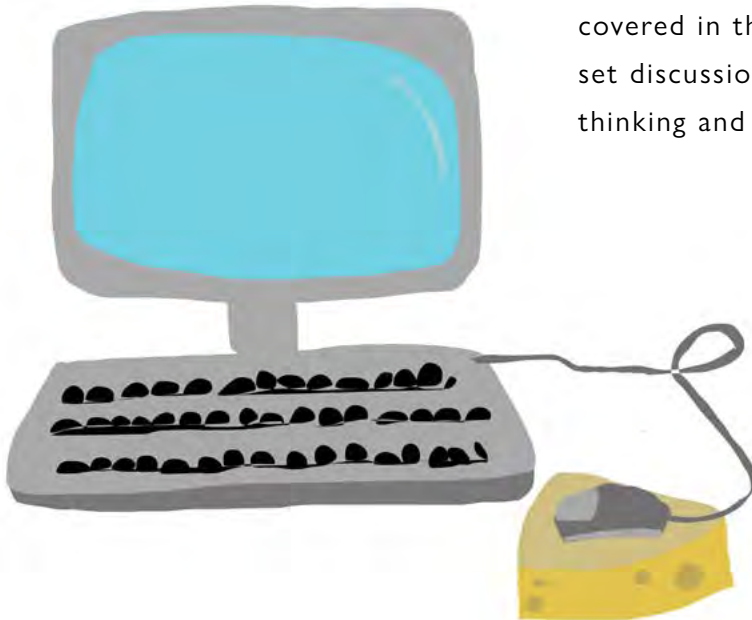
## 3.5 Online writing

There are benefits in writing online: ease of access, editing, restructuring and shareability. Online writing can take place in various open spaces such as Google Docs (*Google Docs - About*) or you may wish to use the tools in your VLE, for example the wiki tools that allow for collective authoring.



**Top tip:**

Utilise online Discussion Boards. Select key points that need to be covered in the assignment and set discussion Q to get students thinking and writing.



## 3.5.1 *The collective answer*

In groups, students produce collective answers to Q very like the ones they will have to tackle in their assignments. Either give out the Q or ask students to generate the sort of Q they would expect to be set in the module. The writing could take the form of a collaborative document produced in the class or outside the class.

Participants of the MOOC Rhizomatic Learning: The Community is the Curriculum (#rhizo14) facilitated by Dave Cormier produced the 'Unreadable Text' (viz. *Writing the Unreadable Untext - University of Glasgow* or *The Unreadable Text - Hybrid Pedagogy*), which could be used and discussed as an example of collaborative online writing.



### **Variation:**

As assignments, students can be asked to set up their own website or write 'instructables' for other students and make them available to their peers as online documents or pdfs. This sort of writing gains a wider audience while encouraging professionalism.

## 3.5.2 Collaborative online poetry

Rather than writing to answer a Q, ask the class to produce a collective poem on their experience of your module or course in a shared Google doc or wiki. This helps them to experiment with different writing genres and to improve their writing per se. When we have engaged in this form of creative, collective writing we have found that the 'threshold concept' that you need to cross is not the adding of your own lines, but the editing or deleting of the words of others.



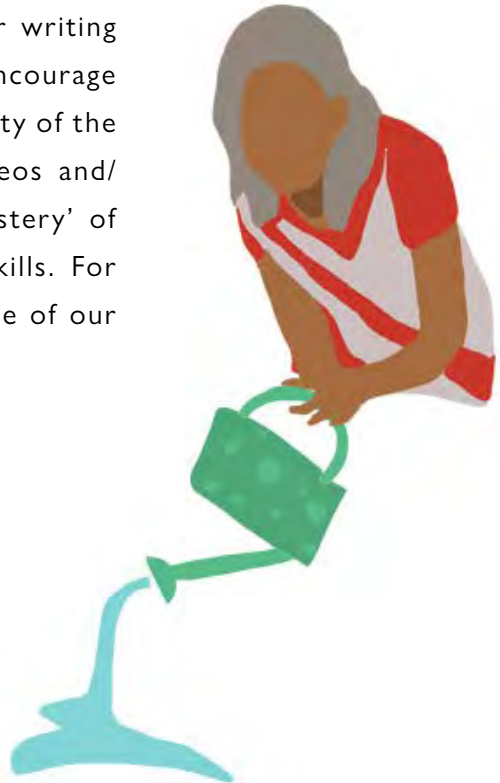
### **Top Tip:**

The Class Artist: Promote active and creative learning by appointing a class artist or an artist in residence. This creates a creative learning mindset and the outputs can be discussed by other students as part of the weekly revision process. For example, Dr Sam Illingworth was a Conference poet in residence: *EGU 18 Artists in Residence*.



### 3.5.3 Blogging and tweeting

Encourage students to ‘tweet’ about a topic or theme and/or write their own personal blog, focusing on a module or assignment or writing as such (blog to learn). In all of these, encourage students to make use of the multimodality of the medium. They can insert pictures, videos and/or links. All of this helps develop ‘mastery’ of writing while enhancing their digital skills. For an example visit the blog written by one of our undergraduate students: *noblechloe*.



**Extension:**

Ask students to read and comment on the tweets and blogs of their peers. This develops a sense of audience and writing with a purpose. It also promotes the idea that writing and learning are dialogic (Bakhtin, 2008).

## 3.5.4 *Software tools and applications*

Utilise all the fun - and free - online software tools and applications that can make writing enjoyable. We like the following, but there are many more (especially now that many universities have moved to online learning and teaching due to the recent pandemic):



Ren'Py: <https://www.renpy.org> - visual novel engine.



Free Write Tool: <http://learning.londonmet.ac.uk/TLTC/freewrite/FWT.html> - simply write.

Written kitten: <http://writtenkitten.net> - get a kitten for every 100 words.

750 words: <http://750words.com> - write regularly and earn points (free trial for 30 days).

WordNet: <http://wordnet.princeton.edu> - large lexical database of English (free but you need to reference the source).

Portent's Content Generator: <https://www.portent.com/tools/title-maker> - create titles or fun assignment questions using keywords.

PowToon - to turn your reflections into animations (quite time consuming): <https://www.powtoon.com/home/> (free if the animation does not exceed a certain length).

FlipGrid - <https://flipgrid.com/> - as with Padlet below - this is an online noticeboard that can be used to collate ideas across a class.

Padlet: <https://padlet.com/> - to collect ideas and opinions.

StoryBird (<https://storybird.com/>), to turn your reflections into an illustrated story book (viz. textbook chapter as a storybird: <https://storybird.com/books/chapter-3-parents-have-a-prior-right-to-choose-the/?token=jxkumdebz3>).

Timeline: [http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/interactives/timeline\\_2/](http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/interactives/timeline_2/) - helps create a graphical representation of related items or ideas.

WordPress – to blog: <https://wordpress.com/> (free but upgrades need to be paid for).

Academic Phrase Bank: <http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk> - a resource for academic writers.



## 3.6 *Discussing writing - reflecting on writing*

Set aside class time for students to talk with each other about their writing (or non-writing) and share their notes and drafts. They could also interview each other to generate ideas and help improve their writing/drafts: Who? What? Where? When? How? And Why? Ask students to compose together, perhaps a sample introduction or a paragraph.

### **Variation:**

Encourage students to role-play the arguments by different theorists or writers. This can help them understand different perspectives while revealing key points to highlight in their work.

Students could also present their writing as a speech and get others to comment on the key arguments presented. This is especially useful for students of Drama or Performing Arts who typically do not expect 'to have to write' when registering for a module or course.



**Top tip:**

Utilising metaphors can be useful when discussing writing. This can help students articulate their feelings and understand an idea before putting it into sentences or paragraphs and it can spark ideas on how to express their thoughts in written format. You could also ask students to comment on their peers' work, utilising metaphors, for example: 'writing is like cooking' (viz. *Elbow, 1981, 1998*).



## 3.6.1 Peer review



As well as having relatively informal though actually well-structured discussions centred on writing, it is also useful to have a more formal peer-review session where students bring in assignment drafts for constructive peer review against assessment criteria and LO.

Build in a structured peer review as early as possible in a module in order to normalise the process and encourage students as soon as possible to take control of their learning and writing.



### **Top tip:**

Discuss peer review practice with the students, emphasising the fact it is dialogue and not 'marking'. Peer review is a conversation about the writing in relation to assignment criteria and writing goals, not just saying what is right or wrong in the reviewer's opinion. Put up the assignment task and criteria and insist that students compose feedback in line with the LO. Make sure that all students in a pair or triad have time to give and receive feedback. Take a moment at the end of the session to consider the outcomes of the peer review process.

## 3.6.2 Scrapbook

Encourage students to keep a scrapbook of ideas that they can go back to if they run out of ideas, but also to make them conscious that it is sometimes important to throw out ideas as a way to clarify and improve the ones you are trying to develop on the way.

### **Variation:**

Ask students to select an item from their scrap pile that captures 'where they are now'. A focused discussion of items can lead to very active reflection (Schön, 1983) on writing - and learning (viz. *The Slow Academic*).



### **Top tip:**

Build in a session where students show their scrapbook on a particular topic or theme to others, for inspiration and a discussion on writing.



### 3.6.3 Journalling



Encourage your students to keep a journal whilst they study. This can be akin to the sort of diary that people might keep on a vacation or the more writerly type of journal that journalists might keep. The journal is slightly different to the scrapbook or ‘blogging to learn’ that we also suggest. The idea is to build up and build in a habit of daily writing and reflection (viz. *Five Benefits of Journaling* - Milligram and *Journalling* - Lonerwolf).



**Top tip:**

Build in regular time each week where students get out their journals and reflect on the module or session. Also make space for journal sharing. And... be available if students want to share their journal entries with you.

### 3.6.4 *The revision session*

In revision week, ask students to come up with essay or exam Q for your module or course. Collect the student Q and perhaps collate several together so that they look like the sort of Q that might be set for the coursework or exam. Divide the class into two: one group can be tasked with producing mind-maps on the topics, and the other with producing 'perfect' answers to the Q. The mind-maps and perfect answers can then be merged into revision notes.





### ***3.7 Writing activities to avoid***

While the aim of this section is to highlight ‘best practice’ strategies, we think that it is still useful to point out what does not work and hence should be avoided. In particular, we ask instructors to avoid the following:

### 3.7.1 *Do not: Set ‘right answer’ tasks*

Assignments and Q where there really is only one right answer may be appropriate in some modules and at some stage but they inhibit the exploratory thought that is so necessary at the beginning of a degree programme. If rigidly imposed, students can be so constrained by this sort of assignment that they cease to think for themselves and start to only look for the right answer that the instructor wants (viz. *John Holt: “How Children Fail”*). This is destructive practice, limiting students’ thinking and further increasing the fear of writing.

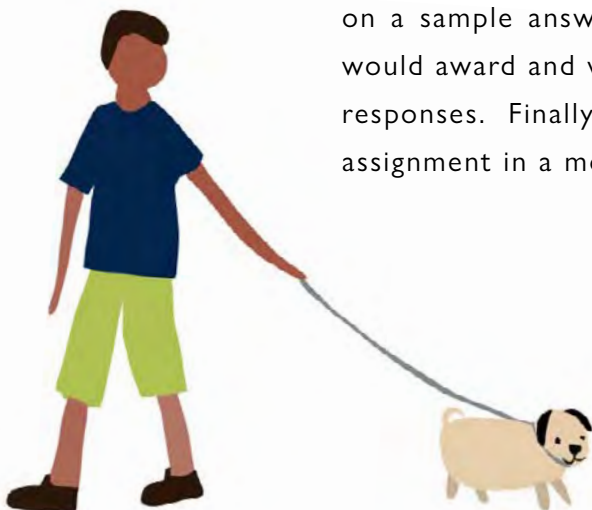
The setting of targeted writing tasks - for example the six-, twenty- and eighty-word ‘essay’ (viz. 3.3.2 Post-its) - can allow students to play with words, experiment with their thinking and reveal through emergence and creativity just how focussed and targeted academic writing can become. These small and focused writing tasks also show the students - in a ‘practical’ way - the iterative nature of particular forms of writing.



## 3.7.2 Do not: Give ‘model answers’

Whilst students want model answers and will argue convincingly for them, this activity can backfire. The model answers provided can act as straitjackets on thinking, suggesting that there is only one right answer to a Q when typically there is more than one solution to a problem. Moreover, it is thought by some that they can lead to academic misconduct because students start copying answers. There is no research evidence to say that model answers are well-used by students. Instead, as illustrated earlier, encourage students to develop their writing, writing style and writing confidence (viz. 13th WDHE conference).

However, it can be useful to ask students to give and receive feedback on a sample assignment in relation to the Q set, the assessment criteria and the LO (viz. 3.6.1 Peer review). Once students have compiled (constructive) feedback to give on a sample answer, ask them what grade they would award and why. Then discuss the different responses. Finally, and, hopefully, unpack the assignment in a more generative manner.



### 3.7.3 *Do not: Ask students to read out their writing in class*

This is, and does feel, scary for many students. There is little evidence to show students benefit from reading out their writing in class. Rather, it can make the student feel open to unnecessary criticism, further fostering his or her fear of writing. There are alternative and more useful ways to discuss writing (viz. 3.6 Discussing writing - reflecting on writing).

However, we have found that once trust has been built up in a class, attitudes to sharing work of any kind can alter radically, which can be beneficial for the whole class. In the classroom that has a positive and encouraging atmosphere, students are often eager to share their work and to engage fully with their peers and the instructor. This shows - again in an embodied way - that learning is social (viz. *Edinyang, 2016*) and that knowledge is socially constructed (Burr, 1995).

### *3.7.4 Do not: Use plagiarism and plagiarism software to threaten students*

While students should not copy ideas and arguments from others without proper acknowledgement of the original source, many students struggle to understand how academic writing 'works' and why it is important to reference sources (the idea of academic honesty and integrity). Thus, it makes little sense to threaten students with academic misconduct and plagiarism penalties before they understand the 'problem' of copying and before they have been initiated into the forms, conventions and practices, that is 'the what, why and how', of successful academic practice.

The more threatened a student feels, the more likely they are to lose confidence and begin to believe that 'copying' is their only route to academic success (or survival).

Rather, build an explicit 'write to learn' ethos in your course, and include space to discuss how the ideas and arguments of others can be utilised and referenced. For example, you could encourage students to actively engage with an article or a book and build an argument around that one source with a clear reference to the original piece. You could provide sessions on referencing, but by starting with real work that students have drafted - covering the 'how' of referencing as part of developmental, discursive feedback. You could also ask students to review a particular piece of work, as if providing constructive feedback to a peer about the use of quotes.

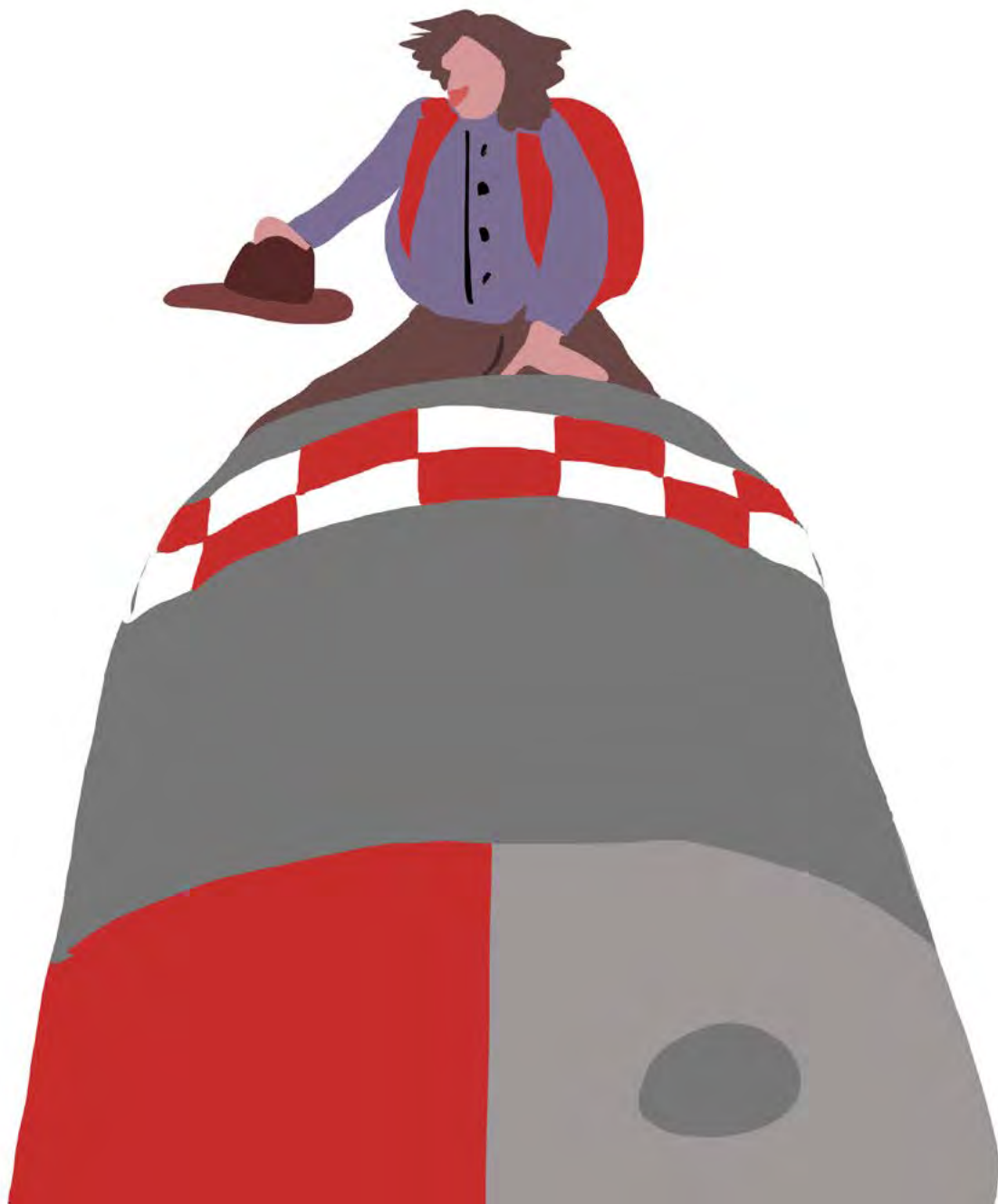


Once students are comfortable with writing and understand the importance of acknowledging sources, they could try a (free or university-owned) Plagiarism Checker to see where they can improve their work. However, it is important to discuss what these tools can and cannot provide. For example, they can detect duplicate content and quotes that are missing a reference but they cannot tell if references have been made correctly (e.g. if they contain the correct page numbers). When using Plagiarism Checkers, there is also the danger of students focusing on the similarity percentage that is often provided rather than the content and style of their writing.





## 4. WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM



## 4.1 Introduction

Most of us, when teaching, feel time pressure and ‘content’ pressure: there is too much to cover and so little time. This has been further challenged by the Covid-19 pandemic, which has forced many instructors to move their teaching online. These pressures tend to force out those reflective moments, those hermeneutic spaces (viz. McNamara, 1994) where students can make sense of their learning, and where they can see the connections between different topics and the writing they will have to do for their modules or course. Although it may feel counterintuitive and wasteful in the face of all of this pressure, we urge you to make space and time in your teaching sessions for some of the writing and write-to-learn activities in this chapter. This is a valuable substantial change to the curriculum, and students’ understanding and deep learning will improve in the process. Engagement in these activities will foster mastery of material, encourage real ‘active’ learning, and produce better, ‘owned’ writing that has something to say.

The following sections offer a range of longer and more structured writing activities to use in your teaching sessions as well as writing activities that students can complete in their own time as self-study tasks. There are also models for writing workshops and a suggestion for developing a write-to-learn curriculum for writing across and beyond the academic year.



## 4.2 A movement-based workshop

Starting a writing session with movement is a great way to unblock or release thoughts; for some, being required to move and make noises is so surprising that they find themselves writing more freely almost by accident. The movement-based activity described (viz. 'How to') launched the Writing Workshop that led to this Guide and everybody who participated fed back that their perceptions had changed. It helped that we really believed in the activity and in our participants.



Adapted from an idea by John Hilsdon, Plymouth University (*Writing - Take5*).

### **Variation:**

Use in subsequent weeks of the module - varying the subsequent writing time and task. Adapt further by following with a 10-minute free write on the assessment task or Q.



### **Top Tip:**

Do this early in a module or course before students have the time to think this an impossible thing to do.

**How to:**

'Caller' calls out the following instructions:

- All stand in a circle.
- Breathe together: in through nose and out through mouth in time with the leader for about 30 secs.
- Shake arms.
- Shake legs.
- Shake head.
- Relax all muscles and shake whole body.
- All say 'brrrrr' (as if it's cold!) and make the lips vibrate! If they won't, put a finger lightly on each cheek and try again.
- Make the 'brrrrr' go all the way up to the highest note you can produce then all the way down to the lowest note.
- Repeat!
- All 'sing' the sound 'ng' like in the 'dong' of a bell – (leader leads with the note to sing this together).
- Repeat - with different notes - following the leader.
- All say 'blah blah blah' and start to wander around the room in any direction saying this continually – try different notes and changing the 'tune' whilst still saying 'blah blah blah'!
- All sit and close eyes.
- Have one minute of silence with eyes closed.
- Take pen/paper and 'free write' whatever comes to mind for three minutes.

**Extension:**

Also, use movement throughout the writing process. Make students 'move' and stretch, including when writing online (viz. *Stretch goal added - Tactile Academia*).

## 4.3 Overcoming writing blocks workshop

Set up a session, circa one-and-a-half hours long, where students actively engage with writing. Ask students to have two sheets of paper in front of them, one for writing and one for writing why they are not writing. Reassure the students that their writing will not be assessed or marked.

To 'seed' students' writing, put up a relevant Q (a real assignment Q works best, as it constructs a much more authentic activity) and ask them to write without stopping for ten minutes on the Q, and to write the reason when they have stopped (for they will) on the second sheet.



After ten minutes structure three reflections:

- What was your reaction to that process?
- Why did you stop writing?
- What can you take from this process into your other academic writing?



The activity can be used as an introduction to writing but also to get students to think about a specific task. It helps students to overcome writing blocks - and shows them that they have something to say (even if it is only the reasons as to why they cannot answer a particular Q).



**Top Tip:**

Use these additional unblocking/free writing exercises to 'seed' writing:

- Choose a postcard - sight unseen - from a pack - turn over – see picture – write.
- Choose an object from a sack – write.
- Have a piece of paper in front of you – focus on something you can see, hear, feel, smell – write.
- Use this free write tool: *Freewrite*.
- Each student opens the 750-Words app and starts writing: *750 Words*.
- Be inspired by our academic writing pages and resources: *Writing - Study Hub*.
- Find more activities from our Take5 site: *#Take5*.



## 4.4 Using different writing ‘voices’

Students can gain deep knowledge of a topic when they have to switch genres to communicate (viz. English, 2011). One of the reasons students benefit from experimenting with different voices, styles and genres is that it gives them the possibility to experiment with arguments and content and it helps them find their own voice.

For deep thinking about writing, we ask students to turn a chapter or article into a comic book, or a short play, or a digital animation (viz. Burns, Sinfield & Abegglen, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2018d, 2018e).

Also, try to incorporate playful writing and writing activities into your sessions (viz. James & Nerantzi, 2019) as well as creativity per se as a means to understand and communicate (viz. *Creative Academic*).



**Top Tip:**

Experiment with the different writing strategies suggested here: *Creative Writing Exercises for Beginners*.

## 4.5 The ‘write to learn’ year

Make your students aware that you are having a ‘write to learn’ focus across your whole module or course and that they will be writing regularly as a way of learning the material, rather than just as a way of being assessed on the material. When we did this at LondonMet, the student evaluations indicated that they had enjoyed the module more, they had understood more, they had been more creative, and they finally understood the point of academic reading (viz. Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2019). The module grades revealed that those who attended the seminars and workshops with embedded writing obtained the best grades they had ever received. Changing attitudes and approaches to writing was a ‘game changer’ for both the students and us.



### **Top tip:**

Build in short writing spaces in every session. For example:

- After reading a short article in class, ask students to write for ten minutes summarising the main arguments.
- Ask students to sum up the main arguments in your lecture or in the seminar itself as text, bullet points or a drawing/sketch.
- Ask students to write a short paragraph that could be used in their final assignment and that uses material from the reading with which they have just engaged.
- If using charts and illustrations show the students the visuals again and ask them to write on your topic, referring to the information in those visuals.
- Ask students to write about a key concept in your subject as if they are explaining it to their nephew or their auntie.
- Explore QMUL thinking-writing site for further tips: *Thinking Writing*.

## 4.6 Peer review and/or shut-up and write

Before a hand-in date for a summative assessment, ask students to bring in draft work for feedback. In the session, divide the room into two; all of the students who have brought in writing congregate in one half of the room while the others must congregate in the other.

With work - Peer Review: Students with work are paired up and have to give thoughtful feedback on each other's work in line with the Q itself, the relevant LO of the module and/or the assignment criteria.

Without work - Shut-up and Write: Students who come in without any work have to sit and start drafting their assignment, there and then, in class. You could ask them to free write their essay or gather their initial thoughts as a collage. They could also produce a brainstorm (3.2.1) or mind-map (3.2.3).



### **Top tip:**

It helps if this session can be double-staffed so that one tutor can keep an eye on the peer reviewers - and the another on the 'shut-up and writers' to make sure that they do get on with the task - and profit from the time and space offered.

## 4.7 *Putting a small writing programme together*

If you are brave, you might pull together several of our suggested activities to scaffold a specific piece of writing. This format could be built into any module with a written assignment. It would also work well in a Higher Education Orientation module, where academic development is a core focus and/or where one of the outcomes is to raise students' awareness of the forms and processes of academic writing.

For example, you could start discussing assessment (the 'what, why and how' of university assessment practices) as well as the meaning and purpose of assignments and feedback more generally. The aim of this would be to help students better understand and engage with university assessment and hopefully to see how assignments are designed to progress and deepen their learning. This will help them to take control of their writing and writing practices - and their learning per se - and enjoy writing.

This could be followed by actual writing or pre-writing activities. You could also make use of creative and playful writing, different genres and online writing. The activities in the next sections can be undertaken separately, even in different modules, or they can be run together to form a coherent whole in one particular module over the year.





## 4.7.1 Reflective writing in action

Ask your students to reflect on their first weeks at university, all of the pluses and minuses and all of the contradictory emotions, successes, setbacks, surprises, and then make a collage (viz. 3.3.1 Collage).

### **Prompts:**

- What have been their highs and lows?
- What do they feel about being a student?
- What did they feel when they first arrived?
- How has university been exactly as they expected?
- How has it surprised, unsettled or delighted them?
- What do they think they will have to do to get the most from university overall?



Then they write: to first 'describe' their collage and then to 'analyse' their collage: What is it saying back to them about their first few weeks at uni?

In pairs they review the writing (self- and peer assessment):

- Discuss where it is powerful and effective writing.
- Discuss their two pieces of writing in a comparison: what are the meanings of/in/conveyed by the two pieces? How/where could the 'impact' or 'power' or argumentation be improved?
- Discuss what sort of introduction/conclusion might be written to give it a more impactful shape.
- Discuss whether the two pieces could be combined into one, and how.

Plenary: What have we discovered about (academic) 'writing-as-a-process' over the course of this 'writing-to-learn practice' (formative writing and feedback)?



**Top Tip:**

As a reflection point, ask students to reflect on that activity. How did it surprise them? How useful was it? And get them to post their reflections on the VLE.

## 4.7.2 *Artful and slow writing*

Follow up the first writing session with one that makes explicit use of creative and playful practices. We suggest that students find a piece of art or a poem or a song that speaks to them about their subject (for inspiration check this out: *5 Responses to Ticky-tacky Feedback*) and:

- Be with it for one-hour with no distractions. Make notes, doodle or sketch, but no phones, chats or Google.
- Write exactly 300-words on that piece of art, in relation to studying that subject at university.
- Share with a partner or with the class.
- Reflect on the process, the writing and the content.

## 4.7.3 *Writing workshop*

Following these introductory writing activities, inform the class that you now want them to write a 500-word piece reflecting on their experiences by synthesising the writing that they have already undertaken. Set a time limit for writing the 500-words to be developed from the collage reflection (4.7.1) and the artful and slow writing (4.7.2). Once that time has elapsed, make class time to develop thinking about writing further and develop the writing:

As a class:

- Reflect on the emotional aspect of engaging in those three writing activities.
- Reflect on the barriers to the writing processes as well as the opportunities created.
- What did you do to overcome those barriers?
- What lessons can be learned about writing?
- (Hopefully the class will come up with some responses along the lines of free writing is good, starting writing is essential, or if you cannot think about what to write, prompt yourself with a collage ...)
- Develop tips for the production of successful academic writing.



Optional extra: Individually:

- Review the 500-word piece of reflective writing that you have now undertaken and write or edit it into a more formal piece of writing reflecting on your experiences as a student ('My growth and development as an active learner').
- Reflect on the revision you have done to turn the 500-word piece of writing into a new piece of writing.
- Reflect on how good the new piece of writing is and how it has grown and developed. Think about options to further develop the piece, making use of some of the writing techniques you know or have got to know.
- Try producing something more multimodal (viz. 3.4.5 Genre and re-genre): an animation or a short video, a poster, or a blog.

## 4.7.4 Peer review and ‘shut-up and write’ workshop

Now, ‘tackle’ assignment tasks ‘head on’ (viz. 3.6.1 Peer review and 4.6 Peer review and/or shut-up and write):

Discuss ‘good’ writing/review practice and then split the class:

Peer review group: all those who have already engaged with the assignment set for the module and have produced a first tentative draft in one part of the room to form the peer review group. Require students to get into pairs to peer review their writing/artefact against the assignment criteria.

‘Shut-up and write’ group: All those that have not yet produced very much writing congregate in another part of the room. This latter group must literally now ‘shut-up and write’ for a set period of time. (Refinement: write for twenty minutes - discuss in pairs for ten - write for another twenty...)

At the end of the allotted time have a quick whole class review. Make sure that everybody has benefitted from the session. Refer to resources, including other/further study support sessions for your course/at your institution.



## 4.7.5 *Multimodal exhibition*

Either create a formal exhibition time and space for the artefacts and pieces of writing produced during the writing programme or develop new artefacts for a meta-reflection on the whole programme - and writing process - to celebrate students' achievements (viz. Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2016a).

### **How to:**

- Students gather artefacts and pieces of writing produced during the writing programme and select the ones they would like to showcase. They need to think about how to present those items and may alter them for the display (or create new ones).
- Students plan the exhibition as a class and think about who they would like to invite and how.
- Students set up the exhibition, showcasing their multimodal artefacts. Invited students and staff members view and comment on them and celebrate.

### **Extension:**

Reflective prompts for further artefacts and pieces of writing: Individually, in pairs or in small groups, reflect on this whole process: what has been the point of the last few weeks? What has been gained, individually and collectively? What can be taken forward to enable successful academic writing and learning?



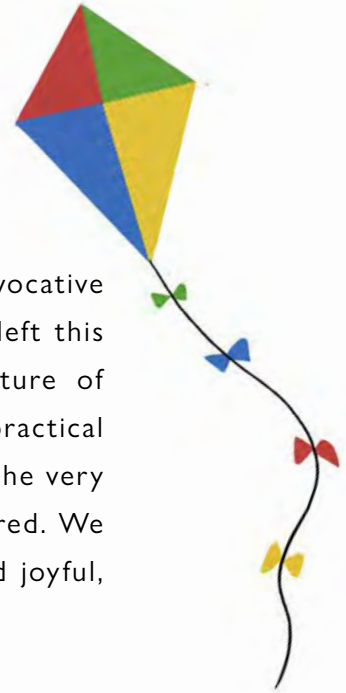




# 5. WHY DO LECTURERS HAVE TO ENGAGE WITH ACADEMIC WRITING?

## 5.1 Introduction


What is it that makes academic writing such a provocative and contested issue in Higher Education? We have left this reflection on attitudes towards and upon the nature of academic writing to the end of this Guide for a practical reason. We did not want this to act as a barrier to the very embodied and impactful activities that we have covered. We wanted first to show that writing can be playful and joyful, and that assignment modes can be various.





Indeed, we attempt to show that writing itself is multimodal and can be diverse and that all multimodal practices can have value if they are sufficiently challenging and engaging. Moreover, the ‘threshold concepts’ of academic writing (viz. 5.2), are as applicable to any assessment mode by which we want to prompt (active) student learning as they are to formal academic essays. By writing about writing at the same time as writing on the possibilities of alternative, multimodal genres, we want to demonstrate that academic writing is not the only medium through which we promote engagement; nor is it the only genre or mode by which we can assess students’ learning.


## 5.1.1 *But writing can feel different*

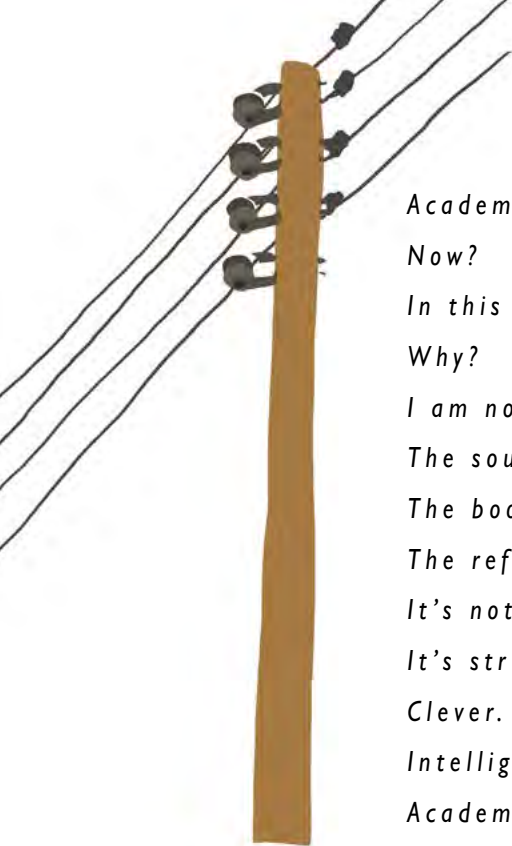
At the same time attitudes to students and to writing - the often subliminal lenses through which we view both - can have a significant impact on the way we teach writing and support writing development. Here is what academics participating in our Writing Workshop at the LondonMet Learning and Teaching conference had to say about academic writing:

 Academic writing can be very daunting for students when they first approach it, partly due to misconceptions about what it actually is, and also because they have little experience of what it entails. Practice with academic writing is therefore a key.


 ...it is about research - about establishing and discussing debates on a subject of choice. It is about your own voice and personality influencing your style - and your assessment of what needs to be discussed in the subject area. It should include analysis - but also facilitate discovery and give curiosity and inspiration - to find out about something and trying to come to a position. It is answering a question and presenting an argument - it is about discovery of the self in doing so.


 The process of academic writing is the ability to express oneself using a range of material, sources and skills ... to support a topic of interest, to voice their opinions, yes, but must be embedded in academic language and knowledge based on research.


 Academic writing should be fun, exciting, enjoyable and meaningful. It can be empowering; enhancing skills in the learning environment and in general life. Academic writing can be precise, clear and educational.



*Academic writing.  
Now?  
In this moment?  
Why?  
I am not ready.  
The sources!  
The books!  
The references!  
It's not spontaneous.  
It's structured - thought-through.  
Clever.  
Intelligent.  
Academic.*

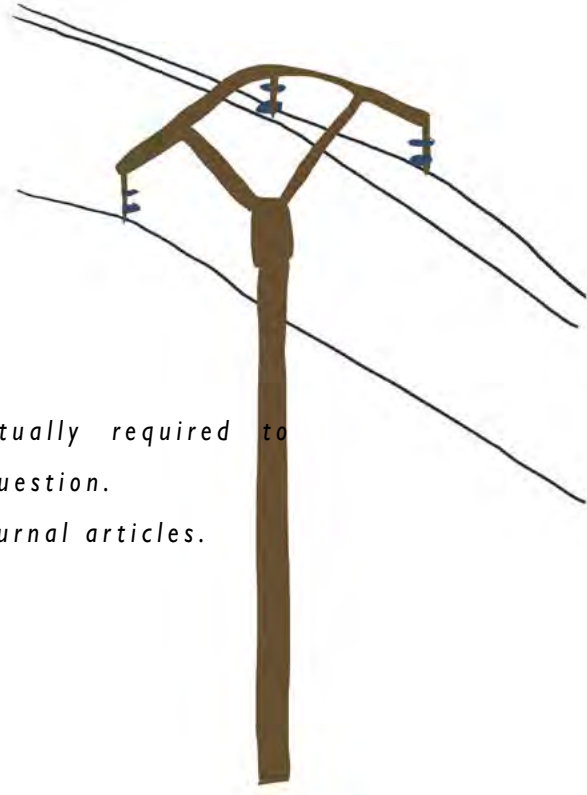
 Students either grasp it immediately or gradually become accustomed to it. The latter is the more common experience for students and the reasons for this vary. Nevertheless the common ones are: getting used to the standard of writing, not having adequate resources, not dealing with the task at hand and lack of self-belief.

 Academic writing can be hard. My experience is that to write well you must be focussed and very clear as to the core of what you want to say. Once you are, you can build your arguments outwards.

 I used to teach academic writing to EAP students in Scotland but it was just translation because they already understood most of the concepts and just required the correct words. Teaching undergrads [in England], I've met with the realisation that many students are incapable of writing arguments or making clear connections between cause and effect and that their writing skill is much worse than that of foreign students.



Academic writing is, in my opinion, one of the most important skills we develop in our students. It is a skill which they can use in any occupation, sector or country in which they work. This is particularly important in today's context where careers are increasingly boundaryless. That is to say, that students may have diverse career trajectories so whilst I teach them HRM as a subject, they might not work in this field all their working lives.



*Grammar.*  
*Structure.*  
*Layout.*  
*What is actually required to answer the question.*  
*Books and journal articles.*  
*The essay.*  
*The end.*



Academic writing is not a given or a natural accomplishment, it probably isn't a talent. It is lodged within a set of social positions that facilitate certain ends that include entry and belonging to a community of practice. It can be taught. It becomes an important relationship to other forms of literacy and lives with graduates long after we've forgotten everything else we have learned. If you want to feel safe when working up a ladder, climb higher than you want to work and then descend two rungs. You'll feel safer. I'm not sure I see it hierarchically, but working at a limit builds strength to work within that limit.



The quotes show that academics themselves view and tackle writing very differently. They use different styles, voices and approaches. They also interpret their students' skills and approaches differently and, thus, they 'teach' it differently. It is something that is 'hard' to do and understand especially when making an initial transition into Higher Education.

This demonstrates that academic writing is closely intertwined with the persona. Writing development is part of learning the subject; it is a part of co-constructing knowledge; it is an essential part of teaching students how to learn as well as what to learn; it is an essential part of classroom practice. If we want to facilitate active and significant learning, we need to build in opportunities for students to learn to write by writing to learn, that is, by engaging in authentic and meaningful writing processes.

The collaborative, discursive and interactive writing activities suggested in this Guide are designed to develop thinking, dialogue and 'real' writing in action. The focus is not on 'right answers' or spelling, punctuation and grammar in the first instance, but rather on foregrounding emergence, development and process. This is writing as learning and for learning and evidence suggests that making space for activities like these demystify academia, build epistemic efficacy and develop real academic writing that is owned by the students (viz. Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2017).

## 5.2 *The threshold concepts of academic writing*

Many of the instructors' comments (viz. 5.1.1) upon academic writing made in our writing workshop reveal their implicit notions of the threshold concepts of academic writing. There is a focus on joining an academic community and of how slow and emergent, fraught and disempowering that might be. Surprisingly, there is also much consideration of the personal aspects of this writing, and of the joy of discovery. The latter, perhaps not evident to students from their particular disempowered points of view, often need to be teased out. We found that Molinari (2017) helps us focus on the ontological and epistemological functions of writing that speak to all of the aspects of academic writing mentioned spontaneously by our workshop participants. Her argument is that there are 37 possible threshold concepts of academic writing with the key ones being:

- It is a social and rhetorical activity
  - involving knowledge-making;
- It speaks to situations through recognisable forms, representing the world, events, ideas and feelings whilst being open to interpretation;
- It enacts and creates identities and ideologies;
- It is not an end in itself; and
- All writers have more to learn.



This suggests that successful academic writing tasks are the ones that are challenging (Gossferich, 2016), and provoke curiosity and social activity, and/or that reveal and initiate students into the epistemic cultures of their discipline. This challenge and invitation is both apprehended and appreciated by students and, when appropriately supported, it spurs them to engage and be the best they can.

It is important to share with students that all writing is developmental and all of us who write - instructors and students - have more to learn. This acceptance in and of itself might help shift academics' focus away from perceptions of deficit students and more onto what we can do to develop students' writing. It can help students realise that writing is and should be an iterative process; they are not 'failures' because their writing develops (this is seriously counter-intuitive for academics; it is hard for us to see just how wedded students are to the notion that one-draft writing is good writing). One way to do this is to build in regular writing time into our seminars and workshops, so that students experience for themselves that writing is a thinking process:



*"I call this process a loop because it takes you on an elliptical orbiting voyage. For the first half, the voyage out, you do pieces of almost-freewriting during which you allow yourself to curve out into space - allow yourself, that is, to ignore or even forget exactly what your topic is. For the second half, the voyage home, you bend your efforts back into the gravitational field of your original topic as you select, organize, and revise parts of what you produced during the voyage out" (Elbow, 1998, p. 60).*

## 5.3 Diversifying writing - and multimodal assessments

Writing is and always has been something with more energy and potential than the formal academic essay. Writing is marking, scratching, tearing and drawing as well as what we would acknowledge to be writing; it is and always has been multimodal:

*Etymology of to write: From Middle English writen, from Old English wītan (“to incise, engrave, write, draw, bestow by writing”), from Proto-Germanic \*wītaną (“to carve, write”), from Proto-Indo-European \*wrey- (“to rip, tear”). Cognate with West Frisian write (“to wear by rubbing, rip, tear”), Dutch wrijten (“to argue, quarrel”), Low German wrieten, rieten (“to tear, split”), Norwegian rita (“to sketch vaguely, carve, write”), Swedish rita (“to draw, design, delineate, model”), Icelandic rita (“to cut, scratch, write”), German ritzen (“to carve, scratch”). See also rit and rat (Write - Wiktionary and cited in Molinari, 2017).*







Molinari (2017), in her exploration of the threshold concepts of academic writing, harnesses the historically multimodal nature of writing to also make useful arguments for developing more multimodal assessments - video essays, blogs, animations and more. Multimodal assessments may never entirely replace the essay, but could occasionally de-centre its dominance (Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2016b). This is not a fad, but a praxis designed to capture the dynamism of academic writing itself. Moreover, arguably more multimodal tasks offer fairer assessment opportunities for all of our students, as they allow different sorts of engagement with a topic or task (viz. *Multimodality and fairness in #acwri - Academic Emergence*).

Multimodal assessments that we have found provocative and productive can be found in *Developing a Digital Student - Take5* - and there are a host of further suggestions here: *Welcome to ds106* and here: *ds106 Assignments*. In one of our modules we have set students the task of being able to choose what to submit for their final coursework (Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2016b) - with great outcomes - and results.



## 5.4 Allowing and fostering alternative voices - for study success

Whether writing an essay or producing an animation, the student is both curating and communicating; engaged in selecting, revising, shaping and editing information. Ideally this should be in ways that they feel stimulated by. When we have asked students to 'Develop a Digital Me' or to represent their findings from exploring the learning spaces of our university, not as a poster presentation, but as poetry, knitting, an animation, or a video or comic book, rather than being instantly diminished by criticisms of their spelling, punctuation and grammar, they have felt excited and valued. The production of these creative artefacts has generated real pride. The process(es), once mastered, have developed self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982) - leading to confident and articulate students. As one of our first year students said:

*"Today was such an amazing day as we all worked together to produce a poster exhibition based on our DigitalMe projects. My poster was created as a collage; I cut out pieces from magazines and newspapers. The words and phrases I used meant a lot to me and took me a few days to put together. While I was putting my poster together I couldn't help but reflect on how it made me feel as an individual, a student, a parent and a person in society. I had doubts about preparing the DigitalMe project but now I had the ability to prepare a poster about it, it was a great feeling. This was the first time any person or institute really cared about who I was and how I felt before starting University" (Week 12 DigitalMe Poster - pinarniyazi).*





## 6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this Guide is to help academics discover fresh energy when supporting students with their writing. We wanted to reveal in practical, real and creative ways that writing is a thinking process and that we as instructors also benefit when we create spaces for generative and exploratory writing that enable our students to develop as confident academic writers and confident academics.

Students will flourish if academics set meaningful and valuable writing tasks, as well as other more multimodal forms of assessment. Rather than ‘dumbing down’ we need to ‘scale up’ our challenge levels, whilst ensuring that students are appropriately scaffolded, supported and developed on their route to mastery. We need to harness the fact that students are provoked by their curiosity, by the opportunity to have their say and/or by their perception of the value of the task. They know the difference between being invited into their epistemic community/ies and being asked to ‘regurgitate’ their learning. The onus is on us to set those challenging, provocative tasks.

In this Guide we have drawn on our extensive work with widening-participation students, our work with instructors and our engagement with the literature from the Writing and Learning Development communities, to highlight that writing really is more than a skill or set of skills to master.

We need to move beyond a focus on the mechanics of writing, a preoccupation with spelling, punctuation and grammar (important as these are for final draft writing), to develop a love of writing and to initiate students into their epistemic communities.



We suggest that students need help not just to overcome their fear of writing, but also to positively discover the pleasure of exploratory writing. They need to discover in practice that writing is a learning process that gives them a voice, a voice that places them powerfully within their own learning. They also need to experience for themselves and in embodied ways that formal writing does improve with practise.

We urge you to run writing workshops/weeks/years and set up free-write sessions where students experience writing as thinking/learning as opposed to the alienated (and alienating), judged one-draft writing that they tend to engage in.

We can all encourage students to take ownership of their learning through a variety of active learning modes and diverse writing and meaning-making activities. And we can develop writing in a variety of ways: by scaffolding reading; by encouraging blogging to learn; by setting provocative, open essay questions; and by setting more multimodal tasks, where students seem more naturally to engage in the selection, revision and editing processes that we also want them to engage in with their writing. Writing should not be a trick, something with which we catch students out or judge them as deficient. Academic writing is a process through which to develop and participate.









# 7. RESOURCES

The following online resources and applications (listed in alphabetical order) proved to be useful in our teaching practice and, in particular, in our academic writing sessions and workshops. They are by no means exhaustive but provide a good overview of the materials and tools currently available for positively supporting students with their writing. As the resources and applications are produced and maintained by third party providers, no responsibility is taken for their content. We therefore recommend you visit and assess the links before sharing them with your students.



#101 Creative Ideas - project to share ideas that foster and promote creativity in Higher Education:

<https://101creativeideas.wordpress.com>



750 Words - write regularly and earn points (free trial for 30 days): <http://750words.com>



Academic Phrasebank - excellent site for linking phrases and for academic writing by the University of Manchester, UK:

<http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/>



Academic Writing - site with lots of resources for writing and thinking by LDU/Learn Higher CETL and Write Now, UK:

<http://learning.londonmet.ac.uk/TLTC/connorj/WritingGroups/>



Assessment - reflections on assessment by Phil Race:

<https://phil-race.co.uk/assessment/>



Assessment and Generosity - podcast on the topic:  
<https://hybridpedagogy.org/assessment/>



Becoming Educational - personal blog discussing all aspects of learning, teaching and assessment:  
<https://becomingeducational.wordpress.com/>



Blog-to-learn - blog post on blogging to learn:  
<https://becomingeducational.wordpress.com/2015/09/29/becomingeducational-welcome-to-becoming-an-educationalist/>



Collaborative Writing - viz. Writing the unreadable untext, a piece written by participants in the MOOC Rhizomatic Learning: The community is the curriculum (#rhizo14) facilitated by Dave Cormier: <http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/107186/1/107186.pdf> or <http://hybridpedagogy.org/writing-the-unreadable-untext/>



Comic Book - viz. Nick Sousanis, who has written a comic dissertation (Unflattening) and also produced a guide for comics as thinking: <http://spinweaveandcut.com/unflattening/> and <http://spinweaveandcut.com/comics-as-thinking-15/>



Cornell Notes - to help organise notes and thoughts:  
<http://coe.jmu.edu/learningtoolbox/cornellnotes.html>



Creative Academic - anything to do with creativity, including access to free online magazine exploring the many dimensions of creativity:  
<https://www.creativeacademic.uk>



Creative Writing - tips for beginners: <https://study.com/academy/popular/creative-writing-exercises-for-beginners.html>



Dance your PhD - yearly contest asking participants to dance their doctorate: <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2016/10/and-winner-year-s-dance-your-phd-contest> and <http://gonzolabs.org/dance/>



Draw-to-learn - blog post reflecting on the idea of draw to learn: <https://becomingeducational.wordpress.com/2014/12/02/becomingeducational-w9-blog-research-and-draw-to-learn/>



Digital Literacies - ways of fostering students digital skills  
<http://learning.londonmet.ac.uk/take5/digital.html>



Failure - see John Holt: <https://www.hachettebookgroup.com/titles/john-holt/how-children-fail/9780201484021/> - and a book review by Kevin C. Costley:  
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED495278.pdf>



Feedback - rethinking assessment and giving feedback:  
<http://www.nomadwarmachine.co.uk/2017/12/02/ticky-tacky-feedback/>



Free Write Tool - simply write:  
<http://learning.londonmet.ac.uk/TLTC/freewrite/FWT.html>



Google Docs - write, edit and collaborate online: <https://www.google.com/docs/about/> - to access and use Google Docs you will need a Google account: <https://www.google.com/gmail/>



Google Jamboard - a simple, free online board that allows writing notes and posting pictures, individually and collectively:  
<https://jamboard.google.com>



Hybrid Pedagogy - a community, a conversation, a collaboration, a school, and a journal - discussing critical digital pedagogy:  
<https://hybridpedagogy.org>



Inclusivity - a blog post exploring the potential of multimodal assessments: <https://academicemergence.wordpress.com/2016/10/09/multimodality-and-fairness-in-acwri/>



Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education - published by the Association for Learning Development in Higher Education (ALDinHE), and aimed at those interested in all aspects of how learning is facilitated and how it is experienced by students in Higher Education: <https://journal.aldinhe.ac.uk/index.php/jldhe>



Journalling - a blog post exploring the benefits of journalling: <https://blog.milligram.com/benefits-of-journalling/> - and website discussing further benefits of journalling: <https://lonerwolf.com/journalling/>



LTHE Tweetchat - an opportunity to discuss learning and teaching in Higher Education with the wider academic community via tweetchats: <https://twitter.com/lthechat>



Meditation - for writing: [https://youtu.be/hL-FiMY\\_34](https://youtu.be/hL-FiMY_34)



Mind-map - how to create mind-maps: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u5Y4pIsXTV0>



Multimodality - multimodality and fairness: <https://academicemergence.wordpress.com/2016/10/09/multimodality-and-fairness-in-acwri/> - multimodal assessments : <http://assignments.ds106.us/> - and an example of digital and multimodal storytelling: <http://ds106.us/>



Pixton - making comics: <https://www.pixton.com/>



Plagiarism - preventing plagiarism course:

<http://learning.londonmet.ac.uk/TLTC/learnhigher/Plagiarism/>



Poetry - Sam Illingworth as a Conference poet in residence:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z48CTpjzXYM> and <https://thepoetryofscience.scienceblog.com/author/thepoetryofscience/>



Post-its - twenty uses for a post-it note: <http://www.lifehack.org/articles/productivity/advice-for-students-twenty-uses-for-a-post-it-note.html>



Portent's Content Generator - create essay titles using keywords: <https://www.portent.com/tools/title-maker>



Powtoon - creating videos and presentations:

<https://www.powtoon.com/home/>



Reflection - using pictures or objects as aids to reflection by The Slow Academic:

<https://theslowacademic.com/2018/06/06/daily-moments/>



Regenring - a student example of using different genres:

<https://youtu.be/KOW3wq57Q5s>



Ren'Py - using words, images, and sounds to tell interactive stories: <https://www.renpy.org>



Self-efficacy - blog post looking at the role of self-efficacy:

<https://becomingeducational.wordpress.com/2013/10/30/w4-feel-the-fear-education-self-efficacy-and-the-role-of-culture/>



Slow Academic - blog outlining the benefits of slowing down and slowness: <https://theslowacademic.com>



Storybird - visual storytelling: <https://storybird.com/>



Student-Teacher Roles - visit the Upside Down Academy initiatives: <https://ww2.kqed.org/mindshift/2012/04/03/turning-teacher-student-roles-upside-down/>



Study Hub - writing information and resources by London Metropolitan University (UK):  
<http://learning.londonmet.ac.uk/studyhub/writing.html>



Tactile Academia - blog exploring the links between creative and academic practice: <https://tactileacademia.com>



Take5 - staff blog and resources: <https://learning.londonmet.ac.uk/take5/> and <https://lmutake5wordpress.com/>



Ten steps to academic writing - prezi presentation: <http://prezi.com/cbaj9e5kised/copy-of-ten-stages-of-assignment-success/>



Textscrolls - a free resource for teachers, homeschoolers, and education researchers: <http://www.textmapping.org/index.html>



Thinking-writing - QMUL site for further writing tips for academic staff and teachers: <http://www.thinkingwriting.qmul.ac.uk/>



Visual Learning - website supporting the development of visual, spatial and tactile knowledge and skills in any discipline:

<https://blogs.brighton.ac.uk/visuallearning/>



Walking Curriculum - link to a book and journal supporting the idea of a walking curriculum: <http://www.educationthatinspires.ca/walking-curriculum-imaginative-ecological-learning-activities/>



WordNet - large lexical database of English (free but you need to reference the source): <http://wordnet.princeton.edu>



Writing Across the Curriculum - tips for academic staff:

<https://learning.londonmet.ac.uk/take5/writing2.html>



Writing Development in Higher Education Conference - 2010: 13th WDHE conference: <http://literacyinthedigitaluniversity.blogspot.com/2010/07/writing-development-in-higher-education.html>



Writing Resources - for academic staff:

<http://learning.londonmet.ac.uk/take5/writing2.html>



Written Kitten - get a kitten for every 100 words:

<http://writtenkitten.net>



Writtenness - on 'writtenness', geopolitics and the academic and other values and assumptions that surround formal academic writing: <https://academicemergence.wordpress.com/2018/05/24/on-writtenness-its-geopolitics-and-other-academic-values-and-assumptions/>





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Creative Writing Exercises for Beginners: <https://study.com/academy/popular/creative-writing-exercises-for-beginners.html>



Developing a Digital Student - Take5: <https://learning.londonmet.ac.uk/take5/digital.html>



DigitalMe Project 2015: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KOW3wq57Q5s&feature=youtu.be>



ds106 Assignments: <http://assignments.ds106.us>



EGU 18 Artists in Residence:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z48CTpjzXYM>



Five Benefits of Journaling - Milligram: <https://milligram.com/blogs/all/five-benefits-of-journaling-why-take-time-to-write>







Frames of Thought - Humanities Futures:  
<https://humanitiesfutures.org/papers/frames-of-thought/>



Freewrite: <https://learning.londonmet.ac.uk/TLTC/freewrite/FWT.html>



Google Docs - About: <https://www.google.com/docs/about/>

-  Guided Meditation: Centering Yourself:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hL-FiMYY\\_34&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hL-FiMYY_34&feature=youtu.be)
-  How To Mind Map - Tony Buzan:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u5Y4pIsXTV0>
-  Hypothes.is: <https://web.hypothes.is>
-  John Holt: How Children Fail:  
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED495278.pdf>
-  Journalling - Lonerwolf: <https://lonerwolf.com/journaling/>
-  Multimodality and fairness in #acwri - Academic Emergence:  
<https://academicemergence.wordpress.com/2016/10/09/multimodality-and-fairness-in-acwri/>
-  noblechloe: <https://noblechloe.wordpress.com>
-  Pixton: Comic, Storyboard & Graphic Novel Maker:  
<https://www.pixton.com>
-  Place-Based Poetry, Modeling One Revision at a Time: <https://lead.nwp.org/knowledgebase/place-based-poetry-one-step-at-a-time/>
-  Powtoon - Create Videos & Presentations: <https://www.powtoon.com>
-  Storybird - Artful Storytelling: <https://storybird.com>
-  Stretch goal added - Tactile Academia: [https://tactileacademia.com/2020/06/03/stretch-goal-added-integrating-movement-into-online-teaching/?\\_\\_twitter\\_impression=true](https://tactileacademia.com/2020/06/03/stretch-goal-added-integrating-movement-into-online-teaching/?__twitter_impression=true)



Take5: <https://learning.londonmet.ac.uk/take5/index.html>



The Learning Toolbox - Cornell Notes:

<http://coe.jmu.edu/learningtoolbox/cornellnotes.html>



The Slow Academic:

<https://theslowacademic.com/2018/06/06/daily-moments/>



The Unreadable Text - Hybrid Pedagogy:

<https://hybridpedagogy.org/writing-the-unreadable-untext/>



Thinking Writing: <http://www.thinkingwriting.qmul.ac.uk>



Turning Teacher-Student Roles Upside Down - MindShift: <https://www.kqed.org/mindshift/20467/turning-teacher-student-roles-upside-down>



Unflattening - Spin, Weave & Cut:

<http://spinweaveandcut.com/unflattening/>



Walking Curriculum – imaginED: <http://www.educationthatinspires.ca/walking-curriculum-imaginative-ecological-learning-activities/>



WDHE conference: <http://academic-practice.blogspot.com/2016/05/fw-writing-development-in-higher.html>



Week 12 DigitalMe Poster - pinarniyazi:

<https://pinarniyazi.wordpress.com/2015/05/11/week-12/>



Welcome to ds106: <https://ds106.us>



Write - Wiktionary: <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/write>



Writing - Study Hub: <https://learning.londonmet.ac.uk/studyhub/writing.html>



Creative Academic: <https://www.creativeacademic.uk>



Writing - Take5: <https://learning.londonmet.ac.uk/take5/writing2.html>



Writing the Unreadable Untext — University of Glasgow:

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/107186/1/107186.pdf>



5 Responses to Ticky-tacky feedback:

<http://www.nomadwarmachine.co.uk/2017/12/02/ticky-tacky-feedback/>



750 Words: <https://750words.com>



# 9. ACADEMIC STAFF VOICES

## **Jon Tandy**

BSc Natural Sciences Course Leader; Senior Lecturer in Physical Chemistry;  
School of Human Sciences; London Metropolitan University

This Guide provides an insightful overview of key strategies for writing as a tool for academic learning. This is extremely timely, as students within the natural sciences are increasingly daunted by the concept of academic writing, partly due to preconceptions about how and why scientists write (e.g. ‘chemists don’t write essays...’). Consequently, they are often reluctant to fully engage with writing activities/exercises aimed at deepening their understanding and preparing them for future assessments. This Guide empowers tutors by providing useful and accessible strategies to adopt and mould to fit within their own teaching practice and to support students to develop their confidence and skills within academic writing.

I have personally found the recommended peer-led, problem solving within a workshop context highly effective in teaching and revising key elements of a module. This strategy encourages students to verbalise and write down specific scientific concepts/ideas in a group setting, where they develop concisely written, scientific descriptions/explanations. I have also found the suggested pre-writing posters useful during a tutorial exploring different forms of magnetism. As described in the Guide, the use of creative drawings and text on a single sheet allows students to form a more holistic picture of the topic and clarifies thought whilst enabling articulation of key concepts. Additionally, I have adopted the ‘two minute writing’ and ‘free writing’ techniques in a particular area of physical chemistry to encourage the habit of regularly writing to embed learning and highlight some of the obstacles (conscious and unconscious) to writing long pieces (e.g. a research project report).

The subsequent discussion and reflection (also detailed in this Guide) revealed that several students found these tasks challenging but very rewarding, as they demonstrated how their written ideas developed and changed their perception of the difficulties associated with 'starting to write'.

Finally, I have implemented an 'alternative assignment' recommended in the Guide by providing students with a choice of assessment type: traditional essay versus video essay or digital artefact on an area of chemical kinetics or quantum mechanics (with additional guidance provided). This allowed a more creative and personal approach and encouraged students to take ownership of the assessment, resulting in deeper research into the topic and overall higher engagement with the task.

Website: <https://www.londonmet.ac.uk/profiles/staff/jon-tandy/>

### ***Susannah McKee and Marie Stephenson***

Senior Lecturers; Extended Degree; School of Social Professions; London Metropolitan University

We love the book, both its content and beautiful design. And we would jointly say that: We've been enthused by the possibilities of working creatively with these strategies together with our first year and foundation year students (Education/Social Sciences). They have inspired us to develop new modules and revisit existing practices. Students have responded to creative challenges, engaged in participatory practices and produced powerful and high-quality outcomes, which have in turn been interesting and inspiring to read. There are a wealth of ideas in this book that we are excited to continue exploring.

Websites: Susannah McKee <https://www.londonmet.ac.uk/profiles/staff/susannah-mckee/>

Marie Stephenson <https://www.londonmet.ac.uk/profiles/staff/marie-stephenson/>

## **Angharad Lewis**

Head of Visual Communication; Principal Lecturer; School of Art, Architecture and Design; London Metropolitan University

This feels like a much-needed book. It's been put together in a very user-friendly way, and I can immediately see ways that myself and colleagues can apply the techniques it shares in our practice. I have been lucky enough to benefit from the authors' expertise in the area of supporting students' writing and have had the opportunity to apply some of the techniques in my own teaching. As a lecturer working with students in the field of Visual Communication (BA Graphic Design and BA Illustration & Animation) we often find that writing can be intimidating or evoke the response of 'I can't write'. We often have a number of dyslexic learners on our courses, for whom writing presents a different challenge.

Text mapping has been very effective in helping Visual Communication students digest and respond to longer texts. I have used the technique to support an annual cross-disciplinary book design project with my students and English Literature and Creative Writing students. For my students, the visual and physical way of breaking down a text enlivens their engagement with words. It feels closer to their experience and gives them a feeling of confidence, validating the visual response to a text, and underlining that their approach is not inferior, but rather different and of equal value to the purely textual handling of words.

I also use cluster wall, mind mapping, 2-min writing, Cornell notes and online writing/blogging with Visual Communication students. These are largely used to support reflective practice, providing starting points for the students to reflect, which don't involve sitting and staring at a blank sheet or screen. These techniques are valuable in empowering students to feel confident and embed reflection in their learning.

It helps students to feel comfortable talking about their own work and contextualises their practice in an informed way. If the students feel they can master the appropriate language for their discipline, it helps them be more independent, reflective learners and confident graduates.

What a brilliant book and I'm so proud of our student Veronica, who has done the design. She's done an amazing job with the illustrations!

Website: <https://www.londonmet.ac.uk/profiles/staff/angharad-lewis/>

Twitter: @angharadhari

## **Emma Gillaspy**

Senior Lecturer in Digital Learning; School of Nursing; Faculty of Health and Care; University of Central Lancashire

Supporting Student Writing is an excellent book. The authors have done a great job of mixing practical ideas for active learning, with gentle challenges to change practice in developing academic writing. It is beautifully illustrated, and the 'toolkit' style structure allows you to dip in to find an activity that suits your needs at that time. Alternatively, you can read the whole thing to integrate writing exercises across your curricula. I particularly value that the authors have given examples of what not to do, suggesting what to try instead that might work better.

This book has stimulated and challenged my thinking around academic writing, encouraging me to come up with other ideas that would work with my students. Overall, it is an honest, practical and thoughtful book that I would recommend as an essential read for anyone looking to develop the writing skills of others.

Website: [https://www.uclan.ac.uk/staff\\_profiles/emma-gillaspy.php](https://www.uclan.ac.uk/staff_profiles/emma-gillaspy.php)

Twitter: @egillaspy



This Guide promotes writing-to-learn. Academic writing is a contested area that is tricky to navigate and master especially for newcomers. However, this does not need to be the case. This Guide is an invitation to move beyond the 'mechanics' of writing, to make it meaningful, engaging, interactive and fun. If writing is appreciated as developmental - and appropriately supported - it spurs students to write of their 'best' as they write to learn.

The illustrations, bright block colours, white space and shapes are all designed to make the content of the Guide come alive for the reader in a playful way that is designed to facilitate adaptation for their own practice and contexts.



*Creative pedagogies have a huge part to play in offering a different lens; as does the decolonisation of the curricula practices. As educators in positions of power and authority, no matter how 'nice' we are, we still grade their work; it is for us to frame their efforts within a wider social justice platform, giving a voice to all the students in our care, not just the privileged ones.*

**Debbie Holley, Professor of Learning Innovation, Bournemouth University**

*This Guide empowers tutors by providing useful and accessible strategies to adopt and mould to fit within their own teaching practice and to support students to develop their confidence and skills within academic writing.*

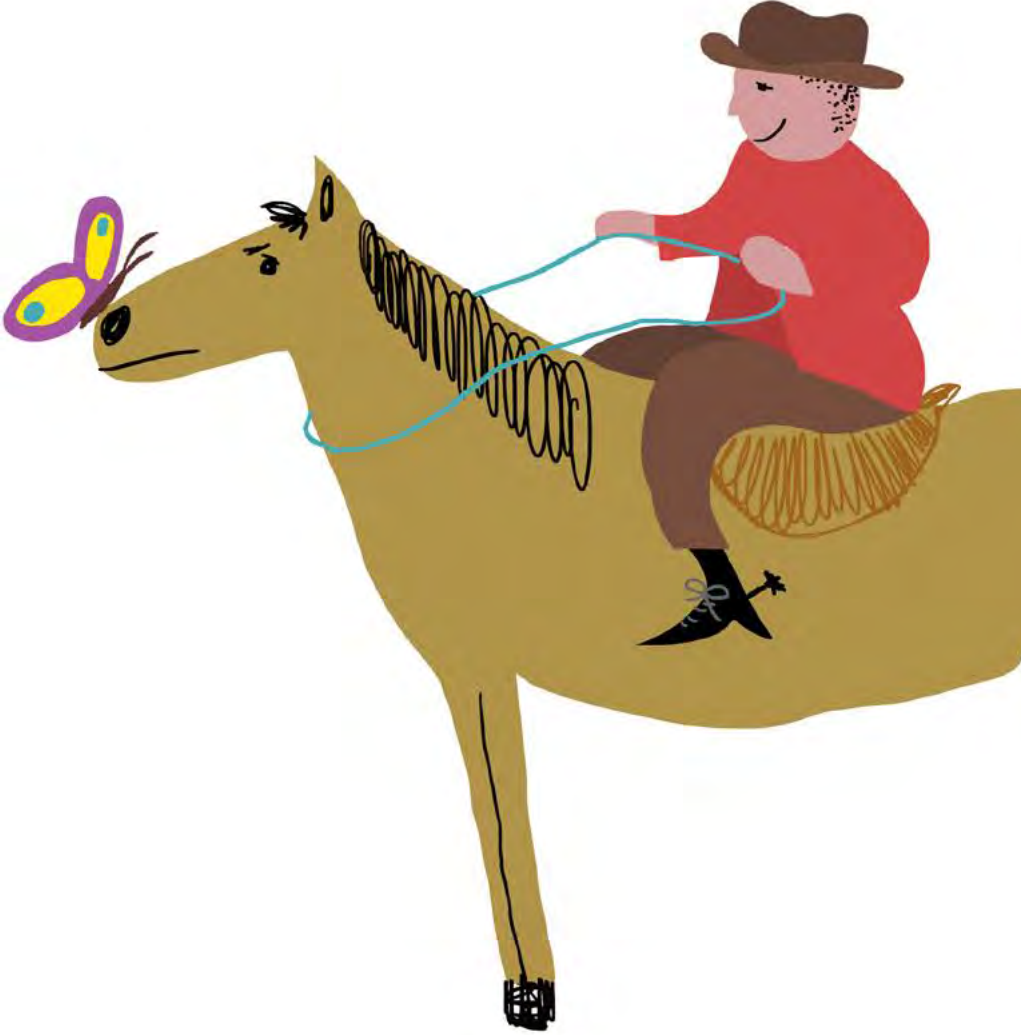
**Jon Tandy, BSc Natural Sciences Course Leader, Senior Lecturer in Physical Chemistry, London Metropolitan University**

*There are a wealth of ideas in this book that we are excited to continue exploring.*

**Susannah McKee and Marie Stephenson, Senior Lecturers, Extended Degree, London Metropolitan University**

*Overall, it is an honest, practical and thoughtful book that I would recommend as an essential read for anyone looking to develop the writing skills of others.*

**Emma Gillaspay, Senior Lecturer in Digital Learning, University of Central Lancashire**



## Chapter 4:

# Diversity and Inclusion in the Design Studio

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Fabian Neuhaus | [fabian.neuhaus@ucalgary.ca](mailto:fabian.neuhaus@ucalgary.ca)

### Field/Discipline:

Design (Architecture, Planning and Landscape Architecture)

### Course level:

Graduate/Masters

### Key words:

Design Studio, Diversity and Inclusion, Indigenous Ways of Knowing, Problem-based Learning, Study Outcomes & Success

## Introduction

The design studio has a long history in design education, both as a method for learning and as a place for learning (Drexler, 1984; Madrazo, 1994; Peters, 1979; Schön, 1985; Van Zanten, 1975; Wingler, 1975). This case study explores how the practice in the design studio links with the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework (La, Dyjur & Bair, 2018) and in particular the UDL principles: Multiple Means of Representation, and Multiple Means of Action and Expression. The UDL framework models the idea of Universal Design (Centre for Excellence in Universal Design, 2020), which is the design of the built environment and of artefacts so they can be

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used by the widest range of people in the widest range of circumstances without the need for adaptation (The Center for Universal Design, 1997). Thus, as a starting point, we assume a close link between the UDL framework, and the teaching and learning in Architecture, Planning and Landscape Architecture. The chapter aims to critically reflect on that assumption with the help of two case study examples: the interdisciplinary advanced design studio course 'Interchange: Cross Culture Approaches to Design' and the urban design studio course 'Kuniya' that was

delivered entirely online because of the Covid-19 pandemic. The chapter argues that design studio education, in person, and even more so online, needs to be diverse so all students can succeed. An inclusive design education is a pre-set for developing Universal Design in professional practice, as a fundamental condition of good design.

## Case Studies:

### The Interdisciplinary and Urban Graduate Design Studio Courses

The discussed design studio courses are taught at the School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape (SAPL): the fall 2019 course 'Interchange: Cross Culture Approaches to Design' and the fall 2020 course 'Kuniya'. Design studio courses, at SAPL and other higher education institutions, provide students with opportunities for experiential learning (Chickering, 1977; Gibbs, 1988; Kolb, 1984, Moon, 2004). Largely student-directed, these are educational settings to practice skills and apply knowledge gained in previous or parallel courses. While the Interchange studio was open to graduate students from Architecture, Planning and Landscape Architecture, the Kuniya studio was aimed at graduate Planning students. The instructors of the interdisciplinary design studio course consisted of Dr. Fabian Neuhaus, Associate Professor Planning and Dr. Graham Livesey, Professor Architecture. The urban design studio course was led by Dr. Fabian



Neuhaus. Hal Eagletail, a traditional Knowledge Keeper from the Tsuut'ina Nation, was appointed by the School as an additional instructor for both courses, leading students' introduction to Indigenous cultures, histories, languages and spiritual beliefs. The two courses had also a research project embedded that explored the application of a design process management tool, the Design Studio Matrix, focusing on students' learning. The fieldwork was led by Sandra Abegglen who was present as a researcher in both studios. This means, the courses were interdisciplinary and cross-cultural in the make-up of its instructor/teaching teams.

In both studios, students were asked to develop an urban design proposal on a specific site on the Tsuut'ina Reserve adjacent to the City of Calgary. As part of this task, they had to engage with Indigenous ways of knowing and living and explore different cultural approaches to design. Through Hal Eagletail's inputs, students got to know 'the land' and its people. In addition, both in person and virtual, Tsuut'ina Elders shared their knowledge with students through storytelling, and traditional Indigenous practices such as praying and smudging. Invited guests, many with an Indigenous background themselves, provided further input and feedback on students' work. The interdisciplinary studio allowed students to go on a guided field trip to the Tsuut'ina Reserve and they visited the sacred mountain of the Tsuut'ina Nation, Moose Mountain. This experience provided students with a better understanding of the project site and its meaning for the Indigenous community. In the urban design studio course, delivered online, students explored the project site through visual means: videos of the project site taken with a 360-degree camera and image stills of relevant locations shared by their instructors.

## Teaching Approach

The Interchange and the Kuniya course took an inquiry- or problem-based learning and teaching approach (Centre for Excellence in Enquiry-Based Learning, 2010; Dewey, 1997; Duch, Groh & Allen,

2001), meaning students were asked to tackle the design brief independently, but guided by the instructors, and through inputs by Elders and professionals. They were expected to actively engage with the tasks set, the inputs provided, and the materials presented. For example, in the Interchange studio, students were asked to make a video about the site in the initial phase of the project. In the Kuniya studio, they were asked to produce a video log as part of their reflection on the design process. Students were also expected to utilize their knowledge and skills from theory courses and previous studios into the development of their project. This was meant for them to integrate substantive theoretical understanding and practical experience into a single course. As such, the studios built on what Donald A. Schön (1983) describes in his work as "reflective practice": by 'doing' students extended their thinking, and by thinking students refined their doing.

While the design briefs asked students to develop a specific proposal, the process that led to this proposal formed a crucial part of their learning. Thus, both studio courses had a strong emphasis on teamwork, asking students to work in groups of various sizes, to jointly develop their projects and to collaborate on tasks for assignments. Online this was facilitated by video conferencing and a shared whiteboard platform. In person this took place in the studio space. This meant, students had to develop a shared and inclusive work ethic, modelled on the UDL framework (Centre for Excellence in Universal Design, 2020). This would include actively listening to each other and developing strategies to communicate ideas. The teaching team modelled this practice by sharing responsibilities and duties. Further, they collaborated with Elders and invited guests - design professionals, developers, planners, and community and city representatives - to provide the best possible learning experience and outcomes for students. Hence, both studio courses could be described as a 'socially active environment of experimentation' (Ioannou, 2018) where students learnt by doing and thinking in a constant exchange with others - a collaborative endeavour.

## Design Studio Education & UDL

The design studio has a long tradition in design education (Schön, 1984): it is the signature pedagogy of the design disciplines (Motley, 2017; Peel, 2011; Schrand & Eliason, 2012; Shulman, 2005). Students work either individually or in teams to develop the design of both small- and large-scale objects, structures and environments. Usually, design educators and design studio instructors in particular develop a comprehensive scenario to which the students respond. In the case of both the fall 2019 design studio course Interchange and the winter 2020 design studio course Kuniya, this meant working on specific sites on the Tsuut'ina Reserve, with the aim to develop urban design proposals that respect and acknowledge traditional knowledge and Indigenous culture.

Uniquely, the studios not only asked students to work on a cross-cultural project but embedded a cross-cultural approach in the studio. This was realized by the appointment of Hal Eagletail as an instructor and the direct collaboration with Tsuut'ina Elders and Indigenous professionals. The intention was to proactively engage with Indigenous ways of knowing and living, and to develop a constructive dialogue across cultures so students could develop proposals that pay respect to the traditional stewards of the land, both past and present. In addition, the design studio format provided learners with various ways to access and engage with the topic, while encouraging them to demonstrate their learning through different forms (proposals, essays, portfolios, exhibitions) and media (sketches, drawings, 3D models, animations, videos). The researcher embedded in the studios provided further opportunities for students to reflect on the design process and their learning in a broader context.

In both the fall 2019 design studio course and the winter 2020 design studio course, there was a particular emphasis on Multiple Means of Representation, and Multiple Means of Action and Expression (CAST, 2020). Students could engage with the course themes and project briefs by talking to people, attending lectures, reading lecture materials and notes, consulting books and articles, going on fieldtrips (physically and virtually), and conducting their own explorations and research. Similarly, they

could demonstrate their learning through various forms and media. For example, most assignments had various components to them, giving them the opportunity to talk about their work, present visuals and objects, and write about their findings and experiences. As such, the design studio pedagogy was 'student focused' meaning students and their learning stood at the center linking it closely to UDL that aims to maximize learning opportunities and learning outcomes for all learners (CAST, 2020)

## Implications and Lessons Learned

As instructors and researchers, we aim to enrich the quality and breadth of learning for our students. We also strive to create learning experiences that meet the demands for future professional practice. Based on our design studio teaching experience, and the formal and informal feedback received from students, colleagues, collaborators and guest reviewers, the fall 2019 and the winter 2020 studios had a significant impact on the learning and the learning experience of students. In particular, students learned a lot about Indigenous culture and cross-cultural approaches to design through the inputs of Hal Eagletail, Tsuut'ina Elders and Indigenous design professionals. They learned to work with others, and to appreciate different views and approaches. At the same time, through their projects, they explored what it means to develop 'inclusive' design proposals.

There are certainly refinements that can be made to the courses, in particular to some of the assignments. For example, the task that asked students to work in groups of ten in the interdisciplinary studio to combine some of their ideas into a larger proposal was too challenging. The group size was simply too large to achieve a meaningful outcome in the timeframe provided. Similarly, some of group work tasks in the planning studio required more time for students to complete because figuring out how to collaborate online was an additional, new challenge. However, overall, the design studio courses were highly successful enabling a reciprocal exchange between students, instructors and the different stakeholders, through which we all have learned. As Donald A. Schön (1983, p.31) states: "Reflective practice is a dialogue of thinking and doing through which I become more skillful."

## Recommendations

Design is described as a process of making decisions based on reflection in and on action (Schön, 1983). It is a complicated process for which everything matters. Thus, design education is challenging, especially with the Covid-19 pandemic when teaching had to be moved online. It appears that studio learning needs to adapt and evolve to align with today's complex and fast-changing world. As Findeli (2001) argues, we need to rethink design education - theoretically, methodologically and ethically - for it to be 'fit' for the 21st Century. In addition, design students need to learn more than to produce 'good' designs and be 'good' designers. They need to be able to make their designs accessible and usable for everybody. This requires "a new paradigm for design studio education" (Wang, 2010), one that allows for a purposeful engagement with topics and issues, together with stakeholders. Thus, what is required in courses is not a third person perspective but a discourse with actual people, a subject that is very much alive and lived.

The learning and teaching approach adopted in the design studio courses Interchange and Kuniya certainly has the potential to act as a formula for other courses on how Indigenous knowledge and traditional ways of doing can find their way into the classroom. The outcomes demonstrate that a cross-cultural approach in both course instruction and course content supports an inclusive practice. It is a setting that all learners can access and participate in meaningfully, modeling the idea of UDL and projecting it through studio practice onto the work produced by students. One could argue that this reverses what was originally the point of departure with UDL that models the idea of Universal Design. In our studios, Universal Design was implied and fostered through UDL practice, challenging the traditional one-size-fits-all model. However, for this approach to be successful, instructors need to actively support and foster collaboration and, especially online, allow enough time for a meaningful exchange.

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**Design students need to learn more than to produce 'good' designs and be 'good' designers. They need to be able to make their designs accessible and usable for everybody.**

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# Issues of gender, 'race' and social class in education

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## 6.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to disentangle some of the many inequality issues in the realms of gender, 'race' and social class in education. The opening discussion sets the scene by using constructivist theory to offer a critique of education and schooling as important sites where social problems and social inequalities are regularly and historically addressed through prescribed inclusion policy. It is against this rationale and premise that the chapter will move on to untie and develop some of the growing patterns of inequality that have characterised schooling in the United Kingdom for many years. Firstly, there will be a section in which gender equity issues in schools are outlined and interrogated (Skelton et al. 2006); this will be followed by a critique of the notion of post-feminist education (Ringrose 2007). Secondly, there will be explorations around issues of 'race' and education, articulated through an analysis of Gillborn and Youdell's (2000) research around the 'rationing of educational opportunity'. Thirdly, the work of Ball (2008) will be used to illustrate some issues around social class and educational opportunity. The chapter ends with an overview of how, although schooling has been characterised by particular gender, 'race' and social class inequalities, it

still remains one of the key sites for attempts of social inclusion to be realised.

## 6.2 Schooling as a site to tackle inequalities?

When discussing and thinking about social problems, we might think about things that have gone wrong with our societies or new trends that threaten the way in which people live together in societal arrangements. In this book there are various chapters suggesting how social problems emerge, how they can be defined and how they have been addressed, and whilst there is a historical and long-standing plethora of social policy attempting to respond to social problems, no social institution is so central to the tackling of social problems as schooling has been and continues to be. This chapter is an attempt to explore some of the main issues of inequality that characterise schooling in the UK, yet it is also important to understand the ways in which schooling as a social institution is utilised to highlight and address any current social problems that a society might have identified.

This chapter, similar to the others in this book, presents arguments as to how social problems are constructed as part of a social fabric which is never static, but rather changes frequently. Some of the reasons for the changes in how social problems are identified and articulated can be said to be impacted by socio-political agendas: that is, whatever social problems we talk about often find their beginnings in political ideology and media/news attention at the time. Nevertheless, what is constant is that the system of schooling, and of education in general, are very often utilised to respond to emerging social problems. Schooling, seen from this constructionist perspective, is a socio-historical amalgam which acts as a site – both physically as a space and intellectually as an ideal – where social problems and their consequences are mitigated. Hence, it is in these environments where governments have decided to implement policies to tackle the most common social problems in society. This is discussed by Smaeyers and Depaepe (2008), who talk about the educationalisation of social problems, which transfers social responsibility to the school. An example of this might be the many days, events, assemblies or weeks dedicated to creating an awareness of road safety, healthy eating and sex education, amongst many other things, or the responsibility schools now have of running breakfast clubs and after-school clubs to help struggling families. Many of these initiatives are included in the day-to-day running of schools to address wider social problems surrounding obesity, teenage pregnancies and poverty, amongst other well-known social problems in the UK.

In the same way schooling bears a lot of the responsibility in addressing inequalities in society, it has also been discussed as being at the centre of the reproduction of social inequalities. Particularly since schools,

from a sociological perspective, are used as a means to socialise pupils (formally and decidedly) into the ways of a society: that is, of course, the desired ways in which a society wants to develop and maintain itself. Giddens and Sutton (2013) discuss how Durkheim viewed education as key for transmitting social and cultural values and also for reproducing a skilled labour force. Giddens and Sutton (2013) also discuss how other theorists, such as Bowles and Gintis, point to how education, instead of levelling or resolving inequalities, might be creating further divisions or reproducing patterns of inequality. For example, black students still win fewer undergraduate places than other applicants with similar qualifications, despite long-standing efforts to support their access to and participation in higher education (Adams 2017). One of the main aims of this chapter is to open up possibilities for thinking about schools as sites that are not only created, run and regulated to tackle social inequalities and social problems but that also have historically inherited inequalities.

Against this understanding of education and schooling as a means to address and foster equality, this chapter will proceed to illustrate and discuss some of the patterns of inequality that nevertheless still exist in modern schools in terms of gender, 'race' and social class. These patterns of inequality will be explained first by dealing with key notions and, secondly, by drawing on classical educational and academic research which focuses on explaining the relational patterns between the particular inequalities and schooling.

### **6.3 Understanding gender and gender differences**

It is important in this section to reflect on a question which underpins many of the debates around gender and schooling. Why do boys and girls tend to behave so differently in society and education as a whole? Where do these differences come from, and how do they become manifested in aspects of schooling? Across different societies, there are patterns of behaviour and expectations around gender which shape the socialisation of boys/men and girls/women. These expectations vary from place to place and from society to society; the important thing is that these notions and invisible rules work to organise and codify the behaviour of people in social situations, such as schools. These codes and notions surrounding boys and girls are not necessarily equal but might, in fact, be disempowering and restrictive. So what are some of the formations around gender that are found in our society?

We tend to think of gender as being explained through biological differences between men and women and that consequent differences in gender and sex behaviours are a result of diverting genetic properties. These ideas correspond to the view of gender as explained through biology and

evolutionary psychology, which justify our gendered behaviours on Darwinist ideas of evolution as the survival of the fittest (Birkhead 2001). However, other educational theorists have put forward ideas which openly challenge evolutionary arguments and psychology's take on gender and argue that this is a simplified and narrow view of how gender is constructed in society.

The social determinist view explains that there are plausible and important social explanations for why women and men are seen as needing to conform to certain types of behaviour in order for them to be categorised as male or female. Following these ideas, 'first-wave' feminist writers have argued how gender differences are far from being natural or innate; they are continued because of unequal treatments and social conventions around gender in society. For instance, Wollstonecraft wrote in the eighteenth century about how the exclusion of women from higher education and other parts of education – for example, particular curriculum subjects such as science and mathematics – resulted in the wider educational exclusion of women. Much later, in the 1970s and 80s, 'second-wave' feminists and activists argued how gender differences and the reinforcement of gendered 'sex-roles' (e.g. women as 'homemakers' and men as 'breadwinners') were learned through interactions with important social institutions such as schooling and the family (Skelton et al. 2006).

Importantly, the view that gender differences happen as a consequence of social forces, conventions and constructions underpins the ideas discussed in this section. Of particular interest to the ideas developed here is the view that, as one of the major social institutions, schooling – as compulsory and socially influential – is crucial for the reproduction of gender roles and gender differences in society. In what follows, we will discuss and illustrate some of the most common gender differences and inequalities that have characterised education in the UK. There will also be important commentary on some of the most influential academic works which have attempted to explore and explain these inequalities.

## *Understanding gender inequalities and schooling*

Before World War II, systems of education in the UK were made up by some fee-paying, state-run and other church- and charity-based provisions which would be considered very 'patchy' in comparison to today's compulsory and free (at least to a certain extent) systems of schooling. Although education became compulsory for both boys and girls and solely state funded after World War II, there were still issues surrounding a gendered curriculum and unshifting gender and sex roles which affected both girls and boys. To this effect, Spencer (2005) explores in her book *Gender, Work and Education in Britain in the 1950s* how, despite positive and overall



inclusionary changes to schooling, which opened up new opportunities in education and employment for girls, there was still a universal belief that women's place was in the home.

Some of these arguments are continued further by the work of David (2015: 163). who, in her analysis of the same historical period, sees education and developments in schooling as the very mechanism through which women were 'returned to the home' after they had gone out in huge numbers to work to help the war effort. This return to the home that David (2015) discusses was carried out through the continuation of a gendered curriculum which still relegated girls to an education that was not as extensive as that of boys and which was based on subjects that developed girls' quiet character and domesticity, such as needlework. The inequalities in the treatment of women were also evident when attempts were made to produce educational policy as there was an overall lack of concern in addressing the gap between boys' and girls' participation in further education. David (2015) discusses how the Crowther Report in 1959 pointed to the existence of a 'wastage of talent' since both boys and girls were not pursuing courses in further education, with 25 percent of boys in further education and only 6 percent of girls; it therefore recommended raising the school-leaving age to 16. Although the Crowther Report highlighted these pressing issues, it failed to provide solutions for the lack of education still faced by many girls and proceeded to provide recommendations for boys' continued engagement in education. The report also stated that, in the case of the education of girls, 'The prospect of courtship and marriage should rightly influence the education of the adolescent girl. . . . [H]er direct interests in dress, personal experience and in problems of human relations should be given a central place in her education' (David 2015: 170). In this way, the school's main educational concern for girls stayed with their preparation as future homemakers, mothers and wives; these ideas were accepted and continued because of the belief that boys and girls were to live very different lives, in turn reinforcing some of the gendered 'sex-roles' discussed earlier. This is an important example which shows how gender inequality in schooling is tightly connected to the ways in which we understand the role of men and women in society, as 'taken for granted' and part of a 'common-sense', which presents unequal educational opportunities for both men and women. These ideas and trends in behaviour around gender are argued to be socially constructed; produced by sets of social relations which occur in all aspects of social life; and, as we have discussed so far, embedded in systems of schooling.

Meighan and Harber (2007: 375), discussing issues of inequality of opportunity in education for boys and girls, point to 'a lack of a well developed comparative perspective of education . . . a systematic comparison with other countries (e.g. Russia, Sweden) would have presented some

disturbing information about women, education and occupations elsewhere' as occupations and further study in applied sciences and other subjects were considerably more populated by women. Meighan and Harber (2007) continue to explain that it was in the 1970s when there was a recognition that sex differences in education as an 'official' problem needed to be investigated. The government announced in 1973 that it planned to ask Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) to conduct an inquiry to determine the extent to which difference in attitudes and school curricula continued to affect girls' and boys' life chances. This request resulted in the HMI's (1975) document titled *Curricular Differences for Boys and Girls*, which

showed the persistence of the familial emphasis in secondary schooling. And there is no further evidence, in policy rhetoric, or research, to suggest that by the end of the decade girls were no longer taught that their adult lives would consist of two activities, one of which would be the care of the home and children.

(David 2015: 184)

All of these developments led to the creation of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, which stipulated that neither boys nor girls should be refused access to any courses solely on grounds of their sex or the appointment of teachers (except in single-sex schools). The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC; now the Equality and Human Rights Commission) made direct and indirect discrimination against women illegal. Although the differences in the curriculum for both boys and girls are not as glaring as they used to be, because the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act made unequal curricula illegal, there are still prevailing gender inequalities. For example, girls still show more negative attitudes towards maths (Gunderson et al. 2012) and hence display less interest in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) fields than boys, and because of this, girls also perform lower in these subjects (Shapiro & Williams 2012).

Whilst the 1970s saw considerable change around gender differences and discrimination on the basis of gender, there are persistent patterns which have continued, such as subject uptake by gender. Francis (2000) discussed in her book *Boys, Girls and Achievement: Addressing the Classroom Issues* how these patterns of inequality could be explained by problematising the dominant norms and behaviours associated to a particular femininity or masculinity. Part of Francis's argument is that within an environment of social change, which has seen the introduction of policies to balance gender inequalities in society, the classroom and its dynamics have been characterised by a continuity of traditional attitudes towards gender. Francis's work examines schooling and the classroom as an environment that

reproduces society's values but also, more critically, as reproducing some of the inequalities that characterise that society.

Similarly, Valerie Walkerdine's (1988) work *The Mastery of Reason: Cognitive Development and the Production of Rationality* presents a complicated review of issues in the classroom. For Walkerdine many of the more insidious inequalities that we find in schools and in the intimacy of the classroom are as a result of stifling and unshifting attitudes to teaching and learning which are gendered and place both boys and girls in disadvantageous positions. Walkerdine looks at specific examples of boys' and girls' perceived lacks in certain subjects and also how certain subjects have become marginalised in the school curriculum. In the case of boys, Walkerdine points to how the unsuccessful paths in languages, which see them historically underperforming in subjects such as English and other modern languages, are normally explained by the suitability of boys for languages, a subject which is more associated with femininity. Similarly, girls' apparent disinterest in mathematics was constructed based on the methods used by girls to learn and perform mathematical calculations, which were seen as non-traditional. This inherent method suggested that there was a 'right method' for learning mathematics which girls struggled to comply with; teachers therefore encouraged girls not to take the higher examinations in this subject. This problem was made worse by how boys were seen to dominate classroom talk and interactions, with teachers not addressing the imbalances between boys' and girls' contributions during classes (Walkerdine 1998).

However, in recent years, there have been several stories in the media landscape which point to how boys are being failed by the educational system, and boys' underachievement has been constructed as problematic and as in direct opposition to the achievements of girls. Some examples of these headlines are 'Boys are being failed by our schools' (2006) and 'Why lack of male teachers could be the reason for boys fail in the classroom' (2012). There have been many critics of this narrative since it places boys and girls in competition with each other in the education plane, and the panic associated with boys' underachievement might suggest that boys outperforming girls is the status quo; thus, the sudden shift is constructed as a threat. This narrative of boys being outperformed by girls is also constructing girls' achievement as detrimental to the boys and also as harmful to the boys. Should we not want everyone in education to perform to the best of their ability, regardless of their gender? Why is female success constructed as harmful and as a threat to male achievement? And why is boys' underachievement placed in direct opposition to girls' achievement?

Ringrose (2007) has addressed how the construction of educational underachievement through gender binaries produces new disadvantages in the world of education. Ringrose's work explores how the 'successful

girl' discourse, co-constructed by 'girl power' cultural and social shifts in the 1990s, has led to 'divisive educational debates and policies where boys' disadvantages/successes are pitted against girls' disadvantage/success' (Ringrose 2007: 471). Ringrose raises questions about the silence in educational policy and public debate that surrounded the many years of educational exclusion and undermining experienced by girls in the UK. As with this chapter, Ringrose's work understands schooling as a crucial environment, productive of cultures and practices which in themselves reflect society's views on gender. Yet schooling is also conceived as a space in which gender binaries should be challenged and called into question. Ringrose's work also suggests that the educational focus on 'successful girls' alienates those girls who fall out of this category and, therefore, become deviant in the world of schooling. Rising numbers of girls' school exclusions might be associated with this phenomenon. More importantly, the focus on girls' and boys' achievements helps us overlook more pressing social issues to do with sexuality and gender in schools: for instance, the unequal access to STEM subjects at higher education by girls and the rise in sexual violence and sexual harassment in schools in recent years, which led to an inquiry into these issues by the Women and Equalities Committee in 2016.

As reviewed in this section, schooling is very often the space in which traditional gender inequalities have been addressed. Historically, evidence of how gender is constructed and understood can be found in key educational policies, as presented by the work of David (2015). These same differences can be traced back to classroom and school practices as explained by Walkerdine (1988). Schooling remains a site in which we both reproduce and challenge gender stereotypes and mandates. However, it is important to develop the criticality necessary to recognise where the debates lie and how to engage with them. Thinking about schooling and education as a site for locating, understanding and tackling social problems is a useful critical perspective to engage with issues of gender and inequalities. Nevertheless, it is important to also examine critically how the very responses from policy and institutions to perceived problems can be damaging, undermining or neglectful of other issues.

## 6.4 'Race'

Besides gender, 'race' is an important factor to consider when speaking about social inequalities. Generally speaking, 'race' is the idea that human beings can be classified into groups based on their physical appearance: their facial features, skin colour or type of hair. As history shows, the categorisation of human beings according to their physical appearance is highly problematic as it led to racist ideas about innate predispositions of different groups, attributing the most desirable features to the white

European race and arranging the other races along a continuum of progressively undesirable characteristics. This led not only to racial discriminations and racial inequalities, some of which exist to this day, but also to eugenics, the troublesome desire to improve the genetic quality of a particular population, which further embedded ideas of the superiority of some human beings to others.

However, historically, 'race' has not always been used as a distinguished feature of how humans are different from each other. Initially, 'race' was used to refer to speakers of a common language and then, later on, to denote continental or national affiliations. This means that the term has not always been used to define humans in terms of perceived physiological differences but to describe and distinguish groups of people according to their place of origin and/or their culture. However, the work of early anthropologists and physiologists – plus historical processes of exploration and conquest, which brought Europeans in contact with groups from different continents – actively promoted the idea of human difference based on appearance and, through that, fostered ideas of inherent racial privilege.

The first to actively challenge this concept of 'race' on empirical grounds was the anthropologist Franz Boas, who argued that 'race' was an invalid designation because human form and behaviour stemmed from the environment and not biological or genetic predisposition. His groundbreaking work was taken up by other (social) scientists and thus:

By the 1970s, it had become clear that (1) most human differences were cultural; (2) what was not cultural was principally polymorphic – that is to say, found in diverse groups of people at different frequencies; (3) what was not cultural or polymorphic was principally clinical – that is to say, gradually variable over geography; and (4) what was left – the component of human diversity that was not cultural, polymorphic, or clinical – was very small.

A consensus consequently developed among anthropologists and geneticists that race as the previous generation had known it – as largely discrete, geographically distinct gene pools – did not exist.

(Marks 1995 cited in Marks 2007: 234)

This means that nowadays most scientists – including social scientists – agree that 'race' is a social construction. This led to the term 'race' being replaced by less ambiguous and emotionally charged terminology, which allows individuals to self-identify as belonging to a particular social group. For example, people might identify as black or white, regardless of their skin colour. Because of this, many refer now to ethnicity, the ethnic classification or affiliation, rather than 'race', when asking people to which socio-cultural group they belong.

## *Racialised worlds: the challenges of schools and schooling*

However, although there is strong agreement amongst social scientists that 'race' is a social construct, and new language is being employed to describe group membership, racialised ideas are still pervading social life with 'real' effects on people's lives and life opportunities. For example, black and ethnic minority graduates with a first degree are more than twice as likely to be unemployed than their white peers, and those in employment earn less than their white counterparts (Trades Union Congress 2016). These closed-down life chances could be referred to as racial discrimination – 'the discrimination, unfair treatment or bias against someone or a group of people on the basis of their race' (HarperCollins 2017) – which often coincides with racist mindsets whereby individuals of one group come to perceive themselves as superior to those of another group. This, in turn, leads to racism and abusive or aggressive behaviour towards members of another 'race' or, as in this case, closed down life chances for those who belong to a particular group.

In this context, institutionalised practices can support racialised ideas; hence, schooling has an important part to play in tackling racism. Educational institutions have long been asked to promote 'race' equality. Over time, various educational policies have been implemented to ensure that schooling promotes equal opportunities for all, in particular in terms of learning outcomes. More recently, initiatives have been promoted to ensure schools adhere to the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, which places a duty on public authorities to have 'due regard' to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and promote good relations between people of different racial groups. Although these (educational) initiatives have good intentions, they often foster the very same issues they are trying to eliminate. This phenomenon is referred to as 'institutionalised racism', a form of racism prevalent in the practice of social and political institutions such as schools.

A study that explicitly looked at the issues of institutionalised racism in schooling was conducted by Gillborn and Youdell's (2000). The study explored how racial inequality is created and sustained in educational settings. Based on their findings, Gillborn and Youdell (2000) put forward the argument that, particularly in a neoliberal context, schools are 'rationing education', meaning they unwittingly deny pupils equal experiences and opportunities. The neoliberal context to which the authors refer involves the many policies and political pressures placed on schools, specifically the rise of competition between schools and the opening up of education as a consumer-led market, which leave schools fighting for a privileged position in publicly available league tables.

Because of the racialised ways that ability is constructed in a neoliberal context, it is black and ethnic minority students who are 'significantly

over-represented in the group of pupils deemed to be without hope' (Gillborn & Youdell 2000: 200). They are implicitly discriminated because of their 'race'. The discrimination comprehends a rationing of the best resources, teaching, experiences and overall school's investment in their educational futures based on the belief that the outcomes of their educational careers will be less favorable than those of others. As asserted by Gillborn and Youdell (2000: 199):

The extraordinary demands of the A-C economy are such that both our case study schools are seeking new ways of identifying suitable cases for treatment – pupils who will show the maximum return (in terms of higher-grade passes) from receipt of additional resources of teacher time and support.

Gillborn and Youdell (2000) point out that this creates a virtuous cycle of disadvantage for this particular group of young people: they receive less support and hence are less likely to achieve, which, in turn, confirms schools' perception that they are less capable; hence, schools provide less support for them. As Gillborn and Youdell (2000) highlight, these institutionalised forms of racism operate through discourses of 'culture' and 'difference' rather than direct action, meaning that institutions such as schools do not actively promote this sort of behaviour but leave the complex mechanism supporting racial inequality unchallenged. Because of this, Gillborn and Youdell (2000) argue that schooling is prevalent in practices of inequality.

This means that, to tackle racial inequality, educational institutions such as schools need to engage more critically with the pervasive and complex forms that racism – and racial inequality – can take. Equally, and probably even more importantly, to avoid institutionalised racism, educational institutions such as schools need to scrutinise the continuous and numerous policy changes more critically to ensure they are not contributing to already-existing elitism. As Gillborn and Youdell's (2000: 222) state:

[T]he wider education system, policy makers, headteachers and teachers are currently remarkably busy remaking and reinforcing inequality. . . (albeit that they are frequently unaware of these particular 'fruits' of their labours). It is time that this level of activity was refocused toward the achievement of social justice.

A prominent yet very sad example of institutionalised racism is the case of Stephen Lawrence. Lawrence, a 18-year-old black British man from Plumstead, Southeast London, was murdered in a racially motivated attack while waiting for a bus on the evening of 22 April 1993. The case became one of

the highest-profile racial killings in UK history because it was suggested during the course of the investigation that the handling of the case by the police and the Crown Prosecution Service was affected by misconceptions of 'race'. A public inquiry held in 1998 concluded that the institutions handling the case, in particular the police, were institutionally racist. One of the ways in which it was suggested the police were institutionally racist was by placing Lawrence's family under surveillance during the investigation, instead of proceeding to investigate suspects. This prompted the amendment of legislation and a transformation of the police service: its recruitment, training, practices and accountability. The name of Stephen Lawrence became a potent symbol and catalyst for change, promoting widespread re-examination of questions of (in)justice, cultural identity and continuing racism in British society.

The concept of institutionalised racism, then, not only gives important insights into people's opportunities and experiences in institutions which appear to have developed and implemented equal opportunities policies, but also offers opportunities for resistance and action. This means that the notion of institutionalised racism allows the much-needed scrutiny of racialised practices at a micro level whilst retaining a contextual understanding of wider socio-economic practices and developments. A particular strength of such an approach to racial inequality, as Preston (2007: 23) points out, is 'that whiteness is treated as a *practice*, not as an identity and white privilege is *institutionally* as well as individually determined'.

Although much has been achieved in terms of racial equality through a critical analysis that goes beyond the individual, there are, as the black British scholar Stuart Hall (1993: 361) famously pointed out a few years ago, further challenges to face when thinking about re-balancing racial inequalities in a globalised world:

'he capacity to live with difference is, in my view, the coming question of the twenty-first century – something which affects us all, including those involved in education and schools/schooling.

This means that the discussion about the role and responsibility of schooling in regards to 'race' need to be continued to make sure educational institutions promote 'true' equality in a multicultural world. Steps Towards Racial Equality, a recent report on racial equality in the UK, the government's race disparity audit (viz. [www.gov.uk/government/publications/race-disparity-audit](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/race-disparity-audit)) shows that there are still pressing issues that need to be addressed. For example, the report highlights that black Caribbean pupils still fall behind their peers, although pupils in the black ethnic group made more progress overall than the national average. This means



that pupils of ethnic minority backgrounds are still disadvantaged compared to those from other backgrounds, and this not just in education but also in areas of health, employment and the criminal justice system. Because of this, some – for example, the Equality and Human Rights Commission, Great Britain’s national equality body – call for a comprehensive and coherent race equality strategy to foster equal opportunities for all (viz. [www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/healing-divided-britain-need-comprehensive-race-equality-strategy](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/healing-divided-britain-need-comprehensive-race-equality-strategy)).

In this context, it is argued that educational institutions such as schools can (and should) do much more than closing the gap in educational achievement but provide a much better and fairer educational experience for all. It seems, therefore, important not to dismiss issues of ‘race’ or, as pointed out by Gulson et al. (2016), let ‘race’ slip to the periphery of education policy. ‘Race’, as many research studies show, still matters. It is therefore timely, as Gillborn (2016b) suggests, to ask ‘policy in whose interest?’ There is some useful work done by critical race theory (CRT), in particular in relation to white supremacy.

White supremacy is the unnamed political system that has made the modern world what it is today. . . . the most important political system of recent global history – the system of domination by which white people have historically ruled over and, in certain important ways, continue to rule over nonwhite people – is not seen as a political system at all. It is just taken for granted; it is the background against which other systems, which we are to see as political, are highlighted.

(Mills 1997: 1–2)

Considering recent political and educational developments, it seems important to continue this work and not dismiss schools as ‘neutral’ territory or to glorify them as a site where social equality can easily be achieved. There are dangerous racial myths which are sustained and renewed through social arrangements, processes, behaviour and discourse. Schools and the whole education system can challenge these myths by carefully addressing the specific rights and needs of all pupils, by advocating pluralism and the riches of multiculturalism and also by fighting institutional racism as well as racist frameworks of reference to ensure they are not contributing to the very same problem they are trying to solve. As David Gillborn (2016a) points out, the issues of racism, as with many other social problems, are hidden in the small print. It is therefore key for schooling to be critical of its own practices, constantly asking itself: I am racist? to eliminate race thinking or, as Ware and Back (2002) state, diminish ‘white-friendly’ systems and structures.

## 6.5 Social class: asking the right questions?

A further factor to consider when speaking about inequality in education is social class. Social class has created significant divisions in English society, yet it is often very elusive. Wider discussions around class have almost disappeared from political discourse, with politicians being more comfortable discussing problems to do with institutional racism or the gender pay gap than they are discussing issues of class. Within the study of education and academic educational research, there have been several contributions not just to help render class visible but also to help reveal how it impacts educational opportunity and educational achievement.

If we asked the simple question What is social class? we might come to traditional sociological theory to provide some answers since social class has held a prominent place in the discipline of sociology for a very long time. This long history of social class in sociology might bring you to read the works of Max Weber or Karl Marx. Sociology professors and academics might argue the existence of social class based on economic inequality arguments, lack of equality of opportunity arguments or through questioning the fairness of systems that do not acknowledge the accumulation of privilege by the few in a society. Depending on who you read, you will agree and disagree with some or all of these arguments. Whether we think of social class as straightforwardly divided into ‘working class’, ‘middle class’ and ‘upper class’ or we think it is as complex as seven different categories, as suggested by a BBC survey in 2013, the fact is that class is difficult to define. Even in recent years, many articles that can be argued to discuss dimensions of class ‘often use the terms “inequality”, “stratification”, “family background” or specific indicators (such as education, wealth, income, or occupation) – sometimes interchangeably. As a result, considerable ‘murkiness swirls around the empirical study of social class’ (Lareau & Conley 2008: 3–4). Perhaps asking what social class is might not be the best question to pose, but rather how does social class work? And, if social class is better analysed through how it works, then what are its workings in education and systems of schooling? These are some of the questions that are posed in this section.

### *Staying with social class: culture, class and schooling*

In spite of its complexity, we should not avoid the term ‘social class’, particularly since it offers an analytical angle which encompasses much of everyday social life, one without which we would struggle to provide an understanding of how inequalities continue to prevail and worsen in societies. But let’s begin by thinking about how schooling might actually be reproducing social class inequalities. Many educational theorists have set themselves the task of explaining how social class could be said to work

in education and schooling. If you were to investigate issues of class in education by conducting a simple library literature search, you would find that many articles refer to the theorist Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu was a French theorist working primarily by observing French society, particularly the culture of the middle classes. A lot of his work around class can be said to be very Francocentric; works such as *Distinction* (1984) and *The State Nobility* (1996) are difficult to apply or translate to English culture and contexts. However, this has not stopped many researchers and writers who have used Bourdieu's theory and key concepts to provide an analysis of class in education. For instance, Gunn (2005) uses some of Bourdieu's ideas to understand the rise of the middle classes in Britain in the twentieth century. Unlike other theorists, Gunn (2005) does not fully accept that the rise of the middle classes in Britain came about as a consequence of the industrial revolution in the nineteenth century and the creation of middle-class occupations. Instead, Gunn uses the concepts of 'culture' and 'cultural capital' as important elements that contributed to the rise of the middle classes. What is meant by culture in this case is not to do with what people wear and eat or the languages they speak, but rather what people do, what people regard as valuable and worthwhile in their lives, from what gives them pride to what they see as leisure. Cultural capital is regarded as a set of practices and embodiments of knowledge and legitimacy which give people a sense of belonging and permanence in particular contexts, places, institutions and everyday socialities. In Bourdieu's work, the middle classes (*bourgeoisie*) went through a process of establishing themselves through a distinctive culture; this culture had 'class'. This is particularly important since, at the time, the lower and working classes were constructed as having no 'class' or 'culture'. The working classes have been historically discussed as being 'uncultured' or 'uncultivated' and therefore as lacking in 'class'. This is, of course, not true, but this social construction of the working classes aided the emergence and establishment of middle-class culture:

The bourgeoisie finds in cultivated nature and culture that has become nature the only possible principle for the legitimation of their privilege. Being unable to invoke the right of birth (which their class, through the ages, has refused the aristocracy) or nature which, according to 'democratic' ideology represents universality. . . . [T]hey can resort to cultivated nature and culture become nature, to what is sometimes called 'class', through a kind of tell-tale slip, to 'education', in the sense of a product of education which seems to owe nothing to education, to distinction, grace which is merit and merit which is grace, an unacquired merit which justifies unmerited acquisitions, that is to say, inheritance'.

(Bourdieu 1993: 235)

Bourdieu is suggesting the culture of the middle classes becomes a kind of education which in itself owes nothing to education, but which becomes distinctive learnings, attitudes and practices. This is somehow in direct opposition to how the working classes were thought of and constructed as 'classless' and 'needing an education' to elevate them and give them a sense of culture. What Gunn (2005) is proposing is that following some of the initial thoughts by Bourdieu, and with the advent of organised systems of schooling in the UK, the middle classes in Britain have, indeed, continued to pass on their cultural genes, not just in the family but through schooling. Inherently, Gunn (2005: 58) discusses how systems of schooling have absorbed the cultural ways of the middle classes historically into their everyday practices:

Family and education intersected in the workings of cultural capital, not only because the middle-class family represented a primary site of training but also because it allowed for early immersion in precisely those codes and competences that would later be valued in formal schooling.

This is where we find many of the arguments around social class and education: at this intersection between schooling and class privilege. Many scholars agree that school has been made and changed to reflect the privileges and images of a particular class: the middle classes. Within academic educational research, there are further claims that this has continued to contribute to the exclusion of large groups of people historically, primarily the working class, even when they seem to be included in systems of schooling that are mandatory. It is at this intersection, this critical perspective, that the following works are discussed, to provide an understanding of how class has been put to work in research and academic work around education and has permeated the world of education and schooling.

## **6.6 Exploring class through educational theory and research**

When discussing the interrelationship between class and schooling, there is a tendency to overlook the importance of another context, the home. With changes to education in the 1940s and the introduction of the Butler Act of 1944, the tripartite system of education began, and children were allocated to secondary modern, technological schools or to the more prestigious grammar schools. The children who sat the 11+ examination and obtained high scores were sent to grammar schools, and the ones who did not were allocated to one of the other schools. With the 11+ examination, some working-class children were admitted to grammar schools, which

were normally far from traditional working-class communities and very different to elementary schools, with strict uniform and behaviour codes, a more extensive curriculum and regular examinations. Many of the working-class children who went to grammar schools experienced a disconnect between home life and school life. Within the discipline of sociology, there are some important contributions to the understanding of these experiences and systems of education, not just as a social institution but as an aspect of everyday life which can be very impactful on issues of class. The work by Jackson and Marsden, *Education and the Working Class*, first published in 1962, offers some early insight into class distinctions and how the home interacted with systems of schooling. Their work is regarded as pioneering a new type of sociology of education, one which, through careful narrative, built an image of class in the home and in the school with distinctiveness and clarity, an approach which clearly rivalled the more quantitative tradition of the time. Ball (2011: 959) comments on the importance of Jackson's and Marsden's (2012) work:

*Education and the Working Class* is about class mobility, class inequality and waste, and about what Dennis describes as a 'blockage' – selective education. In stark contrast to the sometimes pathologising focus on working-class failure in much of the contemporary sociology of education, *Education and the Working Class* works with a sample of 90 'successfully' working-class children. That is, children who passed the 11+ and went to grammar school and many of whom went on to higher education.

Jackson and Marsden portray the lives of working-class children who can be said to have been successful in education and narrate the differences the home and school thresholds brought to them every day. In their work, they offer an alternative storying of working-class children in the educational system; their stories showed the many strategies the children utilised to survive and thrive in grammar schools but also, in turn, how this exerted an influence in their everyday lives. Jackson and Marsden (2012: 117) offer a textural description of the lives of the working-class children who attended grammar schools and how the class codes of schools produced home pressures for the children:

Few working class homes had easy provision for home study. Some children went into the front room, others retired to a bedroom, but many did their homework in the living-room/kitchen at the very centre of family activity. This immediately produced difficulties. Should the wireless be on or off? Could the younger children play noisily? Could the father stretch his legs and tell the day's tales? To ask for silence

here was to offend the life of the family, was to go against it in its natural moments of coming together, of relaxation. So many learned the early habit of working with the wireless on and the family talking, of building a cone of silence around themselves. To a certain extent this worked well. . . . [T]he family was not always untroubled at this, for the private concentration could produce an abstraction, a forgetfulness, an off-handedness that also gave offence.

Moreover, *Education and the Working Class* (2012) takes us through an empowering narrative highlighting the resourcefulness of working-class children and families, but not without understanding the huge challenges and disparities that characterised these educational pathways. It is clear from their investigations that the world of schooling occurred within a cultural code which was different from that of the working-class home. This is an important reflection to consider and seek to understand when dealing with issues of class in education: namely, that the educational system itself has historically reflected the values of the middle class, disadvantaging those who represent a different social and cultural code.

Another major issue in relation to social class in schooling is that of language. Basil Bernstein focused on differences in language and how they affect aspects of schooling. His work conceptualised school as an institution that functions through language culture (Bernstein 1971). Bernstein explored language differences as representative of distinctions of class, specifically between working-class and middle-class children. He constructed his theory around 'elaborated' and 'restricted' codes which were made consonant with working-class and middle-class children. In Bernstein's work, middle-class language codes were seen as more elaborated, descriptive and expansive whilst working-class language codes were seen as restricted in comparison to the language culture of schools. Bernstein's work explained how language is not just internal but also reflected in institutions, organising and, to a certain extent, determining outcomes in education. Schooling is therefore not seen as a neutral environment in which all language codes can be accepted and readily recognised and incorporated. Instead, Bernstein suggested that differences in language codes lead to different possibilities and, what is more, different levels of achievement in educational settings. His work has raised some critique in more recent years because of the way in which its centrality on individuals has overlooked the inherent inequalities the cultures of school seem to perpetuate. Bartlett et al. (2001: 184) summarise some of the critique and controversy provoked by their work:

The danger in the position expressed by Bernstein in relation to class, language and education was the attribution of essential qualities to

the differences between working-class language and middle-class language, and the potential correlation of working-class culture with less expressive linguistic forms. The use of distinction between working-class speech as 'restricted code' and middle-class speech as 'elaborated code' became infamous as it seemed to imply a hierarchy of expressive power.

When we think about school, we tend to think of places for learning or places for advancement; the works discussed so far have presented arguments which problematise these understandings of schooling. Bowles and Gintis (1976), two American writers, provide another strand of thought to the problematisation of schooling. For them, schools' primary purpose was to hone in on the 'hidden curriculum'. With this phrase, they were attempting to describe the many ways in which school was less about instruction or learning in mathematics, the sciences or literacy and more about learning your place in society. The hidden curriculum encompassed the insidious forms of control, punishment and management that characterise schools and which are directed at organising and governing pupils' behaviours and aspirations, commanding pupils to learn to respect the institution, to conform to rules and to obey authority. Their study *Schooling in Capitalist America* was an attempt to document the systematic failure of systems of education to shift wider societal inequalities, in spite of tons of educational policy change and reforms. They saw the main aspiration taught to students at school to be the acceptance of a wage-dependent life, a life which was only attainable if students learned to refrain from resistance and contestation whilst conforming to the ruling status quo.

Stephen Ball's work has been highly important in developing a systematic analysis of education and the effects of schooling on individuals. In his works, he has developed what he calls a 'policy sociology', which seeks to develop a thorough understanding of changes and reformations to educational systems in the UK through the analysis of the effects of educational policy (Ball 2008). Ball's work has also centred on developing an understanding and theorising of how the privilege of the successful in education helps us understand the challenges and exclusions inherently faced by the disadvantaged. His work has also offered an analysis of how family strategy, developed through being successful in the system themselves and through more extensive resources, influences educational achievement, attainment and pathways (Ball 2006).

More recently, there has been an increase in educational research using the notion of habitus to make sense of class distinctions in education. Habitus is a very tricky notion to define and discuss, and although there are

many pieces of research utilising this notion, its meaning is still debated. On habitus, Turner (2013: 752) offers a useful definition:

Those within a given class share certain modes of classification, appreciation, judgment, perception, and behaviour. Bourdieu conceptualizes this mediating process between class and individual perceptions, choices, and behaviours as habitus. In a sense, habitus is the ‘collective unconscious’ of those in similar positions because it provides cognitive and emotional guidelines that enable individuals to represent the world in common ways and to classify, choose, evaluate and act in a particular manner. . . . [T]he habitus creates syndromes of taste, speech dress manner and other responses.

The work by Diane Reay and Carol Vincent (2014) is one of the pieces of educational research offering an insight into various class analyses within the sociology of education, paying close attention to how the institution – more specifically, schooling – helps build and shape perspectives around class. By using Bourdieu, Reay and Vincent assert the concept of habitus as to do with how schooling embodies the dominant group’s cultures as a starting position of privilege within schools. In saying this, there is also a need for recognising ‘institutional habitus’ (Atkinson 2013: 119). Institutional habitus is theorised as the many mediations that have value within an institution and which, in turn, are used to decide which views, codes, practices, behaviours, representations and perceptions are upheld and desirable in it. With reference to class, institutional habitus overlooks and misrecognises, mostly inadvertently, anything outside its own culture. Schooling has therefore been constructed as possessing an institutional habitus that has reflected and continues to reflect the individual and family habitus of some classes over others, making it prone to reproducing social inequality. Throughout this section, there have been various examples of how the habitus of schooling is at work within education, with a distinct culture, expectations and behaviour codes which divide and perpetuate some of the social disparities we find in our societies.

## 6.7 Summary

The present chapter has looked at gender, ‘race’ and social class as ‘markers’ of inequality in schooling. As pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, schooling is conceived here not only as a designated and highly regulated space through which social problems are rendered visible and addressed through various social and educational policies,



but also as a 'space' where social inequalities are reproduced and even enhanced.

In this chapter we dealt with introductory issues highlighting the disparities in gender, 'race' and class, which continue to be factors of people's lived experiences and opportunities. As outlined, there are still gendered understandings of what boys and girls can and should achieve, similar to still existing understandings of 'race' and social class that determine what young people can achieve in life, not because of their abilities, but by the opportunities they are presented with and are able to access.

In this context, schooling has been constructed as necessary for the continuation of society's values and stability, but it was also suggested that schooling by accumulating society's ideals lacks the means to challenge the effects of its own workings. The increasing involvement of the government in systems of schooling, impacting and determining their funding, performance indicators, assessments and curricula, can be said to reduce schools' autonomy and capacity to respond to in-school inequalities even further.

Whether we regard schooling as an important solution to address social problems and inequalities or as part of the problem, an analysis of school inequalities needs to reflect the complexity of these environments. This chapter has attempted to articulate some of these complexities, with a particular focus on gender, 'race' and social class. Yet it is necessary to understand that a more comprehensive view would explore how inequalities intersect and interact in educational settings, rather than viewing them as occurring separately.

This is particularly true as gender, race and social class, although separated for analytical purposes in this chapter, are not separate processes; they act simultaneously and affect people in many ways. This means that lived experiences are often far more complex than this chapter suggests; hence, the experience of inequalities is far more difficult to discern and rather needs to be understood as inextricably intertwined.

However complex issues of inequality are, educational institutions continue to be an important site where inequalities are perpetuated:

Education is not, as older social science pictured it, a mirror of social or cultural inequalities. That is all too still an image. Education systems are busy institutions. They are vibrantly involved in the production of social hierarchies. They select and exclude their own clients; they expand credentialed labour markets; they produce and disseminate particular kinds of knowledge to particular users.

(Connell 1993: 27)



## Key Points

### Education and schooling

These are important sites where social problems and social inequalities are regularly and historically addressed through prescribed inclusion policy because they are seen as sites where social equality can be achieved.

### Educational research

This has shown that education and schooling reproduce many patterns of inequality and disadvantage. Whilst schooling remains one of the key ways in which a society seeks to address social issues and social problems, other solutions need to be considered to diminish social exclusions.

Gender issues in education continue to disadvantage boys' and girls' life chances as well as their everyday performance in the classroom. Issues of gender influence the world of education in various ways which lead to unequal experiences and opportunities for both boys and girls. Feminist thinking and scholarship have developed a deeper understanding of these issues and talk about gender as socially constructed and not explainable in biological terms. Gender inequalities, although always changing, are still discussed as profound and prevalent in society, and the world of education and schooling is no exception to this.

'Race' still affects what boys and girls can achieve as institutional racism continues to discriminate against particular groups of pupils, in particular those from black and ethnic minorities. Schools need to do more to promote equal opportunities and provide a fairer educational experience for all. Critical race theory, in particular in relation to white supremacy, offers useful tools to analyse social arrangements, processes, behaviours and discourses.

Social class is a concept in social sciences which allows us to analyse society. Although a term that has been explored in significant detail in educational research and sociological study, it still remains neglected in the making of educational and social policy. The overlooking of issues of class in education is discussed as problematic as education is not understood to be a 'class-less' activity. It continues, similar to other social issues, to reproduce social inequalities.



## Coursework questions

Research one of the key thinkers introduced in the chapter and discuss how their work has widened the understanding around gender, 'race', or social class issues in education.

Find a recent educational study exploring gender, 'race' or social class inequalities in schools and report on its key findings, critically examining possibilities and limitations.

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Partnering with students, colleagues and  
external stakeholders*

Article 01

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2021

## Editorial: Collaboration in higher education: Partnering with students, colleagues and external stakeholders

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## Editorial: Collaboration in higher education: Partnering with students, colleagues and external stakeholders

### Abstract

Welcome to this Special Issue of the Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice (JUTLP). This editorial provides an overview of Collaboration in Higher Education. Humans are social, inter-dependent beings, needing to be and communicate with each other. Being with other people provides an opportunity to grow and develop, creating a sense of self and identity. Together we construct, structure and restructure the stories that build the larger narratives of who we are, what we do and how we live, act and behave as people, professionals and larger communities. It is through our collaborations that we come together, and construct meaning and ourselves. As Higher Education continues to exclude and sideline, as it constrains and removes spaces and places for collaboration between service staff, faculty and students within institutions, between institutions, and with other stakeholders, there is a need to rediscover the power of collaboration. The articles included, build on practical experience, research data, personal and collective reflections, to outline how the contributors have navigated this tension to create spaces of voice and hope. Presented are case studies that are boundary crossing: across disciplinary boundaries; cross-institution collaboration; cross-boundary working; pedagogical co-creation and the re-conceptualising of learning; and students as partners, co-researchers and co-authors. Together they showcase refreshed notions of collegiality and collaboration in Higher Education that support new and more nuanced, and dynamic models of co-creation. We hope the Special Issue helps seed an ecology of collaborative practice for social justice – a more humane academia.

### Practitioner Notes

1. Humans are social, interdependent beings – humane collaborative practices enable us to make space for ourselves as we strive to co-create a humane university.
2. Working with other people provides an opportunity for both a recognition of the self – and for joint growth and development.
3. Beyond the transactional: collaboration in Higher Education creates opportunities not for ‘best practice’ but for refreshed notions of collegiality and partnership.
4. Working together in academia and with external partners implicitly challenges the managerialist imperative of the neoliberal university.
5. An ecology of collaborative university practice supports social justice.

### Keywords

Higher education collaboration, co-creation, boundary crossing, partnership, being with

## Acknowledgment of context

We, the Guest Editors of this Special Issue of JUTLP, would like to invite readers to take a moment before they delve into the pages of this journal to reflect on the context they are situated within. In Canada, this includes the acknowledgement of Indigenous presence and land rights. In the United Kingdom, this means a recognition of a colonising past. If we take these territorial acknowledgements as sites of disruption, they can be transformative acts that can bring people together. It is in this spirit that we would like to show honour and respect to those past, present and future – to move forward in a good way.

## Higher education collaboration

This Special Issue focuses on the opportunities (and challenges) created by working in collaboration and partnership in Higher Education (HE). While HE Institutions (HEI) become ever more competitive to sustain their place in a global, neoliberal education market, students and staff are confronted with alienating practices that create a managerialist, audit and surveillance culture (Giroux, 2018). It is in this climate that we have curated articles that advocate for a more inclusive and more empowering education, a vision of education that advocates for teaching and learning that is more than a means to an end but rather a practice that enables personal and societal growth. The human element of education is therefore at the core of this Special Issue: the things we can do and achieve together, both students and (academic) staff.

Our argument is that collaboration is or creates a ‘third space’ (Soja, 1996; Shields, 2004; Lefebvre, 2003, 1991), an in-between space, facilitating deep and meaningful practice and useful reflection, to give focus and generate new meanings and potential solutions. Webster (2018) describes this as a space where boundaries are fuzzy and malleable, and hence a space that can expand and morph to accommodate the needs of those involved as well as of the broader environment. It is a space ‘occupied with’, defined by joint goals and outcomes. It is a space where the negative striations of normal academic power relations can be swept away (Burns, Sinfield and Abegglen, 2019) as together participants can (re)define the space and inhabit it more powerfully.

Given that the third space is the space of potentiality, of the liminal and the unmapped; given that it is the street fighting and nomadic space (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) of education, we would argue that it is essential that all those in academia are given the sorts of third space opportunities that we have described here and that are discussed in this edition. Education for action depends on more than structural processes (Hall, 2021) and the banking of information (Freire, 2007), we need authentic curricula and practices that, rather than promote competitive individuality or reductive ‘skills for business’, emphasise the social nature of teaching and learning, the co-construction of knowledge (Lea and Street, 1998; JLDHE, 2019) and empowering knowledge exchange. As we strive for education for social justice, there is a need to develop programs and courses that better welcome and ‘hold’, sustain and support both those that are learning and those that are teaching. A humane academia requires methods and methodologies that offer multiple, non-hierarchical entry and exit points (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) that embrace uncertainty (Cormier, 2012), creativity (Sinfield, Burns and Abegglen, 2019) and cooperative ‘third spaces.’

As collaborative academics, we advocate for praxes and habits that allow for cooperation both within and out-with academic institutions, that enable the formation of diverse Communities of Practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and the development of heutagogic networks that create those very human interpersonal spaces for growth. Such liberatory spaces need to be supported by critical (Freire, 2007) and democratic (Dewey, 1916) pedagogic practices that create a more welcoming university that acknowledges the super-complexity of people’s lives (Abegglen et al., 2020). As argued by Bhabha (2004), it is in a collective ‘third space’ (Burns et al., 2019; Gutierrez, 2008) whereby ‘being with’ (Nancy, 2000) individuals start to ‘become’, together. Where:

*everything comes together . . . subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history.* (Soja, 1996, p. 56-57, emphasis in the original)

In this issue we explore what is possible when students, staff and institutions work in partnership and constructively co-create the spaces and places they inhabit. We showcase theoretical and practical explorations of how students and



staff can take control of where and how they work; finding their identities in ways that are recognised by the academy and those outside of academia, but which they negotiate more on their own terms. We share examples of a range of inspiring practices (rather than ‘best practice’) and also open up the discussion of what it means to co-construct learning, teaching, research – and a humane academia.

## **The many facets of co-creation**

The Special Issue offers a series of case studies that are all boundary crossing in one way or another: working across teams, across disciplines, across institutional and national boundaries, and across staff/student boundaries: working together with each other – as partners in curriculum change, as co-researchers and as co-authors. The first set of articles explores how faculty worked together across disciplinary boundaries to collaborate on curriculum design and delivery to enhance student learning and experience: cross-team working. The second set of articles looks at cross-institution collaboration within and out-with national boundaries, and presents case study examples of how institutions – and those within those institutions - came together to achieve a common goal. The third set of articles focuses on the notion of cross-boundary working. The articles outline how third space professionals, academics and practitioners came together, virtually and in-person, to decolonise contested academic spaces and places. The fourth set of articles outline pedagogical co-creation and the re-conceptualising of learning. Articles included provide examples of how to re-think pedagogy and practice together with and for students to de-territorialise education. The fifth and final set of articles included helps in rethinking faculty and student relationships providing concrete examples of how students and staff can work and research together to enhance learning: students as partners, co-researchers and co-authors.

### **Cross-team working**

The article by **Buckley and Heard-Lauréote** provides a case study of how a university in Southampton, United Kingdom prepared 1100 modules for online delivery in September 2020 via a uniquely non-hierarchical institutional cross-team collaboration to ensure success within a narrow timescale. The outcomes of this project highlight what brings worth and value to all collaboration work: challenge, agency and being valued.

Another example of cross-team working that serves to promote inclusion, social justice and anti-oppressive practice is detailed by **Smith et al.** Here a joint research project between staff and students at DeMontford University, Leicester, United Kingdom led to the co-creation of a Level 6 (third year undergraduate) module on Special Educational Needs and Disability. The module emerged from staff and student co-designed research that explored the lived experience of neurodiverse people, their families, practitioners and academics. The collaboration itself harnessed and valued the voices of ‘non-professionals’ to develop and embed socially just practice in course design and delivery.

The article by **Mfundo Makhanya and colleagues** also calls for non-hierarchical collaboration between faculty to foster student success. It outlines a unique fusion of a collaboration between academic departments and university writing centres at a South African university to help undergraduate students develop their abilities to write for academic and research purposes in their discipline of study. The article reflects on the success of the non-hierarchical collaboration and outlines recommendations for future practice.

### **Cross-institution collaboration**

**Walker and colleagues** explore the experiences of organisations participating as community partners and co-educators in a service-learning module in a HEI in South Wales, United Kingdom. The article outlines the opportunities and challenges faced by community organisations when working within the service-learning model, and the relationship with the university and the students, including issues of expectation, assessment and identity.

The article by **Weakley et al.** outlines how a team of academics, professional staff and students from a Scottish University in the United Kingdom worked with ‘third sector’ partners to achieve civic and social purpose goals. The paper is written by a team of academics, professional staff and students. The group outlines important considerations for university initiatives aiming to improve academic and student engagement with community partners for social change and the anchor role HEIs can play in this.

**Buchmüller et al.** present a case study about a research and teaching collaboration between two HEIs, one in Germany the other in India. Harnessing Feminist Science and Technology Studies and user-centered and participatory design

methods, they created an online course where students with different disciplinary backgrounds collaborated in cross-cultural teams. The goal was to propose design interventions for particularly affected social groups, for a post-Covid future – and make recommendations for future researchers, designers and engineers as to how to act responsibly in a globalized digital world and how to work together to achieve a common goal.

The article by **Koris et al.** argues for the capacity of cross-disciplinary virtual collaborations to prepare students for the complexity of working in today's interconnected world. The project implemented by students and faculty at one European and two US universities, brought together three disparate disciplines in a single project, where one team created a website for the proposed business of another team with accessibility advice from the third. Pre- and post-project surveys revealed that students demonstrated increased awareness of cross-disciplinary learning as well as improved effectiveness while collaborating to create cross-border solutions.

### **Cross-boundary working**

The first article in this group is written by a collective, the **Bickle et al.**, that consists of geographically dispersed third space professionals. Together, these individuals have formed a research-based virtual community of practice (vCoP) to enhance professional collaboration, visibility and identity of practitioners who are often side-lined by their contractual or spatial placing within HE culture. The article illustrates how collaborative writing activities, including the authoring this paper, helped the vCoP members retain elements of traditional academic identity, such as independence and purpose, whilst drawing out a clear appreciation of a lack of hierarchy and a focus on a supportive environment in the vCoP. In the process they offer a model of collaboration that could help groups in similar situations.

The second in this group is also written by a collective, a multi-disciplinary group of Australasian academics and practitioners, **Lucas et al.**, that was established as a Small Significant Online Network (SONG). The SONG group reflects on work integrated learning (WIL) using a collaborative ethnographic approach. Together, they have developed a HUMANE framework to enhance relationships with stakeholders that are central to the formation of a successful WIL experience.

The final article in this group is inspired by a shared vision of reconciliation. **Poitras Pratt and colleagues** explore practical ways in which heterarchical collaboration can serve to decolonize university teaching and learning. The indigenous and non-indigenous author team proposes ensemble mentorship as a collaborative education practice that allows the creation of an ethical space in universities where relationality is prioritised in service of social justice. They argue for decolonising pedagogies and education practice for collaboration.

### **Pedagogical co-creation and the re-conceptualising of learning**

In **Marrs and Mattingly** work across teams to both decolonise ballet pedagogy and traditional approaches to scaffolding writing with ballet students. Ballet itself is typically individualistic and trauma-filled. The expectation is of endurance and suffering - as it often is when arts-based students face academic writing. In this collaboration the emphasis instead is on play and the play mood, revealing ballet technique as an emergent strategy, a way of understanding how complex systems and patterns arise from multiple simple interactions. Alongside this emergent, playful strategy, writing practices are scaffolded by simple prompts for free-writes – progressing to more structured and complex essays. In this way they subvert habit and ignite curiosity, revealing writing and ballet as repeated and iterative practices that emerge from their own individual and collective perspectives as writers and dancers.

**Bustillos Morales'** work on de-territorialisation for pedagogical co-creation is both an action research project designed to re-think pedagogy and practice together with students and an exploration of the expectations that students bring with them to university. Conversations with students revealed very traditional notions of a hierarchical, transmissive classroom with students individually filled with knowledge by the tutor. Morales' collaborative and progressive pedagogies allowed students to co-create an alternative emancipatory vision of education as together they re-negotiated normative pedagogies and disrupted traditional power relationships.

**Pavlov et al.** explore how the video camera, traditionally seen as a surveillance tool, can be turned into one for interaction and collaboration in the online classroom. The article uses a foreign language class in a Russian University to examine whether learning and a learning community is facilitated by the use of cameras. In the process of conducting the case study they noticed that students, rather than turning cameras on as a proximity tool, were turning

them off to concentrate and study alone. This reveals the work that has to be done to build new understandings of learning as the co-production of knowledge and that being close in a digital sense can help develop a virtual ecology of collaboration.

### **Students as partners, co-researchers and co-authors**

**Keeling et al.** exemplify a delightful faculty-student collaborative. The article illustrates what partnership between students and faculty can achieve as they redesign a course that was initially stultifying into an energising and creative capstone project. The article demonstrates that together both students and faculty can serve as active agents in curriculum development, redesign and assessment.

**Peseta and their student-colleagues** offer a less common account by the student partners themselves of what partnership and power feel like in the neoliberal university. They are a group of staff and student partners at Western Sydney University, Australia, engaged together in the 21C project to transform curriculum, teaching, and learning. The article itself is a reflexive interrogation of their involvement with a new elective unit: *We are the University: Students Co-creating Change*. Offered as a fictional account, their multi-voiced experiences reveal partnership as forms of power *over*, as *permission-giving*, as *sharing (or partnership)*, and the power *to act (agency)*.

### **Coda**

As an editorial and research collaboration, we the Special Issue editors, break down, and out of, silos; avoiding the pitfall of navel gazing by having others to pull us back to reflect collaboratively. By working 'out loud' and by sharing we are opening up our own doing and thinking to others, co-constructing new knowledge, developing multi-vocal practice. Through collaboration we acknowledge each other – and others – with compassion and we challenge the individualistic characteristics of the 'euro-centric epistemological' traditions that colonise academia.

Humans are social, inter-dependent beings, needing to be and communicate with each other. Being with other people provides an opportunity to grow and develop, creating a sense of self and identity. Together we construct, structure and restructure the stories that build the larger narratives of who we are, what we do and how we live, act and behave as people, professionals and larger communities. It is through our collaborations that we come together, and construct meaning and ourselves.

Searching for an ecology of humane university practice that can sustain and nourish in what are often hostile times, collaboration is not a panacea for HE deficits – but it offers a porous and flexible space for action. There is much power in the 'in-between' spaces of academia and the transgressive space of continued collaborative work, writing and research that allow for different voices to be expressed – and heard. In this journal edition, we celebrate and promote the opportunities inherent in the different positionings experienced by our authors – where the very act of collaboration, research and writing increases visibility and gives voice not just to high status academics, but to early career researchers and students – and most importantly to those underrepresented, outsider identities.

The articles and case studies included build on practical experience, research data and personal and collaborative reflection. They provide refreshed notions of collegiality and collaboration in HE; new and more nuanced and dynamic models of partnerships between student and student, student and staff, and staff and staff. In the process we hope to nurture an emergent epistemology of co-creation. A longer-term goal is that this edition seeds an ecology of collaborative practice and advocates for joint learning, teaching and research approaches in HE. Collaboration is one of the keys for unlocking sustainable human educational futures.

We hope you enjoy this Special Edition of JUTLP as much as we have enjoyed curating and producing it.

### **Acknowledgement**

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## Dialogic montage: Reflecting on playful practice in higher education

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### ABSTRACT

#### ARTICLE INFO

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In our advocacy for playful and creative practice, we engage in collaborative writing as a method of inquiry. In this paper we have extended that practice, conducting a collage conversation between the three of us reflecting on playful practice in academia through visual means, and using this paper as a meta-reflection on the value of collaborative practice and writing to promote a culture of research for academics primarily engaged in teaching. As we are located on different continents, the conversation unfolded synchronously and asynchronously: with us sending images of our thinking and responses back and forth. This shared playful and visual conversation has been captured for this article and supplemented with case study examples of how we utilised such playful practice with our student and staff learners. We argue that playful practice is even more important in these lean and mean times as it enables an honest but suitably supercomplex dialogue about learning, teaching and research that recognises education's human element. Playful practice is inclusive and empowering: it strengthens the individual while at the same time enabling connection - with peers and the larger social and academic context.

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### Introduction

Dialogue and the dialogic (Bakhtin, 1981) are vital parts of our professional practice and of our research focusing on the exploration of emancipatory and empowering learning and teaching approaches (Dewey, 1938; Gillies, 2005; Freire, 1972; Holt, 1976; hooks, 1994; Illich, 1971; James & Nerantzi, 2019; Shor, 1980). In the UK, we work in a post-92 inner city university with a widening participation brief and an education for social justice framework. In Calgary, we believe in experiential learning and community engagement to seek and share answers to our most challenging problems in a cross-disciplinary way. Together, we regularly engage in collaborative writing as a method of enquiry (Gale & Bowstead, 2013; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) exploring our praxes through emergent and exploratory writing conducted synchronously and asynchronously. Initially,

this occurred when we worked in the same institution but in separate departments, and it continues now as we work on different continents. We have always believed and invested in collaboration - knowing that it enriches our work. The whole always becomes greater than the sum of the parts when we - when anyone - works in this way (Nummenmaa et al., 2015).

A key focus of our work has been the emancipatory potential of creativity and play in education (Sinfield, Burns & Abegglen, 2019). Play and creativity enable so much more than a 'traditional', transmissive lecture. Play is disruptive and transgressive - it can transcend the normative and challenge notions of teaching and learning transmitted from birth. Thus, play can liberate especially those traditionally unwelcome in higher education such that even within formal academic settings, they might define their learning differently and become academic more on their own terms.

[Play] is an activity which proceeds within certain limits of time and space, in a visible order, according to rules freely accepted, and outside the sphere of necessity or material utility. The play-mood is one of rapture and enthusiasm, and is sacred or festive in accordance with the occasion. A feeling of exaltation and tension accompanies the action, mirth and relaxation follow. (Huizinga, 2002, p. 132).

We argue that playful, visual and multimodal practice is more important in these lean, mean and physically distanced times because it enables an honest and open dialogue about learning, teaching and research that recognises education's human element. Playful practice is inclusive and empowering: it strengthens the individual while at the same time enabling connection and co-creation. "It is in playing and only in playing that the individual child or adult is able to be creative and to use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self" (Winnicott, 1971, p. 54).

When we theorise and conceptualise play, we include the power of the symbolic: playfulness as a mindset (Stenros, 2015). This enables us to recognize play in contexts that are not explicitly marked as play or set up for play. For example, playing with images, text and sound are part of the repertoire that we use when working with our undergraduate students, and staff-as-students. This paper hopefully reflects and illustrates that: play as a subjective experience and as a transgressive activity.

## **Collages**

To begin our visual and playful conversation about play and creativity in education, we would like to briefly highlight why we have chosen collages as our means for this 'dialogic montage' discussion. Collages are assemblages made by sticking or gluing (French: coller: paste, stick, glue) juxtaposing images or materials together to create new images and fresh meanings, a composition of sorts (Merriam Webster, n.d.). There are different approaches to collage-making. One is to assume quite a conscious response on the part of the 'maker'. This positions the maker as quite in control of the 'message' that they want to convey. In this instance, the maker could be seen as actively choosing and placing images to construct their collage, producing meaning

almost in the way a writer is believed to produce a message-bearing text. However, our approach owes more to the Surrealist movement and the notion of allowing the unconscious to speak to us. Here, the maker seeks images from various sources and positions them on the page in a way that ‘speaks’ to them subliminally - often in response to a question or challenge held in the mind. Meaning emerges as the maker works with and reflects on the image produced. In advocating this approach, we are drawing particularly on the DaDaists (viz. MoMaLearning, n.d., para. 2):

In their attack on rationality, Dada artists embraced chance, accident, and improvisation. Such forces figured prominently in their creation of collages, assemblages, and photomontages—and subverted elements that had long defined artistic practice, like craft, control, and intentionality.

Both views of collage-making have value - and if using collage in your own practice, we would suggest that you outline both approaches and allow your participants to adopt whichever mode they feel more comfortable with. At the same time, our view of collage-making allows us to also contest deep rooted notions of the writerly process, which we have criticized before (Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2019), and which we discuss more below. It also acts as a ‘live’ metaphor for our research practice, where we engage in emergent, exploratory collaborative writing as a method of inquiry - the reflective, writerly practice of researching and theorising.

### **The conversation**

We wanted this visual conversation to constitute a creative hermeneutic space for us, for we find ourselves like most academics too busy to think, too busy to play. This is a recurrent motif in a micro-managed higher education where every second counts and every minute is monitored - even more so in these Covid/post-Covid times (Ahmad, 2020, March 27). Thus, we wanted to create for ourselves a much-needed space for being and being with (Nancy, 2000) - where we expected that playful visual discussion to generate new insights into our collaborative learning, teaching and research practice. To start our conversation, we asked Tom, module leader of Facilitating Student Learning (FSL) of the PGCert course at LondonMet to reflect on that module, its underlying philosophy and what he hopes it achieves both for the staff participants and consequently for their own students. Tom created a ‘physical’ collage which he shared with us online - and we produced our own in response - which led to an active exchange between the three of us.

We hope that you spend some time with our collages – or, more precise, the pictures of our collages - and look at them carefully - before you read on to see our discussion on the benefits of playful practice - and of playful research. You may note that Tom’s collages are slightly different to the ones made by Sandra A and Sandra S as he has used and reused the same images to create three different collages (the images used are only fixed in the photographs he took). This ‘hybrid play’ (De Souza e Silva & Glover-Rijkse, 2020) utilised by Tom adds to the complexity of our conversation, generating additional meanings and understandings - a new mixture.

And so it begins...

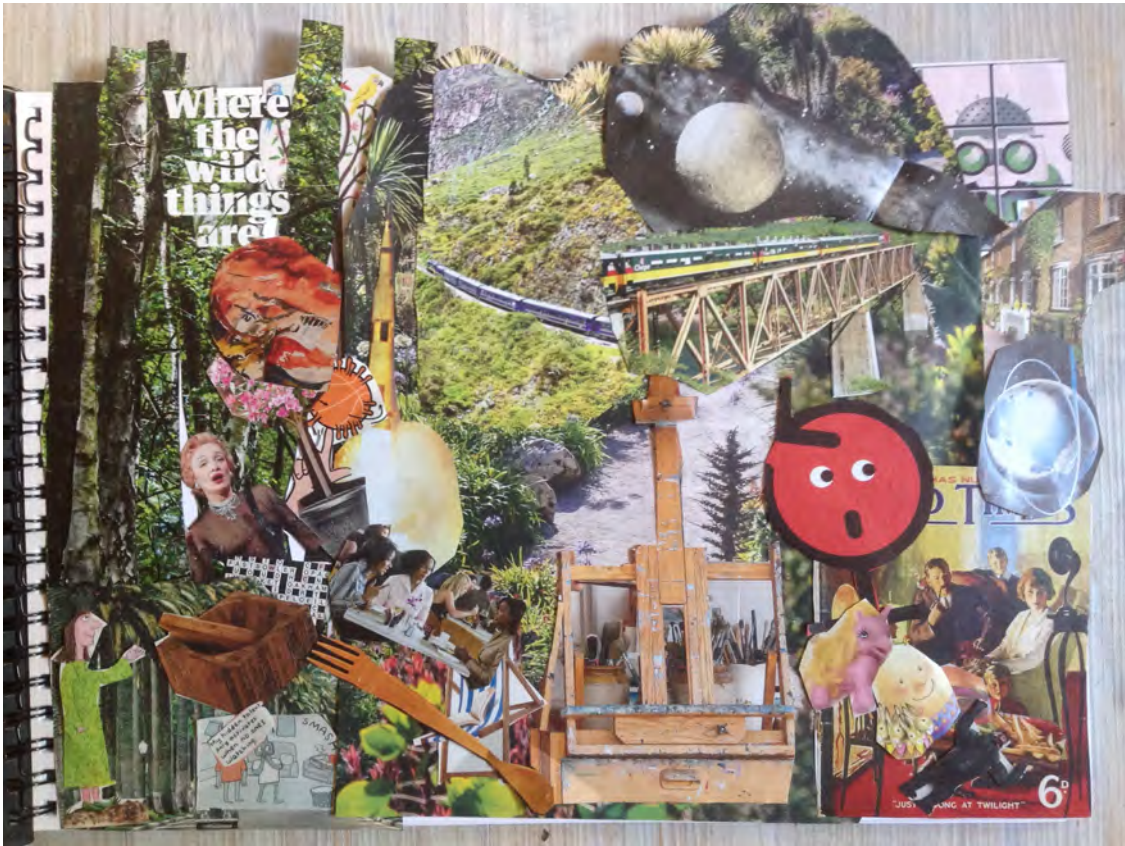


Figure 1: 'Where the wild things are' by Tom B.



Figure 2: 'And where they are not' by Sandra S.





Figure 3: 'Hoch hinaus' by Sandra A.



Figure 4: 'Co-creation and collaborative writing' by Sandra S.



Figure 5: 'Bringing the different worlds together' by Tom B.



Figure 6: 'Glowing hearts & spirits' by Sandra A.



*Figure 7: 'Empowered' by Tom B.*

### **Collages in practice**

While the content of our visual discussion is open to interpretation, the process of creatively 'making', openly 'sharing' and attentively 'looking' is definitely worth pursuing. When working with students and academic staff, we typically engage in collage work in the very first week of our modules. In our staff-facing FSL module (Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2020), we ask all our participants, mainly lecturers but also those in the student supporting professions, to make a collage that represents themselves as a person or as a tutor (which may or may not be the same thing). This 'embodied doing' (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984) creates space for creative reflection (Gibbs, 1988; Schön, 1983) - facilitated and mediated by the images (Palus & Drath, 2001). Once the collages are made, we ask people to pair up to discuss them and their works' various meanings - with the 'maker' first listening to what the other can 'see' in the collage. This acts as a spur to a 'rich' discussion on education and their roles within HE, before they swap. In FSL, the follow up to this activity is that for 'homework', we ask participants to either develop the collage self-portrait or to 'make' a 3D representation of a 'typical' student to bring back to the second workshop. In that second workshop, we hold an exhibition of the self and student makes - and this leads into small group production, using clean recyclables, of a representation of either a typical or an idealised HE system or university. By the end of the second session therefore, our staff participants have visually and dynamically explored the self, the student and the institution - and engaged in embodied thinking to produce creative ways of bringing these humanely together. We have also demonstrated

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active ways of teaching and learning - very different from the traditional lecture format. The programme itself continues by harnessing movement to facilitate thinking (viz. Newell & Kleiman, 2012), collaborative reading of text with scrolls (Abegglen, Burns, Middlebrook & Sinfield, 2019), thinking through song, and free writing (Elbow, 1998) - as different ways of continuing to explore emancipatory practice together in creative, embodied ways.

### *Collages and academic writing*

As well as valuing collage-making as playful practice with its own value in ludic classrooms, we harness collage-making as a useful way into academic writing (Burns, Sinfield & Abegglen, 2018a). When used as a pre-writing activity with undergraduates, the making of an exploratory collage takes away the pressure students often feel when faced with an assignment question. That is, that they ought to know the answer and they should immediately be able to write perfectly formed paragraphs. The production of a collage can reveal that answering a question means exploring themes and ideas experimentally and playfully. The collage process makes visible how different themes or ideas are connected. It allows students to see 'the bigger picture', make connections between the question that they are answering, the themes and topics covered in class and the learning outcomes they must meet to successfully complete the assignment.

We often start this process by asking students to make a collage on their first assignment. The purpose is to let their unconscious work through image selection and placement to help them explore the question set and see where that leads. This can be followed up in several different ways: students can write what they 'see' (literally) in their collages - and then explain why and how that 'answers' the question. They could work in pairs and, as with the introductory exercise described above, the non-maker first says what they discover in their partner's collage. Discussion helps participants 'unpack' what they have made and explore what emerges - what is worth keeping, what could be rejected, and what needs to be developed further. This, in an embodied way, helps students inhabit the sort of iterative writing that we as academics regularly engage in. Many of the students we have worked with that moved on to become successful in their degrees, reported back that it was the various 'write to learn' activities that we engaged in with them that enabled them to see writing as a process that allowed them to think through ideas more powerfully - a far cry from a mechanical focus on spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Thus, we recommend that academic staff help students 'write to learn', in much the same way as they engage in the 'emergent' collage process. That is, that their students start writing before their thinking has settled. This gives them permission to play with the ideas that they are engaging with - rather than just repeating arguments or writing the answer that they believe that the tutor wants to hear (Holt, 1976). Through that they experience for themselves that writing is a thinking process - developing from initial ideas and relatively unformed and unpolished notes to a piece of text with an argument:

I call this process a loop because it takes you on an elliptical orbiting voyage. For the first half, the voyage out, you do pieces of almost-freewriting during which you allow yourself to curve out into space - allow yourself, that is, to ignore or even forget exactly what your topic is. For the second half, the voyage home, you bend your efforts back into the gravitational field of your original topic as you select, organize, and revise parts of what you produced during the voyage out (Elbow, 1998, p. 60).

### *Collage as qualitative tool*

Additionally, we have used collages to introduce students to academic research - in the first year of their studies, in the first few weeks of their course. To initiate the process, we asked our students to make a collage reflecting on their first few weeks of university: What has it felt like? What surprised you? What has caused you to think twice? We then asked students to reflect on their own collages: What can you see in your collage? What does this tell you about your experiences over the first few weeks here? Obviously, this is useful reflective practice (Schön, 1983) which could also be used to seed reflective writing; when used to seed first year, creative qualitative research, we ask students to use the collages to surface some aspect of university learning, teaching or assessment that is of interest to them. Thus, for the students, these collages become the method of their own small-scale auto-ethnographic pilot study, revealing back to them via a Creative Analytical Process (CAP) (Richardson & St Pierre, 2005) something that they would like to research further.

In our teaching, we continue our support for creative qualitative methods, by steering our students away from questionnaires (and their implication, when badly done, of a controlled, convergent process) and urging them to undertake their research utilising less controlled and more actively divergent methods (viz. University of Brighton, n.d.). Whilst we want the students to be engaged and have fun whilst they conduct their research, this is also serious business, constituting a 'real' invitation into an educationally or socially relevant topic. In our case, each student had to produce a formal research proposal to initiate their study - and they had to write up a formal report once they had collected and analysed their data. To support the former, we scaffold academic reading in class, via the more discursive and open practice of collaborative reading of textscrolls (Abegglen, Burns, Middlebrook & Sinfield, 2019) and sharing out the reading that would go to produce a literature review. To develop the latter, we engage in further CAP practice, 'reading' artefacts made by other students and discussing discoveries made. We also engage across many sessions in the sort of textual analysis that is undertaken by literature, film and television studies students - reading images, short films, poetry and prose - such that they can analyse the creative data that they have gathered with confidence.

### **'Creative' writing as a method of learning and teaching - and inquiry**

To sum up, for us, collage-making is so much more than an artistic activity. It is a creative, embodied process that enables discovery and discussion of ideas and topics. Given the relatively restrictive nature of pre-tertiary education in the UK and elsewhere (viz. Robinson, 2006), we believe that this playful practice is necessary to

'de-school' (Illich, 1971) our academic staff and students; where the emergent, divergent, exploratory nature of the playful practice moves them from a place of unsafe certainty to a place of safe uncertainty (Mason, 1993). This acts as an empowering introduction to academic writing - and even research. It is the underlying 'playfulness' that makes collages so useful. While play in higher education is often seen as something that is either confined to particular subject areas (the Arts) or should be done outside the core curriculum, an add-on, we have adopted it as fundamental, emancipatory practice that reveals in embodied ways that education is socially constructed, rather than fixed and found - and that our participants are active learners, explorers with agency. As James and Nerantzi, in the introduction to *The Power of Play in Higher Education*, write '...academics, researchers, students and managers can all benefit from play. In its limitless forms, it is a means of freeing up thinking, opening new channels, confronting obstacles and reframing persistent challenges' (2019, p. xlv).

So, we recommend you engage in collage-making with your learners - generally, for essay writing or for research. Get playful - and play:

Bring in magazines, scissors, glue and paper.

Put up the assignment question (and the learning outcomes) that you wish your learners to address.

Ask learners to reflect on the question and produce a collage that answers the question for them - individually, in pairs or small groups.

Remind learners to review the learning outcomes, making sure that they are addressed also.

Invite learners to share their collages explaining what it shows and why it answers the question.

Alternatively, a group can show their collage to another - which says what it sees in the picture - whilst the first group engages in 'active listening'. The first group then responds - and a productive dialogue can ensue.

Ask learners to 'write to' their collage to see what essay ideas emerge.

Ask learners to reflect for themselves how useful the collage-process has been.

## **Conclusion**

We, the authors of this paper, have used play and creativity in our own teaching practice (Burns, Sinfield & Abegglen, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2018d, 2018e) - and we harnessed the visual (Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2018; Burns, Griffiths, Myhre & Sinfield, 2017), including in our research (Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2019). We have also reflected on empowering pedagogies and inclusive curricula, especially their value for widening participation students (students that are mature, have work and/or care responsibilities and often have limited resources in regard to time and money) (Abegglen, Burns, Maier & Sinfield, 2020a; Abegglen, Burns, Maier & Sinfield, 2020b). In this paper, we have deepened this reflection through a collage discussion between the three

of us about our approach to staff development and undergraduate teaching - and also educational research: collaborative writing as a method of inquiry (Gale & Bowstead, 2013; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005).

As we are now located on different continents, Europe and North America, the conversation has unfolded synchronously and asynchronously, communicating visually and verbally with each other, sending images of our collages and words back and forth. Whilst superficially playful in appearance, such practices harnessed in pedagogy, better prepare our learners – academic staff and students - for agentic study and powerful action in the world. The emergent, divergent and exploratory nature of the collage process - and the following collage-enabled conversation - models a more super-complex and heutagogic education process and practice – one that brings together ideas and people (Nummenmaa et al., 2015).

This shared playful and visual conversation has illustrated the case study examples of how we utilised such practice with our student and staff learners - and in our own collaborative research practice (Figure 1). We argue that playful practice is even more important in these lean and mean times (Figure 2) where people work mainly from home (Figure 3) as it enables authentic and honest, dialogic learning, teaching and research that recognise the human element. Playful teaching and research practice are inclusive and empowering (Figures 4, 5, 6, 7): they strengthen the individual while at the same time enabling connection - with peers and the larger social and academic context.

### *On a final note*

With our own commitment to education for social justice, much of the focus of our teaching, research and writing has been to uncover, discover and propose teaching, learning and assessment practices designed to develop ownership and agency in all students - and that we harness particularly as emancipatory practice for those typically excluded from or denied a voice within academia. Despite our physical dislocation, we still engage in that collaborative writing/research, seeking new ways to work and write together, and this paper emerges from that. It was a way to have a creative, emergent conversation about our practice, now and in the past - a sort of 'working out loud' (Stepper, 2020): to shed new light on different, more empowering ways of creative practice and creative research.

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# 1 Introduction

How can we make sense of the influence of economics in education?

*Jessie A. Bustillos Morales and Sandra Abegglen*

## Background

The world of economics is very pervasive, and in recent years there have been many changes in the world of education and schooling which have increased the influence of economics in education. This book explores some of the ways in which the field of education and schooling has become closely aligned with economic imperatives and interests. Some of the most significant changes come with the decision that turns the school into a competitive institution that depends on results for survival. This competition has been enabled by the introduction of national testing and assessments, national and international league tables, and the alignment of education to employment demands (West and Bailey, 2013). This means that nowadays education is more than something we take pleasure in and do for our own development. It is also an economic activity.

This book builds on the editors' interest and expertise in education. Discussion with colleagues and attendance at conferences have highlighted the pressuring demands on education, and degrees in education. In particular, the increasing influence of economic arguments, economic ideologies and government involvement in education have made apparent that there is a need to reflect and talk about economical influences and trends in education. Many staff members in education lack a background in economics. Similarly, students attending degrees in education are often not introduced to debates surrounding education from an economic perspective, and thus lack the knowledge to examine how education is intertwined with the needs of economic systems. The editors feel that it is timely to close this gap and to offer a book that engages and offers ways to explore critical debates around economics and how they take shape in education.

The editors have asked other educationists to join them in outlining and articulating their thoughts and their work on the topic. The final product, this book, articulates key debates and theoretical perspectives which can give both students and staff across several courses within the study of education a framework for discussing and analysing how economics impacts on the world of education. Furthermore, the book presents propositions of how aspects of economics are present within education and schooling, and how they may impact learning and teaching. These discussions are not only relevant within the study of education but also in a broader socio-political realm. We are all subject to market trends and demands and thus cannot escape the unforgiving pace of the different economic realities that dominate the world. Knowing more may empower us to act. As John Dewey, the famous American philosopher, psychologist and educator maintained, 'We do not learn from experience ... we learn from reflecting on experience' (1933: 78).

## Opening up education

Education is a very contested concept, with many competing views on what education is and what is supposed to be for; it is difficult to arrive at a definition (Carr, 2003). As a topic it provokes debate and discussions, and everyone has an opinion, sometimes a very strong opinion, on what education means and what its purpose ought to be. We all seem to know something about education and thus have something to say about education. This might be due to our ongoing participation in education: whether we choose to participate in education or whether we have to participate. For instance, as an individual you might have thought about attending university and you might have considered different courses before eventually making your final choice. However, if you have children and they are of school age, this is less of a choice, rather it is a compulsory activity. Everyone, at least in the Western context, needs to go to school or receive some sort of education, be this through home-schooling or tutoring. Either way, education is an essential part of everyday life, and in current times it is very difficult not to be involved in some sort of educational process, either directly through our own experience or through the lives of others.

Another important distinction to make is that within education there are historical tensions which contribute to its ambiguity. On the one hand, there are philosophical questions regarding education and its meaning, and on the other hand there are more practical questions regarding how, as a society, we see education happening. For instance, we easily equate education to schooling, education as only occurring in schools and other educational institutions, although this does not need to be so. We could think about education as a lifelong process or something that happens in stages depending on our life circumstances, and not just during the traditional school cycle. This chapter argues that there are consequences to how we see education; the very initial steps as to how we define education alter any possible interpretation. For example, if we accept that education can only happen in schools, everything else associated with education is transformed to match the interpretive framework of the school as a social institution. The main relationships are centred around the teachers and the students, the parents and the school, the school and the community. Knowledge emerges as needing to be organised and delivered in the form of a curriculum. Learning becomes something that is confined to the sphere of the school and is quantifiable or measurable through assessments. Students and teachers are quickly categorised as 'good' or 'bad' depending on their adherence to these dynamics. Education becomes subservient to the main characteristics of schooling as a social institution. Schools are seen as places where we must go to learn and acquire knowledge and qualifications which are useful for the future, even if the future is increasingly uncertain.

With regard to education, this book will provide you with 'food for thought', enticing you to open up your ideas about education, to think critically and beyond your own experience and look at education as a system, and not just what your experience might have been like. Whilst drawing on experience is very important to understand things more deeply, to think about education more critically, we need to do more than that. We need to try and take a step back so that we are able to reflect meaningfully. Education is ubiquitous in our lives; in order to think more critically about it we need to make the familiar strange and apply a more sociological understanding. It is very difficult to think critically about something that over many years we have learnt to accept unproblematically. Instead, this book invites you to develop what C.W. Mills (2000: 5) called a 'sociological imagination' within the context of education; a more reflective understanding which recognises the value of thinking about the intersections between personal biographies and history.

The sociological imagination shows us how what we regard as our experience can only be seen as part of a wider set of collective experiences. Pause for a moment and think briefly about your own educational experience. Was it a positive experience? Did you enjoy going to school? What kind of student were you? Would you call yourself an educated person? Why? The answers to these questions might ask that you think about your experience, but in the same way they are what they are because of the environment in which your education happened. For example, if your hairstyle clashes with the expected codes of conduct and behaviours set by your school, you immediately become a 'problem student' who does not comply with school policy. Some people might suggest that you change your hair in a way that conforms to the rules and regulations in your school, but the main issue, the need to conform, will not disappear as it arises from the environment in which you find yourself in. Simply, if the rules on hairstyles were not there, you would not be labelled a problem student at all. Recently, schools have been accused of passing unnecessary punishments to pupils because of hair and uniform transgressions, with some students becoming temporarily and permanently excluded, or put in isolation (Turner, 2018). We might ask questions around why students' uniforms and hairstyles are so important in schools, that we are willing to disrupt a child's education by sending them home if they do not abide by strict dress codes and rules.

Throughout this chapter and throughout the book the notion of education is presented as broad and wide-ranging, with some chapters posing critical questions about education as an extensive process beyond the school and others more focused on education in schools and other educational institutions. The aims of this chapter are to get you to think about education and to introduce a broader understanding of education, from only defining it through our personal experience, to considering how education is constantly influenced by societal changes, one of which includes the importance of maintaining an economic equilibrium or *status quo*. The chapter also provides a purposeful outline of the upcoming chapters, against the backdrop of economics as an added layer of understanding, a layer which is normally neglected when we think about education. Education, in present times, raises questions of cost, value for money, financial benefits and gains, investment, efforts to improve and secure certain outcomes, effectiveness and usefulness. The drive behind these factors is very often defined by what the economy demands at a particular time and within a particular economic system. These factors cannot be ignored and need to be addressed in order to understand how the purposes of education change with each wave of economic change.

This book is primarily written for students, teachers and academics who wish to learn more about education and how the pressing demands of the economy and economic processes seep into its nature and its purpose. Readers will be introduced to various critical stances on how economics co-opts educational processes and becomes a key driver for educational change. The book will use current examples, case studies and theories to explore and illustrate how the study of education could be diversified; that is if we are willing to engage with an analysis of education which encompasses the pressure from wider economic debates.

## What is education?

As the key focus of this book is on education, it is important to outline what we mean by it. When trying to define education, the work of British philosopher R.S. Peters is important as he provides perhaps the most systematic framework for understanding education. As Peters' view is very extensive, we will focus on the three criteria which he has formulated; for a full discussion, see Peters'

#### 4 Introduction

original works (1966; Peters, Woods and Dray, 1973). In his book *Ethics and Education*, Peters provides a 'synthetic sketch' (Beckett, 2011: 239) for the concept of education. Firstly, Peters places education above other important aspects of human learning; he purports education is something that 'is worth-while to those who become committed to it' (1966, 45). That means education is not something to 'tick off' and 'pass through' but something to be enjoyed. In other words, if the learner does not see any purpose or value in the things he or she learns, then, according to Peters, this activity is not worthwhile and thus cannot count as educational. Secondly, 'education must involve knowledge and understanding and some kind of cognitive perspective, which are not inert' (45). This means that education does not, and cannot, consist of the mere acquisition of knowledge and skills. What counts is the transformation that happens. It also implies that individual needs to look beyond their own nose, into other fields and areas; to become educated they need to be able to see the wider world. Thirdly, education 'rules out some procedures of transmission, on the grounds that they lack willingness and voluntariness on the part of the learner' (45). This implies that education is something people 'opt in' and thus the educational process and procedures need to be morally acceptable. This means, teachers cannot 'force' learners to participate in activities that cause harm. According to Peters, any process that does not satisfy these three criteria cannot be called education. Thus, Peters has argued against an instrumentalist view of education, one that sees education as a utilitarian tool to serve society, improve economic and industrial growth and, consequently, the contentment of the populace.

However, Peters is not the only one who has thought deeply about what we might mean by education. Education Studies, as a discipline, explores educational issues and practices by drawing upon a range of theories and methods (Dufour and Curtis, 2011; Whitty and Furlong, 2017). Theorists and researchers in this area might ask why we educate and how. This is underscored by the belief that there is a need to question the nature and purposes of education in order to engage in a discussion about what education is. As Bartlett and Burton (2016) state, you need to turn the subject on its head to think critically about it. This leads them to define education as something that is broader than schooling. They might argue that education is '... essential for human development for both individuals and societies and has the potential to empower, change lives, bring about greater opportunities and enrich those who experience it' (Marshall, 2018: 1). Others go even a step further and argue that in order to accommodate the various 'language-games' and to utilise opportunities, we need definitions that are flexible and open-ended whilst yet being context-specific (Sewell and Newman, 2014).

Depending on the standpoint taken, we could say that people adopt a particular ideology. Ideologies refer to the system of beliefs and values that an individual or a group holds, although some argue that ideologies are something that we as subjects do. For example, Louis Althusser (1976) said that ideologies only exist because they are enacted and performed, and for Althusser education was the most effective institution to reproduce dominant ideology. Either way, it is undeniable that people have different ideas about what education is and what it should be for. Functionalists might argue that education is essential for the continuation of society (and the state) while Liberalists see education as something that offers opportunities for individuals while also teaching us to live together respectfully. It is important to be aware of these different ideological stances because they underpin our views and approaches. In recent years, our belief of what education is (and should be) has increasingly been shaped by economic needs and ideologies, the

prevalence of neoliberal economics, and the importance of enabling a market which sees competition as the defining characteristics of human relations.

## Education and economics

To explore how economic ideas have become embedded in understandings of education, this book presents a variety of perspectives which illuminate how economics insidiously defines the meaning and purpose of education and schooling. In the past we have argued that education as a subject and as a notion is always under some regime of fast-paced change. We have discussed elsewhere, through the notion of discourse (Foucault, 1987), how education is conceived of and appropriated for purposes other than the pure pursuit of knowledge, self-development or enlightenment (Bustillos and Abegglen, 2018). Discourses 'govern the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others' (Hall, 1997: 44). This book has emerged from such thinking and such reflections. Chapter by chapter, new possibilities are explained to envisage how economics has imposed itself as the prism through which education, its purposes and nature are viewed. Some of the chapters in this book analyse historical and political contexts in which systems of education and schooling have emerged. Other chapters look at more recent events and provide explanations for how education is a plane marked by competition for funding, the deskilling of teachers, the view of students and families as customers, and education as a form of economic investment among others. In this book, the site of the school, perceptions of knowledge, the history of education and the experiences of students and teachers are used to point out and decode some of the discourses deriving from political and economic rhetoric which influence the world of education as a whole. Looking at these discourses is useful because they are a representative of the production of power and as such underscore developments in education both on a global as well as on a personal scale.

In recent years, neoliberal rhetoric and arguments have fuelled an economic-driven discourse about education. These discourses have become embedded in education and have produced coercive entanglements that make it impossible to talk about education without looking at neoliberal ideas and practices. The ways of talking about education as an economic activity have produced an educational reality which we all adhere to. For example, returning to the notion of discourse, there are economic maxims which have trickled down to educational institutions, such as providing good value for money and running cost-effectively. Schools are now asked to conform to the practicalities dictated by these discourses; this means discourses are not just 'talk', what people say about something, but they have 'real' consequences. They influence what we 'do', the actions we take, and through that form the world in which we live. In other words, 'They constitute the "nature" of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and the emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern' (Weedon, 1987: 108). Discourses of this sort are changing the nature of schooling, encouraging schools to think about what their pupils can do for them, rather than what the school can do for its pupils, transforming curricula to 'twenty-first-century skills'. More than ever before, head teachers are 'positioned as managers accountable to the needs and wishes of clients' (Savage, 2017: 143). To add to these tensions, schools are being asked to respond to these pressures at times of economic hardship, years of economic austerity which have left schools very often with limited and depleted funding.

## 6 Introduction

However, this has not just remained an exclusive dynamic for schools and colleges, but is extended to other sectors of education. In the United Kingdom higher education system, the significance of cost-effectiveness and value for money led to the introduction and increment of fees for students and a new form of higher education (HE) league table, produced by a national student feedback exercise, compiled by the National Student Survey (NSS), where students like customers rate and review their degree courses. The results of such surveys are very important to attract students and they organise institutions hierarchically, with those universities at the top of the market producing the best results. Whilst the survey could be seen as a genuine opportunity for students to give feedback, the survey also furthers the marketisation of higher education by lodging competition and pitting universities against each other. Interestingly, one of the most prestigious universities in the United Kingdom, Cambridge University, has been excluded from the NSS for two years in a row because of an ongoing student boycott of the survey; students' refusal to complete the survey makes its results invalid (Kiel, 2018). The boycott has been proposed by students and is supported by the Students' Union as a way to combat against the culture of education as a consumable product, and the government's approach to universities. This boycott has even been discussed in the House of Lords.

This book is arguing that current understandings and approaches to education are constructed through economic discourse. Market metaphors now dominate the world of education, and schooling has become an essential part of state policy and politics. The development of the 'knowledge economy' (see Powell and Snellman, 2004) has pushed this development even further. As Giroux (2012) states:

Since the 1970s, we have witnessed the forces of market fundamentalism strip education of its public values, critical content, and civic responsibilities as part of its broader goal of creating subjects wedded to consumerism, risk-free relationships, and the deconstruction of the social state.

This has enabled a discursive formation around 'education for the sake of the economy' (Bustillos and Abegglen, 2018). If we start asking questions as to how we got here, we are bound to find the escalating intervention in education by governments, the disempowering of teachers and educational professionals, the reconstruction of students and families as educational consumers, and the involvement of businesses and big companies with schools, all disguised as raising standards. Whilst it is debatable what exactly this means for learners, teachers, parents and educational institutions, it definitely changes the outlook of what we mean by education. The book is an invitation to think and ask different questions about education, to contemplate it in the light of economic contexts, but also to ponder about the potential of education, what it could be, and not just what it currently is. The question is where this might lead us in the future, respectively, which educational futures are going to be imaginable within this economic logic and how we can help ourselves and others think outside of it.

Thinking about educational futures, Ward (2013: xiii), points out that it is important '... to know what education is, but also what education *could be*, and might be'. Thus this book goes beyond a mere discussion of economics in education and raises questions of the meaning and purpose of education on a broader level. As Arendt (1954) points out, this sort of questioning offers opportunities, particularly in a context where things seem to be in 'crisis'. 'A crisis forces us back to



the questions themselves and requires from us either new or old answers, but in any case direct judgments' (Arendt, 1954). This means, in order to avoid a catastrophe and resolve issues we need to make decisions: decisions about what we think of things and how to act. This involves taking risks (Biesta, 2016). These risks seem worth taking as education is about human beings, and hence the book strongly advocates an engagement with educational debates, especially those that surround education and economics. The outcomes of this engagement might not yet be known, but simply closing our eyes is not the solution. '... the acknowledgment that education isn't a mechanism and shouldn't be turned into one – matters' (Biesta, 2016: 4).

## Summary and chapter outlines

This chapter has introduced you to a more comprehensive understanding of education and has argued that schools are no longer independent from wider economic realities and government projects. In fact, the chapter implicitly presents education as an essential part of any political sphere and, intrinsically, an economic activity. Year on year, politicians have a lot to say about education, schools are inherently there to serve the public good, but in the last decades education has become the 'best economic policy' (Tony Blair, 2005, cited in Walford, 2013: 7). These extracts in public debate have allowed for a re-imagining of education as a plane where economics is becoming not only increasingly present but also a dominant force. The role of the school in society is changing, yet, it is not changing in a vacuum; instead, it is changing within the shaky realm of everyday economics and politics. Some, like critical pedagogist Henry Giroux (2011: 51), describe these refashioning of schools as 'an attack on education', where 'institutions no longer are designed to benefit all members of the community', but instead are 'designed to serve the narrow interests of individual consumers and national economic policies'. Others might regard this as progress and inevitable in a world where everything needs to translate to economic benefits.

The following chapters continue the debate about education and economics, and introduce readers to the many ways in which the tradition of schooling is being rewritten, not just by changes to educational and social policy but by the idea that education is an economic activity. They offer rigorous analysis of how economics, including its ideological and theoretical stances, is continuously used to define and shape the nature and the purposes of education.

The second chapter presents a historical account of the main influences behind the teaching of economics. It deals with key concepts such as microeconomics, macroeconomics, neoclassical economics and *homo economicus*. This is an important chapter as it explains key concepts and terms which readers of this book are not expected to know or handle already. The chapter sets the scene and explains some of the language which readers will see in later chapters. It also argues that the teaching and understanding of economics is still too dominated by neoclassical economics which creates a 'perfect rationality' characterised by optimising, self-interest and equilibrium. Neoclassical economics is discussed as offering an interesting yet limited representation of human behaviour. Part of the chapter carefully explains how the psychological turn of the twentieth century influenced economics creating another branch of the discipline, called behavioural economics. The chapter gently introduces the reader to basic ideas and definitions in economics, whilst also developing educational implications resulting from how economics is taught in schools and universities.

## 8 Introduction

The third chapter addresses the major historical developments that led to the creation of a formal education system in England and Wales. The developments are carefully explained to denote the increased commitment by governments, to fund and monitor an education system centred around the school as a new social institution. The chapter critically argues what role the formation of the school played in shaping societal beliefs around childhood. An important layer of analysis in the chapter also suggests that the education of children was planned to reflect the economic interests of the time. Focusing on how childhood has been historically linked to the dynamics of school and the pureness of nature, the third chapter uses current examples to problematise the ecological crisis facing us all and the role of the school in educating children about the change needed.

Chapter 4 is the first in a series of chapters which show how neoliberalism underpins the world of education in different ways. It particularly addresses ways in which neoliberal economics coerces education to serve economic needs, and in this process teachers lose power and authority, and knowledge must be useful to have any value at all. The chapter pays close attention to the discourses around *utility* as a way to redefine what is useful knowledge in schools, but the chapter critically unpicks how the usefulness we currently attribute to knowledge is dictated by economic needs. An important argument in this chapter is how educational values of pedagogy, trust in teachers and vocational expertise are being replaced and reinterpreted by the introduction of neoliberal values. These neoliberal values transform the world of education and everyone in it, stripping back the educational experience of many, in order to meet the needs of a growing educational market in which competitiveness and performance thrive.

The fifth chapter continues to use the prevalence of neoliberal values in education to offer a critique of how they impact on individuals. Offering critical commentary on recent policy and educational changes in the United Kingdom, Chapter 5 opens up different ways to examine the effects of neoliberal values in schools. The chapter isolates the notion of *choice* to unravel an analysis of how individuals are made increasingly responsible for their educational futures. Using a Foucauldian conceptual framework, the chapter carefully illustrates how the introduction of *choice* and other educational policies creates an environment which is designed to favour a new type of *educated subject*. The chapter harnesses current changes in educational policy and a Foucauldian theoretical stance to offer a critical account of how the values of neoliberal economics seep into the world of education and schooling.

Other impacts of economic values in education are explored in the sixth chapter. In Chapter 6, *Human Capital Theory* (HCT) is used to shed light on how there is a tendency to think about human beings as investments. Education is also discussed as one of the main ways in which an individual acquires human capital in a world where education success is exchanged for jobs, better pay or to compete in the global employment market. The chapter offers clear definitions of the theoretical stance and a useful historical context to introduce readers to this critical perspective. The chapter narrates how our engagement with education is normally thought about on very economic terms, with education seen as a valuable investment which should allow us to secure certain benefits.

In Chapter 7, the relationship between education and employment laid out in the previous chapter is problematised further. In this chapter, the conflation between education and employment is explored to highlight emerging issues of inequality in the world of work. This chapter delves into the notion of the *Precariat* and the rise of precarious work as a way to problematise the role of education and schooling in reproducing unequal employment realities. The *Precariat* is defined and used to draw educational implications throughout the chapter, raising critical questions about the

role of schools in reproducing a workforce facing precarious futures. The chapter also seeks to emphasise the ways employment relations occur in the *gig economy*, a particular climate affecting the world of work and enabling precarious conditions of employment. These points are used to argue that the purpose of education is reduced to that of an *edu-factory*, where the production of qualifications, led by market trends, overlooks more traditional values. Although the chapter refers to UK contexts, the applicability of its critical points are global and can be used to analyse other educational contexts.

Chapter 8 offers critical exploration of how the university as an institution has undergone profound change, and has now come under pressure to renew itself to meet economic demands. The chapter has three main sections, *the mediaeval origins of the university*, *the modern university* and *the postmodern university*, which unpack the development of the institution and the current exposure to changes in the educational markets facing universities. The chapter pays close attention to recent changes in the United Kingdom in relation to tuition fees, student funding and the markets in which degrees are created. In critically discussing these changes, the chapter is arguing that higher education has become another economic commodity, turning it into an integral part of political agendas, and incrementally monitored by governments. Further reflections around what happens to knowledge in market relations and the effects of increasing scrutiny on universities are also considered.

The association of neoliberal economics and progress is critiqued in Chapter 9. It argues that an important impact of a neoliberal education is that it is reductionist and Eurocentric. Chapter 9 problematises the development discourse and how it impacts on the projects of schooling in non-Western societies. As part of its analysis, the chapter uses Foucauldian theory to raise critical questions on how Eurocentric knowledge is being replicated in developing countries, legitimised by schools created to mirror the West. These are important arguments, particularly as education has had a long history of being an instrument of colonisation, and recolonisation in developing countries (Brock-Utne, 2002). Engaging in a critique of the belief that any type of education is progress, the chapter also draws on critical pedagogy as a way to decolonise education. The final chapter, Chapter 10, provides concluding remarks to the book and highlights the importance of criticality when thinking about education. The chapter also contains questions for reflection that encourage readers to explore the topic further. The future of education is uncertain and hence the chapter argues for all readers to engage with education – with an open and inquisitive attitude.

Please note that each of these chapters reflects its author's, or authors', own view(s). Although not all of them agree with each other, they all have a critical, analytical outlook on education and address economics or economic questions of some sort. It is therefore not necessary to read the chapters in the order they are presented, although we, as the editors, have tried to put them in a meaningful sequence, presenting those chapters giving historical insights and addressing more general questions first, and those providing concrete case studies and examples later. Each chapter also poses questions which we recommend readers follow up on, to learn more about particular aspects of a topic or argument.

## Conclusion

As explained in this chapter, this book is actively encouraging you as a reader to pose questions about the nature of education and the organisation of important institutions, such as the school. The

## 10 Introduction

chapters are a compilation of possible challenges to the dominant views on education. Throughout the book, accepted views on education are outlined and very often questioned to contest hegemonic judgements that prevent us from thinking differently. In the case of education and economics, this book outlines some of the new political rationalities based on 'truths' associated with the economy, the market, human capital and an entrepreneurial vision of the individual (Foucault, 2008: 215). On a more inherent level, this book also seeks to broaden readers' perspectives on what education could be for, and what it should be for.

To conclude this first chapter, we would like to point out that this book is part of an Education Studies series. These books address philosophical, sociological, historical, psychological and social issues in education both on a national and international level. These discussions are equally relevant within the study of education, particularly at a time when within education courses the influences of other disciplines are being made more apparent and pressures on justifying educational outcomes are mounting. We therefore recommend that readers explore educational issues beyond this book and join the debate about education because: education is something that concerns us all.

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## CHAPTER 6

# GLOBAL UNIVERSITY, LOCAL ISSUES: TAKING A CREATIVE AND HUMANE APPROACH TO LEARNING AND TEACHING

Sandra Abegglen, Tom Burns, Simone Maier and  
Sandra Sinfield

### ABSTRACT

*The chapter explores the value of dialogue and the dialogic for developing student and staff agency, “voice” and ethics in the context of a first-year undergraduate module of the BA Hons Education Studies, an undergraduate course at The Sir John Cass School of Art, Architecture and Design and a Postgraduate Certificate of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education module, at London Metropolitan University, United Kingdom. The authors take a case study approach, making use of Freire’s ideas of critical pedagogy, to reflect on their personal learning and teaching experience as well as the feedback received from students and staff. The aim of the chapter is to explore how to empower (non-traditional) students and staff – and bridge the gap between students’ and teachers’ understanding of what this might entail. Rather than trying to bring students “up to speed” to prepare them for successful study and a professional career, or better “train” staff to deliver policy and strategy, we argue that we need to welcome them for the people they are as we help them to navigate a Higher Education system in need of humanizing.*

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**Keywords:** Higher education; widening participation; inclusion; critical pedagogy; dialogic; undergraduate/undergraduate students; staff/academic staff; curriculum; emancipatory; empowering

## INTRODUCTION

The present chapter builds on selected notions of humane and critical pedagogy to explore the use of creativity, dialogue and the dialogic to foster an inclusive, equitable and socially just practice with undergraduate students and similarly with academic staff. Our University is based in central London, United Kingdom (UK), and we operate both globally and locally: global in that we attract staff and students from around the world; local in that we are a widening participation institution reaching out to British students that are traditionally excluded from or unwelcome within tertiary education: mature students and those from working class backgrounds and ethnic minority groups. The chapter touches on the impact of marketization on university teaching and learning, and explores the value of a humane approach to education in our local/global context: for developing our students' agency, "voice" and self-efficacy and for developing staff as humane, ethical practitioners. The case studies presented highlight the importance of staff and student development, and draw on our experience of teaching on a first-year core module of the BA Hons Education Studies, *Becoming an Educationist* (*Becoming*), and of the BA Hons Fine Art at the Sir John Cass School of Art, Architecture and Design (The Cass), London Metropolitan University. It also relates to our work with staff on the Postgraduate Certificate of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (PGCert), London Metropolitan University. The approach taken in all three cases makes use of Freire's (1970) ideas of critical pedagogy and critical consciousness, in particular, his work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, alongside creative and ludic approaches to emancipatory practice.

### *Traditional and Non-traditional Students*

The typical university habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) has been found to privilege the success of a youthful, white, middle-class and able-bodied student; de facto discriminating against all forms of "difference" and diversity, making the non-traditional student feel more than ever like a "fish out of water" (Thomas, 2001a, 2001b). This chapter illustrates ways to afford more opportunities to shape a welcoming, holistic and creative curriculum (Abegglen, Burns, & Sinfield, 2018) and pedagogy that does not privilege one form of cultural capital over another. We highlight how creative practices can be harnessed to promote an environment designed to enable all students to flourish academically, while demonstrating their learning more on their own terms. Thus the aim of the chapter is not only to critically reflect on the methods used to foster student and staff agency, but also to bridge the gap between students' and teachers' (mis)understanding of a well-trodden study path in widening participation institutions: that of bringing non-traditional students "up to speed" to prepare them for successful study and

a professional career. We argue that rather than remediate, we need in practice to welcome all students – and staff – for the people they are as we help them to navigate a Higher Education (HE) system in need of humanizing and personalizing. We propose that embracing creative, ludic and empowering pedagogies enables and makes transparent greater criticality and awareness of the ecology of knowledge-generation in epistemic communities. This is the real world!

## MANAGING A MARKETIZED MERITOCRACY: UK HE AND WIDENING PARTICIPATION

The ascent of managerialist cultures in HE and the ubiquity of performance metrics into every crevice of academic life is blamed for the erosion of creative flair and ... the degeneration of the university as a knowledge incubator. (Watermeyer & Olssen, 2016, p. 212)

London Metropolitan University is a post-1992 inner-city university in the UK. In 1992, UK polytechnics were offered the opportunity to become universities in their own right. These are now called post-92 institutions to distinguish them from the increasingly more prestigious Russell Group universities, a self-selected association of twenty-four public research universities in the UK. This highlights a source of conflict in UK HE at this time. Arguably when Blair (2001) as Prime Minister introduced his “education, education, education” mantra with the goal of 50% of 18–30-year-olds in or through HE by 2010, rather than creating and valuing a more diverse university project, he ushered in a two-tier HE system, with some universities, degrees and students deemed to be worth more – or less – than others.

As universities ostensibly opened their doors, university fees were introduced and within a very few years they had moved from £1,000.00 to over £9,000.00 per academic year – with funding distributed unevenly across the sector:

The most comprehensive, pervasive and arguably pernicious manifestation of academic monitoring in the UK is the performance-based funding system, the Research Excellence Framework (REF). (Watermeyer & Olssen, 2016, p. 203)

The REF competitively ranks Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) according to their research outputs, providing a route to financial reward and professional esteem “at least for those institutions adept at playing its game” (Watermeyer & Olssen, 2016, p. 203). Similarly, the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) evaluates teaching not by observation of teaching but by a measure of how many graduates progress to high paying graduate jobs (Times Higher Education, 2019). This has provided a “value for money” rationale for deleting traditional “adult” and “Liberal Arts” courses from those institutions reaching out to include those historically excluded from or unwelcome within HE. Consequently, post-92 or widening participation universities like ours have lost History, Philosophy, Women’s-, Caribbean- and Irish Studies courses not because they were unpopular, but rather they have no linear trajectory to high-paying employment. Thus, the widening participation HEI is not celebrated for its diversity but traduced for its failure to be a Russell Group institution. And, as Watermeyer and Olssen (2016) argue, staff and students in these universities are further stigmatized: staff for working



in an institution that prioritizes teaching over research and students for achieving a de facto lower status degree that is still, despite the draconian revision of courses offered, positioned by government policy and rhetoric to be not worth the fees. Thus, UK HE reveals itself to be fundamentally unequal and unfair.

The stratification of the UK education system is widely acknowledged by intergovernmental organizations including The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD): “According to the OECD, British schools are some of the most socially segregated in the developing world” (Bloodworth, 2016, p. 81). This means the education system is riddled with inequalities justified on the back of a misguided belief in the notion of meritocracy where the “best” rise to the top; an idea continually promulgated by successive UK governments from both sides. The continued “myth of meritocracy” (Bloodworth, 2016) justifies differential educational outcomes and thus perpetuates the inequalities in society. It is a system that from the top down favors already privileged groups, and where schools, teachers and parents gamify this process on a micro level (Gewirtz, Ball, & Bowe, 1995). League tables like the National Student Survey (NSS) play into this situation. Set up by the HE Funding Council for England initially and now the Office for Students, the NSS was designed to anonymously collate feedback on UK HEIs with the claim that it would “help prospective students to make informed decisions about where and what to study” (Ipsos Mori & Office for Students, 2019). In effect, it functions as a management tool, often weaponized against staff and students alike. As the Cambridge University Students’ Union (2019) puts it: “[NSS] survey data is used to prop up the marketisation of education, making universities businesses and students consumers.” For post-92 universities like ours, the NSS has a worrying degree of power with its annual results significantly impacting student applications and thus further defining the funding awarded. In an attempt to wrestle back control from this self-proclaimed authoritative survey, some student unions regularly call on their members to boycott the NSS.

Together, managerialism and the marketization of HE have had an impact not only on “global” educational narratives but also directly affect local and actual classroom practice. The linking of managerialism and education arguably dates back to the 1980s Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher, where:

“Arrogant” professionals were arraigned alongside “inflexible” bureaucrats and “interfering” (local) politicians, all of whom had prevented efficient, effective and economic public services. They argue that the only way to disentangle and defuse these “interlocking modes of power” is by the combination of markets and management. (Sinfield, Burns, & Holley, 2004, p. 139)

A marketized HE system set within a Western discourse is becoming increasingly hegemonic – in language, structure, practices – and seeks to manage that which is considered to be legitimate pedagogical activity:

It is here that emergent forms of managerialism, with all the implications for the content and organisation of professional work, specifically the work of lecturers, becomes important with relationships between professionals and managers constituted unevenly between and within different organisations. (Sinfield et al., 2004, p. 139)

In this context, “academic freedom” has for the first time been placed in the hands of senior management asserting their “right to manage” (viz. also [Barnett, 2014](#), August 26). Pedagogy, once purely the concern of academics directly involved in course design and delivery, has become a matter of policy, strategy and targets stifling creativity and the “risk-taking spirit” ([Shattock, 2019](#), April 03). Thus, rather than a humane, ecological university ([Barnett, 2014](#), August 26), we have the “educational experience”: a “journey” disintegrated and distilled into “discrete, reified, and ultimately saleable things or packages of things” ([Noble, 2002](#)). Standards have become standardization: the assemblage of courses into reusable units: syllabi, lectures and exams. The ineffable has become commodified and, for [Noble \(2002\)](#), barely reflects what actually takes place in classrooms, lending “an illusion of order and predictability to an undetermined process.” Subsequently, teachers become producers, students become consumers and their relationship takes on not “education,” but a shadow of education, “an assemblage of pieces without the whole” ([Noble, 2002](#)). It is in this overarching atmosphere of commodification and top-down micro-management that our widening participation university and our emancipatory (teaching) practice is lodged.

## **LEARNING AND TEACHING IN UK HE: THE TROUBLE WITH STUDENTS – AND STAFF**

In the UK HE students “read for their degrees.” This means, students have about 12 hours (less in some UK HEIs) contact time per week with staff directly concerned with course delivery and assessment. Managed by learning outcomes, the teaching that exists is delivered in the main in traditional, transmissive lecture format. This model requires very motivated and well-organized students who are able to schedule and manage their academic “labour” and their study time; independently and proactively. Implicit and explicit is that students need to have the sort of academic, social and cultural capital ([Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977](#)) required for navigating tertiary education: higher level learning, criticality, maturity. They need to dexterously juggle the competing demands of their various courses and a raft of assessment processes and deadlines. The reality is, especially in widening participation institutions where students have work and care commitments beside their studies, students do not start university with either the time or the “capital” to immediately engage either with the educational or the extra – and co-curricular offers made. The majority of our students are non-traditional, and thus they tend not to have the time or space to take up the same opportunities that other, more traditional students, might do. Rather than addressing such disparity of opportunity in embedded, creative, developmental ways, many UK HEIs offer instead extra “skills” programs and workshops designed to bring these “time-poor” non-traditional students “up to speed.”

### *It's “Skilled” Work*

With student success predicated on successful “study skills,” the skills agenda becomes the benchmark and proxy of learning and teaching success ([Knight, 2001](#)). The hope is that this improves not only the “student experience” but

also the institution's retention, progression and achievement statistics. In this context, [Lea and Street \(1998, 2006\)](#) offer seminal theorization that highlights the contrasting and exclusionary expectations and interpretations of successful learning and teaching in HE. Their work comes from an ethnographic background and distinguishes conceptualizations of such "skills" practices as either remedial or developmental: "study skills," "academic socialisation" and "academic literacies" ([Lea & Street, 1998, 2006](#) – viz. also [Abegglen, Burns, & Sinfield, 2019](#)):

*Study skills:* A "skills" approach suggests that there are various discrete skills and strategies that students need to employ to succeed: time management, note making, reading for learning, writing in the correct genre and mode, etc. This is typically critiqued as a deficit model, where complex academic processes are reduced to de-contextualized parts and where the student is seen as flawed and in need of "fixing."

*Socialization:* The socialization argument suggests that disciplines and academic communities have habits and epistemological practices that students need to learn and embrace in order to become full community members. This too is often critiqued as a model that represents students as passive, inexperienced learners who need to be moulded into successful adults (and compliant employees).

*Literacies approach:* The literacies approach is framed as the more critical approach to developing student agency and suggests that the student is an (active) actor in their own learning. This contradicts the general assumption and perception that student literacy is "falling" and that students lack essential study, critical and writing "skills."

This taxonomy holds up a helpful mirror to academic discourse – but at the same time, we argue that the reality is yet more complex. While we too reject the notion of the deficient student, we do argue that there are moments when students do not "just know" how to study successfully. For example, when entering university, many may not "just know" that they need to make active and memorable notes in order to engage with, understand and learn their material. Moreover, if we take [hooks' \(1994, 2003\)](#) ideas about education and [Lave and Wenger's \(1991\)](#) apprenticeship model of "Communities of Practice," it becomes evident that novice students will need to "learn" how to become academics within their own epistemic communities. Yet this need not be a passive and unquestioning indoctrination into a fixed and static schema, rather it can be an active and embodied process of becoming. However, it is hard to disagree when [Lea and Street \(1998\)](#) argue that current perceptions in regard to academic literacies need to change. Rather than locating "problems" within individual students, or broader categories of students "at risk," wider socio-economic factors that position some students as more traditionally advantaged or disadvantaged do need to be addressed. This is where the supercomplexity of the university ([Barnett, 2000](#)) meets the concrete reality of what happens in the classroom. We suggest that we need institutional approaches both to

non-traditional and traditional students and to (all) academic staff based not on the micro-management of opportunity but on more emergent practice and more dialogic relationships.

To that end, we call for a nuanced discussion of and approach to student learning that integrates and fosters more than one conceptual model or pedagogical approach. Given the transactional educational experiences that are promoted by league table positions: the constant measurements, the relentless high stakes assessment and subsequent “teaching to the test”; we argue that a “de-schooling” (Illich, 1970) of students and staff is necessary to destabilize common sense notions of education itself and to (re-)invigorate teaching, learning and assessment practices (Abegglen, Burns, & Sinfield, 2016a). Students need to be provided with opportunities that creatively scaffold their learning throughout their studies, and that build on their existing skills and knowledge. They need to be welcomed and recognized as whole human beings – with all their strengths and weaknesses.

### *The Staff are Revolting*

UK HEIs not only offer “skills programs” for their students but also programs and workshops for their academic staff, in particular, their international staff, to familiarize them with the expectations and customs of HE and of their particular institution. At this moment, all staff new to UK university teaching must obtain a teaching qualification soon after appointment. Quite often this is driven by an agenda of a supposed staff deficit (Learning and Teaching in Higher Education Chat, 2019, March 17) – similar to the approach that the majority of HEIs adopt toward their supposedly deficit students. Staff development is therefore not offered with the aim to profit educators but as a form of training designed to benefit the institution. Reductive in nature, this neither gives staff the encouragement to develop their teaching nor does it give them ownership in respect to their own practices and praxes. UK HE can be almost as disempowering for academic staff as it can be for students.

This reveals a picture of UK HE that is far from humane. UK HE has become a “battleground,” where academic staff and students, between and within institutions, are competitors trying to “survive.” There is little focus on the individual and their abilities – their desires, hopes and fears. There is also little focus on those subjects and methods that do not immediately bring the desired league-table results: the adult and liberal arts; the creative and developmental; the social and the socio-political. This is particularly the case in widening participation institutions that feel the need to demonstrate their “worth” and “fight” for their place in academia now that HE is subject to market forces and a completely untheorized concept of “value for money.” As a consequence, teaching and learning have become a means to an end: an inverted utilitarianism where the many are sacrificed for the few; a discourse that Thomas Gradgrind (viz. Dickens, 1854) would recognize: one that only values the facts and numbers, and is dedicated to the pursuit of profitable enterprise, rather than activities of intrinsic worth and value.

## AN ARGUMENT FOR A MORE DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION

Considering the current UK HE context and the hostile outlook on and approach to teaching and learning, it seems timely to develop a more inclusive and humane education – one that acknowledges and fosters student and staff agency. This requires developmental curricula that value integrity and which help develop an ethical outlook and responsibility toward society. Nussbaum (2016) suggests a stronger consideration of human capabilities, while Freire (1970) proposes a pedagogy that gives people the opportunity to be in a democratic exchange with each other; teachers and students working in partnership, creating education for emancipatory action. This would be important for all students, but is perhaps more necessary for those oppressed not just by funding inequities, but also by the concomitant hierarchical, elitist nature of education that places widening participation students at a social disadvantage.

Recently, Norman Jackson (viz. *Creative Academic*, 2019) and the Creative Academic Project (of which we are members) developed a “manifesto for a more creative HE” as a “public declaration of beliefs, a provocation and a call to action” (*Creative Academic*, 2019, April) – signifying a journey toward a more humane, enlivening and enriching HE. Cole (2018, June 05, p. 1), a leading figure in AdvanceHE, has added his voice to this call to humanize education, arguing that UK HEIs need to be “looking at measures of success that go beyond employment rates, job titles and salary.” Cole (2018, June 05, p. 3) concludes that we should consider student success in a broad sense, “supporting them [students] to be successful in any given context and across all aspects of life.”

However, rethinking education as a practice of freedom where people have equal opportunities and where learning and teaching is a process rather than an outcome is challenging. This is especially the case in an unjust education system that favors some over others: the few not the many. We argue for a more rhizomatic model of and approach to education; one where the striations, paths and patterns of previous inhabitants become smoothed out and new students can wander, and wonder, nomadic, street fighting; re-territorializing (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972, 1980) tricky academic space and creating new meanings, together. However, as Nancy (2000) in his work *Being Singular Plural* points out, there is a delicate balance of how we can speak of a plurality of the “we” without making the “we” a singular identity. It is about developing a sense of being part of a wider community and showing empathy for other people’s ideas and practices. What is therefore required is a complex dance – with multiple partners – in complex landscapes of meaning (Wenger, 2010); and new meaning-making by both academic staff and students. To that end, a humanistic curriculum – and education system in general – takes the idea of the Humboldtian model of education, that is, the integration of teaching and learning with the service to humanity. An education system that strives for knowledge and practice that equally address human needs and problems or, following Freire (1970), an education that not just treats students (or staff) as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge but one that facilitates true learning, dialogue and participation.

The following sections discuss three cases studies – an undergraduate module, an undergraduate course and a staff development program – that aim to empower learners and educators and through that foster a more humane education and education system without ignoring the wider context.

## CASE STUDY 1: BECOMING AN EDUCATIONIST

The BA Hons Education Studies at London Metropolitan University (UK) is a multidisciplinary degree drawing upon history, sociology, philosophy, pedagogics and cultural studies to equip students with the skills, knowledge and understanding to take on socially responsible roles as critical professionals in a range of settings including: (primary) teaching, youth and community work, sport education, mentoring and personal development. It is designed to be a preparation for further study toward Master qualifications and beyond. The first year of the BA offers a grounding in key educational theories and concepts via four, year-long (30-week) modules: Making Sense of Education; Education and Encounter in the Global City; Culture, Curriculum and Technics; plus, our module, *Becoming an Educationist (Becoming)*. *Becoming* is nominally the “academic skills” module, but we shape it as the synoptic module, the hermeneutic, “collective third space” (Gutierrez, 2008, p. 148), wherein the students can make sense of and experiment with that which they are learning across the program as a whole. This framing of *Becoming* is disruptive of typical perceptions of skills modules as the place for fixing deficit students, as we take an approach that is challenging, dialogic, creative and emancipatory – helping students find their academic identity and voice through blogging, role play, simulations, and real research and the production of multimodal exhibitions and digital artifacts (Abegglen, Burns, & Sinfield, 2015). We encourage wonder, developing a critical consciousness as a humanizing way to gaze at, examine and play with this and potential worlds and devising research methodologies to reveal “real-world problems.” A key desirable outcome for us is that our students develop without losing themselves in the process: we seek to enable the emergence of an owned critical academic persona.

Specifically, we decided to develop a module that would welcome all students into the university for the people they already were – as it took them on a developmental journey to become the academics they wanted to be. The module opened by creating opportunities for the students to interact with each other, with the module and with the degree program as a whole. We used role play and simulation – to get students talking and to validate their thinking. We used drawing and “making” to help them think and see differently. And we fostered proactive discussion mediated by images, by topic, by objects and by academic texts (viz. Palus & Drath, 2001), such that students learned that talking is thinking and, as with writing, making and doing, it can foster active learning. The students participated in a range of projects including producing a multimodal exhibition (Abegglen, Burns, & Sinfield, 2016b) to showcase results of an early participant observation exercise, exploring what makes learning

happen in a university – and what stops learning from happening. Students represented their findings as knitting, poetry, 3D objects, animations, video, collages, comic books and posters: they saw and communicated “differently” (Burns, Sinfield, & Abegglen 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2018d, 2018e). The students also blogged their learning – and concomitant formal academic writing flourished as a result (Abegglen, Burns, & Sinfield, 2016c). They develop a “Digital Me” for a showcase event and end of term party; a further opportunity to gather together and celebrate their achievements rather than merely “assess” their learning. Each student also engaged in a small qualitative research project on a topic of their own choosing but based around university study. Some of these projects produced innovative findings – such as the first year who uncovered the benefits of group work because it allowed “flow” in student-directed learning – and another student who discovered that her peers resisted visual note making, because they were frightened of drawing. By the end of the module, the students took over the running of the sessions developing interactive learning opportunities for their peers.

Formal and informal feedback, classroom discussions and module evaluations, showed that none of the participating students saw this as a “deficit fixing” skills module. They saw it as a space to learn what they were capable of – and they learned that they were capable of so much more than they had thought when they entered the university. Feedback from the Module Monitoring Log 2016 (Burns, 2016):

Thank you very much for taking me to another level of my journey to ‘Become An Educationist’, each class was captivating, refreshing and interesting. You are Legends, I am really grateful to have worked with you.

I’ve spent more time than expected on my portfolio but to say I’m proud is an understatement, you’ve REALLY inspired my creativity and drive, especially approaching the final hurdle.

Thank you for teaching such an inspirational module. It brought out such creativity within the group and I believe it changed the group dynamics as we had to work with various people whom we generally wouldn’t.

Thank you for all your support within the module and the experience was truly invaluable. :-)

Thank you so much for creative, fun and engaging lessons. I will definitely miss Becoming an Educationalist.

*Becoming* became the space, where they could make sense of themselves as actors and agents in their own learning, of the other modules they were studying and of the University as a whole. Challenged in ways they had not imagined or previously encountered, students experienced “opportunities to collectively generate new forms of joint activity to solve the double bind students encounter” (Gutierrez, 2008, p. 160). As one student wrote on his blog (The Social Hand Grenade, 2016, May 26):

Becoming has been the most unique and creative module with the Education studies course at the London Metropolitan. Its content has been all-encompassing and has helped me greatly in other modules, yet the real lesson has been the way in which the content has been delivered; the module is democratic and relies heavily on the dialogic. It lets us express ourselves honestly and freely, and asks that we allow others to do the same.

## CASE STUDY 2: BA HONS FINE ART

Similarly, to students on the Becoming an Educationist module, students on the BA Hons Fine Arts are diverse, non-traditional and often feel even more academically dispossessed than students of more traditional subjects. For example, artists and “makers” are not seen as well-placed for formal academic reading or for university writing. Thus, staff teaching at The Cass (The Sir John Cass School of Art, Architecture and Design) perform this delicate dance; balancing the learning needs of predominantly non-traditional but creative student cohorts with the wider pressures from UK HE stakeholders such as the [Quality Assurance Agency \(2017\)](#), AdvanceHE and the omnipresent NSS. What is said to differentiate Fine Arts education from many other disciplines is that it does not align in straightforward ways teaching against learning outcomes. As stated by Eliza Bonham Carter (Bonham Carter cited in [Phillips, 2019](#), Spring, p. 55), Curator and Head of the Royal Academy Schools, “Studying art is a process in which you don’t know the outcome.” The quality of a student’s learning is assessed through their making processes and the eventual outcome, which is the artwork. Anita Taylor, Executive Dean of Bath School of Art & Design (Taylor cited in [Phillips, 2019](#), p. 58) explains that:

Art is an opportunity for people to have a tangential thought without the polemic of reading or being spoken to – a different wavelength, a different bandwidth, a space which is about connecting to our sense, our ethics, our emotions ...

The Cass works from a foundation of acceptance of the students for who they are and what they are interested in – and focuses on their (learning) process. Students’ tasks are not driven to reflect a particular canon, nor are they focused on predictive outcome-based course design, but rather follow an emancipatory pedagogy (viz. [Nouri & Sajjadi, 2014](#)) that allows for embodied forms of knowledge including emotion, memory, haptic/optic/kinetic/sonic awareness and physical dexterity. Students in many of the courses are asked to assess their own work – and also their own working process – in dialogue with their tutors. Often, they are provided with feedback rather than grades, helping them to take ownership of their learning – and making learning processes transparent and meaningful; shifting initial reliance on the tutor with which they arrive such that they become rounded artistic practitioners rather than compliant professionals.

Our perception is that the emergent and emancipatory approaches to education embraced by art schools like The Cass should not in fact be limited to art courses or the teaching and learning of art, but are paradigmatic of all “true” teaching and learning. As [Hunting \(2013\)](#), Course Leader BA Hons Fashion Textiles at The Cass, states: “Making art is not easy, relaxing or restful, it’s painful, hard and bloody ... but also fulfilling and necessary to me.” This is similar to teaching – and learning – in other courses. It is bringing together (art) philosophy with pedagogic practice in inspirational ways. As [Hunting \(2018\)](#) states, this includes: “The rejection of normalisation and fulfilling expectations of others ... [to] produce work that can confuse, annoy or destabilise the viewer....” We want to reflect back just how empowering and universally applicable such praxes can



be; how they capture the essence of exactly what an emergent approach to teaching and learning could be.

### CASE STUDY 3: THE PGCERT

The emancipatory teaching in our modules and courses is carried forward into our staff-facing PGCert; a course designed to develop subject experts to additionally being informed, capable and engaging teachers. Here, we focus particularly on our module, the first that staff participants encounter: Facilitating Student Learning (FSL). Our postgraduate module for staff has been developed by drawing on the theory and practice of *Becoming*, our first-year undergraduate module and the ideas of Fine Arts education as practised in The Cass. There is a strong emphasis on staff bringing “real” teaching dilemmas into FSL workshops. Via dialogic peer-to-peer learning situations, lecturers explore how emancipatory teaching can be used to engage our non-traditional students and allow for authentic and embodied interactions (viz. Barnett, 2014, August 26) that welcome their diversity. In practice, this means that staff are encouraged to engage in learning via the same learning, teaching and assessment strategies that we use for our undergraduate students.

In FSL, staff too engage in role plays and simulations; they make collages and draw rich pictures; they text map and free write; they blog their learning; they engage in ongoing dialogue, peer review and feedback; and they make representations of themselves, of HE and of students from found objects and clean recyclables. Together participants engage in embodied, active and interactive learning with low- and high-tech resources. For example, one FSL workshop is structured around a Flipped Classroom model (Plymouth Educational Development Department, 2014) and is scaffolded by discussion in the course Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), while the class itself is conducted virtually in Collaborate (an online platform developed by Blackboard, an education technology and service company). Prior to the synchronous online workshop, the (staff) participants are asked to log-in to the VLE to find their reading list and provide a brief 250-word answer to the question: “How do you know if the learning environment you’ve created is meaningful for your students?”. Participants are also requested to comment on the answers of their peers. With this task, the FSL message board becomes a hive of activity. Participants typically engage in far greater depth, with more peer-to-peer interactions – making suggestions, offering resources and seeking clarification – than they would in peer-to-tutor interactions.

FSL participants hence experience and reflect on engaging, creative and dialogic (Bakhtin, 1981) practice, face to face and online, synchronously and asynchronously. Many lecturers quickly adapt and implement the methods, approaches and practices modeled and experienced into their own classes and teaching praxes. Feedback taken from the *Module Monitoring Log 2017–2018* (Burns, 2018):

It felt both exciting and disorientating to be a student again, and perhaps for the same reason; what both disorientated and eventually excited me was the feeling of it being a class like

no other, a format of teaching like no other, an idea of learning not based on superimposed information to memorise, but rather based on the beautifully phenomenological concept of co-construction (Vigo) of meanings (and thus of learning) ...

[...] I just wanted to thank you all so much for the support and guidance you have given me while I have been studying for the PGCert. Your individual approaches to the material in the modules have been so refreshing and shown me that there are so many ways to deliver material that can engage, excite and challenge a learner. It has been a truly revelatory experience, and I now feel so much more confident, taking your advice and insights with me as I continue to strive to do the best for the students in my care.

A bit of news I wanted to share is that I've recently taken up the post of Head of [Department], in addition to my teaching post, which is a big step up for me. It's a big challenge (one I'm enjoying) and I definitely would not have been in a position to do this without all the learning and support I've received from you on the PGCert course. The course has helped me develop so much as a teaching practitioner, so I just wanted to say thank you very much for all that you do!

We, therefore, lobby not only for students to experience humane classroom practices, but for staff to experience them also. We make the case that all academic staff be given the time and space for the authentic, critical discussion of key aspects of humane and engaging university teaching and learning practices. In our HEI, this means participating at least in the three modules of our PGCert. This is not to force staff to engage in performative activities just for the sake of passing through some “upskilling” tick box training exercise. Rather, we are fighting for space and time within their overloaded work schedules where they can “be with” (Nancy, 2000) other staff in emergent “Communities of Practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991) on their own journeys to discover and become the academics that they wish to be.

## CONCLUSION: GLOBAL ISSUES, LOCAL ACTION

Leaders who do not act dialogically, but insist on imposing their decisions, do not organize the people—they manipulate them. They do not liberate, nor are they liberated: they oppress. (Freire, 1996, p. 159)

While all educational research continuously reiterates that good education is labor intensive, relying on the quality of interpersonal relationships between tutors and students, between students and students, and between tutors and tutors; we see instead cost cutting, staff reduction, outsourcing, draconian excision of liberal arts education, a reductive notion of employability, standardization rather than standards – and overseeing it all, the assertion of managers’ right to manage a marketized HE within an unequal, unfair, commodified education system. This is not to argue that the university system in the UK was ever equal or fair. Historically, only 3% -7% of the population ever went into tertiary education (Chowdry, Crawford, Dearden, Goodman & Vignoles, 2010, May) and despite the UK mission to bring this up to 50% (Blair, 2001), still, we see that the non-traditional student is stigmatized and unwelcome within HE. Moreover, we argue that this Western discourse with its narrow form of education that seeks to define that which counts as legitimate pedagogical practice stifles the emergence and

the hearing of the “new” voices that de facto do speak within our universities. Managerialism itself can silence those students, those staff and those praxes open to emergence; open to the uncertainty and the supercomplexity present in HE (Barnett, 2014, August 26). We, therefore, promote more humane, multidimensional teaching and proactive student and staff development. Most importantly, we take into account the whole person, and the subtle range of attributes and practices they possess and which they need in order to inhabit (and own) academia – so they can become “academic” in their own discipline(s), without losing themselves in the process. Underpinning this approach are arguments surrounding critical, emancipatory and empowering pedagogy (Freire, 1970), and an emergent approach to practice that fosters creativity (Jackson, Oliver, Shaw, & Wisdom, 2006) for self-actualization (Maslow, 1970) and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982) – and that make time and space for slow, meaningful learning (Berg & Seeber, 2016).

Our approach is predicated on a belief that everybody who wants to learn should be enabled to do so and, as with Fine Arts, what our modules and courses do is welcome students – and staff – for the people they already are and create humane spaces: engaging educational spaces with play and creativity as an emancipatory practice designed to facilitate an embodied journey of becoming. *Becoming*, our first-year undergraduate module, was designed to be emancipatory, creative, credit-bearing and running over the whole of the academic year – giving the module the necessary “seriousness” and our students necessary respect. This approach created time and space not only to explore topics and themes in depth but also for students to “be with” (Nancy, 2000) each other and form their own engaged “Communities of Practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Similarly, the BA Hons Fine Art and FSL, our PGCert module for staff, were not designed to “fix” participants but to give space for thought, engagement, emergence, process and action. All our praxes were designed to enable an empowered transition into and inhabitation of academia, for both teachers and learners. All were designed as rhizomatic, “de-schooling” (Illich, 1970) spaces of encounter with emancipatory and creative praxis with the aim to shake up their notions of “education,” making time and space for them to “...reach their own accommodation with discourses of belonging, identity and power” (Medhurst, 2000, p. 31).

As we are cognisant that we operate in a HE system that promulgates a Western discourse which is becoming increasingly hegemonic and anti-humane, our response is to construct – and argue for – courses and modules that constitute collective third spaces (Gutierrez, 2008) for emancipatory education and for socio-political action. We argue that we require this new, humane and engaging narrative of education, manifest in praxis that welcomes all students and academic staff for the people they are and designed to help dialogic navigation of their own, owned transformation, their own process of becoming.

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# Supercomplexity: Acknowledging Students' Lives in the 21st Century University

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## Abstract

We live, work and study in a supercomplex world. This paper explores whether supercomplexity could be a term that helps us acknowledge this and thus help us reframe how we talk about education, in particular widening participation education. We use theoretical works on supercomplexity and third space, a critical angle on current policy and politics, as well as our own experience, to launch this exploration and to map the educational landscape our "non-traditional" students travel through - where for our students: *hic sunt dracones* ('here are dragons').

**Key words:** supercomplexity, non-traditional students, widening participation, third space, higher education

## Introduction

We work in the United Kingdom (UK) in a post-1992, widening participation university set in an inner city context that recruits mainly "non-traditional" students. The typical, politically correct way to discuss our students is that they are "diverse". However a sub-text of many conversations about students such as ours is that they are "deficit" or deficient, lacking the skills or attributes required to succeed in university without some form of remediation. We want to challenge those conversations - and those words - in this piece. This paper therefore reflects on supercomplexity as a notion with which to talk about 21st century students to enable a more inclusive education for all learners. The reflections build on our own teaching experiences as well as theoretical works by authors on supercomplexity (Barnett 2000a, 2000b; Barnett & Hallam, 1999) and third space (Bhabha, 2004; Soja, 1996; Lefebvre, 2003; Gutiérrez, 2008). We move on to argue that 21st century educators need to create and utilise third space opportunities to counter current educational narratives so as to create a truly inclusive Higher Education (HE) and to acknowledge and foster the strengths that non-traditional students already possess to navigate a supercomplex world.

### *Starting Questions*

Defining a student body as "diverse" or "non-traditional" does not fully capture the extent of the supercomplexity of students' lives in the 21st century. As educators and Learning Developers, we are searching for terminology for, or a means of adequately talking and writing about, today's students. We have considered *post-Web 2.0* or *Fourth Industrial Revolution* as terms as they implicitly recognise that today's students are online, with extensive networks, and are part of the

participatory digital movement in which educators and students have moved beyond a one-to-many pedagogic model to many-to-many education that necessitates students connecting not just consuming (Stewart & Lynds, 2019). However, we feel that our students are more than actors and participants in a digital world; thus these terms fall short. We also briefly considered the term *intersectionality*, but it can conjure up a world of increasing fragmentation where the language of identity can become weaponised not least through institutional practices: identity defined by economic outputs; skills audits; and rankings on the social mobility matrix. Hence we feel it is also not the right term to talk about our students. Similarly, *multicultural* does not seem to fully capture what we see in our classrooms and what we experience with our students. Although we have learners who come from different cultural backgrounds, most of our students have more complex lives than students had in the past. They are defined and shaped by a multitude of experiences that go far beyond binary explanations of the self to ones that span the globe and extend into the digital realm. Also, talking about *working-class* students seems no longer sufficient. Although those students often come from “non-advantaged” backgrounds, they, and their parents, are more prone to the “gig economy” and minimum wages than traditional manual labour jobs. In addition, the term *working-class* itself is becoming increasingly hard to define in our complex world where “traditional” markers of class status can no longer be applied (Atherton, Neal, Kaura, Jeavans & Applied Works, 2013). It seems therefore timely to strive to develop a language that helps us to describe today’s student body. We need “words” to talk about students’ lived experiences and their particular consciousnesses: their histories (social, cultural and digital), identities (gender, ethnic, religious, socio-economic, online and philosophical), familial contexts and commitments. We are therefore wondering: *Could supercomplexity be a term that helps us to talk about, and with, today’s students? Should it therefore be a term that is refreshed to use in HE learning and teaching? And if so, how can that help us develop a humane university for widening participation students?*

## **The Supercomplex Highway**

Higher education is faced with not just preparing students for a complex world but is faced with preparing them for a *supercomplex* world. ... It is a world in which we are conceptually challenged, and continually so (Barnett, 2000b, p. 257).

Supercomplexity as a term is often used in Business and Computing. Where it comes up in the Humanities and Social Sciences it is mainly about a humane curriculum (see Humboldtian Education Ideal). In education, and HE in particular, the term is sparsely used. Authors that have engaged with the notion are Barnett and Hallam (1999) who have argued for a pedagogy that is operative not only in the domains of knowledge and action, but also of the self. Barnett (2000a; 2000b) asserts that the main pedagogical task of a university is not to transmit knowledge but to develop students’ attributes appropriate to the conditions of supercomplexity. In a later paper Barnett (2004, p. 260) calls for a pedagogy that prepares learners for an ‘unknown future’; a pedagogy that fosters and supports human qualities that help



students in 'standing up to the world and engaging with it purposefully'. 'What is called for, therefore, is a creative knowing *in situ* (Barnett, 2004, p. 251).

Gough, Oliver and Thomas (2012) talk about 'best practice' being linear, predictable and controllable i.e. a pedagogy defined by "what works". Although this is achievable, the question is: For whom does best practice work? And to what ends? Thus our proposition: we need to problematise the way that we discuss our students to help us rethink learning and teaching itself. Most current discussions about non-traditional or widening participation students centre around the idea of this cohort as 'other' (Mountz, 2009). The implication is that these students are seen as a typically problematic, essentially homogeneous group with similar issues and deficiencies. And yet when we "map" these students we see a mix of young and old, we see many different nationalities and cultures, we see a spectrum of self-confidence and doubt, and we see those excited to be in our classrooms and those who would rather be elsewhere. We argue that these students, although all non-traditional, are *truly* diverse and valuable in their supercomplexity. Thus, we need a bigger ontological turn not only in terms of pedagogy but also of the discourse about these learners. We need a terminology that is supportive and allows us to *see* our students and students to hold on to their subjectivity while also acknowledging the supercomplex reality we all live in.

Supercomplexity seems to enable this sort of discourse as it acknowledges increasingly multiplied and contrasting frames of reference. According to Barnett (2000a, 2000b), a situation is complex when we have to choose between a range of options, all within a well-defined frame of reference. Once decisions need to be made that require us to go beyond the usual (or original) frame of reference, that go beyond a single department or institution, that engage information technology, that are diverse and operating in a global context - the situation becomes supercomplex. It is a situation of uncertainty and unpredictability, one where the frames of reference are constantly shifting. This means, when talking about students, we can no longer refer to them as a single, unified group nor can we classify them or group them into different categories. We need to acknowledge that there is an element of uncertainty and fragility and thus strangeness (Barnett, 2004). This demands imagination, creativity, openness and ingenuity on the part of staff on the ground, and of institutional approaches and practices. We need processes that facilitate the student's ability to hold on to their subjectivity rather than abandoning it for objectivity. In other words, approaches and practices that enable students to see the university being comprised of many overlapping subjects where knowledge is constructed through humanity that is in search of knowing using reason.

### **The Context of Today's Learners**

As the humanities and liberal arts are downsized, privatized, and commodified, higher education finds itself caught in the paradox of claiming to invest in the future of young people while offering them few intellectual, civic and moral supports (Giroux, 2011).

In UK HE, and HE elsewhere, there is much talk about the lack of aspiration and subsequent lack of mobility within or between social strata, that affects certain groups. Rather than acknowledge wider systemic injustices and socio-economic circumstances that frustrate the progress of certain students and student groups, the failure to achieve is located in individuals (Reay, 2018). Particularly blamed for “failing to aspire” in the UK are those from a “working-class” background. A lack of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1973) is framed as an individual failure to have ambition and to achieve. And the words ‘inclusion’ and ‘fifty per cent participation in HE’ (Blair, 2001) that were supposed to midwife a change in the form and content of UK HE have instead become the ‘mind-forg’d manacles’ (Blake, 1789/1794) of our age, constraining the way education, universities and our students are seen, and how our students are responded to and treated. This is particularly pertinent considering current discussions revolving around skills, employability and success/achievement.

The stratification of the UK education system is widely acknowledged by intergovernmental organisations including The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as unjust and socially divisive: ‘According to the OECD, British schools are some of the most socially segregated in the developing world’ (Bloodworth, 2016, p. 81). The UK education system is riddled with inequalities justified on the back of a misguided belief in the notion of meritocracy where the best rise to the top; an idea promulgated by UK governments of all shades. The ‘myth of meritocracy’ (Bloodworth, 2016) justifies differential educational outcomes and perpetuates the inequalities in society as ‘neoliberalism’ (Bosanquet, 2019). Education operates as a system that from the top down favours already privileged groups, and where schools, teachers and parents gamify this process on a micro level (Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe, 1995). League tables like the National Student Survey (NSS), the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and Research Excellence Framework (REF) play into this situation. These “tables” not only function as ranking tools, but cultivate and sustain an assessment and management culture, which ensures that only those that conform to middle-class notions of “the best” are recognised and rewarded. Students either ‘fit in’ or ‘stand out’ (Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2009).

For UK post-1992 universities this has real consequences. These universities are often deemed not worth their money. ‘Value for money’ being defined by the TEF (Times Higher Education, 2019) as the progression of graduates into high-paying jobs, something more likely to happen for middle- and upper-class students, those students that are already privileged and have the social and cultural capital to navigate HE and job markets. Some therefore argue that these universities should not be called universities (see Adams, 2017). Others again attribute these “new” universities a focus on vocational and applied subjects of lower status (see Scott, 1992). Viewed through these reductive lenses, students in post-1992 universities are said to attend ‘Mickey Mouse courses’ (Harding, 2019); courses that do not lead to well-paid jobs and satisfactory careers.

Some even argue that these students should not go to university at all because completing a university degree makes them ‘overeducated’; ‘They possess more

education than required for the job' (Office for National Statistics cited in BBC News, April 2019). Similarly, staff working in these institutions are seen as less academic than that in "elite" universities and thus are subjected to (casual) contracts that demand high contact hours and offer little time for research. Academic positions in post-1992 universities like ours are therefore often described as 'staging posts' until a position in a higher ranked university can be obtained (Grant & Sherrington, 2006). Meanwhile there is no evidence that staff in these institutions deliver lower quality work; on the contrary, teaching in post-1992 universities is often of excellent quality (Leathwood, 2004).

### **Imagining Education Differently**

There have been numerous attempts to counter this sort of rhetoric and arguments (Burns and Sinfield, 2004). For example, Burn and Finnigan (2003) counter the very framing of students in post-1992 universities as deficit, arguing that these students are not disadvantaged but rather they are 'not advantaged'; they have not been groomed from birth to survive and thrive in a middle-class academia. Burn together with colleagues (Burn & Pratt-Adams, 2015; Pratt-Adams, Maguire & Burn, 2010) further rejects the term 'social mobility' in favour of a more nuanced discussion of social class and urban life. Lillis (2001) specifically criticises HE for not adopting a broader framework of reference to the contexts and experiences of these "non-traditional" students. She argues that the view of these students, and the institutions they attend, is a negative response to working-class people and widening participation in education. It is a "classist" response where these students, the least powerful of all stakeholders, are accused of "dumbing down" HE, of polluting its ivory towers and taking the jewels out of its crown. She argues that what is needed instead is a critical analysis of HE's own practices, the practices which in and of themselves help to maintain the negative talk about these students and institutions:

Student language is made visible and problematised but the language of discourse and the pedagogical practices in which they are embedded ... remain invisible, taken as 'given' (Lillis, 2001, p. 22).

Similarly, Lea and Street (1998) have argued for a broader approach to learning and teaching, one that focuses on academic literacies rather than "study skills" and thus locates the issues not in individual students but in HE and its approach to learning and teaching:

Viewing literacy from a cultural and social practice approach (rather than in terms of educational judgements about good and bad writing) and approaching meanings as contested can give us insights into the nature of academic literacy in particular and academic learning in general (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 158).

Piccione (2015) goes even a step further in his discussion of 'didactics'. In his analysis, he takes a global perspective, moving beyond and critiquing previous educational theory and literature which he believes is predominantly Anglo-centric and Western European in nature. He argues that technological advances change our very "being", our family relationships, communities and wider societies at an ever increasing rate. Traditional institutions, academic disciplines and individual practices

and praxes fail to recognise, or take advantage of, the opportunities that innovative technological advances afford:

What I mean is: educational professions and roles cannot ignore the impact produced by social phenomena and by the pure presence of tools that have been modifying our lifestyles and learning styles (Piccione, 2015, p. 9).

Whilst institutional responses are to introduce more policies and checklists, what we actually need is to re-frame the very way we view and inhabit our world and the way that world is approached and represented through our educational praxes and language.

### **The Alienated Academic: From Helpless to Hopeful**

Ironically, efforts to make education more ineffable, more emergent and more nuanced (i.e. more “messy”) happen at the very moment when education is coerced into becoming ever more strategic, marketised and market-focused with its language becoming ever more simplistic and reductive. Hall has written recently on *The Alienated Academic* (Hall, 2018) and is now writing about *The Hopeless University* (Hall, 2019), focussing on:

hopelessness and helplessness inside the University; University as an anxiety machine; ...; the University predicated upon alienated academic labour-power; and, the University as an abject space, unable to engage meaningfully with crises of social reproduction. It asks whether it is possible to refuse the University as is, as a trans-historical space that can only exist for capital.

In this alienating and hopeless context, having and using the “right” language that sufficiently describes our students and the worlds they inhabit and represent, and that cannot be easily appropriated and manipulated to negative effect, appears key. We need this (new) language in order to develop an inclusive HE in which all of today’s students can be welcomed and enabled to successfully participate; harnessing the sorts of power/consciousnesses they possess to make learning happen as they inculcate their input into evolving epistemic and disciplinary communities. We need to talk about students more adequately and fairly, especially when trying to develop curricula that capture their interests, foster their existing knowledge and skills, and prepare them for an uncertain and unknown future while acknowledging who they are and who they want to become. There is a sort of double-hermeneutic (Giddens, 1982; 1987) that we need to engage with beyond interpolation. It is an interpretation and understanding of the very own subject we are trying to engage with and support: the students themselves.

We all need to become translators of some sort to navigate the supercomplex and often contested meanings presented to us. Taking this into account, what is important in HE is therefore not the (traditional) transmission of knowledge, but the enabling of *all* students to navigate supercomplexity: to engage in those relationships and to understand and map those processes that are the essential nature of knowledge-construction. This would also enable the apprehension of the

appropriation of knowledge and the knowledge industry by dominant discourses (Foucault, 1969) so that students can make their own accommodation with the discourses of inclusion and exclusion. Needed are empowering approaches and curricular design models that promote the development of critically engaged students. All students need to be recognised as (active) actors and agents in their own learning i.e. individuals who are capable of operating with awareness within their epistemic communities and the world.

### **What can we do in our Classrooms?**

Piccione (2015) asks an important question for all HE practitioners: How do we map this swiftly evolving landscape to better prepare our teaching for the world that our students inhabit now and in the future? He warns us that as the academy is blinkered towards the characteristics of the “new” (and thus unknown) student (inevitably locating problems and issues only there) it neglects the complex, nuanced or emergent ways in which we are all continually ‘becoming’ (Kolb & Kolb 2008a; 2008b) in our lived world. Especially now that that becoming is gaining greater complexity throughout life, educators cannot continue with outdated disciplinary and faculty practices and languages that form silos of knowledge into which students need to be inculcated. Not only is this essentially disrespectful, it becomes preparation for worlds and professional practices that no longer exist.

Piccione (2015) stresses that the knowledge gathering, analytical and critical stances so praised by HE are already possessed by student citizens of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, although not necessarily consciously. It is the harnessing of these “modern” attributes that current HE policy and institutional drivers neglect and even negate (Burns, Sinfield and Holley, 2009) particularly when they, in the most part, demonise our students. Especially in their narratives around the deficit non-traditional student focusing on their lack of social, cultural and academic capital and suggesting that these students are in need of “fixing”. ‘... [S]tudents are referred to in terms of what they are not: *not* traditional, *not* prepared for higher education, *not* in a position of privilege or advantage’ (Smit, 2012, p. 370). The discourse is further weaponised through policy and politics in support of the already privileged.

Vai and Sosulski (2011) indicate that when designing our curricula (and courses), we do need to think more positively and more actively about students. Knowledge cannot be considered a deliverable and transmissible product and educational roles cannot be considered as technical. This does not depend on pedagogical reasons; this depends on a different reason: the human need for perceiving the future as a promise and not as a threat:

Agents inherit a position within the social structure that conditions their perceptions, values and beliefs of the situation. However, their freedom to act is also either constrained or facilitated by the current structure. Hence, social interaction is conditioned by structure but cannot be determined by structure because contemporary agents possess their own emergent properties (Archer, cited in Jennings, 2015, pp. 79-80).

What we see is the oscillation between the latent potential of students *per se* and the threat of the non-traditional student to the expectations of HE. This is not to get caught in another binary turn. We do not see the student as an object to be worked on. We do not believe in the valorisation of knowledge claims and discourses hidden inside disciplines, and protected by physical or discursive gate keepers. Instead, we see the university as a place for everyone to succeed.

This returns us to the role of the university and its congruence or incongruence with student goals and desires. Whilst universities themselves shout for and of their academic credibility, one traditional role of the university was (and still is) “finishing school” for the children of the middle-classes predicated on independent rather than inter-dependent learning and behaviour (Chang, 2018). The end products of this “elite” education are deemed “civilised” and culturally coherent individuals; people fit for the managerial or bureaucratic roles they are destined for. It is with this “hidden curriculum” that ‘the [university] text says what it does not say’ (Macherey, 1990, p.215; see also Giroux & Purpel, 1983). Because of this, the working-class student in a middle-class institution experiences something fundamentally different and potentially more pernicious than the middle-class one.

In a post-1992 university where students are typically over-21 and with life experiences and a history upon which to draw (London Metropolitan University, 2018), students often attend for reasons such as: perhaps to find their voices, perhaps to redirect their lives, or perhaps to bring the knowledge and skills they hope to develop back to their communities to enrich them. And whilst these students are seeking some form of transformation, how much and how far they should change to ‘fit in’ within HE is problematic for them and society. It might be that the response to non-traditional students is rooted in “epistemological conflict”, as evidenced by the audit refrain of study skills, digital skills, employability skills, knowledge skills and soft skills. However, these problematic issues of transformation and identity show that at heart the conflict is ontological. It is an ontological conflict masquerading as an epistemological one, or a skills one, or an employability one; one that is embodied and lived, not one that can be explained by economics or checklists.

### *Case Study Examples*

In widening participation initiatives across the country there have been some concrete and practical efforts to act differently, with less sublimated hostility to non-traditional students. There are well-established supplementary instruction initiatives and student support programmes, for example, peer mentoring and success coach schemes where students from the second and third year support their peers settling into the university as well as outreach programmes that promote achievement and progression into HE more generally. However, well-meaning as these are, these represent a model offering only local, even individual, fixes that may “remediate” or help individual students, but do not address the supercomplexity of either education or the students themselves. For students rightly understood to exist in a supercomplex environment, we must develop approaches much more human and

oscillating. Thus we will discuss our experiences of developing undergraduate and postgraduate (staff development) courses that can be seen as first attempts to reframe practice for supercomplex students in a supercomplex environment.

The Sir John Cass School of Art, Architecture and Design at London Metropolitan University (*The Cass*) offers courses that take into account different ways of knowing and doing. For example, The BA Hons Fine Art allows for students to explore ideas and make work based on ludic exploration and embodied forms of knowledge. Often these embodied forms of knowledge are ineffable but students still attempt to bring it to bear in their courses and personal work. They engage with issues and topics creatively. Similarly in the BA Hons Education Studies we, the authors of this paper, have reframed a so-called academic skills module and turned it into a welcoming but essentially disruptive module designed to 'de-school' (Illich, 1970) and allow for playful and creative learning experiences that integrate and foster students' self-efficacy, belief and achievement beyond reading and writing (Sinfield, Burns & Abegglen, 2019).

In addition, we have reframed our work with academic staff. To prepare the supercomplex practitioner for a supercomplex role, the staff development offered by our Centre for Professional and Educational Development offers a PostGraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (PGCert) designed to provoke our participants into questioning fundamental concepts of teaching and learning. Particularly the first module, Facilitating Student Learning (FSL) seeks to liberate the participants from the shackles of traditional education practices and to destabilise taken for granted notions of what education is and could or should be; it seeks to challenge notions of the non-traditional or widening participation student. The tutors on this course work to help the academics-as-students to be truly inclusive i.e. to welcome their own students for the supercomplex people they are and the experiences they bring, and to value them as they undertake their quest to be the academics they wish to become. Students at London Metropolitan University typically arrive with rich lived lives, and rather than being "diagnosed" so that their whole academic career is designed only that their academic deficits can be "fixed" the ethos of praxes of our PGCert is that the supercomplexity of the undergraduate student experience and knowledge should be embraced. The PGCert teaches radical ways to challenge conceptions and preconceptions about students' learning, teaching, assessment. It tackles reading through 'textscrolling' (Abegglen, Burns, Middlebrook & Sinfield, 2019), and writing through 'free writing' (Elbow, 1973; Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2016) and 'dialogic encounter' (Bakhtin, 1981). Staff on the course are encouraged to reflect on their own learning via blogging (Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2015) and to explore alternative ways to present their final assignment (Burns, Sinfield & Abegglen, 2018a; 2018b; 2018c; 2018d; 2018e) including video diary, visual essays and 3D sculpture. More importantly the course encourages practitioners to change by problematising and developing their approach to teaching, and to their students.

## **Third Space Opportunities: Teaching and Learning as Supercomplex Experiences**

Widening participation, and students themselves, are often tackled in both atomised and mechanistic ways as if responding to complex but essentially traceable issues. Their supercomplexity, however, requires continual mapping of existing challenges in a way that also shows and makes transparent the contested nature of knowledge and knowledge construction, and addresses multi-disciplinarity with multi-contestability powered by student agency, efficacy and a creative criticality. Only this latter would start to build a real apprehension of the supercomplexity of the issues involved and thus to enhance trust across a university and allow for the development of frameworks or matrices, of questions and discourses so as to contest institutional rationales and academic disciplines. We need to, 'locate ourselves in our institutions, to find counter-stories, to inhabit universities in different ways, to open up the nooks and crannies, cracks and crevices. [To] each become a tiny university' (Bosanquet, 2018) i.e. to create "third spaces". Our recommendation is that we need third spaces and places to grapple with the supercomplexities of education and learning in 'an unequally globalized society driven by logics of media and capital' (Stewart, 2019; see also, Gutierrez, 2008). We need these third spaces to bring together the ontology and the ontological roots of our students with their desire for a meaningful academic and epistemological journey.

We could argue that education is a 'third space profession' (Whitchurch, 2008) able to harness 'in-between' opportunities (Gutiérrez, 2008; Healey, Flint & Harrington, 2014; Cook-Sather & Luz, 2014). Soja's (1996) theorization of third space and Shields' (2004) analysis of Henri Lefebvre's work (2003; 1991) reveal the liberatory potential of the space that can be created and occupied by educationists and students. In this space the negative striations of normal academic power relations can be swept away because it is a space that is open to (re)definition (Wesch, Davidson & Bass, 2014). Here boundaries are fuzzy and malleable (Webster, 2018), goals can be redefined and existing hierarchies can be flattened and replaced by dialogic encounters (Bakhtin, 1981). It is a space that can be occupied by 'being with' each other (Nancy, 2000) enabling the creation of something more porous and much more welcoming: a space of opportunities.

In practice, this has involved us utilising creative and ludic (see for example Winnicott, 1971; Huizinga 1980/1949; James & Nerantzi, 2019) practice to foster third space opportunities within the curriculum akin to those created by Gutiérrez (2008) with the emphasis on redesigning what counts as teaching and learning (of literacy) and that honour both our academic staff and our non-traditional students. We posit that it is practices like this that enable negatively labelled students to find their own voices in the exclusionary, competitive, and hostile HE environment (Burns, Sinfield and Abegglen, 2019).



## **Conclusion: Welcoming People into the Future: Supercomplex World, Supercomplex Education**

We occupy and swim in contested educational narratives and currents including debates about the massification of Higher Education, the rationales for academic courses and the introduction of fees. These debates construct government and institutional policies, validation and inspection regimes; i.e. they create our perceptions of education and of ourselves. Education is not neutral: it is socio-economic and political activity; it is ontological as well as epistemological work. As educationists we therefore need not only practices but also “words” that allow us to talk about students’ lived experiences and their particular consciousnesses, and to help us take action. We need ways of supporting students that acknowledge their strengths and their particular ways of being and becoming.

As ‘in-between professionals’ (Whitchurch, 2008) educators are well placed to challenge current trends and perceptions and so positively support students. As in-betweeners they can also offer and create third space opportunities (Gutiérrez, 2008; Soja, 1996; Lefebvre, 1991, 2003) for socio-political action alongside (Webster, 2018), but importantly within the curriculum to work in partnership with students (Healey, Flint & Harrington, 2014; Cook-Sather & Luz, 2014) and with other staff to challenge and stretch the boundaries of HE. It is via this critical and collaborative practice that they can help students map and make sense of the education world and their learning (Van Niekerk, 2016).

Supercomplexity as outlined by Barnett (2000a, 2000b) is a term that allows us to not only to describe and embrace the supercomplexity of the world(s) students inhabit but also the supercomplexity of the lived lives of students, especially of our diverse, non-traditional students. However, powerful as they are, words are not enough. Despite countless arguments and efforts to conceptualise practice differently, it has never been more necessary to make HE truly inclusive (Bloodworth, 2016). Our non-traditional students are the ones who persistently experience educational rebuff, who are labelled as deficit and stereotyped as ‘less than’ (for example see Savic, Vecchi & Lewis, 2019; BBC News, April 2019). Whilst widening participation was welcomed for ostensibly creating more opportunities, in practice it could be said to have ushered in instead a two-tier HE system where some students’ degrees are now considered less than the degrees issued to more traditional students at more traditional institutions (see Harding, 2019).

In our institution we attempt to create third space opportunities within our praxes that allow for a more nuanced engagement with tertiary education. And it is via those creative and ludic praxes that we map and challenge the dominant discourses and narratives of learning to allow us to *see* the supercomplex educational landscape that 21<sup>st</sup> century learners have to navigate. But, there is a need to further debunk the fashionable idea that HE needs to focus on “skills” and “employment” (Cole, 2018; Warren, 2002) and that academics need to “teach to the test” for best outcomes in surveys and league tables because this alienates academics and students from themselves and their work (Hall, 2018). We know that we must make positive accommodations for our non-traditional learners and their supercomplex

realities if we are to create a humane education within educational spaces where they are no longer “othered” or labelled as deficient, but valued for the rich lives and experiences with which they enter our institutions. Yet, it seems difficult for many institutions to fully acknowledge and value the supercomplex world these students live- and study in. There also appears to be little space for this sort of conversation within the broader educational narratives that dominate the political discourse and the popular imagination about what education, and tertiary education, is for, who it must serve and how its value should be measured.

Thus, we would argue that it is essential to think and talk about the supercomplexity of our students’ lives positively and to give all students the sorts of third space opportunities that allow them to be who they already are and to become the academics they want to be. Given that the third space is the space of potentiality, of the liminal and the unmapped; given that it is the street fighting and nomadic space (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004) of education, we need to foster these spaces in times of supercomplexity. But, we are left wondering: *If supercomplexity is a term that helps us to talk about, and with, today’s students, how can that conversation be moved outside the boundaries of our own widening participation institutions such that it influences the way that the public, the politicians and policy-makers enable us to develop a humane university for all students and pave the way for a more humane society?*

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### **Statement**

All materials included in this article represent the authors' own work and anything cited or paraphrased within the text is included in the reference list. The work has not been previously published nor is it being considered for publication elsewhere. The authors declare no conflict of interest.

# Montage, DaDa and the Dalek: The Game of Meaning in Higher Education

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## Abstract

This paper argues for visual playfulness in Higher Education learning and teaching practice. We offer a case study example of how we, the authors of this paper, have incorporated creativity into our teaching - the Facilitating Student Learning module, the first module in the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education. We outline how we used 'visualising to learn' and what learning resulted from our visualisation practices. With our staff learners, we found that visual play gave them the freedom to experiment, to question and to progress; important in these supercomplex, uncertain times. Our desire was not to 'fix' or train academic staff, but to give them the space and tools to become liberatory professionals on their own terms and in their own ways so they can support their students to also become academic without losing themselves in the process. We propose that what is needed are methods and methodologies that enable learners - staff and students - to evolve and transform as they co-construct their knowledge in ludic ways. We incorporate images of the representations that our participants have made of themselves, of their students and of Higher Education systems to illustrate the challenges and possibilities of visual learning - and of creative staff development practice in general - and invite the reader to engage dialogically with them also to see what meanings they might make of them.

**Keywords:** Visual Practice; Visualisation; Creativity; Academia; Higher Education; Educational Development; Adult Learners

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## 1. Introduction: Visual Metaphors and Visual Practice in Learning and Teaching

*Art has begun to feel not like a respite or an escape, but a formidable tool for gaining perspective on what are increasingly troubled times*  
(Laing, 2020).

Playful, creative and visual learning and teaching approaches have found their way into Higher Education (HE) - and into classrooms (James and Nerantzi, 2019; Nerantzi, 2016). This is not 'dumbed down' teaching nor is it 'dumbed down' learning: this is 'serious business' (Parr, 2014). Harnessing the ludic (Sinfield, Burns and Abegglen, 2019) for empowering practice has been shown to enhance our teaching and the learning experience of students (James and Nerantzi, 2019; Abegglen, Burns and Sinfield, 2018; Burns, Sinfield and Abegglen, 2018). Play gives students the freedom (Huizinga, 1949) to experiment, to question and to progress. This is important in these supercomplex (Abegglen, Burns, Maier and Sinfield, 2020b) lean and mean times (Giroux, 2014) where the present is uncertain and the future even more so. Teaching and learning supposedly fixed 'forms of knowledge' (Hirst, 1974) and developing 'traditional' skills are no longer sufficient (if they ever were). What is needed are methods and methodologies that enable students to evolve and transform as they co-construct their knowledge in ludic ways (Sinfield, Burns and Abegglen, 2019). What is called for is an epistemological shift: developing a praxis that consists of ethics, aesthetics, production and explanation - the bringing together of theory and practice (Bernstein, 2001) - and for us this starts with visual play. For it is in play and only in playing that the individual is fiercely alive, able to use the whole personality, creatively (Winnicott, 1971). It is a medium for developing - and growing.

In this paper, we discuss how we incorporate play and visual playfulness into our teaching and learning practice, especially in our Facilitating Student Learning (FSL) module, the first module in the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (PGCert) course and the Masters in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (MALTHE) programme at London Metropolitan University (UK). In FSL, we use these creative and ludic practices to deepen the learning experiences of our staff learners, to make space for them to think, see and 'be' differently - and to increase the repertoire of creative learning, teaching and assessment strategies that they can embody in their own practices. In the process, we place a strong emphasis on developing the 'self', as 'knowing' oneself is a key attribute for being able to develop (Rogers, 1961) and to move on to the precarious ground of teaching, as opposed to operating in places of 'best practice' instruction. 'Best practice' or 'safe certainty' has been shown to fall short in a marketised education system - as it has in other sectors (Care, Financial, Health) in Western democracies that have failed to provide the requisite care, stability and success, and as exhibited most recently in various

inabilities to adequately and fairly address the Covid-19 pandemic. Arguably we, universities, tutors and students, need to acknowledge and embrace 'radical uncertainty' (Kay and King, 2020) - our own and that of our disciplines - to be able to adapt and then (successfully) learn and support.

Here we outline the visual and creative approaches we use in our teaching with staff learners: we tell the story of 'visualising to learn' and 'learning to visualise'. We showcase the work we have undertaken and discuss the artefacts produced along the lines of a Creative Analytical Process (CAP) ethnography (Richardson and St Pierre, 2005) - as a promotion of a more creative HE searching for increased social justice.

## **2. Facilitating Student Learning: Visualising the Self, the Student and the University**

*...the image possesses an uncanny power. It can travel where the body can't. It migrates and strays, taking up permanent residence in the mind, revealing what - who - has been forcibly excluded from sight (Laing, 2020).*

At this time, all staff new to our London-based University have to undertake a formal teaching qualification. This can be as fundamental as attending our core FSL module, successful completion of which confers Associate Fellowship of AdvanceHE, the Professional Standards body of the Higher Education sector. It can also involve undertaking the full PGCert which comprises three modules that cover student learning; assessment and feedback; and curriculum evaluation and development. Completion of the PGCert confers full Fellowship of AdvanceHE - and we also hope it acts as a further springboard not just to participation in the MA (which consists of the PGCert modules, further learning opportunities and a Dissertation or Project), but also for our staff, as scholarly professionals, becoming more aware of their practice as 'action research'.

This academic year, 2019/2020, we had 27 staff enrolled in FSL, across the disciplines: architecture to nutrition, international relations to sports science, social sciences to computing. Many of our participants have been teaching for many years in other institutions and countries. Typically, all our participants have multiple responsibilities in the University, they are time poor and under constant pressure. They are, and they 'feel' that they are already proficient tutors and lecturers. This makes attendance of our modules and courses not always their first priority nor is it always what they feel they 'need' or 'would like'. Despite potential resistance and the pressures they experience, we definitely want our participants to engage critically, mindfully and reflectively with our module - using it as a lens to interrogate their own ways of 'doing'. We aim to 'make strange' (Shklovsky, 1990) their taken-for-granted

notions of education; to move to a place of ‘safe uncertainty’ (Mason, 1993) - using chance, collaboration, visual practices and language as a catalyst for creativity (MoMA, no year).

### **3. How we Encourage our Students to Become Creative**

A key aspect of our FSL module is that we ‘immerse’ participants in playful and creative learning; we facilitate an opening up and an imagining of what they, the education system and their students could be (see also McIntosh, 2010; McIntosh, 2007). To initiate this process, we ask them at the very beginning of our module to make a collage representing themselves or themselves as teachers - which may or may not be the same thing. We use this as an opportunity for them to ‘get’ or ‘be’ creative as they reflect and surface their thinking through pictures (Berger, 1972): to construct meaning visually. Participants develop their self representation in class, using the magazines, scissors and glue provided. Once the collages have been made, people discuss them in pairs - starting with the ‘non-maker’ saying what they ‘see’ in the image of their peer as the starting point for ‘rich’ conversations. We then ask participants to move around, so they have more conversations with different people in the room, introducing themselves, and connecting in the process.

For the second class, we ask our staff learners to return having completed one of two alternative visual tasks: they can ‘make’ an extended, more elaborate representation of themselves in collage, combined if they wish with any other visual medium - or they can create a more abstract, 3D, multimodal artefact representing a ‘typical student’ (although there is no such thing). Staff learners showcase their visual and 3D artefacts of their self and student representations in an in-class exhibition - a semi-safe space, with their peers and us, the instructors, as the audience. Staff learners decide how to showcase their artefacts and where and how to pin them up or where and how to display them in the room. This means, learners take the responsibility for their work and of the exhibition as a whole. This is deliberate as we want them to experience agency and to take ownership of their learning.

Following on from the exhibition, staff learners are asked to make a representation of either the present HE system or an ideal or utopian HE using material from our Dalek of Resources (Figure 1), our fictional extraterrestrial mutant modelled on those portrayed in the British science fiction programme Doctor Who. The staff have been ‘imprisoned’ in ‘nuclear bunkers’ (viz. Post-apocalyptic simulation: <https://learning.londonmet.ac.uk/take5/simulations.html>) in the first week of the module. In this second ‘role-play’ session, we allow staff learners out to rebuild the world, starting with the building of a representative HE system. For this, we use the resources on our Dalek (perhaps our own embodiment of HE?). The Dalek is loaded with wool, cardboard tubes, multicoloured confetti, paper clips and paper cups. There

are sponges and pegs and chopsticks - blu-tack, duct tape and glue. There are pots of pins, and bits and bobs from the DIY store. There are felt-tips, pencils, crayons - and paint. Participants are asked to use whatever materials they like or consider useful for their representation. We encourage them to 'create' a type of hyper-reality: that brings together, in oscillation, how they either perceive or imagine the post-apocalyptic HE world - something which is now more important than ever with current world-wide developments.

**Figure 1: Sandra Abegglen and Dalek of Resources used to facilitate staff learning**



Each group has to 'present' their imagined post-apocalyptic HE system and the rationale behind it to their peers who cluster around, ask questions - and applaud. This discussion surfaces and recognises the values, hopes and aspirations - or preconceptions - to which they have given form. They recognise their common humanity and their diversity - not in terms of age, ethnicity, class and gender necessarily - but of their epistemic and their personal selves. We incorporate into this also reflective practice (Schön, 1983) and reflective writing (Elbow 1998). All our staff learners are encouraged to keep and share their own blog to engage with their own learning and teaching practice and with that of their peers. These opportunities for reflection and meta-reflection are part of the participants' professional development as they take ownership of who they are, what they know and the theoretical perspectives

they are encountering. It is also important to help them realise that they have engaged in purposeful activity.

At the end of this second session therefore we have brought into view visions of the teaching self, the student self and the institutional ‘self’ - and have discussed how we might make HE better fit the human beings that it is ostensibly designed to accommodate: a humane education (Abegglen, Burns, Maier and Sinfield, 2020a). These visual practices surface the utterances and the voices that constitute the self in this context. The production of the collages and the ‘universities’, from the almost chance encounters with magazine images and random resources, offer a surrealist encounter with the self - with the unconscious. This is a production and reconstitution - the visual as a search for authenticity and re-imagining of other selves (Bateson, 2000); an opportunity to build new narratives.

#### **4. The Thing Itself Always Escapes (Evaluation)**

*Art is a place ... where ideas and people are made welcome. It's a zone of enchantment as well as resistance, and it's open even now* (Laing, 2020).

Our evaluation of the success of our visualising techniques for critical learning is undertaken not by analysis of participant reflections on these activities nor from in-class surveys or by interrogating their reflective logs or blogs; although we could do that. Our focus here is to share and discuss some of the visual representations that our staff made of themselves, of students and (collaboratively) of HE Institutions (HEI). This is where we do not want to fall into the epistemology traps of positivist methodologies (and some qualitative ones, too). We do not want to make ‘over assumptions’ about the ‘whole’ based on the ‘parts’ (Vygotsky in Moen, 2006) because the parts must stand with the whole (the students with the staff, the staff with the students, students and staff with the universities, the universities with students and staff) to avoid a reductionism that is rendered inadequate in an era of supercomplexity (Abegglen, Burns, Maier and Sinfield, 2020b) and radical uncertainty (Kay and King, 2020). Thus, we are sharing some of the representations of self, student and institution for readers to consider and think about.

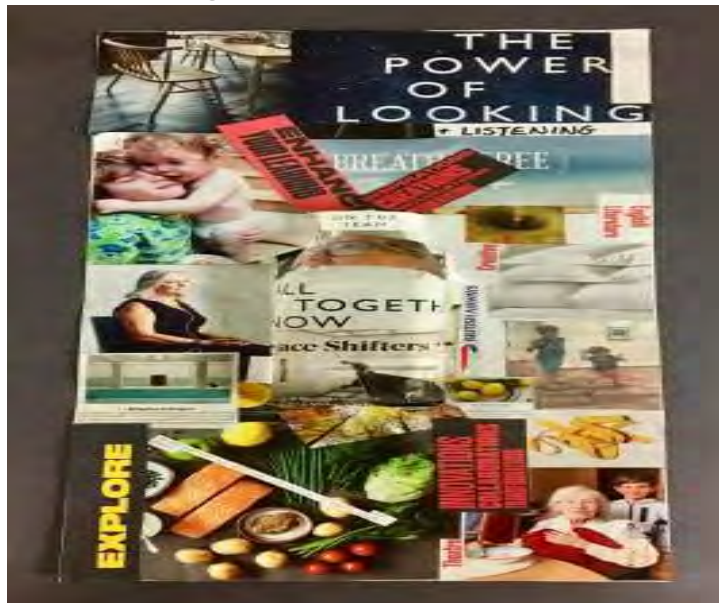
First, we are focusing on staff learners’ representations of themselves, as teachers. Second, we show staff representations of ‘typical’ students. Third, we present staff representations of universities (or HEIs), which they made collaboratively in class. These representations are taken from participants’ blogs, which are publicly accessible to everyone interested in their work. We have chosen images from across several module runs to ensure confidentiality. This means, the representations shown here stem from several different year groups attending FSL.

4.1. Staff learners' self portraits:

Figure 2: Staff Self Portrait 1



Figure 3: Staff Self Portrait 2





4.2. Staff learners' Representations of Students (or a Student):

Figure 4: Representation of a Student 1



Figure 5: Representation of a Student 2

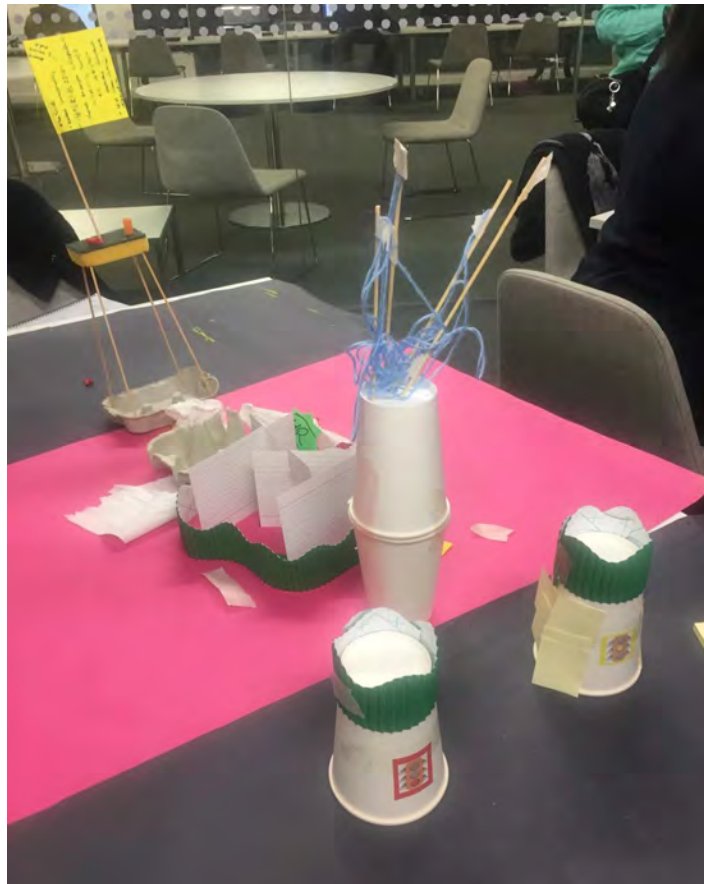


**4.3. Staff Learners' Representation of a (Real or Imagined) University or Higher Education System:**

**Figure 6: Representation of a University/Higher Education System 1**



**Figure 7: Representation of a University/Higher Education System 2**



**Figure 8: Representation of a University/Higher Education System 3**



**Figure 9: Representation of a University/Higher Education System 4**



## **5. Discussion**

*Hope is the precursor to change. Without it, no better world is possible.*

Laing (2020)

Looking at these representations poses a few immediate questions: How might the 'jelly student' (Figure 5) feel when entering HE? How does he or she fit into, for example, a university that is built out of Lego as a high straight, impregnable tower (Figure 8) - with only space for a very few at the top? That tower is built on successive strands of successful education foundations: nursery, primary, secondary... The majority of our students do not enter our university with such solid educational foundations - and thus our task is to make sure that they are not further diminished by this. Typically, we attempt to de-stabilize that very tower - we de-school (Illich, 1972) and un-school (Holt, 1976) so that the students can critique and interrogate the system that they are entering and create their own selves as they become academic in their own terms. In our current crisis, the only response from the Lego tower appears to be to add an antenna and broadcast content \*at\* students, rather than develop interactive and engaging practice with them.

Every year, staff also build more optimistic representations of HE (Figures 6 and 9) where there is a positive 'outlook'; porous and amorphous structures with flexible, welcoming learning and teaching spaces and 'shelters' that acknowledge and accommodate the people that enter. These HEIs provide for the student that is ready to learn, arriving with a pencil case and a box of tools (Figure 4), but also those that are less sure of their new undertaking (Figure 5). These open and flexible universities allow a weaving in and out of people and of ideas. For example, the construction in Figure 9 stands tall like the Lego tower but with fewer walls and borders: everyone is welcome here and the institution is prepared to shift to accommodate. This is in complete contrast to the HE that is gated and restricted, with a watchtower controlling entry and exit (Figure 7). In this system, only a few are welcomed. Even those that 'make it' encounter blank walls topped with spikes. Beyond that is a gated maze, the ground littered with more upended spikes. The few that 'survive' this test must pass yet another, even more rigorous, inspection before they leave. The learning - and the teaching - in this system is more than challenging. It is occult, mysterious and dangerous. It requires from students - and teachers - super fitness and strength (Figure 2). And, no wonder one may wish sometimes to be elsewhere, at the beach, escaping from it all. In this context, how can anyone bring the whole self into the classroom (Figure 3)? Teachers - as do students - have personalities and lives that consist of so much more than their learning and teaching selves. How can one use personal traits, responsibilities and interests in a professional context? We definitely suggest that looking at oneself and reflecting on the different aspects of education is a starting point - making visual what stays normally hidden and is untold.

## **6. Implications for Praxis**

*Comfort the troubled and trouble the comfortable.*

By Mike Bearsley in BBC Radio5 Live, 22 April (2020)

We would argue that these visual and creative activities, here undertaken with staff, would also prove fruitful as student-facing activities in any discipline in their current form. For example, these activities could be used as they are with new students - in class or in induction week. Students could produce self portraits of themselves as putative students - and collaborative representations of 'university'. If you felt really brave, you could also ask them to make models of a 'typical' tutor - and then deconstruct those together. These would reveal to themselves - and to tutors - what the new students are thinking about HE at their point of entry. These visual representations can lead to useful discussion of the what, why and how of study. They can also lead to discussion of the what, why and how of being an engaged and successful student. These can be built on over time. For example, they can seed small pieces of reflective writing that many students are asked to produce these days in their first few weeks at university or they can seed a first piece of qualitative research into successful study practices or attitudes to study.

These activities can be developed even further: students can be asked to make representations (purely visual or 3D) of different concepts or models that are covered in courses and modules. Business students, for example, could make representations of different organisational structures - and of a particular issue they are facing - perhaps then changing the representations to solve the 'problem' set. In any discipline, students can make visual representations rather than writing an essay or producing the traditional academic poster to display their research findings (Burns, Sinfield and Abegglen, 2018). Students can also prepare collages to reflect on learning or to prepare for an assignment; and we have asked students to utilise resources, as on our Dalek, to make revision games for other students as a very interactive way to prepare for their exams - and this could even be developed as an alternative 'exam'.

## **7. Taking Down the Lego Tower: Effectiveness of Visual Methodologies in the Game of Meaning in Higher Education**

*We are used to horrible things and stop fearing them. We get used to beautiful things and stop enjoying them. We get used to people and stop experiencing them as personalities. Art is a means to make things real again (Shklovsky, 2015, p. 151).*

Conceiving of PG Cert modules or staff 'training' as a form of re-educating staff does nothing to tackle the overarching and problematic narratives of education with which they are also struggling, nor enhance their teaching practice. Rather they/we need

spaces that allow: “a feeling of being inducted back into hope, a restoration of faith” (Laing, 2020). We therefore recommend moments of play, of creation and of experimentation. Giving expression to the conversations and interactions in the classroom but also to those voices that constitute who we are in any given context. Our use of visual practices allowed for the creation of new, more positive and hopeful narratives of learning and teaching, for without these educational narratives we do not exist (Polkinghorne in Moen, 2006). We believe that we need more creative and emancipatory practices - for staff and students - that seed multimodal engagement with learning and teaching; imagining what is possible; a moving beyond. We are particularly keen to take down the hostile and impenetrable tower of HE, to tear down the watchtowers and remove the gatekeepers: to build a village of learners that have equal participation and say in the process. Our staff’s visual practices create a ‘Dadaesque montage of the Dalek’ of academia and at the same time surface an emancipatory bricolage of ideas and praxes that help them de-construct that Dalek.

There are many reasons to start our FSL PGCert module and course in the way that we do. One is our belief in creativity as emancipatory and reparative practice (Sedgwick in Laing, 2020; Sinfield, Burns, Abegglen, 2019) coupled with our perception that typically the pre-tertiary education system with its transactional focus on League Table positions and consequent urge to ‘teach to the test’ will have worked very successfully to eradicate the creative in most learners (see also Ken Robinson, TED talk, 2006), and thus also in our staff. Working in a predominately widening participation HEI we see staff and students arrive with low self-efficacy and little self-belief. Our ‘non-traditional’ students in particular are made to feel unwelcome or uncomfortable within HE, where a typical response is to see them as ‘deficit’ and to devise supplementary programmes or instruction to ‘fix’ them (Sinfield, Burns and Abegglen, 2019). Concurrently there is a ‘rush’ to make HE - and academic staff themselves - more successful, efficient and accountable: to strategies and targets, to learning, teaching and assessment frameworks, to ever-evolving policies and practices. Implicit, here, is a concept emerging of a deficit staff that also needs ‘fixing’ or at least micro-managing (Sinfield, Burns and Holley, 2004).

We do not conceive of our module as a way of ‘fixing’ staff - nor of preparing them to ‘fix’ their students. Rather we use creative and visual practices as a way of helping them explore more ‘ways of seeing’ (Berger, 1972) the educational context(s) in which we all operate. We do hope that being enabled to see and think differently “can be a route to clarity ... a force of resistance and repair, providing new registers, new languages in which to think” (Laing, 2020). As shown through our analysis, our visual practices allow the surfacing and discussing of the problematic nature of HE itself, of the systemic inequities built into the very systems with which our staff and students have to engage. What we attempt is creative action and reflection - opportunities for our participants to actively and critically engage and thus to develop curricula and

pedagogic practice that better help them and their students to become their whole creative selves. Our staff learners have produced visual representations to envision their own selves. They constructed students and collaboratively built representative HE systems. Their representations acknowledged power (the tower) and pain (the dangerous maze) - but they also showcased opportunities for flexibility, porosity and openness. They 'visualise' where staff sees issues - and potentialities - to develop a new vision of what education could be. Their artefacts constitute acts of hope and of resistance.

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# 2

## Exploration: Becoming Playful—The Power of a Ludic Module

Sandra Sinfield, Tom Burns and Sandra Abegglen

What resources do you want for your ‘Performance’?  
Nothing special... The usual scissors, glue, magazines, sugar paper...

### Introduction

Our context is the academic skills or Higher Education Orientation (HEO) module that all our BA Hons Education Studies undergraduate students have to take. Our Widening Participation (WP) students and our inner city post-1992 University are often labelled as deficit: ‘They are Mickey Mouse students for whom Mickey Mouse degrees are quite

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appropriate' (Starkey cited in Brockes 2003). This has never been our experience. Our students are fierce and diverse; they have walked powerfully across borders, on building sites and down hospital corridors. We are not there to fix deficits, but to give space for the emergence of voice and to acknowledge the super-complexity of university life and study and for us this could only exist in a powerful, playful, fully ludic course. Only thus could we capture the whole glorious messy business of fierce, joyous learning—the intensity—the rhizomatic (Gillies 2017)—the power of being and working with others (Nancy 2000).

Here, we explore what happened when we allowed our students to take responsibility for their learning in a celebratory and playful way and gave them the options about what they wanted to learn—and how. We discuss what role 'play' played in this and make a strong case for a more ludic approach to learning and teaching. In many ways, we designed a module stripped of what people normally see as 'content' and focussed on process: role plays, simulations, projects, exhibitions, showcases and performances. In line with the idea of hybrid pedagogy (Morris 2013), we suggest that academic content is a proposal to inspect, laugh about and jump off from, rather than something to tick off and pass through. Based on our experience and the feedback provided by our students, we see great potential in our ludic module and play itself; it provides the energy, the eruptions, the poetry and the connectivity for our students to succeed. Play transforms the 'deficit-fixing' HEO to a synoptic and challenging one. That is, our *Becoming* module, rather than being 'just' about skills, is one which allows the students to make of all the other modules they are taking. It allows them to understand Higher Education (HE) overall and through that has the power to transform education and educational experiences.

## The Module: *Becoming* an Educationist

We developed our one-year, first-year module *Becoming an Educationist* (*Becoming*) as a 'de-schooling' process (Illich 1971)—to get students to explore what learning feels like when it is creative and empowering. We utilised 'free writing' and 'blogging to learn' to help students

develop a writing habit—such that they wrote more often—and thus became better at writing, themselves (Abegglen et al. 2016a). We asked them to put on performances and produce *Multimodal Artefacts* for an *Exhibition*—rather than an assessment point—and saw them engage purposefully, experimenting with comic books, jigsaw puzzles, board games, pack of cards, songs, poems, dances, memory envelopes, cabinet of curiosities, newspaper articles, short stories, sculptures, 3D artefacts, drawings/paintings, patchworks, collages, posters, garments and videos/films/animations (Abegglen et al. 2016b): fiercely alive and fiercely learning. PLAY is a central aspect of our learning and teaching practice.

In our ludic module, ‘play’ is the *process* that smooths out the reductive, transactional striations of the formal education through which our students have passed. Play is the reflection and recognition of the self. This seems particularly important as our students are ‘non-traditional’ with awareness that they are deemed to have less academic, social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984) than the mythic white, male middle-class student of the Russell Group or Oxbridge universities. We wanted to start the educational journey of our students by valuing and welcoming them into the University as they are—rather than placing them immediately as ‘deficit’ and ‘less than’. We wanted to ‘see’ what they bring with them and help them explore how they can utilise that as they grapple with their new present and become the professionals they want to be.

## Play Is Thirdspace, Play Is Freedom

The world we occupy has competing demands on students and tutors alike. The promotion of higher level cognitive skills competes with the imperative to deliver challenging and yet purposeful content that develops soft skills and has high pass rates. Lecturers have to design curricula that address the concerns expressed in the National Student Survey (NSS), Higher Education Academy (HEA) benchmarks and UK Professional Standard Frameworks (UKPSF), Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) descriptors and professional body standards. They also need to incorporate academic literacies, digital literacies, research skills and

employability to satisfy ‘consumer’ and business demand, in particular when teaching academic skills modules.

We used Shields’ (2004) model of Lefebvre and Soja’s (1996) argument of *Thirdspace* as a way to explore the challenges that conventional HE demands. The classroom and our creative pedagogic practice were harnessed as ludic spaces for empowering practice. By addressing our students’ strengths and their experiences, we gave them the opportunity to develop, playfully. Play is not ‘dumbed down’ learning, but ‘serious business’ (Parr 2014). As Winnicott (1971: 54) argues, ‘[i]t is in playing and only in playing that the individual child or adult is able to be creative and to use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self’. As such play has the potential to make explicit the need for and provoke a paradigm shift in curriculum design, and in our learning and teaching practice. With Winnicott (1971), we argue that play is important in counteracting the implicit threat that occurs when we are in transitional spaces—between worlds, between social classes and in alien educational settings. Play is ‘freedom’ (Huizinga 1949).

## The Essentials

There were some *essentials* we put forward to enable our students the space and time to learn—and play. These essentials, outlined in our Module Handbook and presented to students in the very first session of the module, are as follows:

### **Essential 1—Be there**

You ARE the course! The course happens as we talk, listen, engage and generally do stuff together. It’s important for you to attend—to be with your fellow students—to work together to create the course.

### **Essential 2—Get involved**

We want you to talk, listen, discuss and present; to *make* notes of usefulness; to read actively and interactively; to join in with energy and enthusiasm to all the different things that you will be asked to do; and to reflect on what you have done and why; to self-test and make your learning conscious.

**Essential 3—Think about it**

Think about it: learning is reflective, that is, you have to think about what you have done and why. Each week, write a blog entry. You will get some guidance on this from your 2nd-year mentors. Your blogs do not always have to be written. They can be collages, drawings, photographs, etc. To remember what you have learned, you have to make the learning conscious and you have to revise what you want to keep. Hence, we ask you to keep a weekly learning log/blog, where you make your learning conscious and memorable.

Plus, we asked students to:

- Join in with energy and enthusiasm: smile—and work hard;
- Ask lots and lots of questions;
- Have fun;
- Write something each week; and
- Start their Learning Projects early.

**Learning Through Play: The Projects**

Rather than following a week-by-week programme where we told our students what to do, alongside our immersive and activity-based workshop sessions, we asked them to direct their learning by engaging in a range of projects. We made some suggestions, below, but were happy if students came up with their own ideas (see also Abegglen et al. [2016b](#)):

- Writing: Blogging to learn
- Multimodal Exhibition
- Develop a Digital Me
- End of year Performance
- Reading—Make it fun
- Sketch Books
- Art and Artists
- Writers and writing
- Learning Project.

We asked students to get into *Performance Groups* to work on a *Multimodal Exhibition* and *End of Year Performance*—where each group was asked to plan, develop and deliver the outcomes of their work. The performance itself was their chance to get as creative as they wanted: devise theatre, music or dance productions; deliver a set of presentations; and set up interactive workshops or produce an interactive exhibition. They could do anything that would engage, inform and entertain their audience, their peers—as long as it somehow connected to teaching, learning and/or assessment—and challenged, stimulated or extended our/their thinking on what it means to become an inspiring, emancipatory educationist.

Examples of their work can be found here:

2014/2015: <http://learning.londonmet.ac.uk/epacks/posters-digital/>

2015/2016: <http://learning.londonmet.ac.uk/epacks/posters-digital2/>

2016/2017: <https://educationandsocialpolicy.wordpress.com/2017/03/22/multi-modal-exhibition/>.

## Student Feedback: Focus Groups

We asked a *Becoming* graduate to run a small image-mediated focus group to explore what other students thought of the *Becoming* module. The themes that came up were as follows:

- Importance of the ability to be able work together—something which needs to be learnt—as it is challenging—but seems essential to achieve goals;
- Play helps create a sense of unity—and achievement;
- Play = enjoyment, fun—which, in turn, helps to achieve, brings success;
- Fosters development of self—helps students to build confidence—allows them to become who they want to be.

What they said:

In the multimodal exhibition I learnt how to be creative with my work but most importantly how to make my work reflect who I am as a person and what my work means without having to explain it to others when they see it.

This module has taught me unique ways of teaching such as group activities or individual research projects. I have learnt to look at things in an unusual way, and the importance of education and its meaning.

Overall, this module has taught me more than what I knew at the beginning. It helped me to be confident in myself when presenting work in front of a group of people, which is something that I have struggled with. I am happy to say that these activities have benefitted me incredibly.

At the end of the module, I am quite proud of myself. I feel that my knowledge is a lot more extended now and I can actually debate about education with solid arguments.

## Climb Every Mountain

As the team that devised and delivered this module, we found that the main obstacles for us were those of timetabling and rooming: we needed to break out of the traditional lecture theatre and the one-hour lecture plus two-hour seminar division of our University time, class and space. Yes, we could play for short periods of time and on the lecture theatre steps, but *Becoming* worked better when we were scheduled for three hours in one adaptable classroom—with movable tables and chairs; with resources for drawing, painting and making; and where we used the three hours for an intense workshop on a particular theme or task. For our students, the ‘obstacles’ were opening themselves up and becoming vulnerable; the perpetual challenge of group work; and not feeling creative or artistic. The broader challenge is to get senior managers and discipline academics to realise the emancipatory impact of this ludic practice and thus to be brave in the development and delivery of their own creative modules.



## And So...

Learning is social, collective and embodied, and there are different ways of learning, knowing and being—and many different arguments as to what makes a good learning and teaching environment. On television, Gareth Malone runs ‘empowering’ choirs to help people re-discover their confidence and their communities, and ‘Strictly Come Dancing’ turns novices into dancing experts via personal relationships and tailored tuition. We asked our students to come on a de-schooling, playful journey to engage with their own learning and learning spaces in powerful ways.

The HE sector is currently undergoing radical changes with a strong emphasis on measurable outcomes. We need our WP students to recognise the skills and potential they already have so they can build on their strengths. By making our classroom playful, engaging and productive, we were enabling them to begin the learning journey from where they are. We gave them ‘a voice’, allowed them to be with others, and place themselves and their assignments in meaningful contexts. It is play that surfaces, nurtures and develops the aptitudes, skills and knowledge to be a successful HE participant and engaged citizen. We definitely do not want to make it simple for our students—but we want to provide them with meaningful learning experiences on which they can build.

We call on all educators to explore the potential of ludic practice—making students not only reach for the stars but enabling them to build the required rocket. Classroom activities do not have to mirror the win/lose format of formal assessment or exams. Learning and teaching practice has to challenge, yes, but in ways that allow students and staff to experiment—and get it wrong, again and again, before getting it right. Playful learning is joyful yet not easy. Because of this, as Nerantzi and James (2015) argue, we cannot afford to leave it out of our practice.

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## **It's learning development, Jim – but not as we know it: academic literacies in third space**

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### ***Abstract***

This paper maps our experience of conceptualising and teaching an interdisciplinary first-year undergraduate 'Higher Education Orientation' module against the seminal paper written by Lea and Street in 1998. We conclude by arguing for Third Spaces within the curriculum and for practices that re-imagine what education is and what the university could be.

**Keywords:** learning development; Third Space; academic literacies; widening participation; higher education.

### ***Introduction***

In United Kingdom higher education students are said to 'read for their degrees'. This indicates that there is very little direct teaching, and if there is, it is often in a traditional lecture format, and that contact-time with academics, those members of the university who teach or research, is limited. Instead the students are expected to be able to organise themselves for independent study and inter-dependent learning. Our students are expected to understand the forms and processes of university teaching and learning; to know how we teach and assess, and what sorts of academic labour – what actual work – they have to undertake to get tasks and assessments successfully completed. They are

also expected to have the motivation and self-discipline to engage actively and proactively with their learning; and to be able to step back from their learning experience to develop critical and analytical approaches, and to engage in reflective practice and writing, to improve on future performance and be employment ready.

The reality is that many students are underprepared for the sort of university teaching and learning environment just described. Increasingly they emerge from a transactional pre-university system (at least in the United Kingdom) where the emphasis is on 'teaching to the test' to ensure that students meet performance targets (Jozefkowicz, 2006). Hence, many students struggle to think and act autonomously and powerfully whilst 'self-governing' their studies. In our particular institution, London Metropolitan University, this is complicated in that most of our students are classified as 'non-traditional' coming from a 'widening participation' background (London Metropolitan University, 2018); they are often the first in their families to attend university and they work, often full time, alongside having caring responsibilities. This means, our students have little to no time for academic study outside of class time. Further, it tends to mean that our students cannot – or at least do not – engage in the sort of co- or extra-curricular activities that are said to be of most benefit to undergraduates: the clubs and societies that develop students, creating the networks - and feeding the joy – that makes them ready for the world – and for work.

There have been many attempts to develop practice models designed to help non-traditional students succeed at university study. A model particularly embraced in these lean and mean academic times (viz. Giroux, 2014) is the delivery of extra- or co-curricular 'skills' programmes targeted at just those students deemed to be 'at risk', with the aim to bring these students 'up to speed' and 'fix' their deficits. This ignores reiterated warnings not least from the Learning Development (LD) community that widening participation practices should not stigmatise either Learning Development *per se* nor widening participation students as 'remedial' (viz. ALDinHE, 2019). It also sidesteps the proposition that what facilitates successful widening participation is not 'bolt-on' courses and workshops but the development of creative and inclusive curricula designed to help non-traditional students to succeed and to help all students maximise their potential (Warren, 2002; Wilcox et al., 2005). Targeting resources only at those deemed 'at risk' leaves LD on the sidelines, shouting for equity in this new austerity-driven academia which is anchored almost exclusively in the rhetoric of a reductive employability agenda.

The purpose of this paper is to map our experience of conceptualising and teaching an interdisciplinary first-year undergraduate 'Higher Education Orientation' module against the seminal paper written by Lea and Street in 1998 that first described this sort of work as a learning taxonomy: skills; socialisation; literacies. We want to discuss our module, *Becoming an Educationist*, arguing that it is akin to that created by Gutierrez (2008, p.148), 'a collective Third Space, in which students begin to reconceive who they are and what they might be able to accomplish academically and beyond'; and with an emphasis on 'redesigning what counts as teaching and learning of literacy'. We argue this is not 'embedding' LD within the curriculum. Ours is a much more rhizomatic model: one that offers multiple, non-hierarchical entry and exit points (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) and that embraces uncertainty (Cormier, 2012). It is the collective 'Third Space' (Bhabha, 2004) where by 'being with' you start to 'become' or, as Soja (1996, pp.56-57) said, where

*everything* comes together . . . subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history.

Thus, our *Becoming* module welcomed and honoured our diverse non-traditional students for the people they already were as they engaged in the process of becoming the academics that they wanted to become. We therefore argue for holistic and inclusive learning and teaching approaches that enable students to find their own voices in the exclusionary, competitive and often hostile higher education environment.

### ***Becoming: case study module***

In 2013, we developed a first-year undergraduate module that embraced critical pedagogy (Freire, 2007; Giroux, 2007) as it introduced students to their disciplinary subject as well as to (a contested notion of) academia and academic practices. Making use of the ludic and creative, we posed authentic challenges that invited students to actively learn and to interrogate the university as a (co-)constructed learning landscape as they consciously engaged with their own processes of learning.

*Becoming* was designed for the first-year undergraduate students of three different courses based in the School of Social Professions. The three courses were aimed at students interested in becoming Educationists in the widest sense: teachers, youth workers, educational instructors, learning consultants, health promoters, community supporters etc. The student body of these courses traditionally consists of over fifty percent non-traditional students (Blagburn and Clutterbuck, 2011); ours were about 100% non-traditional. Our students were mature, with work commitments, looking after dependants and attending part-time at least part of the academic year. This means, students on these courses managed, on top of their studies, multiple and often conflicting responsibilities. They also came from a wide range of educational backgrounds, national and international, and hence they struggled to find a 'common ground' for their learning. This presents them with a double bind in that they are either perceived as academically 'deficit' or as lacking commitment to their studies. Similarly, lecturers on those courses find themselves caught between differing professional discourses and contrasting and contradicting demands. Thus, together staff and students tread contested ground, requiring a model of teaching and learning that accommodates the 'flawed self' of both the learner and the teacher: a model that acknowledges and accommodates learning in all its 'supercomplexity' (Barnett and Hallam, 1999) both within academia and the wider world.

*Becoming* was credit bearing running over the whole of the academic year. This gave the module necessary academic weight and it created time and space not only to explore topics and themes in depth but also to 'be with' each other (Nancy, 2000). This helped students bond and belong; to ease the transition into academia and to reveal that intense engagement with themes and topics creates opportunities for 'rich' learning. *Becoming* was designed as a rhizomatic (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) 'de-schooling' (Illich, 1970) space where we embedded emancipatory and creative praxis to help our students become the academics they wanted to be. We utilised 'drawing to learn', 'free writing' and 'blogging' to help students develop thinking and writing habits such that, especially with the blogging, they wrote what they wanted to say – and they wrote often and thus became better at writing (Abegglen et al., 2017). We scaffolded student reading through the use of visual practices (Abegglen et al., 2018) and 'textscrolls' (Middlebrook, 2014; Abegglen et al., 2019), and we asked them to experiment with alternative genres such as songs, dances and videos/films/animations (Burns et al., 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2018d, 2018e)

with the aim to shake up their notions of 'education' whilst making space for them to 'reach their own accommodation with discourses of belonging, identity and power' (Medhurst, 2000, p.31).

Specifically, we decided to develop a module that would welcome all students into the university for the people they already were – as it took them on a developmental journey to become the academics they wanted to be. The module created multiple opportunities for the students to bond and belong – with each other and with the module as a whole. We used role-play and simulation – to get students talking and to validate their thinking. We used drawing and making to learn - with proactive discussion mediated by images, by topic, by objects and by academic texts (Palus and Drath, 2001). The students participated in a range of projects including producing a multimodal exhibition (Abegglen et al., 2016) to showcase results of an early participant observation exercise of what makes learning happen in a university – and what stops learning from happening. Students represented their findings as knitting, poetry, 3D objects, animations, video, collages, comic books and posters. The students blogged their learning – and so wrote to learn – and concomitant formal academic writing flourished as a result (Abegglen et al., 2015). They develop a 'Digital Me' for a further showcase and end of term party; a further opportunity to celebrate their achievements rather than merely 'assess' their learning. They each also engaged in a small qualitative research project on a topic of their own choosing but based around university study. Some of these projects produced innovative findings – such as the first year student who uncovered the benefits of group work because it allowed 'flow' in student directed learning – and another student who discovered that students resisted visual note making because they were frightened of drawing. By the end of the module the students took over the running of the sessions developing interactive learning opportunities for their peers.

Formal and informal feedback, classroom discussions and module evaluations (all carried out throughout the academic year), showed that none of the participating students saw this as a 'deficit fixing' skills module. They saw it as a space to learn and they were capable of learning so much more than they had thought when they entered the university – similar to Gutierrez's (2008) and also Idrus's (2015) students that were 'transformed' by their experiences:

Thank you very much for taking me to another level of my journey to Become An Educationist, each class was captivating, refreshing and interesting. You are Legends, I am really grateful to have worked with you.

I've spent more time than expected on my portfolio but to say I'm proud is an understatement, you've REALLY inspired my creativity and drive, especially approaching the final hurdle.

Thank you for teaching such an inspirational module. It brought out such creativity within the group and I believe it changed the group dynamics as we had to work with various people whom we generally wouldn't.

Thank you for all your support within the module and the experience was truly invaluable (Anonymised comments taken from 2016 Module Monitoring Log).

Students tend to succeed on *Becoming* with many receiving A and B grades (in the United Kingdom considered the highest grades), only dropping out, if they do, for personal rather than academic reasons. We argue that the reason for this is that we designed *Becoming* to be a creative, challenging and engaging module that allowed all members of the non-homogeneous group labelled 'non-traditional' to develop their self-efficacy and to succeed. *Becoming* was the hybrid space where they could make sense of themselves as actors and agents in their own learning, of the other modules they were studying, and of the University as a whole.

### ***It's that Lea and Street experience***

Educationists might argue that what we have done in *Becoming* is simply good curriculum design. Our argument would be that whilst this is true, it is only true because the module was designed to be emancipatory and empowering: something to inspect, laugh at and jump off from (Sinfield et al., 2019). The challenge is to make a case for such a module when the macro-culture within higher education is increasingly focused on the bottom line: NSS scores and League Table positions; student employability and staff salary-reduction targets that need to be reached. This reductionist vision asset-strips creativity from courses and directs or targets resources at those 'in need' rather than learning and



teaching as a whole (viz. Kalin, 2018). The micro-reality of this is that most widening participation students tend to have experienced some form of educational 'rebuff' and tend to have lower self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982) than middle-class students from a traditional university (Soria and Bultmann, 2014). Thus, for us there is an increased need to develop programmes that better 'hold' those ready to flee, and to foster positive learning experiences and outcomes especially for those who are new to and unsure of (UK) academia. In our module, following Nancy (2000, p. 2), we therefore ensured that our students had enough time and opportunities to 'be with each other' and 'learn together':

There is no meaning if meaning is not shared, and not because there would be an ultimate or first signification that all beings have in common, but because *meaning is itself the sharing of Being*.

By taking a dialogic rather than a didactic approach, we encouraged the emergence of 'heutagogy' (Hase and Kenyon, 2000): self-directed and self-determined learning. As emancipatory educationists we argue that this should be the ultimate goal of academia: for students to take control of their learning, finding their academic identities in ways that are recognised by the academy, but which they negotiate on their own terms. We were aware that adopting this approach to teaching might be confusing for students used to the lecture-seminar format where the lecturer presents, and represents, the all-knowing teacher (viz. Illich, 1970). However, as our dialogic approach ran through every session, our students adapted and responded well to this new challenge. Moreover we created 'time' – time for students to explore and to experience and experiment with their own learning (viz. Jackson et al., 2006; Johnson, 2010). Time to take risks, to lose a fear of failure and time to 'be with' (Nancy, 2000) and learn from each other; time to create and inhabit their own Community of Practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

A Community of Practice (CoP) is a group of people who share a profession or craft and, through the sharing of information and experiences, learn from each other, and so gradually improve their knowledge and/or practice:

Communities of practice are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor: a tribe learning to survive, a band of artists seeking new forms of expression, a group of engineers

working on similar problems, a clique of pupils defining their identity in the school, a network of surgeons exploring novel techniques, a gathering of first-time managers helping each other cope. In a nutshell: CoPs are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly (Wenger, cited Wong et al., 2001, p.317).

In other words, CoPs are groups of people who share ideas and insight and help each other solve problems and through that develop a common practice or approach. In academia generally and in *Becoming*, this meant that students work together on projects, developing ideas and solutions, or plan and create their own learning sessions tailored to their needs and supported by others, who either are more experienced and knowledgeable or who have different experiences and knowledges.

It is a tricky business navigating that which empowers students to operate powerfully within Higher Education, with what facilitates effective teaching (Angelo, 1993) because becoming a learning CoP in this time of 'supercomplexity' (Barnett, 2000) requires the negotiation of identity in a complex dance in complex landscapes of practice that are lanced by multiple meanings and tensions. Creating *Becoming* as a year-long module with multiple creative challenges gave us, and the students, time for this complexity.

### ***Academic Literacies: A Contested Space***

Lea and Street (1998) discuss in their paper 'Student Writing in Higher Education' the (often contrasting) expectations, interpretations and conceptualisations of learning and teaching. They adduced a taxonomy of approaches to academic writing: describing first a mechanistic study skills model – where the student is deemed to be deficient and in need of remediation via staged 'skills' development; moving through a 'third way' model of academic socialisation – where the student is a learner, but essentially a passive one; and culminating in an academic literacies model which sees the student as having agency in a politicised landscape of power and authority.

In more detail, the study skills approach suggests that there are various discrete skills and strategies that students need to employ to succeed at university study: time management, note making, reading for learning, writing in the correct genre and mode, etc. Lea and

Street (1998) argue that, in regard to academic writing, this approach conceptualises student writing as technical and instrumental forcing academics and Learning Developers to focus on 'grammar, spelling and punctuation' rather than 'writing to learn'. Whilst we agree with Lea and Street (1998) and reject the idea of atomised skills that students need to master, we do argue that there are moments where students realise that they have not been taught how to study – or learn – successfully and thus where a focus on a particular study approach or strategy might empower them to learn more successfully. For example, when entering university, many will not realise that they need to become active learners, to 'surface' what constitutes academic work, and planning and managing their own academic labour. In our experience, the majority of our students, as with many staff, are unaware of the active learning potential of note making – having been taught instead to passively rely on teaching handouts. Being allowed time and space to explore and rehearse successful note making strategies might improve student agency in their own learning making them less reliant on the good will or the good practice of their tutors. Thus, tackling study strategies directly, and in a supportive and transparent way, need not be experienced as remediation and may enable students to proactively take control of their own learning although the isolated teaching of 'skills' is certainly problematic (Wingate, 2006).

Regardless of their views on skills, most academics acknowledge that disciplines and academic communities have habits and epistemological practices that students need to learn, that they need to model and embrace, in order to become full community members. Lea and Street (1998, viz. also 1997) refer to this as academic socialisation where there is a focus on student orientation to disciplinary learning and interpretation of epistemic learning tasks. Although this approach is much more sensitive to the idea of the student as a learner, the idea is often critiqued for representing students as novitiates, inexperienced learners that need to be moulded into successful adults (and employees) (viz. Kalin, 2018). However, if we take Lave and Wenger's (1991) apprenticeship model of Communities of Practice, it becomes evident that novice students will need to learn how to become academics within their own epistemic communities, and that this need not be a passive and unquestioning indoctrination but, as with the development of successful study strategies as mentioned above, an active, nuanced and embodied process of becoming.

According to Lea and Street (1998), the academic literacies approach, allied to the New Literacies Studies, sees the student as an (active) actor and agent in their own learning,

subjects capable of operating with awareness and criticality within their epistemic communities. The individual student is no longer seen as potentially deficient - rather questions can be asked of the institution itself and its own systemic ways of hiding or mystifying its power. This contradicts the general assumption and perception that students, especially widening participation students, are lacking the skills and knowledge to succeed in academia and that academic literacy is 'falling' (Brockes, 2003). In this context, Lea and Street (1998) argue that not only current approaches but also current perception in regard to academic literacies need to change. Rather than locating 'problems' within individual students, wider, more empowering institutional approaches to teaching and learning need to be developed, and embedded, that are meaningful within and across the curriculum. Although this argument is plausible, there exist still countless approaches within and across courses, subjects and disciplines - and between students and academic tutors – with an underlying assumption that academic literacies are the highest literacies to be achieved. We argue for a more nuanced discussion of and approach to student learning that uses and acknowledges more than one approach. Students need to be provided with a wide range of opportunities that creatively scaffold their learning throughout their studies, and that build on their existing skills and knowledge while creating a sense of purpose and belonging.

Our module was not designed to ensure 'league table outcomes' where power might shift infinitesimally from academics to students, but in reality, it still resides with the higher education institution and its goals (viz. Healey et al., 2018). Rather, in *Becoming*, we created a collective Third Space by sharing the responsibility for the success of the teaching/learning process – with the students driving 'the action' in partnership with each other and with us: choosing their own qualitative research projects; interpreting their multimodal challenges in their own unique ways; and having creative autonomy in how they developed and delivered the concluding weeks of the module itself. We treated our students not as empty vessels to be filled but as agents harnessing their own particular knowledge and experiences to drive their own learning (and that of others). Thus, our students were gradually given the lead on topics and sessions as the year progressed. We wanted our students to experience a more collaborative, complex, subtle and nuanced version of education and to see and experience themselves as actively learning, and learning as *becoming* – a realignment of competence and experience, socially defined, personally experienced and collaboratively expressed.

Looking at the module outcomes and the feedback by our students (and positive comments from the other staff who also taught our students), we argue that all students should be given the sorts of Third Space opportunities that we have described here. Moreover, we argue that it is particularly important for the so-called non-traditional student to have the opportunity to experience Third Space opportunities within their (assessed) modules. These students are the ones who persistently experience educational rejection and refusal, who are labelled as deficient and stereotyped as 'less than'; if Third Space opportunities only happen outwith the curriculum, in the form of Club and Society membership for example, this becomes another way for Higher Education to privilege the traditional and dispossess the non-traditional student. These latter are the students for whom we attempted to create *Becoming* as a radical, emancipatory and transformative space for action: a space of potentiality.

### ***Whatever next: Whither the transformational educational experiences?***

In austerity-driven higher education there is the danger that university – and all the Learning Development support that is still built into universities – is focused primarily on getting students ready for the market, with ever dwindling resources targeted at widening participation students in ever more stigmatising and diminishing ways. Higher education has itself been marketised and commodified (viz. Giroux, 2007; 2017), thus arguably all the pedagogy, all the learning development, is really about getting everyone into employment and fit for work. Lea and Street (1998) provided a model that criticises this approach and outlined what learning development and support might look like when it goes beyond the teaching of skills and the socialisation of students. Arguably, what is needed is:

a more complex and contested interpretation . . . about what constitutes valid knowledge within a particular context, and the relationships of authority that exist around the communication of these assumptions (Lea and Street, 1998, p.170).

This suggests the multiplicity and the diversity in classrooms and lecture halls should be used to explore something as complex as learning and teaching in a more democratic and

empowering way because it is something that cannot be managed and dealt with in an atomised or mechanistic manner.

In our *Becoming* module, a first-year undergraduate module, we aimed to promote multidimensional and proactive student learning, designed to engage and develop all of our diverse students. Most importantly, we wanted to value and take into account the whole student, and the subtle range of attributes and practices they bring with them - as well as that which they will need to develop over time to become academic in their own discipline. Underpinning this approach are arguments surrounding critical, emancipatory and empowering pedagogy (Freire, 2007), and an emergent approach to practice that fosters creativity (Jackson et al., 2006) for self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982). We argue that when you set challenges that pique students' curiosity and invite them to critically engage with that which they want to learn – without one particular skills-set in mind – your very fluidity can create more holistic and humanistic (Rogers, 1969) learning and teaching experiences. Built into our model is also the idea of a Community of Practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) where students have time and space to be with each other and their lecturers (Nancy, 2000). This requires a nuanced literacies approach sustained by continuous and critical reflection (Schön, 1983) upon learning and teaching – and upon the discourses of learning and teaching – from both academics and students:

*Becoming* has been the most unique and creative module with the Education studies course at the London Metropolitan. Its content has been all-encompassing and has helped me greatly in other modules, yet the real lesson has been the way in which the content has been delivered; the module is democratic and relies heavily on the dialogic. It lets us express ourselves honestly and freely, and asks that we allow others to do the same. *Becoming* has made me question why we as people rather than just students do or think certain things, and makes us ask if there isn't another way (Extract from a student blog taken from the week that they were asked to reflect on the module overall – viz. *The Social Hand Grenade* blog).

Our module operated as a collective Third Space for socio-political and critical practice, adopting a critical academic literacies approach and operating in an emergent, oscillating, playful and creative way; capable of engaging and developing the self-efficacy of all our students no matter where they started on their academic journey.

Based on this experience, if asked 'What next?' or 'Where next?' for the Lea and Street (1998) model and academic literacies *per se*, we would seek to stand on the shoulders of giants and argue for a paradigm shift in UK higher education teaching and learning. We argue that what widening participation – and all – students deserve and need is a form of the *Becoming* module at every level of their University study. Students deserve Third Spaces within the curriculum: socio-political spaces that challenge, extend and explore the very nature of knowledge itself; spaces that nurture those more creative and life-enhancing attributes; spaces that continue to value the people our students are as well as the academics they are becoming. We need emancipatory practices within a radical re-configuration of what education is and what the university could be.

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Academic literacies in Third Space

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Bustillos Morales, J. A., & Abegglen, S. (2020). Introduction: How can we make sense of the influence of economics in education? In J.A. Bustillos Morales & S. Abegglen, (Eds.) (2020). *Understanding education and economics: Key debates and critical perspectives* (pp. 1-11). Routledge.



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- Jandrić, P., Luke, T. W., Sturm, S., McLaren, P., Jackson, L., MacKenzie, A., Tesar, M., Stewart G. T., Roberts, P., **Abegglen, S.**, Burns, T., Sinfield, S., Hayes, S., Jaldemark, J., Peters, M. A., Sinclair, C., & Gibbons, A. (2023). Collective writing: The continuous struggle for meaning-making. In: P. Jandrić, A. MacKenzie & J. Knox (Eds), Postdigital research. *Postdigital Science and Education* (pp. 249-293). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-31299-1\\_14](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-31299-1_14)
- Nerantzi, C., **Abegglen, S.**, Karatsiori, M., & Martinez-Arboleda, A. (Eds.) (2023). 101 Creative ideas to use AI in education. A crowdsourced collection. Graphic Design by Bushra Hashim. CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8072950>
- Abegglen, S.**, Burns, T., & Sinfield, S. (Eds.) (2023). *Higher education collaboration: A new ecology of practice*. Bloomsbury.
- 2022 **Abegglen, S.** (2022). Story 4: #QuietCreativeHE Event: Chat June 08, 2022. In: T. Burns, J. Desire, J. Gordon, P. McDonald & S. Sinfield (Eds.), *Say it with a story. The #creativeHE Annual 2022* (pp. 13-14). Creativity for Learning in Higher Education Community, #creativeHE. <https://doi.org/10.25416/NTR.21806085>
- Abegglen, S.**, Neuhaus, F., Wilson, K., & Shah, K. (2022). Story 13: A creative interpretation of 99 Online Education Buzz Words. In: T. Burns, J. Desire, J. Gordon, P. McDonald & S. Sinfield (Eds.), *Say it with a story. The #creativeHE Annual 2022* (pp. 37-38). Creativity for Learning in Higher Education Community, #creativeHE. <https://doi.org/10.25416/NTR.21806085>
- Abegglen, S.**, Neuhaus, F., & Wilson, K. (Eds.) (2022). *Voices from the digital classroom: 25 interviews about teaching and learning in the face of a global pandemic*. University of Calgary Press.
- 2021 **Abegglen, S.**, Burns, T., & Sinfield, S. (2021). Being fiercely alive and fiercely ourselves in higher education. In: R. Toft Norgard, J. E. M. Solheim & K. J. Bukholt (Eds.), *Playful higher education: Voices, activities & co-creations from the PUP community* (pp. 110-113). Playful University Platform.

**Abegglen, S.,** Burns, T., & Sinfield, S. (2021). Co-creating playful higher education: Creative colla(ge)boration. In: R. Toft Norgard, J. E. M. Solheim & K. J. Bukholt (Eds.), *Playful higher education: Voices, activities & co-creations from the PUP community* (pp. 205-212). Playful University Platform.

**Abegglen, S.,** Burns, T., Sinfield, S., & Piras, V. (2021). Undoing academic writing. In: N. Tasler, R. O'Brien, A. Spires, C. Nerantzi & E. Gillaspay (Eds.), *Being creative in the face of adversity – Annual creativeHE collection 2021* (pp. 9-11). National Teaching Repository.  
<https://doi.org/10.25416/NTR.17709860.v1>

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Bustillos, J., & **Abegglen, S.** (2021, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Issues of gender, 'race' and social class in education. In: S. Isaacs, (Ed.), *Social problems in the UK: An introduction* (pp. 86-110). Routledge.

**Abegglen, S.,** Burns, T., & Sinfield, S. (2021). *Supporting student writing and other modes of learning and assessment: A staff guide*. PRISM.  
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- 2010 **Abegglen, S.** (2010). *The woman in my wallet: An investigation of photography in everyday life*. Lambert Academic Publishing.

### Journal Editorials

- 2022 **Abegglen, S.**, Neuhaus, F., Shah, K., & Wilson, K. (Eds.) (2022). TALON Letters. *NEXTCalgary*, 14.
- Abegglen, S.**, Neuhaus, F., & Kehal, J. (Eds.) (2022). Hybrid community: Good neighbour x RPI pop-up. *NEXTCalgary*, 11.
- 2021 **Abegglen, S.**, Burns, T., & Sinfield, S. (Eds.) (2021). Collaboration in higher education: Partnering with students, colleagues and external stakeholders. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, Special Issue, 18(7). <https://ro.uow.edu.au/jutlp/vol18/iss7/>

### Journal Articles

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- Abegglen, S.,** Burns, T., & Sinfield, S. (2015). Voices from the margins: Narratives of learning development in a digital age. *Journal of Educational Innovation, Partnership and Change*, 1(1). <http://dx.doi.org/10.21100/jeipc.v1i1.148>
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- Other**
- 2023 [resource]  
Burns, T., **Abegglen, S.,** Akhbari, M., & Kamal, S. (2023). (Re)Building higher education. *LearnHigher*. <https://aldinhe.ac.uk/teaching-learning/rebuilding-higher-education/>
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Sinfield, S., Burns, T., & **Abegglen, S.** (2023). Take5 #87 Towards a more creative and playful HE. *Association for Learning Development in Higher Education*. <https://aldinhe.ac.uk/take5-87-towards-a-more-creative-and-playful-he/>

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[conference proceedings]

Mag, A. G., Sinfield, S., Burns, T., & **Abegglen, S.** (2021). The joy of teaching and learning in academia – teachers' perspectives from three countries. *MATEC Web Conference 343*, 11007.  
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[research report]

**Abegglen, S.**, Dall'Ara, E., Livesey, G., Neuhaus, F., & Taylor, M. (2021). *Design Studio Matrix: Supporting the decision-making process as part of a reflective practice*. University of Calgary. <http://hdl.handle.net/1880/113442>

[podcast]

**Abegglen, S.** (2021, March 23). *Ep. 17: Unwrapping peer support and mentoring with Sandra Abegglen*. The Education Burrito.  
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2020

[conference proceedings]

Livesey, G., Dall'Ara, E., Neuhaus, F., **Abegglen, S.**, & Tyler, M. E. (2020). Design thinking diagram: A tool for decision-making. In L. Sanderson & S. Stone (Eds.) *Teaching-Learning-Research: Design and Environments*. AMPS Proceedings Series 22.2, 271-281.

[blog post]

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- [blog post]  
**Abegglen, S.**, Gillaspy, E., Burn, T., & Sinfield, S. (2020, October, 14). #Take5 #50: The best way to bring the human into the virtual space? *Take5*. <https://lmutake5.wordpress.com/2020/10/14/take5-50-the-best-way-to-bring-the-human-into-virtual-space/>
- [radio interview]  
 Eagletail, H., Neuhaus, F., & **Abegglen, S.** (2020). *Keeping green – Episode July 2020*. The University of Calgary Student Radio Society. <https://cjsw.com/program/keeping-green/episode/20200714/>
- 2019 [manifesto]  
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 Burns, T., **Abegglen, S.**, & Blundell, D. (2019). Adventure play in 70s East London: Part 1. *The Child in the City*. <https://www.childinthecity.org/2019/02/11/adventure-play-in-70s-east-london-p1/?gdpr=accept>
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- 2018 [report]  
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- 2015 [conference proceedings]  
**Abegglen, S.**, & Bustillos, J. (2015). Science education: Beyond a liminal understanding of knowledge production/dissemination. *Proceedings, International Conference on Education in Mathematics, Science and Technology*, April 23-26, Antalya, Turkey, 290-295. <https://www.2015.icemst.com>

## Complete List of Talks, Presentations & Workshops

2023

09/2023 – Workshop

Nerantzi, C., **Abegglen, S.**, Karatsiori, M., Martínez-Arboleda, A., Pei, Y., Higgs, R., & Salkow, M. (2023, September 29). *What can Educators do with AI? 101 Creative Ideas to Use AI in Education*. Exploring Artificial Intelligence in Education, Nelson Mandela University.

09/2023 – Presentation

**Abegglen, S.**, Burns, T., & Sinfield, S. (2023). *(Re)imagining higher education: A SaP project*. HERG, London Metropolitan University.

07/2023 – Presentation (invited keynote speaker)

**Abegglen, S.** (2023, August 7). *Social media for social inclusion: Enablers and barriers for creating inclusive learning environments*. AMEE TEL Committee Preconference Symposium, Annual AMEE Conference 2023, Glasgow.

06/2023 – Presentation

**Abegglen, S.**, Burns, T., & Sinfield, S. (2023, June 28). *The ideal higher education: Creative visions and visualisations*. Learning and Teaching Conference 2023, London Metropolitan University.

06/2023 – Presentation

**Abegglen, S.**, Burns, T., Kamal, S., Akhbari, M., & Sinfield, S. (2023, June 09). *(Re)Imagining higher education: An inspirational guide for academics*. ALDCon23, University of Portsmouth.

06/2023 – Presentation

**Abegglen, S.**, Burns, T., & Sinfield, S. (2023, June 06). *Push it out*. Virtual Community of Practice (vCoP) of Learning Developers, Association for Learning Development in Higher Education.

04/2023 – Poster

**Abegglen, S.**, Neuhaus, F., & Schneider, S. (2023, April 26-28). *Hybrid play for collective learning*. 2023 Postsecondary Conference on Learning and Teaching, Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning, University of Calgary.

03/2023 – Presentation

**Abegglen, S.**, Akhbari, M., Burns, T., & Sinfield, S. (2023, March 22). *Hopes and dreams: Creative exploration of the future of education*. DigiEd Horizons.

03/2023 – Presentation

**Abegglen, S.**, & Schneider, S. (2023, March 01). *Hybrid literature: Playfully researched and openly shared*. Open Education Talks 2023.

02/2023 – Workshop

**Abegglen, S.**, Burns, T., & Sinfield, S. (2023, February 22). *(Re)imagining HE*. #creativeHE.

- 02/2023 – Presentation  
**Abegglen, S.**, Burns, T., & Sinfield, S. (2023, February 09). *Becoming educational together: Working with students, colleagues and external stakeholders as partners*. Teaching Academy, University of Calgary.
- 2022
- 10/2022 – Presentation  
 Jandrić, P., Luke, T. W., Sturm, S., McLaren, P., Jackson, L., MacKenzie, A., Tesar, M., Tuari Stewart, G., **Abegglen, S.**, Burns, T., Sinfield, S., Hayes, S., Jaldemark, J., Peters, M. A., Sinclair, C., & Gibbons, A. (2022, October 06-08). *Collective writing: The continuous struggle for meaning-making*. 12th International Conference on Education & Justice.
- 07/2022 – Resource Showcase  
**Abegglen, S.**, Neuhaus F., Shah, K., & Wilson, K. (2022). *Voices from the digital classroom*. Connected Learning Summit.
- 07/2022 – Tweet Chat  
**Abegglen, S.**, Neuhaus, F., Shah, K., & Wilson, K. (2022). *Education play online 101*. Playful Learning 20/21/22. University of Leicester.
- 06/2022 – Presentation  
**Abegglen, S.**, Burns, T., & Sinfield, S. (2022). *Writing matters*. Learning and Teaching Conference 2020, London Metropolitan University.
- 06/2022 – Paper Presentation  
**Abegglen, S.**, & Bustillos Morales, J. (2022, June 29). *A quest for hope: Questioning equity in higher education*. British Education Studies Association (BESA) Conference 2022, Education and Social Justice, Manchester.
- 06/2022 – Poster  
**Abegglen, S.**, Bret, C., Neuhaus, F. Shah, K., & Wilson, K. (2022, June 10). *Hybrid education*. ALDCon22, University of Northampton.
- 06/2022 – Resource Showcase  
**Abegglen, S.**, Burns, T., & Sinfield, S. (2022, June 10). *Supporting student writing and other modes of learning and assessment: A staff guide*. ALDCon22, University of Northampton.
- 06/2022 – Workshop  
**Abegglen, S.**, Spiers, A., & Tasler, N. (2022, June 08). *Quiet creativity: End-of-academic-year reflection*. #creativeHE.
- 2021
- 12/2021 – Poster Presentation  
**Abegglen, S.**, Mirza, A., Neuhaus, F., Possberg, M., & Wilson, K. (2021, December 8). *TALON: Networked voices on online education*. UNESCO Inclusive Policy Lab, Education and Digital Skills: A Conversation Event. <https://doi.org/10.21954/ou.rd.17261117.v1>

11/2021 – Presentation (invited keynote speaker)

**Abegglen, S.** (2021, November 25-26). *Online collaboration: The challenges and opportunities of digital learning environments*. International Conference on Mentoring in Teacher Education and Professional Training ICM 2021, Sibiu.

11/2021 – Workshop

**Abegglen, S.**, Burns, T., & Sinfield, S. (2021). *Collective collage making as higher education practice*. Playful University Platform Thematic Webinar Series: Design(ing) for Playful Higher Education.

10/2021 – Panel Discussion (invited panel member)

**Abegglen, S.** (2021). *Panel: Meet the editor*. HSE Academic Writing Centre International Conference, HSE University, Moscow.

10/2021 – Presentation

**Abegglen, S.**, Burns, T., & Sinfield, S. (2021). *Supporting university staff to develop student writing: Collaborative writing as inquiry*. HERG, London Metropolitan University.

09/2021 – Presentation

**Abegglen, S.**, Kloppenburg, E., MacDonald, C., Neuhaus, F., Poschmann, B., Robertson, N., & Wilson, K. (2021). *Richard Parker Initiative*. SAPL Alumni Event: Future of Urban Revitalization, University of Calgary.

06/2021 – Presentation

**Abegglen, S.**, Blundell, D., & Bustillos Morales J. A. (2021, June 24). *Eco-education: A response to the Anthropocene and an uncertain future*. 16th British Education Studies Association (BESA) Annual International Conference.

06/2021 – Presentation

Mag G. A., Sinfield, S., Burns, T., & **Abegglen, S.** (2021, June 03). *The joy of teaching and learning in academia - teachers' perspectives from three countries*. 10th International Conference: Manufacturing Science and Education – MSE 2021, University of Lucian Blaga, Sibiu.

05/2021 – Presentation

**Abegglen, S.**, McGinn, M., Farlane, M., & Neuhaus, F. (2021). *Teaching and Learning Online Network*. e-Learning & Innovative Pedagogies, Transcending Social Distance: Emerging Practices in e-Learning, University of the Aegean, Rhodes Campus, Rhodes.

2020

12/2020 – Paper Presentation

Livesey, G., Dall'Ara, E., Neuhaus, F., **Abegglen, S.**, & Tyler, M. E. (2020, December). *Design thinking diagram: A tool for decision-making*. Teaching-Learning-Research: Design and Environments, AMPS.

- 07/2020 – Presentation  
**Abegglen, S.**, Burns, T., Maier, S., & Sinfield, S. (2020). *Virtually impossible? – Embodiment and being there in virtual inductions*. Learning and Teaching Conference 2020, London Metropolitan University.
- 06/2020 – Presentation  
**Abegglen, S.**, Burns, T., Maier, S., & Sinfield, S. (2020). *Virtually impossible inductions: Creative ideas for online socialization activities*. #creativeHE.
- 2019 06/2019 – Workshop  
**Abegglen, S.**, Burns, T., Maier, S., & Sinfield, S. (2019). *Imagine assessment differently*. Learning and Teaching Conference 2019, London Metropolitan University.
- 2018 07/2018 – Workshop  
**Abegglen, S.**, Burns, T., & Sinfield, S. (2018). *Making reading happen*. Learning and Teaching Conference 2018, London Metropolitan University.
- 2017 12/2017 – Session Chair  
**Abegglen, S.** (2017). *Qualifications and assessment*. Inside Government.
- 10/2017 – Session Chair  
**Abegglen, S.** (2017). *Designing and implementing effective academies curricula*. Inside Government.
- 09/2017 – Workshop  
**Abegglen, S.** (2017). *Seeing the city: Visual sociology*. Master Architecture, IArch Basel.
- 09/2017 – Workshop  
 Sinfield, S., **Abegglen, S.**, & Burns, T. (2017). *Making education – becoming academics*. Digitally Engaged Learning Conference 2017, University of the Arts.
- 07/2017 – Workshop  
**Abegglen, S.**, Burns, T., & Sinfield, S. (2017). *Practical writing workshop – creative ideas for supporting academic writing*. Learning and Teaching Conference 2017, London Metropolitan University.
- 06/2017 – Paper Presentation  
**Abegglen, S.**, & Bustillos, J. (2017). *Toward an understanding of (economic-driven) discourses surrounding education studies*. 13th Annual British Education Studies Association (BESA) Conference, Liverpool Hope University.
- 06/2017 – Poster Presentation  
**Abegglen, S.**, Burns, T., & Sinfield, S. (2017). *Multi-modal exhibition: Genre experiments as assessment*. ReGenring Academic Writing and Assessment Conference 2017, Nottingham Trent University.



- 2016 07/2016 – Workshop  
**Abegglen, S.**, Burns, T., & Sinfield, S. (2016). *'Take them serious': Fostering students' (academic) writing skills*. Learning and Teaching Conference 2016, London Metropolitan University.
- 2015 07/2015 – Paper Presentation  
**Abegglen, S.**, Burns, T., & Sinfield, S. (2015). *Hacking learning: Working creatively in the 'fissures and cracks' of learning, teaching and assessment*. Learning and Teaching Conference 2015, London Metropolitan University.
- 07/2015 – Paper Presentation  
**Abegglen, S.**, & Blundell, D. (2015). *Inside out, outside in: Education studies and its links to 'glocal' communities*. Community in Education Conference, London Metropolitan University.
- 04/2015 – Paper Presentation  
**Abegglen, S.**, & Bustillos, J. (2015). *Science education: Beyond a liminal understanding of knowledge production/dissemination*. International Conference on Education in Mathematics, Science and Technology, Antalya.
- 2014 07/2014 – Paper Presentation  
**Abegglen, S.**, Blundell, D., & Bustillos, J. (2014). *Educating in the Anthropocene: 'Knowledge technologies' as assemblages*. Learning and Teaching Conference 2014, London Metropolitan University.
- 06/2014 – Paper Presentation  
**Abegglen, S.**, Blundell, D., & Bustillos, J. (2014). *Innovating the field of education studies: 'Knowledge technologies' as assemblages*. 10th Annual British Education Studies Association (BESA) Conference, University of Glasgow.
- 03/2014 – Paper Presentation  
**Abegglen, S.** (2014). *Disrupting learning landscapes: Mentoring, engaging, becoming*. CfP conference, Interdisciplinarity in teaching and learning narrative: Crossing creative and critical boundaries, University of Brighton.
- 2013 07/2013 – Poster Presentation  
**Abegglen, S.** (2103). *Peer mentoring in practice*. Learning and Teaching Conference 2013, London Metropolitan University.

## Impact

The selected works have been presented to national and international audiences. Furthermore, I have led and co-led seminars, workshops and symposia on the issues discussed in my work (see Appendix, *Complete list of talks, presentations & workshops*). Some of my work – and collaborative practice – has been awarded. For example, together with colleagues, I received the Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence (CATE) in 2022 from Advance HE, and the Team Teaching Award 2020 from the University of Calgary. In addition, some of my current and past work is supported by research grants, demonstrating a wider interest in the themes and explorations I undertake by institutions and organisations. The projects supported by grants are:

- Building the Ideal Higher Education (2023-2024)
  - Research Grant (GBP 1000) by the Association for Learning Development in Higher Education (ALDinHE), United Kingdom
  - Role: Principal Investigator & Project Lead
- Playful Hybrid Higher Education (2022-2024)
  - Research Grant (CHF 26,000) by the ImaginationLab Foundation, Switzerland
  - Role: Principal Investigator & Project Lead
- Education for Reconciliation (2022-2023)
  - ii' taa'poh'to'p Indigenous Strategy, Capacity Building Grant (CAD 10,000) by the Office of Indigenous Engagement, University of Calgary, Canada
  - Role: Project Lead
- Online Faculty Engagement (2022-2023)
  - EchoInnovation Grant 2022 (USD 5,000) by Echo360
  - Role: Principal Investigator & Project Lead
- TALON, the Teaching and Learning Online Network (2020-2022)

- Project funded by the Richard Parker Initiative (overall grant: CAD 1 million)  
Role: Project Lead
- Design Studio Matrix (2019-2021)
  - Teaching and Learning Grant, Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning, University of Calgary
  - Role: Research Lead

The selected works themselves have been read and cited widely.<sup>17</sup> For example, the open access staff guide *Supporting student writing and other modes of learning and assessment* (Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2021d) has received a total of 4,358 clicks (2,166 views and 2,192 downloads).<sup>18</sup> The co-edited special issue *Journal Collaboration in higher education* (Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2021a) has a combined 4,314 downloads of its articles, including the *Editorial*. The book of the same name, *Collaboration in higher education* (Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2023a), will be available open access by the end of July 2023. I am expecting similar (or even higher) interest in this publication as for the co-edited journal. The article *Dialogic montage* (Abegglen, Burns & Sinfield, 2021b) has been accessed 819 times (676 views and 143 downloads) and the article *Designing educational futures* (Abegglen, Burns, Heller et al., 2023) 801 times.

Some of my other, related publications, advocating connection, equity, and inclusion online, which were not selected for this thesis (see Appendix, *Complete list of publications*), have been equally successful, with some of them exceeding the selected publications in terms of downloads and citations (see individual publication websites).

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<sup>17</sup> Numbers cited as per 01 July 2023.

<sup>18</sup> Please note that the statistics publicly shown on the website are not accurate because of reoccurring website issues.

These achievements and numbers demonstrate the extraordinary reach and impact of my academic work.<sup>19</sup> They are a critical measure of the continuous and on-going contribution I am making to the advancement of knowledge in the discipline of Education Studies.

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<sup>19</sup> My h-index<sup>19</sup> on Google scholar is given as 11 and the i10-index<sup>19</sup> as 12. The h-index is an author-level metric that measures both the productivity and citation impact of the publications. The i10-index, developed by Google Scholar refers to the number of articles published by an author that have received at least 10 citations.