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Editorial Preface

The annual Teaching and Learning Conference at London Metropolitan University has long stood as a cornerstone of our institutional calendar for 22 years, a vibrant celebration of pedagogical innovation, critical reflection, and collaborative practice. This year's conference marked a significant evolution, not only in its thematic scope but also in its organisational structure. A newly appointed chair and an expanded committee membership brought fresh perspectives and a renewed commitment to inclusivity, ensuring that the breadth of teaching and learning practices across the university were more accurately represented and celebrated.

The 2025 conference was framed around four interrelated themes: *Revolution and Evolution*, *Innovations in Blended Learning*, *Closing Differential Gaps*, and *Collaboration In and Beyond the Classroom*. These themes were chosen to reflect both the challenges and opportunities facing contemporary higher education, and to encourage participants to interrogate their own practices in light of emerging pedagogical paradigms. Notably, this year saw a marked increase in student participation, not only as attendees but as active contributors. Through intentional developmental support and encouragement, students presented as individuals, in groups, and in staff-student collaborations, enriching the conference with their lived experiences and critical insights.

In alignment with this spirit of inclusion and innovation, we are delighted to introduce a new conference proceedings edition within the *Investigations* journal. This special issue not only features abstracts from a diverse array of presentations but also includes reflective commentaries from authors, offering deeper insights into their pedagogical journeys and research findings. These reflections serve as a valuable resource for educators and researchers alike, expanding our collective understanding and prompting further inquiry. Under the theme *Revolution and Evolution*, Bernard Aidoo and his team exemplify the transformative potential of student partnerships. Their work explores how academic mentorship can support students navigating the ethical and practical dimensions of AI use, advancing the discourse on responsible technology integration in education. Jo Jenkins contributes a nuanced examination of grade descriptors, tracing their evolution and offering pragmatic guidance for those involved in assessment design and reform. Her article does not shy away from the complexities inherent in this area, instead embracing them to propose actionable solutions. Manorama Koirala's exploration of mindfulness practices adds a critical lens to the conversation, urging educators to reconsider how such practices are operationalised, particularly within

Western contexts, and advocating for culturally responsive approaches. Zyba Varmazyari's compelling critique of Iran's Konkur university entrance exam calls for urgent reform, highlighting the inequities embedded in current systems and proposing pathways toward a more just and inclusive model.

The theme *Innovations in Blended Learning* brought forward several pioneering projects. Timos Almpanis and his team presented their Weblearn Transformation Project, a key area of work under the university's Student Success Strategy, which seeks to elevate blended learning experiences through strategic enhancements to virtual learning environments. Their work underscores the importance of intentional design in fostering engagement and accessibility. Marian Hepburn introduced the concept of "vibe design," a pedagogical approach that positions AI as a collaborator rather than a tool. Her presentation challenges educators to rethink the division of labour between humans and machines, advocating for a model in which human creativity and empathy complement AI's analytical capabilities.

In the domain of *Closing Differential Gaps*, student voices took centre stage. Tammika Chambers and Latanya Malone offered a powerful critique of the disjunction between policy and practice, calling for justice to be embedded in the everyday fabric of educational experiences rather than confined to institutional rhetoric. Skye William Eade's presentation on reframing dyslexia through a strengths-based model provided a tangible example of inclusive pedagogy in action. Ngozi Onuegbu's work on the Reflective Practice Curriculum demonstrated significant quantitative improvements in student outcomes, presenting a scalable model for curriculum innovation. Prabhjot's contribution expanded the conversation to include the Education for Social Justice Framework, reflecting on the potential and limitations of student co-design as a sustainable pedagogical practice. James Hunting and his team rounded out this theme with a dynamic workshop that empowered colleagues to use language intentionally in support of social justice aims, blending creativity with criticality.

The final theme, *Collaboration In and Beyond the Classroom*, showcased the diverse ways in which educators and students are working together to co-create meaningful learning experiences. Mabel Encinas and Rebecca Warren drew on creative pedagogies to advocate for the use of poetry as a medium for student expression and learning. Katherine Fisher's work exemplified authentic collaboration, with students actively engaged as co-authors and co-researchers. Sarah Longbottom and Gill Veschini extended the conversation beyond the classroom walls, presenting innovative engagement strategies that have already yielded impressive results in their pilot year, a testament to the dedication of

both academic and professional services staff. In a continuation of this collaborative ethos, Sarah Longbottom partnered with Ronke Shoderu to explore institutional strategies for improving student continuation rates, demonstrating how cross-departmental collaboration can directly impact key metrics and student success.

Taken together, the contributions in this special issue reflect the core values of London Metropolitan University: inclusivity, innovation, and a commitment to social justice. They also serve as a reminder that teaching and learning are dynamic, relational processes, ones that benefit from ongoing dialogue, critical reflection, and a willingness to embrace change. We hope that readers of this edition will find inspiration, challenge, and practical insight within its pages, and that it will serve as a catalyst for further exploration and collaboration across the sector.

The Editorial Team

“The Pressure’s on but we love it!”: Evaluating an assignment support programme on students AI literacy & Self-Efficacy within deadline pressure contexts.

Bernard Aidoo, Noemi Hrvatin and Kalen Spatcher

Keywords: AI Literacy, Self Efficacy , Academic Mentors, Co-creation

Abstract

Artificial intelligence’s (AI) rapid rise in higher education (HE) has introduced new opportunities and ethical challenges for teaching & learning, and even how students can be supported in their learning journey (Bond et al, 2024, Williams et al 2024). While AI is a relatively new topic within the sector, there are other common challenges that students continue to experience. These include; high levels of stress, low motivation, and self-doubt during assignment periods (Chemagosi, 2024). Academic Mentors thus, are in a unique position not only to support students during this crucial time but to also help students engage and utilise AI in more effective and ethical ways.

Using a student partnership approach, combined with Positive Psychology frameworks , study skill tools & AI guidelines, Psychology Academic Mentors & Final year student co-created, implemented and evaluated a pilot programme for Psychology undergraduate students consisting of 3 workshops (Boniwell & Tunariu, 2019, Cottrell, 2024). These explored how AI, Strength based study skills & Academic Mentoring can form a beneficial triangulation, reducing students’ assignment stress and cultivate strategies that aid in attainment within high stakes assignment periods. Moreover, this programme remained true to the ESJ tenets of Identity, personality, reflection and inclusive learning to improve broader academic outcomes.

From the feedback gathered in the sessions, students appreciated gaining confidence to tackle real assignment challenges. Having a new awareness of how AI and how their mindset towards it could impact their learning. Moreover, they welcomed the safe, non-judgemental space to experiment and reflect, whilst being shown how to adopt study strategies, positive psychology interventions and ethical AI usage tips in a scaffolded way. Finally, our presence mattered; the facilitation style influenced students’ motivation and trust.

Moving forward we aim to include quantitative measures such as Academic self-efficacy & resilience, perceived stress, metacognition, submission rates (pre/post programme). Expand the pilot across faculties and student groups and explore the long-term impact of the programme via a longitudinal, mixed-methods design.

Nevertheless, this programme has implications on how learning developers and educators can support students in responding to generative AI as an opportunity for academic development and employability skills gains rather than a cautionary threat.

Reflective Commentary

Delivering our presentation to colleagues was an informative experience. Our presentation followed on from a session that also spoke about Generative AI. This highlighted the priority educators are placing on how to best respond to this ever-changing technological tool and the way it is currently changing how learning is approached.

The session was met with intrigue as we were discussing pedagogical practices and tools that directly affect students' attitudes and motivational processes which continually being influenced by AI within pressurized contexts.

The intrigue from colleagues also reinforced the need for us to strategically strengthen students' academic literacies such as critical thinking and metacognition in order to utilise AI effectively and ethically.

One attendee asked how our sessions could be adopted in seminars. This was something we didn't consider, which emphasises a deeper consideration of how well academic mentors/learning developers are positioned within the curricula, and the need for continual dialogue between teaching staff and academic mentors of being further integrated in courses and our practice being viewed from a strength based framework and moving away from the deficit-based framework.

Whilst our intervention requires further development the opportunities available for such an intervention to be implemented is indeed promising. It especially highlights the need for more co-created programmes that will help students reap the most benefit in their learning journey.

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Biographical note

Bernard is an Academic Mentor for Psychology. His background is in Teaching and Learning and Positive psychology- the science of strengths and thriving. He has an interest in exploring the intersection between the two to improve student outcomes. He is passionate about developing happy and successful students.

Noemi is a Psychology Academic Mentor at London Metropolitan University. She supports students with assessments, feedback, and Academic literacies. Passionate about learning, she is pursuing a postgraduate degree in Teaching and Learning. Noemi also holds a degree in Social Research Methods and is dedicated to empowering students through education.

AI declaration

We declare AI was not used in the formulation or editing of the article.

Creating School-wide Grading Descriptors

Jo Jenkins

Keywords: Grading descriptors, assessment criteria, AI, student voice

Abstract

Grading descriptors in higher education are essential tools that provide clear criteria for assessing student performance. They offer detailed descriptions of the standards expected for each grade, ensuring consistency, equity and transparency in evaluation (Grainger, Purnell and Zipf, 2008). This approach moves away from norm-referenced assessment, where students are compared to each other, towards criterion-referenced assessment, focusing on the quality of work and alignment with the intended learning outcomes of the assessment. Research by Sadler (2005) highlights the importance of these descriptors in enhancing the reliability and validity of assessments. It is also essential for providing students with clear feedback on how they can improve their work to achieve higher grades. Grading descriptors can be broad (at institutional level) or narrow (at assessment level) or somewhere in between. Most HEI's in the UK have institutional level descriptors which are readily available on their websites. London Met does not presently have these. The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) provides descriptors by level but does not specify what is expected for the grade classifications within each level, except for L6 where detailed descriptors are provided for a fail, 3rd class, 2:2, 2:1 and 1st class honours degree (The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2024). These descriptors outline what is expected at the exit level only and is broad to the qualifications at each level. In 2021, the Southern England Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer (SEEC) (2021) provided more focused descriptions, aligned with the FHEQ, detailing characteristics and context of learning at each level. They can be used to help develop learning outcomes, setting standards and expectations, informing curriculum design and importantly guiding assessment criteria. The aim of this work was to use the FHEQ and SEEC guidelines, to create a broad set of grading descriptors which could be used as a basis for the development of local subject or assessment descriptors. This work also experimented with the use of AI, along with the student voice, in creating a useful and robust set of descriptors.

Reflective Commentary

Creating this presentation highlighted the complexities involved in developing grading descriptors. To draw from reputable, appropriate sources I was required to extract not only specific language but also to blend different sources and consider all the different lenses that are used in the HE sector. This led to quite generic descriptors which was one of the comments I received from the audience. It is true that these are purposefully generic to be applicable across different subject areas and assessment types. The audience were receptive to this idea and some members were excited and challenged by the prospect of adapting these descriptors for subject-specific use. I also explained that I hope to create a repository of assessment descriptors within the School of Human Sciences for different types of assessments (e.g. presentations, lab reports, case studies) to share good practice and enable consistency. The discussions and questions confirmed my belief that these are essential tools to ensure parity and that standards are upheld. It was useful to know of some of the potential issues with using grading descriptors on Weblearn, which encouraged me to experiment with possible solutions and has enabled further discussions with Centre for Teaching Enhancement and the development of a Community of Practice for wider conversations.

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Biographical note

Jo Jenkins is presently Head of Student Experience and Academic Outcomes for the School of Human Sciences. She is a University Teaching Fellow and Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. Her background includes lecturing on BSc and MSc Sports courses, with a particular interest in delivering Professional, Core and Transferable skills for Sports students. Jo has been extensively involved in course developments within Health Sciences and supports colleagues across the School to

improve their courses. She has also chaired course validations across the University, as well as contributing to TNE reviews and international partnerships.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the students and academic staff within the School of Human Sciences who contributed to the development of the grading descriptors. Your feedback was essential and I appreciate you giving up your time for this cause.

AI declaration

Chat GPT and Deep Seek were used to develop the grading descriptors by asking these LLMs to adapt descriptors for other levels (which were then amended). This was discussed within the presentation. The author takes full responsibility for the final content of the publication.

A Meta-Analytic Perspective on the impact of MBI's (Mindfulness Based Interventions) in Depression Treatment

Manorama Koirala

Keywords: Mindfulness, Depression Treatment, Meta Analysis, Cultural Adaptation

Abstract

Depression, affecting over 280 million people globally, is a leading cause of disability and suicide, with more than 700,000 deaths annually. Certain groups, including older adults and postpartum women are at elevated risk, with depression prevalence estimated at 13–20% among new mothers and up to 25% among older adults. These disparities highlight the urgent and effective need for accessible, sustainable, and culturally sensitive interventions. Mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs), including Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), have emerged as promising, non-pharmacological approaches, in alleviating depressive symptoms and preventing relapse by promoting emotional regulation and cognitive flexibility.

First developed by Teasdale et al. (2000), MBCT integrates cognitive therapy with mindfulness training to prevent depressive relapse by enhancing metacognitive awareness and emotional regulation.

Building on randomized controlled trials, neuroimaging studies, and meta-analyses, the presentation demonstrates that MBIs offer moderate but meaningful improvements in emotional regulation, reduced rumination, and relapse prevention, particularly in individuals with three or more depressive episodes. Neuroimaging findings (e.g., Hölzel et al., 2011) link mindfulness practice to increased grey matter in brain regions associated with emotion regulation and self-awareness. Comparative trials further suggest MBCT is as effective as maintenance antidepressants, offering a viable non-pharmacological treatment pathway.

MBIs also show promise for vulnerable populations. MBSR has been found to significantly reduce depressive symptoms in older adults, and MBCT-PD has reduced relapse risk in postpartum women while being well-accepted by

participants. Despite these encouraging findings, the field faces notable limitations: short follow-up durations, sample homogeneity, underrepresentation of minority groups, and inconsistencies in intervention delivery.

Critics further question the theoretical and ethical dilution of mindfulness in Western clinical settings. This presentation argues for a reinvigorated research agenda prioritizing rigorous methodologies, diverse populations, and culturally grounded practices. While not a universal remedy, MBIs represent a hopeful, patient-centred complement to traditional therapies in the ongoing fight against depression: one that demands continued, targeted inquiry amid an escalating global mental health crisis.

Reflective Commentary

Delivering this presentation significantly deepened my understanding of the nuanced landscape of Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs) in depression treatment. While I was already familiar with their core mechanisms, the process of curating and critically appraising studies especially those involving vulnerable populations such as postpartum women and older adults highlighted both the promise and the limitations of MBIs. What surprised me most was the fragmented nature of existing research, particularly the scarcity of robust, culturally attuned studies and the lack of consistency in intervention delivery across trials.

The presentation also challenged me to reconsider how “mindfulness” is often operationalized in Western contexts, raising critical ethical and theoretical questions. This compelled me to think more deeply about how cultural appropriation and decontextualization might affect therapeutic outcomes and participant engagement.

Although the presentation was delivered online without a live question session, the preparation process itself prompted deep reflection. Synthesizing studies across different populations and delivery formats led me to recognize the importance of contextual relevance and fidelity in implementation. This experience has shaped my thinking about future research priorities, particularly the need for culturally grounded, long-term studies that can inform sustainable and inclusive mental health interventions.

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Biographical note

Manorama Koirala is a postgraduate student currently pursuing an MSc in Psychology of Mental Health at London Metropolitan University. With experience in clinical support work and academic research, her interests center on evidence-based mental health interventions, mindfulness-based therapies, therapeutic relationships, and cross-cultural perspectives on care. Her recent work focuses on online therapeutic alliance and how cultural context influences clients' experiences in digital therapy.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Verity Di Mascio for her guidance and for recommending my presentation to the Learning and Teaching Centre, recognizing its contribution to the field.

AI declaration

AI tools, specifically ChatGPT by OpenAI, were used during the preparation of this work to refine language and improve written components. The author takes full responsibility for the final content of the publication.

A Critical Analysis of the Iranian University Entrance Exam Policy (Konkur): Curriculum, Power, and Educational Justice

Zyba Varmazyari

Keywords: Konkur, curriculum theory, educational inequality, student well-being

Abstract

The Iranian university entrance exam, Konkur, has been a defining feature of the national education system since the 1960s. Initially designed to manage rising university demand, it became increasingly ideological after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. This single-day, high-stakes exam determines access to higher education and strongly shapes students' social, economic, and psychological futures. While promoted as meritocratic, the Konkur reinforces inequality, prioritizes test preparation over holistic learning, and serves political privilege (Abbasi et al, 2023)

One of the most alarming consequences of the Konkur is its severe impact on student mental health. Years of intensive preparation expose students to extreme stress, anxiety, and depression, with tragic cases of suicide reported even among high-achieving students. The pressure to succeed is amplified by family and societal expectations, turning education into a source of psychological crisis rather than personal growth.

From a theoretical perspective, the Konkur aligns with A.V. Kelly's (2009) objectives model of curriculum, emphasizing clarity and accountability but reducing learning to testable skills. The system sidelines creativity, critical thinking, and emotional development, while structural inequalities favor urban, affluent students with access to private tutoring. Quota systems, initially intended for equity, often advantage politically connected families, undermining fairness.

International comparisons with Finland, Canada, and the UK show alternatives: continuous, student-centred, and process-based assessment supports well-being, equity, and holistic development. Reforming the Konkur is urgent: reducing its weight in university admissions, adopting process-based curricula, empowering teachers, and embedding mental health support are essential.

Iranian education must move from producing compliant test-takers to nurturing whole persons, fostering creativity, resilience, and active citizenship.

Reflective Commentary

Preparing and delivering the presentation on the Iranian university entrance exam (Konkur) significantly deepened my understanding of the systemic pressures within education. While I was aware of the high-stakes nature of the exam, exploring it through A.V. Kelly's objectives model clarified how the design of curriculum and assessment directly impacts student mental health. The discussion highlighted the profound stress, anxiety, and depression students experience, and the tragic cases of suicide underscored the urgency of addressing these issues in curriculum planning.

The process of presenting challenged my initial belief that educational reform could focus solely on pedagogy and assessment. I realised that well-being must be central to any meaningful reform, as neglecting mental health risks undermining the very purpose of education. Comparing the Iranian system with international examples, such as Finland, Canada, and the UK, helped me appreciate the value of continuous, student-centred assessment in promoting both equity and holistic learning.

The questions and feedback I received encouraged me to reflect on the broader ethical responsibilities of educators and policymakers. I now see that curriculum design is not merely technical but deeply moral: it shapes not only knowledge acquisition but also emotional resilience, autonomy, and democratic engagement. Overall, the presentation strengthened my conviction that education should nurture the whole person, prioritising mental health, creativity, and personal growth alongside academic achievement.

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Biographical note

Zyba Varmazyari is a postgraduate student in Education at London Metropolitan University and a teacher of Persian language and GCSE-level courses. With prior experience as a journalist and educator in both Iranian and international contexts, their research interests include curriculum theory, educational equity, and bilingual learning.

AI declaration

In the preparation of this article, AI tools, specifically OpenAI's GPT-5, were used for translating text from Persian to English as well as improving language and structuring the content. The author takes full responsibility for the accuracy, validity, and final content of the article, and all analyses and conclusions are their own work.

Transforming student engagement through Weblearn

Timos Almpanis, Vic De Jean, Sandra Heidecker, Paolo Oprandi and Fahmida Yesmin

Keywords: Weblearn, student engagement, blended learning

Abstract

The Transforming Weblearn Engagement is a project within the Learning Environment strand of the Student Success –Strategy 2024. This initiative is designed to deliver inclusive module templates and pages, ensuring that all students have access to high-quality blended learning experiences. The change programme aims to maximise London Metropolitan University's use of Weblearn by seamlessly integrating in-class activities with online activities, thereby creating a cohesive and inclusive student experience.

The project focuses on the design of blended learning activities incorporating the ABC learning types (Laurillard 2012; ABC Learning design, no date): acquisition, inquiry, discussion, practice, collaboration, and production, by enhancing the use of Weblearn's module templates making access to module information, weekly learning outcomes, learning materials, activities and assessment tasks easily accessible and engaging for students.

This presentation will discuss the Weblearn transformation and engagement project, its aims and pedagogic principles and will showcase the new Weblearn module template, highlighting how it has been designed to foster an inclusive and engaging learning environment. Attendees will be provided with example resources and activities that have been developed using the new template layout. These examples will illustrate how the integration of in-class and online activities can enhance student engagement and learning outcomes.

Furthermore, the presentation will discuss the practical implications of the project, including the challenges faced and the solutions implemented to overcome them. By sharing these insights, the presentation aims to inspire other colleagues to adopt similar strategies to enhance their own Weblearn modules.

Reflective Commentary

The presentation was well received by colleagues who were keen to find out more about the Weblearn transformation and engagement project, as this is a project with a significant anticipated impact on the student experience. Colleagues were keen to find out more about what has been achieved as part of the project so far and the future plans related to the new Weblearn templates that will enhance the student experience through blended learning.

One of the highlights of the presentation was the inclusion of quotes from students who piloted the new template and the contribution of the Vice President of Education from the Student Union who discussed the students' perspective on the use of Weblearn.

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Biographical note

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Fahmida Yesmin is the Vice president of Education in the Students' Union

AI declaration

No AI tools were used during the preparation of the work. The authors take full responsibility for the final content of the publication.

The Potential for “Vibe Design” in Digital Media Andragogy

Marian Hepburn

Keywords: “vibe design” “digital media andragogy” “generative artificial intelligence”

Abstract

Generative Artificial Intelligence is being touted as the Fourth Industrial Revolution, holding the promise of democratising creativity and ultimately, creating a postwork future (Bastani, 2019). Generative artificial intelligence (genAI) will potentially have a significant impact on digital media degrees in the UK higher education sector at all levels, therefore. Digital media degrees – whether they are categorised in relation to either science or arts – tend to include some practical design elements in the creation of digital artefacts, combined with a deeper mastery of theoretical and methodological issues for the digital media field. The complexity of the digital media degree is enhanced by how wide the digital media field is – thus, individual modules on a degree cover a range of subfields, such as graphic design, animation, web & app design. The research question here reworks the authors doctoral dissertation research question to ask, “what is the potential for genAI for digital media design higher education?” (Hepburn, 2012). The potential for digital media andragogy (in terms of designing, learning, teaching and assessment) is fraught with various complex issues in relation to genAI, such as the “algorithmic experience” (Shin et al., 2020) which students are exposed to from student/genAI collaborations. Students creating digital artefacts for assessment with genAI also gives rise to critical concerns; for example, how student/ genAI assessment submissions might all “look the same” (The Citizens, 2025).

These complex issues for digital media degrees become even more overwhelming due to the plethora of genAI tools to which students now have access to. Questions remain for students on *how* to create digital artefacts with GenAI, as well as *how* to ensure a critical lens within which to innovate with new genAI forms. Inroads into answering the above research question, show how using the term “Vibe Design” from industry could help gain clarity on themes arising for digital media andragogy and genAI. Vibe design is (*rather optimistically!*) defined as “leveraging AI to handle the detailed execution of

designing artefacts(sic) so that humans can focus on the creative and empathetic aspects” (Nielsen, 2025). Vibe Design can give a clear framework for understanding and exploring further the scenarios, challenges and opportunities for GenAI in digital media andragogy – see how the concept of vibe design has been applied in the construction industry – asserted as a democratising force (Ghosh, 2025, unpublished). Conceptual developments on vibe design show how it provides a useful lens with which to investigate the potential for genAI for digital media higher education. The research outcomes of investigating the potential “vibe design” in digital media andragogic practice are at this stage outlined through scenarios, challenges and opportunities – for example, the opportunity for students to hone prompt engineering as a skill in vibe design is as vital as it is to vibe coding (Neilsen, 2025). Future directions for this research highlight the importance of a critical practice- based approach in scaffolding students in the ethical use of genAI tools for vibe designing (Hepburn, 2025).

Reflective Commentary

Initially, the presentation title was hyperbolically, “To Kill the Vibe or Not to Kill the Vibe”, alluding very loosely to the famous Shakespeare quotation “to be or not to be”; the sentiment of the paraphrased quotation attached to some very real concerns on whether students who do not want to use genAI in their studies could potentially be at a disadvantage in terms of their grades – see the term “AI Vegans” in The Conversation article (Joyner, 2025). The conference title was shortened because of more important fundamental questions on teaching and learning with genAI. Presentation of the concept of vibe designing for digital media degrees provided valuable understanding of genAI across the different types of learning, which can be categorised as either pedagogy, andragogy or heutagogy.

Conference consultation with peers enabled discussions on how, for example, different scenarios arise for the application of vibe designing in the lectures and workshops at master’s level compared with first year undergraduates. Thus, attendance at this conference allowed for the development of an original conceptual model for this new area (similar to Ghosh, 2025) and some ideas on how to apply this to scenarios, challenges and opportunities for teaching and learning (Hepburn, 2012). The concept of vibe design with genAI is so new as a professional practice, the conference presentation of this work also allowed for clearer conceptual structuring of different learning outcomes with vibe designing according to the different types of learning.

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Biographical note

Dr Marian Hepburn’s current research interests are on somaesthetic interaction design, critical design research, emotional and aesthetic factors in learning environments, social media, HCI and multimodal interaction, methodologies for new media and new technologies research.

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgement to Cinar Aydoğan for interesting discussions on the distinction between vibe coding and vibe design.

AI declaration

Writing is such a joy (and privilege) – it has taken a number of years to feel confident in finding a voice, it wouldn't be something I would want to pass to genAI yet. Therefore, no AI was used in the content creation of this abstract, however, ChatGPT was used to quickly format the references found by myself through Google Scholar and other sources for my conference presentation. There are plans once this is published to introduce the original concepts to genAI. This is a critical and conscious decision to peer-review terms and scenarios first, and then to introduce the concept to various genAI - such as CoPilot and ChatGPT. These will be used later once a clearer definition and conceptual model has been published.

The author takes full responsibility for the final content of the publication.

Beyond Compliance to Genuine Inclusion

Tammika Chambers and Latanya Malone

Keywords: Educational equity, Differential Gap, Social Justice Education, Learned helplessness.

Abstract

Attainment gaps and a lack of authentic representation persist across all levels of education, from early years to higher education, undermining equity and limiting student potential. While equality policies such as the Equality Act 2010 provide essential legal protections, their impact is constrained by the exemption of curriculum content from equality duties. This enables institutions to meet compliance requirements without addressing the deeper systemic inequities that shape what and how students learn. This presentation critically examines how equality policies can move beyond compliance to genuinely foster inclusion. It argues that true educational equality must be embedded in the core aspects of curriculum design, pedagogy, and assessment practices.

Drawing on the Social Justice Education Framework (SJEF), curriculum theory, critical pedagogy, and educational leadership literature, it explores how policies aligned with legal frameworks can still fail to ensure equitable representation or inclusivity in daily teaching. It advocates for critical pedagogical approaches that empower marginalised learners, challenge oppression, and promote collective transformation, alongside assessment methods that reflect diverse abilities and backgrounds. Practical examples, including initiatives under the SJEF, demonstrate how embedding student voice, fostering belonging, creating networking opportunities, and prioritising wellbeing can lead to more inclusive and successful learning environments. Achieving this requires committed and strategically minded leadership that actively dismantles systemic barriers and embeds equity as a core institutional value, rather than a peripheral goal (Apple, 2019; Ball, 2003; Gillborn, 2008). The presentation concludes that equity must be institutionalised as a sustained and measurable practice, not treated as an aspirational policy. Meaningful change requires embedding belonging, representation, and inclusive practice into the daily culture of all educational settings to ensure all learners, particularly those from underserved or disadvantaged backgrounds, are supported to thrive.

Reflective Commentary

This presentation, allowed us to interrogate both the systemic and personal dimensions of educational inequity. In presenting, we deepened our understanding of the shortcomings within curriculum design, the persistent neglect of diverse learning needs, and the absence of relevant training for staff. The process also prompted personal reflection: on our own learning journeys, how we perceived our abilities compared to our peers, and how those experiences sometimes aligned with the dynamics of learned helplessness, where repeated marginalisation fosters disengagement and self-doubt.

The experience did not change our core beliefs, but it sharpened them. While we have long argued for curriculum reform and greater representation, preparing and delivering the presentation made clearer the necessity of equipping educators with the cultural competence, pedagogical flexibility, and relational skills needed to embed equity in daily practice. Without this, even progressive policies risk remaining symbolic rather than transformative.

A significant insight came from the question and answer when an observer asked how these changes could be implemented. We highlighted London Metropolitan University's Education for Social Justice Framework, which integrates student voice into curriculum design, builds networking opportunities, supports wellbeing, and creates events that connect communities of practice. These initiatives illustrate that systemic reform is most effective when structural change is paired with a culture of belonging.

Ultimately, the presentation reinforced our conviction that belonging is a right, not a reward, and that justice in education must be lived through everyday practice as much as enshrined in policy.

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Biographical note

Tammika Chambers is an educationalist with experience as a Teaching Assistant, Vice President Education Officer, and currently works as a Caseworker in higher education. She holds a BA in Education and is completing her MA in Education.

Latanya George Malone has a background as a Childcare Worker, Youth Worker Manager, and is currently studying Psychology. Together, they draw on professional practice and lived experience to advocate for equity, belonging, and social justice across all levels of education.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all staff at London Metropolitan University for creating inclusive environments for students, for providing consistent support, and for believing in the potential of every learner.

AI declaration

AI tools, specifically ChatGPT by OpenAI, were used during the preparation of this work to refine language and improve written components. The author takes full responsibility for the final content of the publication.

Encouraging Practices in Learning Development: A Focus on Dyslexic Artists

Skye William Eade

Keywords: Dyslexic Sublime, creativity, practice-based research

Abstract

Prior to commencing PG Cert course, I completed four years of a PhD in Art. This practice-based research explored, from an insider positionality, how dyslexic artists such as myself, navigate their often-lived experience of disempowerment and marginalisation through the lens of the Sublime in art theory. By examining the intersection of dyslexia, creativity and the Sublime, I found valuable insights into the unique artistic practices and experiences of dyslexic individuals often brought about in relation to their early experiences in education.

The research employs mixed methodology, triangulated by incorporating workshops, exemplary art works and interviews with dyslexic artists and experts in the field to look further into the lived experiences of dyslexic artists art-making processes. This approach is complemented by my own art making and insider positionality, documented through video diaries and transparency of reflexive practice.

One of the key developments of this research is of my central finding, the Dyslexic Sublime. I define this as; the active utilisation of dyslexic perspectives to explore transcendence in the art making process. This concept highlights strengths such as visual and divergent thinking (Griggs, 2021; Eide, 2023) and how we transcend the often-traumatic classroom experiences through art. This is what Passe (2016) refers to as post traumatic growth.

The interdisciplinary nature of this study and in relation to impact offers practical implications. For example, in psychology and education as therapeutic interventions, promoting an inclusive approach that empowers dyslexic individuals to leverage their unique strengths. Often these individuals are too odd or othered for mainstream but not disabled enough so remain invisible in neurodivergent communities. By fostering a broader dialogue on creativity and

neurodiversity, my work encourages the practices of eliciting, representing and promoting students' interpretations of their learning experiences, ultimately contributing to learning development practice and research within HE.

Reflective Commentary

This presentation on the Dyslexic Sublime was another valuable opportunity to communicate my central finding and consider how I can make complex ideas more accessible. In particular, the question and answer highlighted the need to provide a clearer, layperson-friendly explanation on such concepts as *the Sublime* and *intersectionality*. Although I had introduced these areas briefly, these questions promoted me to be aware of the complexity of the field of the Sublime and how this can be a barrier to understanding without concrete examples.

The audience engagement on intersectionality was also of particular interest. This drew attention on how socio-economic status (SES) as well as ethnicity, to give two examples, might intersect with dyslexia causing additional barriers, particularly in education. For example, access to assistive technology, can be transformative for the dyslexic learner, however, these resources are not always available to all. This factor highlights the importance in the awareness of such inequalities shaping individual experience and that of positioning my research within a wider social context.

Overall, the presentation strengthened my commitment to reframing dyslexia from that of a deficit model to strengths based. The presentation challenged me to refine my explanations so this work can resonate to both academic and non-specialist audiences. These insights shape, how in the future, I communicate and disseminate my research.

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Biographical note

Skye William Eade is a London-based artist, educator and researcher. His work explores intersections of dyslexia, creativity, and the Sublime. Currently completing a PhD at London Metropolitan University: School of Art, Architecture & Design, Skye's practice-based research introduces the concept of the *Dyslexic Sublime*, reframing

dyslexia through a strengths-based lens. Alongside his doctoral work, Skye is undertaking the PG Certificate Higher Education, incorporating active teaching practice with neurodivergent artists in the field of art. Drawing on his own lived experience as a dyslexic artist, Skye contributes to informing inclusive pedagogical approaches. His interdisciplinary research integrates visual art, philosophy grounding and advocacy to advance understanding of dyslexia within education and the arts.

Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge my PG Certificate in Higher Education tutors, John Desire, Janet Gordon and Sandra Sinfield and to my PhD supervisory team, Dr Johanna Hällsten and Dr Jacek Ludwig Scarso, for their unwavering guidance, encouragement and support.

AI declaration

Some sentences in this document have been restructured with the assistance of artificial intelligence (AI) to improve clarity, flow, and readability, while ensuring that the meaning and intent remain intact.

Enhancing Student Agency and Placement Success through Reflective Practice: A Curriculum Innovation at LMET

Ngozi Onuegbu

Keywords: Reflective practice; Student agency; Curriculum innovation

Abstract

This study reports on the development and implementation of a structured Reflective Practice Curriculum to support physiotherapy students undertaking longitudinal placements at London Metropolitan University (LMET). The curriculum was designed to enhance clinical reasoning, student agency, and placement readiness, while addressing challenges related to widening participation and differential outcomes.

Grounded in experiential learning theory, dialogic pedagogy, and social constructivism, the curriculum incorporated themed debrief sessions aligned with the Common Placement Assessment Form (CPAF) (Chartered Society of Physiotherapy, CSP, 2019; 2020). Students participated in peer-to-peer learning activities that fostered collaborative discussion, critical thinking, and engagement with feedback. Reflective tasks were scaffolded to promote metacognitive development, confidence, and clinical skills.

Evaluation demonstrated positive outcomes: debrief session attendance increased from 23% pre-intervention to 68% in the first year and 76% in the second year, with attendance rising from 40% to 92% across a teaching term. Student engagement with placement feedback processes also improved, and qualitative feedback highlighted enhanced preparedness for clinical placements.

The initiative aligns with LMET's Education for Social Justice Framework (ESJF) (2021) by providing an inclusive, dialogic space for students to critically engage with learning experiences. Findings suggest that structured reflective pedagogy can support placement success and contribute to reducing differential outcomes. Recommendations are offered for adapting and scaling this approach across allied health and other disciplines where placement learning is integral to the curriculum.

Reflective Commentary

Delivering the presentation, and more importantly the process of preparing for it, gave me a much deeper understanding of the project than I initially anticipated. While reporting my findings and connecting them to university-wide goals such as student success and PowerBI metrics, I developed a new appreciation for the significance of the work that had gone into developing the curriculum, particularly in light of the positive outcomes achieved. The feedback I received during (MSTeams emoji reactions) and after the presentation further reinforced this sense of value and offered both affirmation and a confidence boost to continue refining the curriculum.

Engaging with the underpinning pedagogical theories also challenged me to think more critically about my practice. Situating my work within frameworks such as dialogic pedagogy encouraged me to reflect on how I was applying these concepts in a practical setting. For example, Alexander's dialogic teaching (2008; 2020) shaped my approach to designing debrief sessions around open, exploratory questioning rather than relying on didactic methods. This experience highlighted how meaning can be co-constructed through dialogue and how peer reflections can be enriched by multiple perspectives.

A particularly valuable insight emerged during the question-and-answer session, when a colleague suggested leveraging vertical tutoring opportunities, inviting students who have already undertaken placements to share their experiences with those about to begin. This recommendation offered a new perspective on how to further strengthen placement readiness, and I am considering how such an approach could be integrated into the curriculum as an additional layer of support.

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Biographical Note

Dr. Ngozi Onuegbu is a Senior Lecturer, Practice Education Lead, and MSc Physiotherapy Course Lead at London Metropolitan University. Her academic interests focus on neuromotor development, physiotherapy clinical education, and curriculum design. She has contributed significantly to student learning through the development of curricula in Reflective Practice and Clinical Simulation, designed to support placement preparation in core physiotherapy specialties. Dr. Onuegbu has collaborated with colleagues, stakeholders, and London-based providers to expand placement opportunities and actively supports practice educators through workshops and strategic collaborative initiatives. She is deeply committed to widening participation and fostering inclusive approaches to student learning.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the contributions of Professor Isaac Sorinola as well as Victoria Mcloughlin for their expert review of the curriculum.

AI Declaration

ChatGPT (OpenAI) was used to summarize the initial notes, generating an outline for the presentation, which was eventually modified by the author, and also for refinement of proposal text and abstract, to improve language clarity and flow. The author takes full responsibility for the accuracy, interpretation, and final content of this publication.

Promoting Educational Equity: Closing Differential Gaps through the Education for Social Justice Framework (ESJF) at London Metropolitan University

Prabhjot

Keywords: Education for Social Justice Framework; Inclusive Pedagogy; Student Co-creation; Degree Awarding Gap

Abstract

London Metropolitan University has a longstanding commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion. However, disparities in student outcomes between White and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups remain (Office for Students, 2022). To address these issues, the Education for Social Justice Framework (ESJF) was collaboratively developed by staff, students, and the Students' Union to close continuation and degree-awarding gaps, support an inclusive curriculum, and encourage pedagogical practices involving students as co-creators of knowledge (London Metropolitan University, 2025a). Based on observations as an international MA Education student, traditional essay-based assessments without sufficient scaffolding were associated with anxiety, disengagement, and lower marks among students from diverse educational backgrounds (Yale University, 2010). In response, multimodal assessments including structured presentations followed by reflective essays were implemented, resulting in an increase in average module marks from the mid-40s to the mid-60s. Participation in a Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) project with students from Pakistan, Argentina, India, and the UK was found to enhance cultural competence and align with ESJF's student partnership pillar (London Metropolitan University, 2025c). A co-design panel for the Social Policy module introduced Global South case studies in place of Eurocentric texts, which was reported to increase critical debate and sense of belonging (Price and Whitehead, 2022). The ESJF is structured around four pillars: curriculum transformation, inclusive pedagogy training, student partnership, and data-driven monitoring and evaluation, supported by initiatives such as "ESJ Pedagogy" workshops, scaffolded rubrics, and a transparent awarding gap dashboard (London Metropolitan University, 2025b). Initial results indicate that the BAME–White awarding gap at London Met decreased from 18.5 to 9.5 percentage points (Universities UK, 2025), and modules

utilising multimodal assessments saw mark increases of 12 to 15 points. Continuing recommendations include expanding co-design panels across all Schools, allocating additional time for inclusive course development, and publishing student-led case studies as open educational resources. This approach highlights the potential for improvements in equity and academic achievement when students are engaged in shaping their learning experiences.

Reflective Commentary

Delivering the presentation deepened my understanding of the relationship between inclusive pedagogy and student outcomes. As I structured the narrative around the Education for Social Justice Framework and the multimodal assessment strategies, I realised how critical scaffolding is in fostering student confidence and engagement (Yale University, 2010). Explaining the quantitative impact students' average marks rising by over 15 points reinforced my appreciation for data-driven evaluation as both an accountability mechanism and a catalyst for reflective teaching practice (London Metropolitan University, 2025a). Preparing the slides also prompted me to revisit the theoretical underpinnings of co-creation and decolonisation, challenging my assumption that curriculum transformation could proceed without explicit student partnership (Price and Whitehead, 2022).

During the question session, a participant challenged the scalability of co-design panels across large cohorts, which prompted me to consider how digital collaboration platforms might support broader inclusion. Another valid point concerned balancing Global South perspectives with disciplinary coherence, leading me to reflect on the importance of transparent selection criteria and ongoing review processes (London Metropolitan University, 2025c). These exchanges highlighted that equity initiatives must be adaptable and context sensitive. Therefore, the process of presenting and engaging in dialogue has enriched my perspective by revealing practical considerations for implementing inclusive frameworks at scale and identifying avenues for future research into sustainable pedagogical innovation. Overall, presenting the provision of ESJF at LMU has provided me with a valuable insight into how differential gaps can be closed and how education equality can be promoted among students from different backgrounds.

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Biographical note

Prabhjot is an international MA Education student session (September 2023-25) at London Metropolitan University with experience in developing and implementing inclusive pedagogies. She has collaborated with the Students' Union on the Education for Social Justice Framework, co-designed curricula incorporating Global South perspectives, and led multimodal assessment initiatives. She experienced both traditional essay format assessment and the latest multimodal assessment during her education at LMU, and she experienced that multimodal assessment is more useful to increase marks. Her work focuses on closing awarding gaps and empowering students as partners in knowledge creation.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all my teachers for their invaluable guidance throughout this project and my family for their unwavering support and encouragement.

AI declaration

During the preparation of this work, I used Microsoft Copilot to generate an initial outline and refine language for clarity and coherence. All substantive content, analysis, and conclusions were developed and verified by me. I take full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and final content of this publication.

"WTH? Decoding LGBTQIA+: OMG! Learn the ABCs So You Don't Go MIA at the EDI/DEI BBQ, FFS" (There will be potato salad. Don't get uninvited.)

james hunting, Andrew Moran, Brian Tutt and Wendy Sloane

Keywords: LGBTQIA+, inclusivity, queering the curriculum

Abstract

Let's be real: navigating the ever-evolving alphabet soup of LGBTQIA+ terminology can be overwhelming. But here's the thing: language matters. And understanding the language of identity, inclusion, and community is a key step in showing up for your LGBTQIA+ colleagues and students in meaningful, respectful ways.

All LGBTQIA+ young people "deserve an education that reflects who they are" (Stonewall 2017). And in a time when Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI/DEI) initiatives are increasingly under attack, it's more important than ever to actively build inclusive spaces - especially in academic and workplace settings.

Students look to the adults around them for signals of support and safety. Colleagues need allies. We're all searching for social justice. In today's anti-trans and increasingly anti-queer political climate, we need to step up. We all should use "transformative practice", as the Ward-Gale model for LGBTQ-inclusivity in Higher Education (Ward & Gale, 2016) points out, to "ensure the curriculum reflects the gender and sexual diversity in the community" (University of Warwick, 2024).

This fun, interactive workshop is your chance to decode the acronyms, unpack the concepts, and engage with LGBTQIA+ issues in a judgement-free zone. We will talk as a group to get a grasp of the lingo, with lots of discussions and some fun activities to aid in better understanding. Whether you're totally new to the conversation or looking for a refresh, you'll walk away with practical language tools, a stronger sense of confidence, and a deeper understanding of why this work matters. Come for the clarity, stay for the community (and the virtual fried chicken and potato salad).

Reflective Commentary

This presentation was more of an overview of queering the curriculum, without a huge amount of detail. As an introduction to the ABCs of the LGBT, it provided a strong foundation for colleagues to address representation concerning sexual and gender diversity in their own teaching. This was especially helpful to us as well, as several of us are working on a book on this topic, relating to our respective disciplines.

Colleagues present seemed to find the presentation valuable and there were many questions, especially concerning definitions relating to sexual and gender labels and identities. While much of the terminology was new to some, we stressed that making mistakes is fine (deliberately refusing to use someone's pronouns is another story). In a nutshell, it's all about trying to be a better ally and showing your respect and solidarity toward students and colleagues who may embrace this terminology.

The comments and questions showed that we were largely preaching to the converted, and that perhaps making similar future presentations mandatory for all as part of the ESJF would be more constructive, especially in the wake of new government regulations that can exclude trans people. The presentation also was beneficial in helping us to think more about the Trans Advocate programme at the university, which has not yet got off the ground, which would help trans students adjust better to life at London Met and deal with bureaucratic obstacles such as name changes. This is something we would like to move forward on.

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Biographical note

All the authors are members of London Met's LGBTQIA+ Staff network or allies. They have all delivered workshops in the past on LGBT terminology and queering the curriculum, to make London Met a truly inclusive, transformative space where everyone feels represented.

AI declaration

Chat GPT was used to think of more abbreviations for a fun, enticing headline. The authors take full responsibility for the final content of the publication

Poetry and Students' Voices

Mabel Encinas and Rebecca Warren

Keywords: academic writing, creative writing, students' voices, learner empowerment

Abstract

Student voice has been identified as a central aspect of students' empowerment and students' learning in Higher Education (HE). This paper presents an action research project that aims to use poetry and other creative writing strategies as a reflective tool to engage with each module's content during the taught sessions to empower students' voices. The intention is to promote students' participation and attainment through writing. The project started slowly in the second semester of 2024-2025, when we worked with Level 4 students. In this project, we aim (1) to investigate students' perceptions of writing poetry and other creative texts in the taught sessions, (2) to identify what students voice express, and potentially what students do not express through their writing, and (3) to evaluate the impact that writing poetry and other creative texts have on students' understandings and assessments. We consider power in relation to collaboration and transformation, rather than control and domination over others. 'Power' is an enabler to achieve a purpose and shape lives (Chigudu and Chigudu, 2015; VeneKlasen and Miller, 2007, p. 5). Power comprises the capacity to declare and to influence (Batliwala, 2019), and for this reason, empowering our students' voices is linked not only to their present lives but to their potential futures. More widely, writing is a way of learning (e.g. van Dijk, 2022) as students have to reason through their ideas and responses to class experiences. Evidence shows that students have valued writing to learn as a way of making sense of course content, and lecturers as a path to build rapport with students (Fry and Villagomez, 2012). This is why poetry and creative writing become part of a dialogic pedagogy. In this paper, we present the proposal, discuss our first steps, and invite colleagues to engage in a dialogue and consider joining this initiative.

Reflective Commentary

Delivering the presentation was a good experience for us working as a team. This might be part of the effect of building ‘power with’ (Chigudu and Chigudu, 2015; Batliwala, 2019), supporting and encouraging each other. Our work was presented in an integrated manner as what we did complemented each other’s work. Being able to share our project with others help us to restate our aims and rationale which had a positive effect on us as a team to. It was interesting that we had an audience of women colleagues, and even more interesting that they were curious about our work and its potential. The questions were helpful. We noticed that although colleagues were positive about the power of writing to learn (Fry and Villagomez, 2012), they challenged the potential our project could have on academic writing, which is one of the assumptions of our project based on previous work (Zuhra, 2024). We realise the project needs to focus on establishing links between the creative writing produced by students and the presence of their voices in academic writing.

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Biographical note

Dr Mabel Encinas is a Senior Lecturer in Education and Early Childhood Studies at London Metropolitan University. Her research centres around social justice in formal and informal educational context. She teaches in undergraduate and graduate programmes, where she engages in action research. Mabel is also a poet and a member of the collective Las Juanas.

Dr Rebecca Warren has worked with young people both in the UK and internationally, specialising in working on youth volunteering and integration projects with young refugees. She did a PGCE in international education and a Doctorate in Education while living in Bangkok, Thailand and working for The British Council. Her doctoral thesis focused on the educational experiences of young refugees in Bangkok, an ethnographic study using poetry and visual arts in the design. This informed the curriculum for CEDAR Learning Centre, an alternative education provider for young refugees in Bangkok, who were unable to access mainstream education.

AI declaration

We did not use AI tools to prepare this work, and we take full responsibility for the final content of the publication.

Antioxidant Status of Culturally Diverse Foods and Beverages: A Student Partnership Project for Nourishing Innovation

Katherine R. Fisher, Cristina Balan, Sthefany Borges Machado Araujo, Gabriella Dines, Una Fairbrother, Vanda Fernandes, Abdollah Ghavam, Dennis Ignat,, Niya Kunnathuparambil Ittoop, John Lodge, Maryam Shafiq, Francesco Romano, Paramvir Singh, Johanna Tandazo, and Zhiyan Xuan

Keywords: Student partnership, authentic collaboration, student empowerment, flourishing academic community

Abstract

This work focuses on student partnership and the importance of authentic collaboration with students in undergraduate research projects. The project specifically investigates the work where research active staff partnered alongside bachelor's degree project students to measure antioxidant status of understudied foods/beverages from culturally diverse backgrounds. Extensive studies have been undertaken on antioxidant/pro-oxidant status of foods/beverages from typical "Western" diets. However, many foods/beverages from culturally diverse backgrounds have not been studied to the same extent. Hence, communities with diverse cultural heritages may be consuming different patterns of bioactive compounds which have not been classified for their oxidant/antioxidant potential. These bioactive compounds influence the antioxidant status of people within communities and therefore the risk of health conditions associated with oxidative stress. A study of the antioxidant and pro-oxidant status of foods and beverages from culturally diverse backgrounds is not only one of equity but could also have a huge benefit for the health and wellbeing of diverse communities. Through student partnership, the students were able to choose the design of the project and what foods and beverages they personally wanted to study. Quite often the foods studied were foods connected to the students' own personal cultural heritage. Giving students a level of choice and ownership over their research project greatly increased student satisfaction in the module which was indicated through student interviews and written feedback. The project enabled and empowered students to engage far more deeply with academic research. It also enhanced their employability skills through developing high-level knowledge and behaviors. It created a sense of belonging and community

amongst the staff and students, vital for retention and success, and students were far more motivated. The project also transformed understanding of academic community from the perspective of staff. As proposed by the Advanced HE, student partnership challenges traditional relationships in higher education and it is essential for academic communities to flourish and have long-term accomplishment (Healey & Healey, 2019).

Reflective Commentary

I delivered the presentation alongside one of my students, who not only co-presented but also supported the session by answering questions. It was their contribution to this that really impacted me and gave me a deeper insight into how they viewed the project from their perspective, giving me an even greater understanding of the work. What was evident to me was the maturity of the students that had contributed, and it demonstrated how they had all grown as individuals. Seeing them flourishing as independent researchers was humbling and, alongside the wisdom and insight demonstrated by my student who co-presented, this challenged me to keep going and apply the principles of the project to all my future research-based work. I was surprised how confidently my student answered questions from the audience and it gave me a new perspective that we need to genuinely believe in and trust our students. If we give students the opportunity and show them trust, in almost all cases they will seize the opportunity and achieve (Lansing, et al., 2023). One key theme that emerged during the question and answer session was the need to move away from traditional hierarchical attitudes in academic research. There was strong support for the idea that student partnership is essential for the long-term flourishing of academic communities (Healey & Healey, 2019). I was pleasantly surprised by how many colleagues not only voiced their agreement but also expressed it non-verbally through nods and other gestures. This clearly signalled a genuine appetite for change.

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Biographical note

Dr Katherine Fisher is currently a Senior Lecturer in Physical Chemistry within the School of Human Sciences, teaching across Level 3, undergraduate, postgraduate, and PhD supervision. Katherine has research interests as a scientist in electron

paramagnetic resonance (EPR) as well as undertaking more holistic research in making higher education more equitable. In addition to her teaching responsibilities, she is actively engaged and passionate about getting undergraduates involved in impactful research. Katherine has also taught at the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich, Germany and she was previously a non-stipendiary lecturer at St Anne's College, University of Oxford, teaching Organic Chemistry.

Acknowledgements

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AI declaration

AI was used (Copilot) to improve the language (spelling, punctuation and grammar). The authors take full responsibility for the final content of the publication.

A collaborative approach to engagement monitoring

Sarah Longbottom, Gill Veschini

Keywords: Attendance, engagement, collaboration, continuation

Abstract

Engagement monitoring has long been a focus of universities to identify students who are finding their studies more challenging for a whole host of reasons and therefore more at risk of withdrawing (Summers, Higson and Moores 2020). As a publicly funded body, the University also has responsibilities to external agencies to ensure that students are only shown as enrolled if they are still actively engaged with their studies.

Our students at London Met, as with many other institutions are leading complicated lives experiencing multiple factors of disadvantage and therefore the more information we can gather about their behaviours in engaging with their studies, the better informed any decisions can be (Delaney and Ashton 2024).

What was once a solely centralised approach to engagement monitoring has this year involved both teaching and support staff to give a richer understanding of a student, what they might need additional support with and improving the quality of decisions made about their enrolment status (Bevitt, Baldwin and Calvert 2010).

This workshop will give you an interactive opportunity to understand how the additional data informs both student support and the enrolment status decisions. Working in small groups you will get the chance to look at some anonymised data in the format that the school level engagement review panels do. You will gain further understanding of how the invaluable data both quantitative and qualitative, from teams and software across the university can be used to inform enrolment status decisions increasing your knowledge of the whole process.

Reflective Commentary

Feedback received after the conference, demonstrated to us that this workshop fulfilled its purpose.: The session successfully helped to demystify the student engagement monitoring process particularly for those not directly involved, highlighting the importance of and challenges that arise. The timing of the conference was perfect, enabling us to update attendees on the process that has been developed further this academic year incorporating a collaborative approach collating information and empowering Schools in their decisions.

The activity for attendees to complete, was particularly successful in emphasising how invaluable any information the course team can input during the process confirms the right decisions are made to support students whilst also ensuring we are compliant with sponsorship conditions for our home SLC funded students.

Following the conference, the policy has been updated for 2025/26 to better reflect the current process and simplify it for students. In addition, a document is under development to help all staff and students visualise the process.

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Biographical note

Sarah Longbottom, Head of Student Continuation and Completion, expertise in data management and analysis particularly in relation to supporting students to succeed. Oversees the current engagement monitoring process at London Metropolitan University.

Gill Veschini, Head of Student Achievement, specialising in project management and strategies linked to supporting student success. Manages and develops the engagement monitoring process at London Metropolitan University.

AI declaration

No AI tools were used during the preparation of the work.

The authors take full responsibility for the final content of the publication.

Continuation: Community of Practice

Ronke Shoderu and Sarah Longbottom

Keywords: Continuation, Office for Students, community of practice, sense of belonging

Abstract

There are many metrics that a university in the UK must meet (Office for Students, 2022a), the B3 Continuation and Completion thresholds set by the Office for Students (OfS) are just 2 of those (Office for Students, 2022b).

Tackling these successfully requires a collective problem-solving mentality where we can identify good practice, share and use it to inform practice across the London Met community.

Using official continuation data as published by the OfS, the courses with 20+ students enrolled and a continuation above the 80% continuation threshold set by the OfS were identified in each school and contacted and interviewed.

This panel discussion session will create a community of practice (Wenger-Trayner, 2015) where the common themes from the discussions with the Course Leaders can be investigated further allowing those in attendance to leave with actions that can be piloted in other schools and courses to improve not only continuation but also the student experience across the university.

Reflective Commentary

The themes of positive practice identified from the interviews with colleagues were: creating a sense of belonging, good links with industry, proactive student support from course teams, and supporting students with transition both onto and between the levels of the course.

A selection of four participants from the course team interviews were invited to address four questions based on the themes. Each panel member provided a rich and detailed response to the discussion. Witnessing the positive response from attendees to the panel, the discussion helped to reinforce our approach to developing a Community of Practice. Feedback from the session also

highlighted to us the value of a staff toolkit offering practical and supportive approaches to improved continuation levels across the university. It is hoped that this staff toolkit will become an integral part of the process for improving our student continuation.

Following on from the Teaching & Learning conference panel, we are planning a series of podcasts and short videos offering examples of good practice as part of this new Community of Practice. Both panel members and attendees acknowledged the importance of analysis of examples of good practice in relation to B3 metrics and welcomed the opportunity to reflect on the variety of activities and initiatives used by the course teams.

The discussions in this conference session also helped us to identify the need in future, to include not only the student voice but also a longitudinal study analysing the continued effectiveness of actions on our student continuation rates.

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Biographical note

Sarah Longbottom, Head of Student Continuation and Completion, Student Success, expertise in data management and analysis particularly in relation to supporting students to succeed.

Ronke Shoderu is an Associate Teaching Professor and Deputy Head of the School of Law at London Metropolitan University. She teaches on courses related to Environmental Law, International Trade and Human Rights. She is the School Lead for the Education for Social Justice Framework, and her interests include sense of belonging in HE and sustainable development.

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AI declaration

No AI tools were used during the preparation of the work. The authors take full responsibility for the final content of the publication.