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Student-staff partnerships at a research-intensive university: A case study of the SPEAK project

Jamie Morris, Abigail Bates, Kathryn Twigg, Muhamad Wahyudi and Kysha Ward, University of Birmingham

Introduction

Considerations of student engagement in Higher Education have progressed in recent years, especially exploring the relationship between students and staff. From this, notions of partnership and students as co-creators have emerged. Based on these concepts, this article will explore a student engagement project run by the Higher Education Futures Institute (HEFi), the University of Birmingham's academic development unit. The project revolved around student-led research, recruiting five 'HEFi Student Interns' to work in partnership with staff at HEFi as part of the Student-Staff Partnership for Enhancing Academic Knowledge about Learning (SPEAK) project.

The SPEAK project aimed to support students in researching and collating qualitative data regarding the student learning experience at the University of Birmingham. The primary purpose of such data was to inform and enhance some of our core practices within HEFi, whilst also embedding student interns in live projects and workstreams. This article will focus on the learning journey of the HEFi Student Interns, and the staff SPEAK project leads. We will briefly examine the higher education landscape and theoretical frameworks that underpin this project. Following this, in line with the student-led nature of the project, the article presents the reflections of the student interns. Finally, we will offer some further reflections from staff project leads concerning their engagement with this project, before considering some areas of further development and lessons learnt for HEFi and the wider sector.

Theory and context

The concept of student engagement has progressed and evolved in higher education, and it's well reported in literature that 'the rhetoric of partnership, student-centred learning and co-creation are not simple concepts', and that the application of such a philosophy in reality is complex (Nygaard *et al.*, 2013, p. vii). Our work has been largely influenced by previous experiences of student-staff partnership initiatives, such as the Student Academic Partners (SAP) initiative at Birmingham City University, research conducted as part of the RAISE network and the Advance HE's (2014) framework for 'Student Engagement through Partnership'. The SPEAK project focused on the ideas of partnership and co-creation, and in particular on student-led research within HEFi. It has been reported in literature that offering jobs on campus is a sign of a growing investment in student development and employability (Millard, 2020, p. 38). Our students are increasingly influenced by extrinsic motivations when searching for work, such as the need for financial gain, an issue which is certainly prevalent in these times of national austerity. Importantly though, once these extrinsic motivations have been satisfied, it has been reported that a sense of belonging and connectedness

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with the institution can impact both on retention and student success (Thomas, 2012; Roberts and Styron, 2010). One of the key aims of our own study was to foster that greater sense of connectedness.

If we then add in some of the wider external influences, such as the institutional culture of the place in which the work is situated, practising such work becomes more nuanced. The University of Birmingham has a long-standing tradition and commitment to developing our graduates through a unique blend of research and education, which can often have an implicit and sometimes explicit bias towards the former in higher education institutions (Jenkins *et al.*, 2007). Recent efforts to make the links between research and teaching increasingly symbiotic (such as the Universitas 21, 2017 framework) have begun to bridge the gap in this regard. One such example is enabling students to recognise the skills developed through conducting research in relation to learning and teaching in partnership with staff (Boyer, 1990). This kind of learning has now been articulated in the University of Birmingham's 4 Graduate Attributes, which aim to support curriculum enhancement by creating a benchmark for our students' skill acquisition and experience during a programme. This was a core element alongside our project aims outlined below, to create a space in which students could individually reflect on their experiences on a live research project. A term such as research-intensive learning could be used to characterise this approach, particularly as it encouraged our students 'to learn through a process of critical enquiry, enabling them to change mindset from that of passive "receivers" of "knowledge" to active pursuers and creators of it' (Hadjianastasis, 2019).

Using an adapted version of Brookfield's (2015) 'Critical Incident Questionnaire (CIQ)', we developed individual reflective diaries housed in Microsoft Teams for our students to record this process of learning. Each entry was submitted every two weeks and consisted of responses to several trigger questions on achievements on the project, the acquisition or development of new skills and moments where they felt distanced from the project. This article contains a jointly written narrative from the HEFi Student Interns summarising some of their own reflections from these diaries.

SPEAK project overview

The kind of impact from work such as the SPEAK project has been demonstrated in other institutions, such as the work at Birmingham City University and their 'CELT interns' (Nagle and Chambers, 2013). Our student interns' roles primarily functioned online, through the use of Microsoft Teams with occasional requirements to attend face-to-face meetings, or HEFi-led workshops delivered to academic/professional services staff at the institution. The structure of this role was informed by the conceptual framework of Redmond *et al.* (2015) for online engagement for higher education, which includes the 'social, cognitive, behavioural, collaborative and emotional' aspects of student engagement as benchmarks to embody as part of the role's functionality (p. 190). Working as a team, and with the project being primarily student-led, enabled the project to meet these areas of engagement and provided a unique opportunity for our students to pursue their own areas of interest and lead on gathering and analysing data in relation to them. The project sought to meet these aims:

1. Research current student issues in relation to key areas noted for improvement following the NSS, including, in particular, student voice, inclusivity and diversity, and assessment and feedback practices
2. Incorporate the student perspective on HEFi's accredited courses for staff on teaching and learning, as well as some of HEFi's core staff-facing guidance
3. Enhance UoB's reputation as a university that values the student voice while also positively influencing teaching practices in the sector, through the co-creation of high quality Open Educational Resources for academics.

The narrative here will focus on the 'journey' rather than the outcomes of the research, the production of the Open Educational Resource and the impact on HEFi's core practices.

Reflections from the HEFi student interns

As student interns on a live research project one of the major concerns raised was the need to communicate effectively with one another, as well as our project team. From very early on we created a WhatsApp group chat and scheduled extra 'intern only' meetings on top of our weekly project team meetings, in order to discuss matters amongst ourselves as and when needed. The extra meetings and use of the group chat proved to be an efficient way of communicating progress and setting goals throughout the project. It worked especially well during times of confusion or points of stress during the academic assessment periods, as we were able to discuss work plans and solutions to fit each other's work and education schedules.

At the beginning of the project, a few interns were confused with the distinction and difference between particular strands of work; again, we used the added meetings and group chat to highlight our points of concern and make sure everyone felt confident with tasks and were aware of group expectations. As we were given the freedom to make most of the decisions with the direction of the project and the focus of the survey and questionnaire, it was imperative that we discussed ideas and agreed with the outcome.

With this being the first time for most working in a research environment, and not having used Microsoft Teams before, the WhatsApp group was the most effective form of communication for us as a team. It meant we could clear things up quicker and discuss the 'availability of each student intern during the assessment' period of the university. Not only did we discuss how this would impact on the number of students we could recruit for the focus groups, but it also influenced the choice of who would be running the groups. We were able to efficiently discuss how feasible in-person and online focus groups would be as these were scheduled during a phased return from our Covid lockdown. This required us to be flexible with one another's schedules, and using WhatsApp for this kind of organisation rather than Teams allowed us to sort smaller issues quicker and manage expectations, such as setting deadlines on different tasks for this project.

The partnership with the HEFi staff not only allowed us the freedom to push this in the direction we wanted but opened our eyes to the 'hidden elements' of the university. This project required outreach to all kinds of staff: academic, professional services, support teams, and those in HEFi. Prior to the project, the interns were not aware of the practices of units such as HEFi, or the broader work of professional services staff. However, the undertaking of interviews with the 'hidden' staff members provided the interns with some insight and understanding about the efforts of the college to 'improve student experience at the university and their engagement'. Our interviews consisted of staff from the Birmingham International Academy (BIA), which provided us with an understanding of the various kinds of support given to international students. One of the BIA's approaches to creating a sense of belonging was to involve home students in events organisation and thus creating new connections with other students. This was important for the interns to explore as it was central to the project

themes, student experience and voice. The interns wanted to consider and encapsulate the experience of all students and encourage them all to voice their opinions in our focus group; the wider idea being to create and publish resources for staff and students to understand each other's processes and create better experiences for all.

As a core element of our study was to examine student experience and voice, as well as the student/staff partnership, it was interesting to explore how the staff viewed the student experience and what they did to encourage students to engage with the university. The interns were able to compare the awareness staff had of student issues with those highlighted by students in the surveys and focus groups. It also allowed the interns to learn more about the university and the behind-the-scenes aspect, namely the training support available to staff and how involved HEFi were with the training of academics. By learning about the process that lecturers go through in terms of creating learning outcomes and marking criteria, the interns could produce our Open Educational Resource that would make these processes more transparent to students. Transparency and communication were some of the biggest themes to arise from the focus groups and working with staff. Going forward, increasing visibility and participation of 'hidden elements' of the university would be beneficial to student and staff experience, as it created another network for those who may not be aware of the support available.

Working in partnership with staff resulted in the interns creating new contacts with various elements at the university. Whilst the interns had to navigate the busy schedules of academic staff to have the interviews, they were particularly insightful as an opportunity to listen to their opinions on student experience, and their suggestions for the future added to the need to create a more transparent relationship between staff and students. It was imperative to maintain effective communication with the staff, to encourage them to participate in the interviews and be honest, and give them the opportunity to be listened to, as one of the aims was to explore and encourage student-staff partnerships. Particularly during our work on HEFi projects, where interns participated in digital workshops with academics from across the university, the interns were able to communicate with and provide academics with possible solutions to issues they may have encountered whilst teaching. Although it was initially intimidating to approach unknown academics and provide our own opinions, it proved to be a positive experience for both the interns and the academics: the former were pushed out of their comfort zone and it strengthened their communication and large-group speaking skills; the latter understood what worked well and not so well for students in an open and honest way.

Overall, the SPEAK project encouraged the interns to create and establish new contacts from across the university and incite open and honest discussion from both staff and students. It allowed different students from across the university to work together in an internship team and produce resources to help better experiences all round, for staff and students. It pushed the interns to improve their research experience and data collection, particularly those who hadn't been in those situations before. Not only did it

encourage new relationships, but it was a valuable experience in the creation of OERs (Open Educational Resource) and the work of HEFi. The student interns valued the encouragement of the project leads and have all gained great experience from working as an intern and feel it will help them for the future.

Reflections from the project lead

It was an immensely enjoyable experience leading this project and working with students. Through observing our students reflect and develop during the process of implementing our project, the similarities of some of our own reflections to those of our student interns were striking. The project leads noted the importance of developing collegiality and a sense of belonging between the group of students. For example, we encouraged the interns to set up a communications space away from the project leads, which turned out to be key in achieving this. Although student-led, there were some misconceptions regarding the power dynamic, such as seeing the project leads as those who would have the final say. This was addressed at the beginning of the project through an induction session, where expectations were set, and a clear structure and timeline were communicated.

Our experiences as project leads also further cemented some of the problematic connotations that come from the idea of students as 'digital natives' (Prensky, 2001). In advance of the project, we were careful not to make assumptions regarding the technological experience of the student interns. For example, we ensured that time at the beginning of the role was given to acclimatise to using Microsoft Teams, a platform described above as completely new to our students. This was also the case with other areas, such as the production of an Open Educational Resource (OER), that our student interns were unaware of the terminology and the platforms that such resources could exist on. Instead, as with any underpinning design principle, it was important here that we do not assume our students will enter a project, or higher education more generally, equipped with a particular skillset.

The articulation of 'hidden elements of the university' was also observed from the project leads' perspective. In this respect the 'hidden element' was the incorporation of the student voice and perspective on our own practices. Despite HEFi being a primarily 'staff-facing' institute, it is often easy to slip into the mindset of seeing our colleagues as our end-user, even though we often encourage the adoption of good practice to ultimately have a positive impact on our own students. This was certainly a perspective shared by staff across HEFi, with our colleagues often citing the value of having a student's perspective in meetings and workshops. The SPEAK project has been one of two HEFi-led projects and its success has resulted in a continued financial investment for the 2022/23 academic year.

Conclusion

It has been demonstrated by the body of literature and reflections in this case study that working with students on campus in collaboration with staff can have a profound impact on personal and professional development. This has been demonstrated by the reflections from our student interns, including being exposed to real-world issues including working autonomously, in teams and in a hybrid modality, resulting in exposure to a multitude of different

work-based platforms such as Microsoft Teams. It is also clear, as stated in the exploration of theory related to this work, that students engaging in such work resulted in an appreciation for the 'hidden elements' of the university. For institutes such as HEFi, it was equally as valuable to have such perspectives integrated into our conversations with colleagues at the institution who teach, and this has certainly raised the institute's profile as one which values the student voice.

Work of this nature is a somewhat new venture within HEFi and the findings have fundamentally changed our practices and work patterns in a positive way. For the staff project leads, having had experience previously of working with students, we were privy to the impact that grassroots-level work such as this can have on shaping support and guidance; however, our research element added an extra dimension to this and importantly, an evidence-based element that could be integrated into our taught programmes and guidance for staff. Our post-project plans are to continue to employ students to work with us at HEFi and we are currently planning to employ up to five HEFi Student Interns to work with us during the 2022/23 academic year on selected institutional and local HEFi projects. This includes working on the collaborative delivery of our HEFi23 Conference in the summer, and feeding into HEFi projects that link directly to delivering institutional strategy on developing graduate attributes.

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The National Teaching Repository – Sharing effective interventions: Learning from each other so that we can continue to enhance and improve what we do

Sue Beckingham, Sheffield Hallam University, **Liam Bullingham** and **Peter Hartley**, Edge Hill University, **Kate Cuthbert**, Staffordshire University, **Dawne Irving-Bell** and **David Wooff**, BPP University, **Nathalie Tasler**, University of Glasgow, **Scott Turner**, Canterbury Christ Church University, **Laura Stinson**, Nottingham Trent University, and **Neil Withnell**, University of Salford

The National Teaching Repository (NTR) is a widely recognised Open Educational Resource (OER) that has made a significant impact on the global higher education community. Recently, the UNESCO Secretariat invited the NTR team to present reports on the repository's reach and impact (Wooff and Irving-Bell, 2022), which has prompted this article. In it, we provide an overview of the NTR's origins, values, and vision, and we also extend an invitation for you to join us in this exciting initiative.

Introduction

Established in 2020, the National Teaching Repository is an online platform for colleagues to upload and share their teaching resources, pedagogical research, approaches, and ideas, with the goal of advancing pedagogy in practice. The NTR was designed to fulfil the need for a centralised space where successful teaching materials could be disseminated while allowing authors to showcase the reach and impact of their work, which is something researchers have been able to benefit from for many years.

Starting out as a UK-based resource, the NTR has quickly demonstrated its global reach and impact. Currently, it has established supporters from around the globe, with 203 affiliated colleges/institutions and organisations, and it continues to expand.

This initiative, which was originally developed through an Advance HE Good Practice Grant (Irving-Bell *et al.*, 2022),

seeks to establish new channels of communication and collaboration across the higher education sector, with the goal of facilitating the sharing and dissemination of best practices. By doing so, the project aims to help educators implement effective interventions that can enhance the student experience, ultimately leading to improved retention, progression, and completion.

The project is founded on the notion that many valuable ideas and insights are often confined to specific disciplines, and that sharing these ideas can help to drive innovation and progress across the entire sector. To achieve this goal, the project explores various mechanisms for promoting collaboration and knowledge-sharing, creating a space where colleagues can exchange ideas and seek solutions to common challenges. Ultimately, the aim is to create a centralised repository, a comprehensive national database that houses a wealth of tried-and-tested pedagogical approaches and ideas from across the higher education landscape.

Curated practice

The repository benefits from the use of the trusted Figshare platform and a team of curators, who play a similar role to that of an editor, adding an extra layer of Quality Assurance (QA) to the process. The curators' responsibilities include organising content, ensuring its quality, and making it accessible to users. Their role is not to judge or reject submissions, but to monitor and enhance the quality of

the work submitted. This involves reviewing each submission carefully to ensure it is ethically sound, accurate, free of typographical or referencing errors, and compliant with accessibility standards. Additionally, curators promote content through social media and other channels to enhance its visibility.

The benefits of sharing work

Sharing scholarly teaching and learning work through the NTR benefits everyone involved. Colleagues have reported accessing innovative ideas through the NTR, which has helped to improve their teaching practice and increase their profile. The repository has also been used to support professional development, with colleagues using the data as evidence of the impact of their work to secure a new job, promotion, or for performance reviews, internal progression, or applications for fellowships or national teaching fellowships.

Acknowledging academic and intellectual property

Acknowledging academic and intellectual property, the NTR provides colleagues with a worldwide stage to showcase their work. Authors retain all rights to their work, have full control over their content and can link it to their ORCID ID. The impact of their work in practice can be measured through Altmetric Data, enabling them to secure recognition for their practice. Colleagues can select the appropriate level of Creative Commons (CC) licensing during the submission process to ensure their work is available for others to build upon and share legally.

The NTR offers the following features that promote access to and support recognition of authors' work:

- Citation generated so that work can be acknowledged
- ORCID ID link
- Unique DOI generation
- Social media sharing
- Altmetric data to measure impact
- Creative Commons (CC) licensing
- Repository profile to help direct traffic to institutional and personal websites and blogs.

When a colleague uploads a teaching resource or research material to the NTR, the platform generates a citation and a unique DOI to facilitate easy access to the original source material. However, it is important to note that the frequency of citations for NTR work is likely to be lower than that of traditional research. This is because the NTR's purpose is to shape and influence teaching practices, and many end-users may not be authors or academics publishing their own material. This fundamental feature underscores the NTR's importance.

The NTR promotes inclusivity by removing any barriers to accessing its content. Sharing and accessing teaching practices is easy and does not require registration, with uploading and downloading taking only a few minutes. The NTR is freely available to anyone with internet access, and its use supports the development of staff and ultimately leads to improved student outcomes and achievements. Moreover, the NTR celebrates the diversity of teaching and learning practices by enabling colleagues to showcase their work in a variety

of non-traditional research formats, such as PowerPoint and poster presentations, teaching resources, data, and video/audio recordings.

Celebrating practice

We are delighted to recognise the valuable contributions of all those who have contributed to the repository. Their support in shaping the learning practices of others is greatly appreciated, and we are committed to continuing to work with them to ensure that learners have access to the best possible resources. We were honoured to present several awards to celebrate the outstanding contributions of those who have made significant contributions to open sharing. Future developments plan to share work via published compendiums of effective practice and offering colleagues opportunities to develop their professional networking.

Global reach and impact

Originally designed to facilitate the sharing of best practices within the UK, the repository has since grown to attract viewers and users from institutions across the globe. The National Teaching Repository has gained significant traction with over 300,000 views and downloads of scholarly work; reaching beyond the UK. Data from the repository's inception to March 2023, shows that 18% of visitors and users are from the UK, while the rest come from 130 other countries and territories around the world.

It is worth noting that 29% of these countries are listed as the 'Least Developed Countries' by the United Nations (UNTCAD, 2023), and are 62% of the 193 countries listed as Member States of the United Nations (UN Org, 2023). The repository's aim is to create a community where colleagues can feel comfortable sharing and discussing their teaching and learning practice, in addition to providing access to high-quality scholarly outputs. If you are interested in contributing to the repository as a curator or critical friend, please do not hesitate to contact us.

In conclusion

Our team would like to express our gratitude to Megan Hardeman, the Head of Engagement at Figshare, and Liam Bullingham, the Technical Director of the National Teaching Repository at Edge Hill University, for their outstanding commitment and hard work towards the success of this project. We welcome and encourage everyone to participate in this initiative. As more colleagues contribute to the repository, it will become a richer source of innovative ideas to enhance our teaching practice, and sharing our work can create opportunities that support our personal and professional growth. If you would like to learn more about how to become involved, please contact us. We would be delighted to hear from you.

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Useful links

The repository is hosted within Edge Hill University's Figshare and is accessible via these links:

Discover research (https://figshare.edgehill.ac.uk/The_National_Teaching_Repository).

Meet our friends (<https://doi.org/10.25416/edgehill.12820727>).

For further information (https://figshare.edgehill.ac.uk/articles/presentation/NTR_-_Welcome_pdf/12673016).

To share your learning and teaching research and resources (<https://figshare.edgehill.ac.uk/submit>).

Follow the NTR on Twitter: @NTRRepository (<https://twitter.com/NTRRepository>).

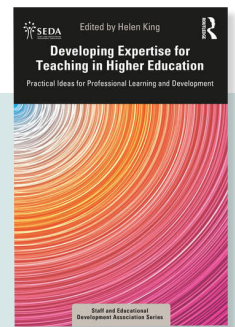
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Book Review

Developing Expertise for Teaching in Higher Education – practical ideas for professional learning and development

Edited by Helen King
SEDA Staff and Educational Development Series
Routledge, 2022
ISBN 9781032057002



Conversations about teaching excellence are taking place everywhere. As I write this review, I am engaged in activities supporting institutional and professional reward and recognition schemes that will bestow the label of 'excellence' on a carefully selected number of colleagues. Not that these colleagues won't deserve this label for their incredible work and impacts upon student learning; but I am grateful to this book for offering another discourse for us to think about the teaching journey and the act of teaching itself.

As an edited collection, the book is structured around King's model for expertise, which comprises three dimensions: pedagogical content knowledge, professional learning and artistry of teaching. Part one sets the scene for the consideration of these dimensions by offering diverse perspectives on the concept of expertise and how it might be

applied to higher education. The book acknowledges that it is not aiming to be the final word on expertise for teaching in HE, but rather a starting point for conversations – for those looking to improve their practices and those who support them. And it certainly achieves this aim well! I can honestly say that each chapter offers research and evidence-based insights into this topic that I wanted to talk about with anyone who would listen. The fact that I did indeed bring many of these insights into assorted work-related conversations shows just how applicable the discussion of expertise is to all aspects of teaching and learning in higher education.

There are so many rich discussions occurring across the chapters that I am sure readers will take countless messages from this book. I will share just a few that have been significant for me. Firstly, the book centres the

notion of teaching and learning as a human experience and a relational act. Teaching interactions and learning situations are dynamic and complex, with unique and multifaceted challenges arising in each educational encounter. Morgan and Milton capture this sentiment well in chapter twelve when likening teaching to a 'wicked problem'. The concept of expertise presented here does not shy away from positioning teaching in this way; indeed, to develop our expertise we must actively embrace the messiness and uncertainty that comes from the human relationships at the heart of teaching. In this way, I would argue that the concept of expertise foregrounds student experience in a way that may not be as explicit within the notion of excellence. Developing expertise requires us to connect with our students, to care about their learning and notice (observationally as well as through scholarship) what is going on

for them in their learning contexts. In many ways, this connection is about valuing and engaging with the standpoint epistemology of students (see Pickard in chapter five), which we must then use to support our critical reflections.

Critical reflection emerges from this book as a cornerstone of expertise development and this is another key message of the book for me. From an expertise perspective, reflection becomes critical when we are engaging with the complexity of the education experience, drawing on additional perspectives and interrogating our practices from a moral and ethical stance (Morantes-Africano in chapter two makes a compelling link between critical reflection and the notions of *phronesis* and *praxis*). There are many implications here for educational developers, including how we support colleagues to engage in this multidimensional and multifaceted process of reflection, that may be (and arguably should be) as uncomfortable and challenging as they are empowering.

A final key message that I took from the book is the essential role of collaboration in the development of expertise. For me, dialogue and

collaboration emerged as key themes underpinning many of the chapter-based discussions. In part two, for example, dialogue with peers, within and across disciplines, is positioned as central to the development of pedagogical content knowledge. For the improvisatory teacher (see part four), teaching is a dynamic interplay in which teaching expertise means creating dialogues to connect and engage with students. Part three provides specific examples of the power of collaborative reflection to support significant and meaningful professional learning. These chapters made me think about how I position myself as an educational developer, particularly for those with significant teaching experience. Instead of seeing my role here as a developer, it made me reflect on how I can be more of an explicit facilitator of the spaces and opportunities for conversations, dialogues and collaborations to occur that are essential for the progression of their expertise.

This point brings me back to the implications of this book for educational developers. As a book that 'offers a new discourse...and a new perspective on teaching quality' (pp. 1-2), there is much to absorb and reflect upon from an educational development point of

view. I think the power of this book is the reflections and conversations that it will start or reframe. For example, the concept of expertise centres individual motivation, purpose and agency in a way not necessarily explicit within the notion of (or conversations around) excellence. In this way, expertise is potentially a more empowering concept for teachers than objective notions of good practice or excellence. That is not to say that we do away with discussions about good practice or excellence; rather, using the framework of expertise may help to bring these discussions to life in more personal and authentic ways for teachers. As such, there is much to reflect upon about how we centre this discourse within our professional learning and development activities.

My final point relates to how we, as educational developers, might consider and characterise our expertise. Does it map onto the model presented by King? What insights might we gain by considering our own expertise in this way? I found myself more and more fascinated by these questions as I read the book and it is a conversation that I would love to start...anyone interested?

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Decoloniality, curriculum, and academic development: A post qualitative inquiry

Amrita Narang, Coventry University

Calls for decolonisation of the curriculum in higher education are not new. We have a wealth of literature, toolkits, glossaries, podcasts, to get us started with thinking about this. As a social justice movement, decolonisation covers wide-ranging and interconnected issues that we, as a sector, continue to grapple with, whether it is questioning the content in the course specification, or interrogating the origin of a curriculum's disciplinary roots, or challenging pedagogical language, or even simply trying to make space for knowledges that have thus far remained outside the dominant purview. It is clear that curriculum continues to remain a difficult inheritance (Tarc, 2011) for many of us working within the academy.

It is important that we step back and take a thorough stock-check of the role the curriculum plays in shaping the individual, our sector, subject communities, and society

at large. As much as it is vital and valid to question what is within and excluded from the curriculum, responding to the calls for decolonisation requires in-depth attention to a core aspect that is yet to be fully considered within curriculum inquiry – our conception of *self* within the curriculum. This means moving away from the idea that knowledge is an objective and neutral set of facts to be delivered, and recognising that knowledge is constitutive of the very relationships, experiences, and ways of being that shape the curriculum.

To do so, I call for a shift towards micro-movements to help us see through decoloniality intricately. This is not to demerit the role of wider institutional agenda that endeavour to bring systemic changes but instead conceives of these micro-movements as equally compelling if we are to see those agenda come to fruition.

Decoloniality as a micro-movement

This article is premised on my own ongoing doctoral inquiry into decoloniality and curricular reform and offers a snapshot view into the mechanism of ‘thinking-doing’ decolonial work. In my research, decoloniality is mapped as emergent through the interrogation of human exceptionalism within the curriculum. Using the post-qualitative approach, and working with academic developers, the curriculum is perceived as an active and vital force as opposed to an objective and static entity. Following Barad’s ethico-onto-epistemological (2007) viewpoint, the inquiry disrupts the individualistic dominance of ‘I’, a human-centric (western) gaze, and urges us to broaden our understanding of the curriculum as relationally emergent. This stance compels us to look beyond the empirical, objectivist views of human-centric knowledge, and recognise the potential of ethical and ontological knowing-in-being, and of human-non-human materiality for decolonial work. In this case the non-human materiality that I am referring to is the postgraduate certificate in academic practice course (PgCert) curriculum space, that the readers of this article may be well familiar with.

Who are the academic developers and why PgCert?

As a field of practice, academic development is close to my heart. Working with colleagues in this area and having been an academic developer was a transformative experience. I started my journey into higher education as a new international staff member and signing up for the PgCert was pivotal at the time. It not only grounded my pedagogical philosophy and practice back then, but I continue to feel its imprint on my professional agency up to now. In any case, it was hard not to take note of the power of the role in guiding and shaping academics’ teaching and learning practices, and subsequently its impact on student experience.

We know that the PgCert programmes are increasingly becoming a requirement for academics to enrol onto as they enter higher education (Spowart *et al.*, 2019). This is because it offers a useful starting point that sets the philosophical tone, initiates a pedagogical line of thinking, and shapes teaching and learning practices in early and new academics. I knew that to think about curriculum reform in teaching and learning, my inquiry needed to confront curricular processes upfront and close, and the PgCert curriculum offers just the fertile ground for thinking-doing decoloniality.

Artistic and political endeavour

My scholarly contribution to educational research practice is the photo~currere~voice, as the means for thinking-doing decolonial work. It is an artistic, political, and ethical methodological and conceptual framework that challenges the normative limits often ascribed to our curricular practice. Premised within a post-humanist perspective (post-qualitative approach is an intellectual strand of it), my inquiry follows Braidotti (2013) who articulates post-humanism as ‘a condition that marks a qualitative shift in our thinking about what the unit of reference is for the human’, and Taylor (2019) who elaborates that the primary goal of post-humanism is to ‘shift attention away from

humans as the central focus, and toward a theoretical and practical engagement with matter’ (p. 38). For my inquiry, this particularly is a useful beginning to interrogate why humanistic individualism must be at the centre of our pedagogical thinking. What might emerge if this space is expanded to non-human subjects and, by implication, also to those who have been viewed as less than human by modern westernised thinking? In other words, what if ‘I think, therefore, I am’ is reconceived as ‘I feel with, sense with, be with, and therefore, I are’? This may sound radical, but I agree with Snaza *et al.* (2014, in Le Grange, 2020) who suggests that the curriculum field should re-tune its perception to being-together (or being with) in learning, albeit without a human-centric gaze. Thinking from a decolonial perspective, challenging the human (Western, white, male) exceptionalism embedded within an acutely metricised and hierarchical learning environment, opens the potential to re-think our pedagogical practices.

So, what is this artistic endeavour? Photo~currere~voice is understood as an enmeshment between photo-voice (Wang and Burris, 1997) and *currere* (Pinar, 1975). *Currere* is a Latin infinitive meaning *to run*. Engaging with autobiographical self, photos, and the curriculum, photo~currere~voice favours an intimate and personal journey into undertaking decolonial working that starts with self and leads us into the curriculum. Built as digital assemblage, photo~currere~voice is both a space to explore as well as a tool to explore with. With this duality at hand, it not only helps excavate colonial inheritances embedded within the curricular space, but, through the very process, it constitutes subjectivities that are receptive to *more than human* materiality. Central to photo~currere~voice is *currere*, which is an active verb form and consists of four phases:

- Regressive (past): ‘One returns to the past, to capture it as it was, and as it hovers over the present’ (Pinar, 1975, p. 21)
- Progressive (future): ‘In this phase we look the other way... We have found that the future is present in the same sense that the past is present. It influences, in complicated ways, the present; it forms the present’ (Pinar, 1975, p. 24)
- Analytical (present): ‘For many the present is woven into the fabric of institutional life. Within that historical form, embodied concretely in the building which houses your office and those of your colleagues and students, what is your present? What are one’s intellectual interests? What is one’s emotional condition?’ (Pinar, 1975, pp. 25-26)
- Synthesis: ‘Who is that? In your own voice, what is the meaning of the present?’ (Pinar, 1975, p. 26).

Using photos as language lends itself well to the practice of knowing-in-being, as participants navigate through the phases of *currere*, albeit rhizomatically. This sort of dialogical encounter with the curriculum illuminates that the curriculum is not a neutral space, it is patterned by epistemic decisions, and built on discourses – some of which are dominant, some marginal, some visible, others invisible (Pinar, 1975). Using objects from everyday life, photo~currere~voice invokes a sense of materiality,

de-centres the role of language and brings the curriculum to life through the throbbing vitality of everyday things. Autobiographical journey then compels academic developers to think *with* the curriculum rather than *about* the curriculum. The space is expanded from knowledge itself to onto-epistemological knowing, and decolonial work becomes a dialogic entanglement, where reflections are confronted (or embraced), diffracted with, in order to see what emerges.

In my inquiry, academic developers created their digital assemblages using photos from their past, present, personal, and professional experiences that they felt comfortable sharing. Not restrained by linearity of photo~currere~voice, their assemblages, as Deleuze suggested, presented ‘a multiplicity which is made up of many heterogeneous terms and which establishes liaisons, relations between them, across ages, sexes and reigns – different natures’ (Deleuze and Parnet, 1987, p. 69). With two in-depth check-ins, and the opportunity to attend two focused collective discussions, each participant shared their reflections and how these acted within their curricular decisions.

In simple words, think of a wave pattern, that is, when waves merge or are interfered with, they emerge with newer patterns. In a similar sense, photo~currere~voice is understood as a space for knowledge and experience to intra-act and diffract, leading to knowing-in-being, rather than sufficing with distant and representative reflections only.

Cats, an allium, a lock, and a sculpture

‘Educational practices and learning processes are entangled with multitudes of objects but these objects are so often disregarded as mundane background and thingified – positioned as dull, inert matter, unnoticed, and made subserviently serviceable in order that the proper business of educating the human can go on.’
(Taylor et al., 2022)

Thus far I have outlined the philosophical roots of photo~currere~voice, and its creative nature, to materialise decolonial thinking-doing which is emergent and relational to academic developers’ own storied subjectivities. As a tool to think with, photo~currere~voice supports academic developers to engage thoughtfully with their curriculum, and explore its un-interrogated spaces that intra-act with their own autobiographical meanderings. In doing so, it de-centres the human gaze and its ‘anthropocentric, colonialist, patriarchal imperatives which have positioned white, Euro-American Man as the only one who matters’, and opens space to ‘focus on materiality and practices of mattering’ based on human-non-human relationality (Taylor et al. 2022).

In the following sections I present examples of photos shared by academic developers that show us their engagement with non-human entities as meaningful ways to think about the roles of power, restoration and dilemmas around curriculum choices.

I would like to remind the readers that these photos are taken from their wider photo~currere~voice assemblages. Should you wish to know more about them, then do get in touch.

Story of Henry and Harold



Figure 1 Participant image of her neighbours’ cat, Henry

‘This is my neighbours’ cat, Henry, who likes to sneak into my kitchen and eat my cat’s food. My cat, Harold, does not appreciate this, and I find it fascinating to watch their interactions [...] At first glance, you might think that Harold has the power because he drives Henry off, yet Henry keeps coming back [...] I find these dynamics interesting and often think about parallels with interactions amongst people. What does power look like? Is it always good to have power? [...] What are the impacts of navigating relationships where power is in question? I think that people do not always recognise the heavy toll that power can take; it is very stressful to gain, keep, use, or worry about power. It is much more comfortable to share it, to take turns shouldering burdens, to both give and accept support. These are the processes that have increasingly shaped the decisions I make with the curriculum, and that shape the politics of my interactions with students and colleagues.’

Sculpturing the curriculum?



Figure 2 Participant image of an industrial machinery in Consett

‘This sculpture (in Consett) is of industrial machinery with organic feet. I’m unsure what process forms the sculpture but it seems to “work”. Similarly, I’m unsure what has shaped the curriculum I select to teach. Presumably, something informed the artist here – I wonder if they could articulate it. Curriculum choices for me are my choices – I can consider what informs them (the material much in some way resonate with me) but is [it] “colonial”? I’m not sure, the aspects of academic development curriculum do not seem to be as contested as say colonial history – but this is perhaps naïveté.’

With or without key?



Figure 3 Participant image of a Wilko lock

'I really feel that the complex mess of regulatory bodies, internal processes and annual metric conveyor belt create a perception (partially born out) that the opportunity for change is "locked" even if you recognise the need to do so. In the first version of this picture I included a key, but in this version it is deliberately out of sight (just).'

The bee with the allium



Figure 4 Participant image of an allium with a bee on top of it

'The sense of being, at once, the bulls-eye in the middle and being on the periphery. There are obvious "gaps" where Academic Development could carve out a home, but we have no "way in". But we are also directing, at the centre, programmes that would benefit from greater plurality and diversity. Could we become like pollinators? Supporting a wider/greater curricular ecology through visiting the many "homes" in which learning takes place, sharing across other "homes", and then growing and learning collectively as part of a hive (university community).'

Discussion

Each photograph suggests how academic developers interacted with different elements, objects, and entities carving a relational knowing. Consider the example of the interaction between cats – their actions and reactions diffract with the play of power – which helped the participant consider the manifestation of power through the decisions made about and within the curriculum (e.g. learning outcomes, pedagogical theories – their sequencing within the modules, types of assessment, and

frameworks used and not used), and how to work with colleagues (academics as students, their disciplinary ethos and habits). What is evident here is that decolonial work is not straightforward, to be classified just as an activity about diversifying the content of the curriculum. The photographs are telling of the sense of becoming, the micro-movements that generate a sense of ethical responsibility to recognise discourses that are at work governing curriculum spaces. Comprehending decolonial thinking-doing transcends the (western) human gaze to allow for non-human materiality. Similarly, the onto-decolonial stance that I propose is not, and cannot be, disentangled (or unlocked) from the wider metricised and hierarchical political nature of the higher education landscape. But what is acknowledged through these photos is that human-non-human materiality is always/already threaded within the curriculum when one starts to sift through scientific empiricism to notice relational vitality. Working with Bennett's (2010) invitation to consider 'the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle' (p. 6), is evident if we perceive the allium with a bee offering the potentiality to re-think academic development's role within pedagogies to foster an ecology of learning. Likewise, the potency of the sculpture shows viscerally how objects, as material and matter, are entangled with processes underlying the politics of identity shaping the curriculum, just as the lock photographed with its key first, and again without it, was closely tuned to the mechanics of regulatory processes that underpin curriculum processes.

As I bring this article to a close, I agree with Deleuze and Guattari (1987), who suggest that to develop our own potentials in a relational rather than individualistic sense, we must attempt to remain in this state of becoming, open to the process rather than being static in our beliefs. *Encountering objects within photo~currere~voice* is more than what we learn from the objects (from a distance) propelling us to experiment with thought, move towards generativity, of the production of the new (Taylor et al., 2022).

Finally, I share some evolving thinking-elements that have marked my rhizomatic grasp of decoloniality in this ongoing inquiry. These thoughts have emerged through constant departures, arrivals, and returns, as I (with academic developers) looked out for human-non-human ecologies, of onto-epistemologies with/in curriculum practices. These are:

- Pedagogy and curriculum are relational occurrences that are emergent and ongoing
- Decolonial endeavours will look, feel, and sense differently for everyone
- Discomfort shapes one's relationship with the curriculum, and intellectual decoloniality starts with occupying the space of discomfort
- Decolonial thinking-doing is an ethico-onto-epistemological knowing-in-being
- Photo~currere~voice is self at the threshold – entangled... becoming always already
- Photo~currere~voice helps us to think differently – challenging the methodological orthodoxy of conventional methods of research, thereby becoming a decolonial enactment in itself.

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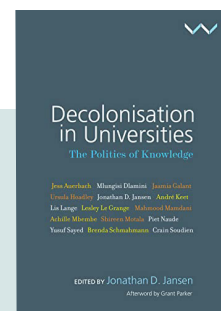
Book Review

Decolonisation in Universities: the politics of knowledge

Edited by Jonathan Jansen (ed.)

Wits University Press, 2019, pp. 447

<https://doi.org/10.18772/22019083351>



'Until the lions learn to write, every story will glorify the hunter.' (p. 131)

A little while ago I was invited to participate in a research project about curriculum decolonisation, for which I volunteered, in part to learn more about it. I found myself at odds with an ability to figure out decolonisation from within my own frame of reference (broadly white, male, western knowledge); this then led me to seek out material to address this. A long search on Amazon reveals a relative shortage of books related to this work and I was pleased to find this quote within this book's introduction, *'[T]he specific focus of this book, however, is primarily on decolonisation as applied to the university curriculum; that is as a knowledge project'* (emphasis in the original).

From the introduction I'm challenged to consider how:

'...hospitality to all knowledge forms is not, however, uncritical of standards of validation and the quest for cognitive justice in bringing to the epistemological table those knowledges left out in the deliberations inside, between and across the disciplines.'

What am I leaving out of the PGCLTHE I teach? How and why do I choose what I include? What informs these decisions?

The book is formed of four parts: (1) arguments for decolonisation, (2) politics and problems of decolonisation, (3) doing decolonisation, and (4) re-imagining colonial inheritances, each formed of two or more chapters.

In chapter 2, the reasons for decolonisation of the curriculum are presented (p. 33), for example, the decimation of the knowledges of the colonised and how therefore cognitive justice should be sought. This is posed as a question, 'why did Eurocentric epistemology conceal its own geo-historical and bio-geographical locations and succeed in creating the idea of universal knowledge as if the knowing subjects are universal?' (p. 34).

In part 2, there are more questions relating to the 'Mamdani Affair' but which can be applied to all knowledge:

'...what constituted valid knowledge of Africa; how was the subject knowledge defined and whose knowledge of Africa should be accepted as valid? In a secondary line

was the preoccupation with to whom and how this knowledge would be taught.’ (p. 92)

Further questions about decolonisation crop up in chapter 5: What counts and who belongs?:

‘Is it [decolonisation] about radical rupture in the forms of knowledge?’

Does it concern issues relevant to the production of knowledge?’

Is it about a shift in the ways that received knowledge is taught?’ (p. 101)

This chapter observes that it is in the curriculum and the classroom that what counts as knowledge is made explicit to students.

Doing decolonisation (part 3) presents three African case studies of

institutions grappling with the task. One chapter concludes by noting that the aim of universities broadly is to teach how to think, but notes that this is closely related to what students already know when they arrive. Another notes:

‘It [colonisation] privileged particular identities that embodied western European, capitalist and Christian and heteronormative identities as the global norm, while casting other identities as local, particular, parochial and often inferior.’ (p. 156)

The last chapter in this section argues that one particular aspect of decolonisation related to the classroom needs to ‘deconstruct what counts as valid teaching practice’ (p.166).

The final part of the book, in four chapters, reimagines colonial

inheritances. This part contains an excellent chapter by Achille Mbembe, ‘Future knowledges and their implications for the decolonization project’.

This is a dense, demanding and challenging book that illustrates well the complexity of its subject matter. The afterword closes with a summation ‘...the matter of decolonization contains an invitation to reconsider existing practice and explore new alternatives’ (p. 262). It is perhaps best viewed as a library resource to dip into (although Mbembe’s chapter especially resonated for me) rather than a cover to cover ‘must read’.

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Looking back and looking forward: Where are we now with reflection on PGC LTHE programmes?

Eileen Pollard, Manchester Metropolitan University

‘Uncritical sharing is not, in and of itself, educational.’ (Stephen Brookfield)

This opinion piece is structured using the TREC model (trigger, review, evidence and consolidation (Cullen and McCabe, 2022)).

Trigger

Coming from an English literature background and having been appointed as an educational developer, I began again, naturally, by reading, and quickly rediscovered Stephen Brookfield’s work. In ‘Against naïve romanticism’, Brookfield notes the importance of acknowledging the Modernist roots of our understanding of adult learning, as well as ideas of ‘experience’ more generally. The now ubiquitous normalising of Modernist ideas as ‘common sense’ means that experience is:

‘Often viewed as a fixed category – something that is bestowed upon us, or something that happens to us, from which we draw appropriate lessons. But experiences don’t happen to us, events

happen to us. Experiences are constructed by us as much as they happen to us: the interpretive frames we employ to assign meaning to events shape fundamentally how we experience them.’ (Brookfield, 1998, p. 129)

Alongside Brookfield’s analysis, this opinion piece mobilises some ideas from critical and relational pedagogy (the two are linked, Bovill, 2020) to demonstrate how assessing experience via reflective assignments can actually further exclude those participants with the least social and cultural capital to begin with (Bourdieu, 1977; Macfarlane, 2015). Here, I ask the interlinked questions: how do we best foster inclusion of participants from a wide range of backgrounds, heritages and experiences, so that they too, in their turn, can do the same for their students?

Review

Reading Brookfield forces an acknowledgement that current educational epistemologies in the Global North are strongly informed, now in a quite unconscious way, by Modernism: ‘Helping adults understand the meanings of their experience

comprises a stream of analysis that has been at the heart of the adult education tradition and the modernist project' (Brookfield, 1998, p. 129). He goes on to list conscientisation, transformative learning, critical reflection and emancipatory education, as especially symptomatic of this European movement. Such a recognition also informs his critique of reflective assignments as not 'inherently emancipatory', but rather as confessional, at best (Edwards, 1994; Usher and Edwards, 1994; and Usher *et al.*, 1997, cited in Brookfield, 1998, p. 129) or, at worst, an example of education as surveillance and 'soulcraft' (Macfarlane and Gourlay, 2009; Macfarlane, 2015). Brookfield explains that for the sharing of experience to become educational it has to be informed by critical analysis, which is, arguably, the role of the reflective assignment:

'As Simon (1988) argues, there is a "conservatism inherent in simply celebrating personal experience and confirming that which people already know" (p. 3). For the celebration of experience to become educational it has to be allied to critical analysis. We have to ask how that experience might be understood from different perspectives, what aspects of the experience need questioning and further inquiry, and what parts of the experience have been misapprehended, ignored or omitted in recollection.' (Brookfield, 1998, p. 129).

And misapprehension, ignorance and omission are not the only problems with reflections, such as this one. One of my responsibilities as a new member of the team was to redesign a FLEX unit as a free-standing, independent study resource. FLEX units are flexible, practice-based approaches to practice enhancement. Having undertaken the unit as a participant, I strengthened the structured aspect of the assessment and created stronger links with the learning outcomes to try to avoid the pitfalls of reflective assessment noted here and in the literature (Roberts, 2012; Macfarlane and Gourlay, 2009). I did this because, despite having taught reflective writing and set reflective assignments as an academic, it was only as a study skills tutor that I truly realised that reflective writing has all the characteristics of critical writing – plus reflection (Moon, 2006). Therefore, proper, or critical reflection is actually a harder or more layered form of writing than non-reflective writing. To me, this was a way of realising (again) why students (and colleagues) find doing reflective writing well so difficult.

My experience is supported by Andrew Roberts, who points out, 'evidence suggests that many students struggle, at least initially, to engage fully with reflection, particularly at those higher cognitive levels that might lead to a transformation in an individual's perspective' (Mezirow, 1991; Samuels and Betts, 2007, cited in Roberts, 2012, p. 58). Then, as an educational developer, I came across the idea of reflective assignments as, like groupwork, an 'emotional performance' that demands 'compliance and confession' (Macfarlane, 2015, p. 339). The critical theorist in me was really struck by academics having the final say on whether or not students had 'reflected well' on their own experiences – I saw the exclusionary nature of this for the first time and the pain of the assignment being so personal.

Macfarlane and Gourlay (2009) apply this double bind to

participants on PGC LTHE programmes too, noting that not all are 'Machiavellian in [their] approach to passing the reflective commentary. Some do engage enthusiastically with reflective commentaries and are happy to toe the line. The more critical thinkers have limited room for manoeuvre. The pragmatic opt to conform or self-censor' (p. 457). And one way to critically question experience and the ideological complexion of reflective assignments is to continue to adopt and strengthen the relational approach to pedagogy across PGC LTHE programmes, fostering recognition, honesty and trust (Murphy and Brown, 2012; Bovill, 2020). But consequently, a key action for our programme team, following my ongoing meta reflection-on-reflection, was to continue embedding critical questioning of 'experience' and 'reflection' on the core unit of our own PGC LTHE. For example, one facet of non-criticality to highlight is the insidious yet superficial culture of celebration in HE, in particular the triumphant against-the-odds 'success story' (that proves the rule). As Sara Ahmed critiques in *On Being Included*, the current vogue for 'celebration of diversity' is just another form of white-washing: 'People of colour are welcomed on condition they return that hospitality by integrating into a common organizational culture, or by "being" diverse, and allowing institutions to celebrate their diversity' (Ahmed, 2012, p. 43). Therefore, if we are to begin to 'decolonise' our provision as educational developers, we would do well to start with the assumptions and presumptions inherent within our reflective assignments.

Evidence

So reflective assignments are pervasive on PGC LTHE programmes, but how did this happen? Having worked in faculty for the last ten years and being new to educational development, speaking to James Wisdom gave me a much clearer insight into how (and why) assessing via reflection has become central to this provision. I realised I, myself, was guilty of what I have often observed in new colleagues, who arrive at an institution that has a rich and complex history, far pre-dating them, and yet this new colleague behaves as if, for the institution (rather than just for themselves) it is year zero. Therefore, my appearance on the stage of educational development in 2022, became, unknowingly, year zero in my head: I could see the problems with reflective assignments, as outlined above, but I could not see the history and context (and politics) as to why we have become reliant on assessing in this way.

James posed the questions faced by educational developers in the past, as this field of work began, shakily, to establish itself: do we teach to teach? With the difficulties inherent in that – that it is patronising, controlling, prescriptive, or, indeed, bordering on surveillance or soulcraft? Or do we compromise, bring colleagues on board, and instead teach to reflect? And what I had failed to realise with my insular year-zero gaze was that adopting this position of 'blowing on the embers' was actually a political position, and that encouraging reflection through feedback actually diffused faculty anger and resistance to this work. The Robbins Report of 1963 expanded both the number of universities and the number of students; there was much political gaming for educational developers working then and later, through a further expansion post-1992. But the work of Jennifer Moon on reflection was gentle, yet thoughtful, and her persona, powerful and independent minded. Yet the problem of do we teach to teach or teach to reflect remains

a recurring tension in educational development: in giving participants more content, more structure, more guidance, do they then expect more? In a sector of exploding workloads, do they perhaps develop less independence in terms of this aspect of CPD? Are they less developmental in their approach to their teaching? More, tell-me-the-answer, in the marketised way of undergraduates – which they articulate so well as struggling with themselves? And is it just a people thing, as I have been thinking and more experienced colleagues tell me? It is not just undergraduates, or postgraduates, or participants, it is just people. And I think it is. But is it also a context thing? A politics thing? A neo-liberal, marketised, survival of the fittest, thing?

Consolidation

So where are we now with reflection? Do exercises like the TEF, the drive of metrics, the changing requirements of the OfS, affect the teaching to reflect approach and model? Perhaps pressuring it, squeezing it, forcing it to compromise, to include a bit of teaching how to teach? And then, is it a slippery slope? Teaching for results, measurable gains and impact, and, and, and (insert difficult to achieve outcome here)?

This opinion piece cannot answer these questions, but as a new educational developer it is important, I think, to pose them. And on a more personal note, having a reflective assignment marked is still hard. It was hard when I completed my own PGCAP (when I felt, as Macfarlane and Gourlay point out, that I had very limited scope and needed to play it safe) and it is still hard, even as an educational developer: it is personal, and exposing. In a recent commentary entitled 'The homeless student', Ronald Barnett provided a compelling argument demonstrating that at university, 'ontology trumps both epistemology and praxis' (Barnett, 2022, p. 4). And, if, as he says, being not knowing is the key transformation during the higher education experience, then tutors and educational developers must take particular care when teaching through 'experience' and assessing it via 'reflection'. Put another way, to paraphrase the words of W. B. Yeats, by sharing their experiences participants spread their dreams before us, so we have an obligation to take care where we place our feet.

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What we learned in the storm: Listening to and learning from the experiences of teaching staff during emergency remote teaching

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Introduction

Through in-depth interviews and qualitative analysis, our study explores the teaching and learning practices of study participants, with a particular focus on how they made use of digital tools and technologies to ensure academic continuity during the pandemic emergency, and the important role of finding and knowing trusted people they could turn to in doing that work.

Our findings are organised around three strong emerging themes: Time and Labour, Resources and Support, and Trust and Relationships. This article is published in two parts. In the first part, we describe the lived experiences of a number of lecturers in a new Irish university – the Munster Technological University – at the beginning of the so-called emergency remote teaching (ERT) period, in the spring and early summer of 2020. We also begin our analysis and discussion of the data we collected. In the second part we continue with our analysis and come to some conclusions. We discuss our findings with the particular intent of generating insights for education technologists and education developers.

In our analysis of the emergent themes, we reflect on the role of institutional context in whether or not teaching staff feel confident, or at least capable, in situations of rapid change and uncertainty, situations we have not seen the last of. In particular, we advocate for embedding the ongoing practices of listening and relationship-building, between education developers and technologists and teaching staff, so as to identify and advocate for the resources and support each of them need.

In Ireland and elsewhere, the Covid-19 pandemic and the closure of physical campuses required an abrupt switch to so-called remote teaching and

learning approaches. Here we describe and analyse shifts in teaching practice and priorities across the Munster Technological University (MTU) in 2020-2021. While this project took place at MTU, spread across the counties of Cork and Kerry in Ireland, the patterns we identify chime with those identified in earlier and related projects conducted in the UK (Lanclos and Phipps, 2019; Price *et al.*, 2022).

At this point in the pandemic (no longer classed as an emergency) journals are filled with articles about what happened during the pandemic, with particular attention to the institutional response (Bartolic, 2021; Czerniewicz *et al.*, 2020; Erlam *et al.*, 2021; Flynn and Noonan, 2020; Moore *et al.*, 2021; Watermeyer *et al.*, 2020; Watermeyer *et al.*, 2021; Weller, 2022). Our contribution illuminates a less-well-represented qualitative approach (Gourlay *et al.*, 2021; Price, 2021; Price *et al.*, 2022; Valsaraj *et al.*, 2021) to how people thought about the role of technology, students, and support staff in their experiences of emergency remote teaching.

Some readers might ask why, in 2023, we should pay attention to voices from 2020. We would respond by saying: 1) 2020 is not that long ago, pandemic time-distortion notwithstanding, and 2) have we collectively in fact paid attention? What evidence is there in our own practices as educational developers and technologists that we have listened? Our intention is to provide space to listen, to gain insights into the lived experiences of teaching staff colleagues, to identify and carry forward practices and approaches that deserve to be continued.

We are a team of digital learning and education development specialists (Ó Súilleabháin and Farrelly), and an

anthropologist (Lanclos). We are also educators, and researchers. We carried out this project as part of a larger agenda around recognising and joining up expertise among teaching and support staff at MTU. This research project was reviewed and approved by the ethics board of Munster Technological University.

After a description of our methodological approach, the section ‘Listening to Voices’ bears witness to the experiences and feelings of teaching staff in the time of emergency remote teaching (ERT) (Hodges *et al.*, 2020).

Methods

This was an interview-based project. We collected 10 hours of data, from semi-structured interviews conducted via video-calls. As with other qualitative approaches, the priority is not to arrive at generalisations about populations, but rather to help recognise and interpret patterns of behaviour, so as to generate insight. We recruited nine practitioners, men and women, in fields that included the social sciences, engineering, health sciences, and business. Most lecturers had been teaching at their institutions for at least five years. In reporting our findings, we identify participants based on what discipline they lecture in, but not by name. We based the interview questions on instruments used in previously published studies (Lanclos and Phipps, 2019; Price *et al.*, 2022) conducted in the UK, that examined teacher and student experiences of remote teaching practices in physical and digital contexts, before and during the pandemic emergency.

Once the interviews were transcribed, we generated a thematic codebook via grounded analysis to generate emergent themes. We focus in the analysis for this part of the article on two themes: Time and Labour, and Resources and Support.

We discuss Trust and Relationships in Part 2 of this article.

Findings: Listening to voices, Part 1

Time and labour

The move to ERT highlighted how little teaching and learning online is a question of ‘upskilling’ – the people we talked to who didn’t think they had specific skills before the shift to online teaching acquired them in contexts of support and connection. They gained confidence to try unfamiliar things and encounter students in unfamiliar places (online) with the help of formal and informal communities of practice, and relationships with support staff.

Some conveyed a sense of duty to the students, going beyond the constraints of the timetable to be there for them:

‘...your timetable is your timetable, and you have to be there present for students,...once COVID kicked in you got a bit more flexibility with that, when we’re doing a bit of online communication with the students. I remember I even went online at four o’clock one Friday evening with the students, because it suited them and it suited me, if you know what I mean. So yeah. And that was totally outside my timetable, it just suited like, you know.’ (Agricultural science lecturer)

Lecturers expressed anxiety about not knowing everything that students needed. They argued that students should be connected with centralised support staff for things that lecturers did not have the expertise or capacity to help with. A pattern in the data emerged of more women lecturers talking explicitly about care for students:

‘And I would often help those students and give them extra time to get them up because I know that they have the ideas or whatever, but you know, if I’m going to, you know, are we going to have to do that now for half of the students because we’re in

an online environment. So their anxiety is increased. We feel, we need to check in more with them. I don’t know. Should that be the lecturer or should that be another individual that is dealing just with their kind of anxiety levels and can assist or direct them to the right person rather than the lecturer being the person kind of going “well I’m really sorry, but I can’t deal with that. That’s something that I need to put you in touch with services”. Should that be my role as well?’ (Media communications lecturer)

One lecturer told us that she likely, when teaching in physical settings, prepares for at least three hours for each hour of delivery. But she noted:

‘When it comes to the online, I find that I even prepare more. Because you don’t with the best will in the world, you don’t have those lapses. You know, if you, even with Zoom, if you break people into breakout rooms and things like that, things still progress faster. Whereas in a class you can be, the discussion is more visible to others, you know, whereas with it, with Zoom breakout rooms, you find yourself dipping into breakout rooms to check and see if people are still chatting.’ (Business lecturer)

There was general agreement that teaching online required more time, and that the requisite work might not be easily recognised or incorporated into a system focused on contact hours or classroom time:

‘In other words, an hour of my time costs a certain amount. Somebody has costed that. So they’re always trying to reduce the hours that I have contact with. But for instance, if I produce a video, as I said to solve a particular problem, there is no recognition within the system that I’ve done that, but maybe other

people haven’t. So it’s a very unequal system, you know?...So it’s, it’s very hard to, what would I call it to define a lecturer’s role precisely for like, I could define my lecturer’s role precisely in terms of hours and equipment and all of that for my job. But I suspect if you then took that definition and handed it to somebody teaching accountancy or philosophy, it’s not gonna match what they do.’ (Maritime studies lecturer)

There was a worry among some lecturers that the extra work they have done in ERT might end up being redefined as ‘normal’ work.

Resources and support

Staff we spoke with knew about resources available to help them with their teaching, but many expressed a desire for someone they trust to sit down with them to help. Students are told that there were learning and guidance materials in the Learning Management System, but they also still want interactions with their lecturers, in the form of email exchanges and video-conference calls (Price, 2021). The presence of guidance and resources does not eliminate the desire for one-to-one interaction, and the COVID emergency meant that work was required to create one-on-one interactions that did not exist before. Lecturers knew that support staff did not have the capacity to help them as much as they needed. Lecturers also knew they did not themselves have the capacity to help students as much as they needed. These are related phenomena: staffing levels of instructors and support staff are not (and have not been) sufficient to meet the desired capacity for student or instructor support.

Some participants pointed out that the training and resources on offer were not always helpful:

‘...because a lot of stuff that’s been done is written and it’s academic, it’s impenetrable for me, it means nothing to me. I need to be in a room

with someone that I can ask questions from and who can give me concrete examples.'
(Media communications lecturer)

This lecturer also pointed to the disconnect between the training opportunities, and time available to dedicate to them:

'You know, we, I have participated where they've done full-day workshops, or even a half day. I feel that's worth it. But time is of an essence. So you're not given time off to do these things.'
(Media communications lecturer)

Support staff were perceived to be very good at doing their work, and also as scarce resources in their institutional settings – there was a regular acknowledgement that functional teams never had enough time or capacity to meet the training and support needs of teaching staff in the context of the growing impact of technology on learning and teaching:

'You know, other than that, I would, again, the people in TEL...They are carrying the can for the entire [university]...I think more resources need to go in there because they're going to be needed to do not just the firefighting stuff in the coming year for people who haven't gotten, all of us, a lot of experience of teaching online.'
(Media communications lecturer)

It is worth considering the extent to which all of the central resources that are available to staff are visible to them. We heard from some lecturers who were participants in formal discipline-based Community of Practice groups, which were perceived as excellent networks in which to learn about practical strategies from trusted peers. Others who had been teaching online before the pandemic were members of an online teaching community of practice which had been meeting regularly to share knowledge and experiences. Other lecturers had departmental WhatsApp groups, more active with the pandemic emergency, which took the place of being able to be in physical departmental spaces and ask

colleagues for help:

'So we have a, I think we call them communities of practice. So we have a [disciplinary] community of practice, which is the...five lecturers in the department. So we might meet twice a year, formally we meet every other day anyway, but we'd meet twice, twice a year and really just sort of chat about, okay, how's it going?'
(Marketing lecturer)

There was also a sense that such learning was happening only if time and capacity were there – which was by no means a guarantee:

'That was probably maybe a dozen lecturers who were comfortable and experienced and were happy to take calls from people. But it happened so late that I think people were just like, "Oh my God, I just, I'm only getting my head around Zoom or whatever," or "I don't want to know anything else." And I can understand that you were just inundated with information.' (Media communications lecturer)

We also heard from lecturers who were very self-contained, who primarily interacted with their department heads around their teaching and found their own way in terms of their digital teaching practices. These individuals tended to have had experience with teaching on 'online only' programmes prior to the pandemic, and so may also have had experience participating in an associated online teaching community of practice.

One lecturer taught in a context where the teaching work was shared across several colleagues, and his department had a prior-to-the-pandemic culture of sharing and communication around teaching content and delivery. This particular lecturer was aware that the sharing of practice, and active work with colleagues around designing and delivering teaching (online and in physical contexts), was not widespread at his institution:

'...we tend to co-teach them. So most of these modules, we have two lecturers on it and that's wonderful...But

mostly what's nice about it is it creates a little community of practice where, where we decide together, how we're going to work. And there's a kind of collegiality in that, which is really nice, which you don't have in a lot of online teaching. And in fact, in a lot of higher education teaching where you, where you tend to work solo, you know, that's, that's, that's been a very, very positive aspect of it.' (Health and leisure lecturer)

In thinking about what were some important pre-conditions to effective integration of digital practices into teaching, one lecturer noted:

'You need a champion. In other words, you need somebody in your department who is enthusiastic, knowledgeable, and who can pick up the phone and ask somebody else who's more qualified, "What do I do here?" ...and it's a gradual process because what we found long before Covid was one person puts their notes up online and does a good job. And then the students start to ask why isn't everyone else doing that? Yeah. So it's a slow process. It's not something where you flip a switch.' (Maritime studies lecturer)

While it is clear that some lecturers are quite confident in their technical skills and capabilities, and are happy to experiment on their own, there are others worried about whether they are capable or prepared, and who need more support:

'It often causes me a lot of anxiety because I feel perpetually insecure in my teaching to the point where I'm often changing year after year, my content, which is again, very time consuming and maybe doesn't need to be done at all. But it's this feeling of maybe, I don't know, is it working so maybe I should change it. Whereas if I knew and I had really strong grounds for saying, okay, this works, just leave it alone, update

what needs to be updated, but you don't need to be creating new content every single year. You know?' (Media communications lecturer)

In the context of emergency remote teaching, however, even some initially anxious lecturers managed the technology requirements well, and even learned that it wasn't as difficult as they thought it would be:

'I suppose what I learned is that the things are not as difficult...having CPD in the absence of actively, you know using the technology. Really, it just sounds a whole lot more difficult than it is.' (Nursing lecturer)

Instructors did not need to be confident in being able to fully use all of the technology but did need to be confident enough in being supported by their peers, and by their institutional support staff, that they would try.

In Part 2 (forthcoming), we present our findings on Trust and Relationships, overall implications, and conclusions.

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Investing in people and communities

Mandy Lyons, Sabrina Vieth and Karen Heard-Lauréote, Solent University, and **Fiona Smart**, External Consultant

Introduction

We speak easily of belonging in the higher education (HE) context. Yet it is a problematic construct within which the supposed ideal state of belonging is under threat from the lived reality (Gravett and

Ajjawi, 2022; Taff and Clifton, 2022). Curiously, in sharp contrast to the volumes of material written about student belonging, there is far less attention to the experience of academic staff. This may be an oversight, or the consequence of

having to prioritise scarce resources. An overview of the literature suggests a preoccupation with ensuring students' sense of belonging without, it appears, a concomitant commitment to a parallel staff-centred initiative, centred on

faculty. Perhaps we assume that with employment into an academic position comes belonging, but this may not be the case. It is possible to be both inside the university as a member of academic staff, yet be an outsider, a person in waiting.

Lave and Wenger's (1991) contemplations around community, more specifically communities of practice, speak, in part, to outside-insiders. Their thinking suggests that being peripheral is part of the process of gaining entry. Certain practices on the part of the newcomer combined with those of those closer to the centre can facilitate movement towards the heart of the community. Time served and experience gained are also perhaps an enabler of belonging. While there may be a natural order to the movement from the periphery to the inside, it seems fraught with risk. Students and their learning experiences may well rest with individuals who themselves do not feel fully part of the places and spaces they occupy. Early career academics would seem to be particularly at risk of not feeling as if they belong. While they will most likely have been to university, or studied to a higher level, being a member of staff is different. Induction programmes for early career academics combined with formal learning opportunities, such as formal programmes of learning, may do much to help such staff settle and to belong.

But what of staff who are established and who have managed to secure their place in the academic community, and feel that they do belong? Would a shift in role require the liminal space between the old and the new to be renegotiated? Does the sense of belonging dissipate as new responsibilities present? While this surmising suggests negativity, it is possible that re-finding your space within the community via a pathway from the periphery towards the centre might be beneficial in enabling a re-thinking of identity and a connection to new priorities. But it may not be, and it seems just too risky to allow role holders to simply find their way. One such role which requires a change in, or development of, perspective is that of the programme or course leader (CL).

Variably described, but readily eluding easy definition even within a university

context, the role of the CL may well warrant superpowers (Cunningham and Wilder, nd). Much is expected of the role, and yet the process by which individuals take up the role and learn to enact it has been argued to be a neglected area of activity. Those who assume its responsibilities may be supported, but they may not be. They might be guided, equally they could well adopt practices through trial and error, never wholly certain of the scope which bounds their action.

Against this backdrop, within the context of a modern university committed to the values of inclusion, respect, engagement, ownership, integrity and teamwork, and where the commitment to the student learning experience is explicitly stated, it became clear that CLs needed to be invested in because of the key roles they play in ensuring the quality of that experience. But the vision extended beyond the needs of students. Quite simply, staff and their continuing professional development matter. They too needed to be invested in.

Solent University's vision for an enabling development programme designed to build the CL community and ultimately benefit its students shares connections with other initiatives, including those featured in the SEDA Blog post series: 'Programme leaders challenging binaries in higher education: Academic vs non-academic?' (June, 2022). They too recognise 'the pivotal role of Programme Leaders (PLs) in higher education':

'(A) group of staff, who work at the junction of pedagogy, academic leadership, and student experience, too often seem to get a raw deal' and need to be 'valued and celebrated for their incredible impact on the student learning journey.' (O'Dwyer and Sanderson, 2022)

In deciding the design of the Solent University CL development programme there was cognisance that the CL role tends to be poorly understood and is not appreciated. Post-holders (certainly at the case-study site) reported formally and informally feeling unrecognised, undervalued, overworked, overlooked etc. In fact, one individual memorably

described it as the 'the last role anyone would want to do'.

For Solent Learning and Teaching Institute, a central University service designed to enhance curriculum and academic practice, this was a space inviting strategic action. The question asked was how could we work with the academic development community to support and develop key roles like CLs? How could we put together a learning and development package for those new in the role and for those people who have been doing the role for several years without any formal training? In taking up the challenge, we appreciated that some CLs, especially those who had held the role for some time, might not value what could seem like another drain on time. And yet the regulatory context (OfS conditions of registration, especially B3, and the Access and Participation Plan) absolutely requires that these roles be at the forefront of HE's ability to deliver a quality experience for students.

The ever-important status of university Access and Participation Plans and the ever-louder sabre-rattling of the OfS has meant that more recently still other key roles have become paramount to securing continuation and retention as they act as tutors across a year of study: Level Leaders (LLs). There has been a similar need to build the confidence of this role alongside that of CLs and build the value of it too. What can result from such a climate is a senior course team acting as proxy CEOs of their own courses driving its growth and strategic development forward – after all, students, at least for the moment, enrol on university courses, rather than individual constituent parts thereof.

Development programmes

Conversations about the design and delivery of a CL development programme began at the end of 2021. Content was produced at the beginning of the 2022 calendar year, with the subsequent launch of the pilot programme in September 2022 and another run in January 2023. The programme consisted of nine workshops in these initial two runs and addressed key areas of responsibilities and activities that are relevant for the CL role (Table 1).

Session theme	Focus areas
Being a Course Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The current HE landscape and key pressure points Effective structures to support CLs
Effective course design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Courses and their constituent modules and assessments Good practices of curriculum and assessment design
Leading course teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Solution-focused approaches to enhance course team experiences Good practices of leading course teams
Managing conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying causes of conflict within course teams Effective conflict management strategies
Coaching and mentoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coaching and mentoring for effective team leadership Leading course teams with focus on people
Inclusivity, widening participation and awarding gaps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Course-level data related to participation and awarding gaps Effective strategies for inclusive practices
Know your data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key internal and external metrics relevant for courses The role of CLs for evidence-based quality enhancement
Student wellbeing and resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student wellbeing and resilience in the context of the curriculum Impact on students' health and academic performance
Graduate outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employability and graduate outcomes Curriculum-focused actions to develop highly skilled graduates and enhance graduate outcomes

Table 1 Outline of workshops of the first two runs of the CL development programme

In addition, we launched a LL development programme to recognise LLs as another group of important stakeholders who are invaluable to a quality student learning experience. The LL development programme was designed to strengthen the LL role at Solent University and its cross-course consistency. Comprising of eight workshops, the programme includes themes such as role and responsibilities of LLs, challenges and opportunities, belonging, community and mattering, working with data, supporting students at risk, planning for and actioning change, supporting students' transitions, and effective student representation.

Rationale

The rationale for developing the CL and LL development programmes links to Solent University's 2025 institutional strategy, which promotes a university that excels at providing its learning community with the confidence, skills, knowledge and experience they need to successfully pursue fulfilling lives and life-changing careers. Layered over this institutional drive for programmes to

develop key staff is the pressure exerted by the educational environment, with the OfS conditions of registration around continuation (retention), completion (attainment), progression (positive outcomes) increasingly shaping the functions and responsibilities of CLs (and LLs) held accountable for the quality of their course.

The overall institutional aim is to ensure that all members of staff performing the roles of CL and LL have completed the

training by the start of the 2023-24 academic year. From thereon, it is expected all staff newly appointed to these roles will undertake the programmes. A shorter annual refresh opportunity is also intended to ensure CLs and LLs remain in good professional standing internally.

The overall strategic intention is that a whole institutional tapestry of key institutional academic role development ensues (Figure 1).

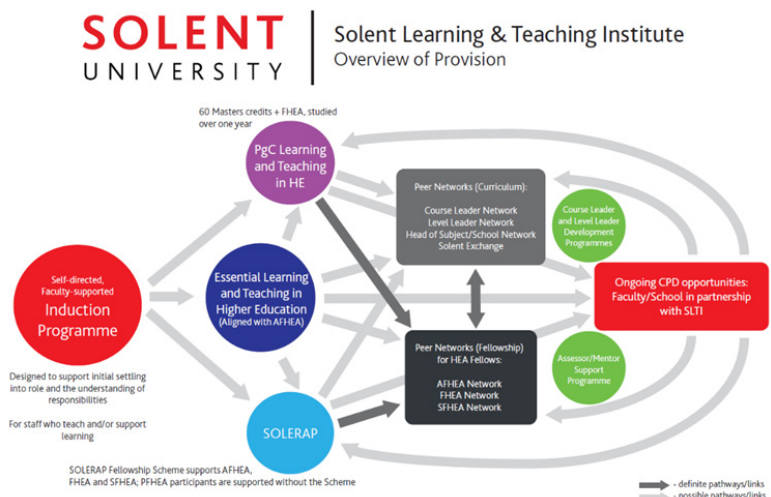


Figure 1 Solent University strategy for institutional academic role development

There was a significant cultural underpinning to this tapestry approach that should not be overlooked: that is, a keen sense that to successfully lead a course or level the component parts of that course and the people that are leading them need to work together to deliver a coherent, effective and successful course borne out by student success. This notion of a senior course leadership team is made up of the CL (acting in the capacity of a CEO) and the three LLs for levels 4, 5 and 6. The desire to standardise, stabilise and share good practice to build this leadership capacity at the course level was deemed a solid and purposeful investment by the University.

This broader internal and external contextual rationale resulted in the following specific programme aims as announced to the cohorts:

- To empower and enable CLs and LLs
- To activate CLs and LLs as communities of practice
- To support the CL and LL networks
- To provide an opportunity for collective reflection and to troubleshoot commonly shared issues
- To offer a channel for peer support and peer-to-peer learning
- To create opportunities and be solution-focused.

Challenges and enablers in practice

Time and workload pressures were frequently raised as challenges to being able to attend programme workshops; CLs and LLs recognised in workshop feedback the value of this development opportunity, but conflicting priorities meant student and teaching activities took precedence over their own and other team members' professional development. The changing nature of the CL role also impacted with some CLs believing they were being asked to take on increased line management responsibilities and at times raising concerns about increasing academic workloads. For example, preparing people to take on the challenge of management *versus* leadership, and having difficult conversations with colleagues, especially if they were in an interim role, were highlighted as significant challenges.

Another key challenge appears to be around how we empower CLs and LLs to engage with their network forums and have the confidence to propose and lead on change. The development of the CL and LL network forums and collaboration with Peer Network Leads has been both enabling and challenging in this process. For example, within the workshops, the Peer Network Leads' role modelled positive CL and LL behaviours in the sharing of insights, examples from practice and in giving constructive, non-judgmental feedback. However, lack of clarity around the scope and influence of their role as Peer Network Leads presented a significant challenge.

The impact of having a mix of people who are new to the role, existing in role and ambitious to take up the role in the future, while being a strong basis for community building and learning from peers, was another challenge. It became apparent that several people were in long-standing interim roles, which left them with a feeling of uncertainty around what impact they could have on a team if not in a permanent post. A question was raised around should there be an organisational policy on how long staff can sit in an interim limbo post to have more impact on organisational change. 'Can I be a change agent if I am interim?' was a frequent question raised.

Finally, a challenge was that several human resource (HR) related issues (such as academic workloads) were raised often, which were beyond the remit of the development programmes. Therefore, one positive outcome of these workshops and reflection on feedback was for us to link with HR teams to determine what training could be offered by HR for future iterations.

Early impact

Reflecting on past iterations of the CL and LL development programmes, we have seen signs of a positive impact on the CL and LL communities at Solent University. Based on our experiences of facilitating the programmes and working closely with programme participants, we have observed the development of communities of practice in which CLs and LLs have a clearer understanding of their roles and responsibilities and recognise the benefits of peer-to-peer

learning. Good practices were often shared and discussed. This aligns with the programmes' overall aims to empower and enable these key stakeholders, provide opportunities for collective problem-solving, reflection and peer support, and to strengthen their peer networks.

Furthermore, it has become apparent that initiatives such as the CL and LL development programmes can only be truly impactful if they are part of a wider development strategy for these roles. At Solent University, the development programmes have opened a window of opportunity to professionalise the CL and LL roles, presuming that feedback and reflections from programme participants and facilitators are timely fed back to academic leaders (in this case, Heads of Academic Departments) so that they can continue conversations around the roles' responsibilities, expectations and individual development needs. Programmes such as these can, therefore, be an excellent catalyst for the creation of new communication channels and the provision of spaces where voices are heard and solutions are co-created, which may eventually allow leaders of peer networks to be included in future governance structures.

Next steps

A key change to the CL and LL development programmes is the reduction in the number of workshops in the future to enable staff to attend the programmes. Feedback and reflections have been considered and some workshops have been combined, redeveloped or updated. There is also scope to collaborate with the University HR department to deliver additional and more role-specific workshops.

In the next iterations, we need to address more clearly the level of ownership of CLs and LLs and fill the knowledge gap. In particular, we need to reposition the CL role, not just as a thought-leader and advocate for their course, but now as a key stakeholder with multiple requirements and responsibilities. These include managing people, liaising with HR, undertaking professional development reviews, having difficult conversations and managing performance issues within teams. How do we skill people

to manage at that level without losing sight of their students and courses? After all, the quality and performance of courses should always remain a priority for CLs. It has been decided that future iterations of the development programmes, therefore, should not only involve pedagogically sound content but also inputs from HR teams.

Furthermore, we will be launching a Module Leader (ML) development programme that will focus on topics such as ML role responsibilities, the use of module and engagement data, quality and consistency, and assessment and feedback. These topics were selected at the requests of CLs and LLs because of the need to standardise practices across modules and across staff managed by CLs. The main aim of the ML development programme, therefore, is to ensure that MLs understand their roles, responsibilities and expected behaviours within course teams, which is a prerequisite for effectively managing and leading course teams towards a coherent and positive student experience.

Conclusion: The value of investing in key roles and building community

Our intention in crafting this suite of key academic role development programmes was to offer something back to the wider academic community. Indeed, the emphasis was on community and trying to get the CL and LL communities to recognise each other and work more collaboratively. In doing that the wider University community has become involved in subsequent iterations and want to be involved in shaping it. As such, it has been about empowering the academic voice and providing a catalyst for further collaboration and ongoing community building. While a recent institutional restructuring has provided an opportunity to develop this further, strong community building has only really been possible by recognising, valuing and developing these key leadership roles in contemporary HE.

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Making it work: A reflection on creating resources for students you never meet

Amy West, University of Northampton

The Resource in a Box project at the University of Northampton was created to enable Sixth Form students to experience university resources within their own setting, without being taught in person by university staff. Physical boxes containing plans and resources can be borrowed by schools, each box having different content. Some of the boxes align with academic disciplines, but as a Learning Development (LD) Tutor supporting academic skills development in Higher Education (HE), I was approached to create a box which would support the development of academic skills. Here, I outline the resource I created, address the considerations of creating resources for independent use in other settings, and reflect on my experience.

How it began

The Schools Engagement team, as project leaders, came to me to discuss the potential for academic skills boxes to loan to secondary schools in the area. Boxes were to be used independently by teachers in schools, offering teachers flexibility, and enabling our connection with schools to extend beyond the practicalities of visits. The intention was to provide Level 3 school students with a 'taste' of Level 4 university

learning, and as such, the boxes were to reflect aspects of university learning and teaching.

I began the process of creating the box with initial meetings with the Heads of Sixth Form in two schools, which gave me clear indication of what content would be most useful for Year 12 and Year 13 students. These discussions enabled reflection on approaches to provide a meaningful and relevant resource for the staff and students, and we began to consider which academic skills would be most usefully supported through the box. In order to make the resource relevant for all, the theme of 'Presenting Myself' was chosen. This provided a vehicle for exercising skills of, among others, reflection, communication, critical thinking and editing. The intention was that these skills could be useful in any application, interview or presentation context, whether in education, employment or elsewhere, and would work towards the students' task of self-reflection and communicating who they are. We decided that developing skills for both spoken and written elements of this would be beneficial, and it was with this idea for two 'pathways' that the structure of the resource took shape.

An outline of the resource

The box itself holds a number of folders. A teacher folder contains an overview document, outlining the aims and scope of the resource, and two plans, one for each of the two pathways: ‘Presenting Myself – speaking’ and ‘Presenting Myself – writing’ (Table 1). For each pathway there is a self-evaluation frame. The areas reviewed in each self-evaluation

are matched by a folder for each area; these are placed around the learning space. In each area folder there are two pouches. Each pouch contains everything needed for a single activity including: comprehensive instructions; information about context, aims and application; and resources or objects needed for the task.

Main box contains: – Teacher folder containing overview, plans, and self-evaluation activities for both pathways – Lists of the contents – All other folders and resources as outlined in next columns	Writing pathway: Writing folders 1-5	Writing folder 1: Writing enough	Activity A pouch
			Activity B pouch
		Writing folder 2: Keeping writing within the character count	Activity A pouch
			Activity B pouch
		Writing folder 3: Getting the tone right	Activity A pouch
		Activity B pouch	
		Writing folder 4: Finding the right words	Activity A pouch
			Activity B pouch
		Writing folder 5: Editing and proof reading	Activity A pouch
			Activity B pouch
	Speaking pathway: Speaking folders 1-5	Speaking folder 1: Body language and eye contact	Activity A pouch
			Activity B pouch
		Speaking folder 2: Coming up with content	Activity A pouch
			Activity B pouch
		Speaking folder 3: Interesting voice	Activity A pouch
	Activity B pouch		
	Speaking folder 4: Speaking with a clear voice	Activity A pouch	
		Activity B pouch	
	Speaking folder 5: Group discussion	Group activity pouch	

Table 1 Structure of the ‘Presenting Myself’ Resource in a Box

Students begin the session by engaging individually with the self-evaluation activity. They then use this to inform their journey through the rest of the session by identifying areas they wish to work on. Having chosen the area for focus, students access one of two activities in that area. The two activities in each folder develop the same skill, but with contrasting approaches, to offer choice in line with preference. In most cases, one activity is based around speaking and listening, and the other is a more independent or reflective activity. It became apparent that within the self-selection structure, the same activity could be chosen by one student, or a number of students, and therefore the instructions outline how to complete them in either case.

Creating resources for independent use

Teachers in HE frequently create resources for their own students to use independently. However, whereas in these cases students can often seek clarification from staff, or have other mechanisms which support their access to the resource (contextual understanding, course expectations and lexicon, knowledge of the teacher), for the Resource in a Box, students and their own teacher would access the resource without this support. After some reflection and conversations with colleagues, I focused the planning and creating on three elements I felt would facilitate the use of the resource once it left me: clarity of instruction, flexibility and choice. These align with aspects of the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Guidelines (CAST, 2018) as outlined below.

Clarity of instruction

Instructions which would be used by students independently, facilitated by a teacher who has not created them, obviously needed to provide clarity of intention and of how to use the resource. In line with the UDL (CAST, 2018: 3.3), clear instructions were crafted to enable processing. This took shape through ensuring they were complete but concise, and used a consistent structure, descriptive icons and subheadings (CAST, 2018: 3.2) to support understanding. Sequences were broken into clear steps (CAST, 2018: 3.3) and there was advice for modifying the activities should it be chosen by only one person, or by more. I aimed for an accessible and friendly tone, choosing language for precision of meaning. The resource was piloted by students, and feedback regarding wording, clarity and structure of the instructions led me to modify them.

The instructions also reiterated the relevance of the activity, with a ‘how does this apply?’ section for each activity (linking with CAST, 2018: 3.4). Clarity about how activities matched the learning aims supported students in doing the tasks, and fostered understanding of how they can apply the skills in their own context.

Flexibility

The academic skills Resource in a Box focuses on developing skills for diverse futures. As this resource was to be accessed

in schools, I felt strongly it should be useful for *all* students, not solely for those who planned to apply for university. It was important the resource was relevant to all, regardless of students' current plans – whether they be HE, apprenticeship, employment, or as yet unclear. Providing the resource to schools purely for future university applicants would not only have excluded a number of people, but would have necessitated students making some level of decision about their future plans in order to engage with the box. The flexibility was also intended to make it a more attractive option for teaching staff, who could use it with entire cohorts rather than splitting groups according to their current plans. There is no limit to the number of students able to be involved, and there is no defined length of time for the session or sessions; this facilitates flexible use.

The UDL (CAST, 2018: 7.2) identifies the importance of relevance, and how learning should support the journey to specific goals. The box needed to offer opportunities for the teachers, rather than be restrictive. The structure of the resource enabled teachers to adapt the session to suit their own context, reflect the needs of the learners, and draw out particular relevance for them. The in-built flexibility around how the box and its contents can be used provided teachers with a malleable resource which could be tailored to their group – keeping it relevant.

Offering choice through self-evaluation

The resource needed to cater for students I would never meet, meaning I had no knowledge of their individual circumstances and needs. There would be students with varying levels of academic confidence; providing options for learners supported this, enabling them to make choices to meet their needs and preferences. The UDL suggests 'offering learners choices can develop self-determination, pride in accomplishment, and increase the degree to which they feel connected to their learning,' (CAST, 2018: 7.1), which felt all the more important given I would not meet the students. Choice may also promote greater inclusivity, allowing learners to adopt the methods or strategies that suit them. Schmidt *et al.* (2018, p. 33) found choice had a positive impact on full engagement for high school science students, who were also less likely to be reluctant in their engagement when choice was offered; I used choice to maximise potential for engagement. The design of the box enabled learners to have low-risk experience of flexible learning, potentially helpful when encountering similar decision-making experiences in future; this may be useful to develop in itself (Wanner and Palmer, 2015, p. 366).

Starting with self-evaluation promotes reflection demonstrates that student input is valued, and enables students to choose how they gain from the session, working towards their own specific goals. The self-evaluation tool enabled this choice to be built in whilst providing structure to the session. However, there are, of course, considerations around the accuracy of self-evaluation. It relies upon developed and inquisitive self-awareness and clear understanding of the concepts one is being asked to evaluate oneself against. Students may benefit from being taught *how* to self-evaluate effectively (Dunlosky and Rawson, 2012) in order to do so. However, in the Resource in a Box context, even if a self-evaluation is inaccurate or non-representative, the activities chosen in error are still likely to be of value to the student. The session also

asks students to choose more than once within a rotation, so there is an opportunity to re-evaluate, to respond to their own experiences, or to change direction based on the post-activity reflections of peers.

Personal reflection

The experience of creating the Resource in a Box has impacted my own teaching in HE, particularly in the three areas outlined above. Creating the resource was an excellent exercise in giving clear and effective instructions. This proved especially relevant when teaching moved online during the Covid-19 lockdown. Clarity of instruction links to engagement in online learning (Palmer *et al.*, 2017, p. 8) and, anecdotally, I found in early online sessions particularly, some students were reluctant to clarify their understanding of instructions in the digital classroom, where it is perhaps more exposed. The instructions I give for online activities now have been prepared to offer concise but complete information, including what to do if technology fails, if students do not feel clear on expectations, and what happens once the activity has been completed. I aim to offer instructions which give students clarity to remove confusion and stress, and to maximise the learning potential.

I have also adapted my teaching in terms of flexibility and choice. In the LD sessions I teach in university, a specific focus has often been requested by the module tutor, in response to the needs of the students and the nature of their assessments. After creating the Resource in a Box, I began to explore ways to implement choice within these parameters. I have found this has worked particularly well with postgraduate students, who have come to Level 7 study from a variety of prior experiences, and may be confident with their academic writing, or conversely may feel they have lost touch with it since their last episode of study. In these sessions I follow a similar pattern to the Resource in a Box, offering a self-evaluation task followed by activities to choose from, with one being teacher-led and the others independent. Independent activities remain available after the session for students wishing to complete the set, and all students are given the opportunity to explore the concepts further with a tutor in individual tutorials. The choice element allows learners to take ownership of their learning path, exercise independence and maintain relevance.

Working with colleagues in any context can provide inspiration and learning. This was a valuable opportunity to work with colleagues across phases, enabling me to benefit from their knowledge and perspective, and consider how this can impact my own practice. Those initial conversations with teaching staff outlined the common challenges faced by students in Years 12 and 13 in terms of writing and speaking about themselves, and that alone informs my teaching of Level 4 sessions in university. Hearing about preferred learning environments, and discovering suggestions of what students at Level 3 may enjoy, not only impacted the design of the resources but also developed my understanding of learners at this stage. Simply having the space to discuss learning with colleagues from a different context gave rise to reflection, and evaluating the resource with those staff members enabled me to see their perspective and priorities. I feel that working collaboratively improved the quality and relevance of the resource.

Working with colleagues outside of one's own institution can be difficult to organise, and it can feel awkward asking for time from those you know are extremely busy. Finding shared ground for collaboration and establishing trust (Muijs *et al.*, 2011, p. 151) could be challenges in themselves. However, the project has led me to consider other opportunities for working with colleagues in cross-phase settings, knowing what I can gain from the perspectives of those in other contexts, and how enjoyable and valuable the experience was.

It became clear this was an opportunity to advocate university academic skills support in post-16 settings. Students, even when at an institution, may be unaware of the support services in place for them, or unsure of their remit (Woods *et al.*, 2019, p. 10). The very fact that this project alerted students and staff to the existence and nature of this support is valuable in itself. Students at this stage of their education may be considering their options for further learning, and discovering more about the support available in university may help allay some fears, or encourage students to seek out Learning Development services when they are in institutions.

Evaluation and conclusion

Informal evaluation of the resource was ongoing, but more formal evaluation was planned. Unfortunately, in the event, this was very limited, partly due to Covid-19, and partly due to the difficulties of gaining evaluation from students I had no ongoing contact with. However, in the limited student evaluation survey the responses were positive, with all participants identifying an increase in confidence in one or more skills after using the resource compared with before. Pre- and post-session interviews were conducted with one Head of Sixth Form; feedback focused on the design of the resource itself and its perceived usefulness. The teacher described the resource as engaging and felt that instructions had indeed come across with clarity. The flexibility and choice within the resource was identified as beneficial for the students, but interestingly, it was suggested that teachers may sometimes prefer a more prescriptive plan so that they can be clear about timing and structure. The academic skills box, along with another created by a Learning Development colleague, were shortlisted for the university's Staff Changemaker Award, highlighting the opportunities they afford for learning outside of the institution.

The Resource in a Box project created valuable opportunities for schools and students, the relationships between schools and the institution, and for me as a practitioner. The process of planning and creating the resource, and of working with cross-phase colleagues, led to my own reflection and

application of strategies within my teaching in university. The resource itself appears to hold value for students and teachers in schools, and further feedback will be acted upon in its development. Creating resources for those who we may never meet is a valuable exercise for reflection on one's own practice, providing the need to think differently about planning and resource creation. Collaborating throughout this process augments not only the resource but also professional development, and in cross-phase cases may also help others understand more about the settings they are working with – in both directions.

Due to ethical/commercial issues, data underpinning this publication cannot be made openly available. Further information about the data and conditions for access are available from the University of Northampton Research Explorer at <http://doi.org/10.15000/a1234b56>

For the purpose of open access, the author has applied a Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) licence to any Author Accepted Manuscript version arising from this submission.

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The SEDA blog: Nine years and going strong!

Emma Kennedy, University of Greenwich, and **Kerry Dobbins**, University of Warwick

Over the past nine years the SEDA blog – thesedablog.wordpress.com – has become a place where fascinating ideas can be shared, discussed and debated by members of the SEDA community as well as interested readers from across the world. In 2023 it has gained a new editorial team, as Kerry Dobbins, Emma Kennedy and Aisling Keane have taken over from the irreplaceable Becky Turner. You can read Becky's reflections on the handover – and those of the new editors – on the blog now.

Looking back

As we come to the end of another academic year, let's take a moment to reflect on the history of the SEDA blog. The blog has a long history, starting in April 2014 with Graham Gibbs' series '53 Powerful Ideas All Teachers Should Know About' (shortened on the blog to '#53Ideas'). This series began with 'Students are trying to get different things out of university' and ended with 'Most assessment involves (unreliable) professional judgement – and is all the better for it' (February 2016). Since then the blog has hosted a rich variety of posts, from event and project reports to research and practical tips, ranging from the pragmatic to the reflective.

During its lifetime, the blog has had a stunning 134,000 views from 174 countries, with 226 posts being published in just nine years. Much of the credit for this must go to the various editors of the blog, not least Becky Turner, who worked to establish a weekly posting schedule for the blog and raise its profile considerably. In 2014 the blog had just over 4000 visitors; this quadrupled to 16,000 in 2022. Visitors do not just view the most recent post, however: our most popular post is from 2014. This shows that the blog is more than a weekly update, and instead provides a longer-term repository of resources and inspiration for our community.

Community through challenge

The blog is constituted as much by those who read, share and comment as by its writers and editors. This might be on the blog itself, or other areas such as the SEDA mailing list and social media. The post that has most online comments is Phil Race's (October 2016) 'Reflection on demand?' This post prompted a debate around time to reflect, contemplative pedagogy and the organisational (over)use of terms like 'reflective practice'. Commenters often become contributors, and we hope that those who comment, in whatever forum, see themselves as part of a broad community.

Higher education is never immune from global challenges – from globalisation to economic woes. Covid was no exception – and the SEDA blog provided a space for the community to explore how we might respond to the pandemic's challenges. One of the blog's most popular posts is from April 2020: Jenny Lawrence's 'Designing out plagiarism for online assessment'. For many readers, this enthusiasm for ensuring academic integrity in the online space will bring back memories of the demands of Covid – as well as showing how keen the higher education community was to get it right for those we support.

A rich tapestry

The blog's short format allows colleagues to respond to issues as they emerge and reduces barriers to contributing (we hope). This is a boon from two directions. Firstly, it means that those who

may be less confident about publishing might see us as a stepping stone to writing for – for example – *Educational Developments*. However, it also means that colleagues who are at the very top of their field, and therefore very in demand, are able to squeeze us in where they might not be able to write an article of many thousands of words. The diversity of authors is one of the blog's greatest assets. It is a space that offers a voice to experts in educational development, and other related fields, as well as early-career colleagues. One week you might read a blog by a Dean of Academic Innovation or professor, and another week a blog by a Teaching Fellow or postgraduate researcher – all, of course, equally valuable and interesting. Some of our contributors work in academic or professional services roles in universities, and some work outside them – as independent scholars, consultants or in another industry. What they all have in common is a desire to enhance learning and teaching in higher education through the field of educational development.

The SEDA blog has offered a space where colleagues can explore ideas that go beyond the mainstream themes of teaching and learning, though their posts often show that these topics are relevant to the work of educational development. Posts have addressed issues of academic career development and progression, HE policy, student-staff partnership, learning technology and global educational trends. They have also taken fresh looks at issues that have become staples in the educational space, from learning outcomes to student transitions and teaching observations. Series and tags allow users to explore the topics that are of most interest to them – while also, we hope, allowing for surprise.

So what next for the blog? We hope to continue Becky Turner's good work in maintaining a steady stream of content, and using the new team format to diversify our contributors even further. We'd particularly love to hear from students who would like to contribute and those who feel their subfield is under-represented on the blog. The posts currently on the blog provide plenty of food for thought and show what is going on in the field; if you feel inspired, visit thesedablog.wordpress.com/about and look at our information for contributors.

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Just published:

Advancing Student Engagement in Higher Education: Reflection, Critique and Challenge

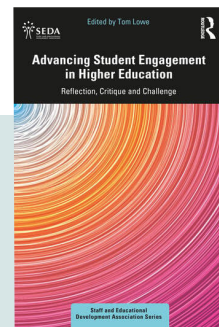
Edited by Tom Lowe

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Student engagement has been a major theme in the development of higher education for many years. There is now considerable experience of working with its ideas and values, and it is widely accepted in the sector.

This book is focused on a critical approach to many aspects of student engagement, written by practitioners who have reflected on and analysed their experience. Its purpose is to challenge and strengthen the theories and practices

around student engagement. It is an ideal companion to *A Handbook for Student Engagement in Higher Education: Theory into Practice* by Tom Lowe and Yassein El Hakim, published by Routledge in the SEDA Series in 2020.

SEDA News

SEDA's Roll of Honour

SEDA's 2023 AGM confirmed the appointment of four SEDA members to the Roll of Honour. They are:



Ruth Brown



Virna Rossi



Claire Taylor



Peter Hartley

The Roll of Honour is for individuals who have made an exceptional contribution to the work of SEDA, or to staff and educational development generally.

The citations are available at: <https://tinyurl.com/3zmpbb4a>

The Student Partnership Impact Award

SEDA and JISC together have created an award for students who can show that their engagement with educational development activity has made an impact on their institutions. It is an international award. It is 'for students and for student teams (including graduates up to five years) who have gone above and beyond their standard institutional role, and have had identifiable impact or influence within their course, department or university'.

The deadline for submissions is **23 August 2023** and there is some really helpful guidance on the Award's web page at: <https://tinyurl.com/5n8bkjhb>.

A date for your diary

The International Consortium for Educational Development (ICED) will be holding its next international conference from the 5th to the 7th June 2024 in Nairobi, Kenya, with pre-conference workshops on the 4th and sessions

on writing for the *International Journal of Academic Development (IJAD)* on the 3rd. The conference will be hosted by Kenya's Association for Faculty Enrichment in Learning and Teaching (AFELT), with Mary Kiguru as the convener.

