

Emma Hamshare BLOG POSTS: TPP 2024

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BLOG 1: REFLECTING ON INTRO TO UNIT:

The success of the 'Intro to' unit I recently taught highlights the powerful intersection of creativity, community building, and academic exploration.

Building Connections:

The unit's first-day collage task set the tone for a unique learning environment. Rather than diving into course content, I prioritised building connections among students. Recognising that students come with diverse backgrounds and learning styles, this task provided an inclusive and engaging platform. The objective was simple but impactful: create a collage to introduce yourself, with the unofficial true aim being, to make a friend. This exercise established a collaborative and supportive atmosphere from the outset. To improve further, I aim to focus on quieter international students who may feel hesitant to engage initially.

Addressing Creative Block:

Acknowledging the common struggle with creative block, I designed the unit to serve as a remedy. The initial enthusiasm of students combined with the accessible nature of the collage task proved effective in breaking down creative barriers. By focusing on the 'how' of being at university rather than the 'what' in terms of content, we designed and delivered an atmosphere where students felt comfortable expressing themselves creatively. This is something I need to implement in planning for my current unit FPFT, Fashion Production, Future Techniques, as the previous materials lacked guidance on 'How' for students. We have identified the upcoming block as the most common time for burnout amongst our students, so I'll focus on time management as this unit runs together with a larger unit.

Inspiration through Examples:

To guide and inspire students, we created a Padlet showcasing zine examples from my personal collection. This served as a valuable resource, demonstrating the possibilities and potential of the task. The examples acted as a creative springboard rather than strict templates, reinforcing the idea that there is no one right way to approach the assignment. We often use examples on FDD, and I think, provided you show a truly diverse range, they are very useful. Padlet link with Zine examples: <https://artslondon.padlet.org/janebowler/intro-to-inspiration-zine-layouts-writing-identity-clothing-6ic9i1znmy6ozo23>

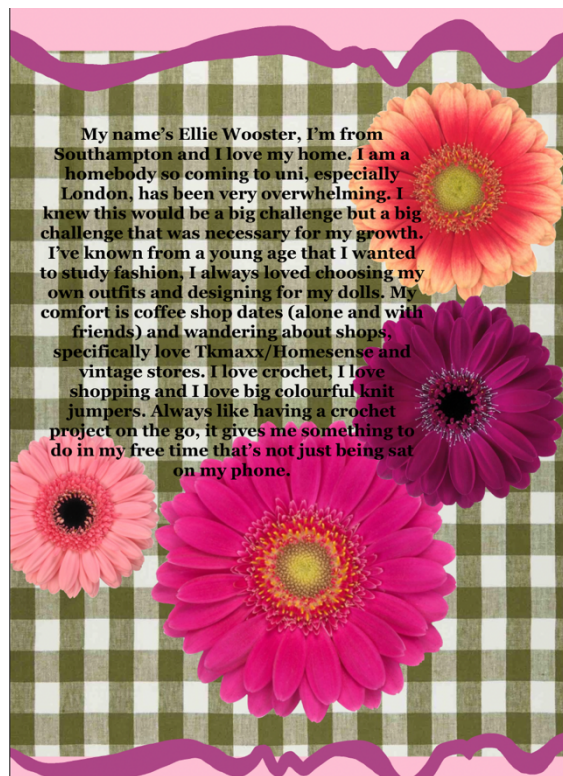
Assessment and Feedback:

The culminating assignments were 1200-word essays presented as zines about a personally significant garment. The results showed the success of providing creative freedom. We gave

direction on ensuring referencing and image referencing was up to Harvard standards. Overall, minimal direction on presentation empowered students, resulting in a diverse range of high-quality, sometimes even poetic submissions. This approach allowed students to take ownership of their work and express their individuality. The varied results showcased diverse skills, perspectives, and creativity within the cohort. The 98% pass rate shows the success of this approach in fostering individuality while maintaining academic standards.

Conclusion:

The 'Intro to' unit was not merely about introducing students to academic content but about introducing them to the art of learning itself at university level. Through community building, addressing creative block, and empowering students with creative freedom, the unit achieved remarkable success. It emphasised the significance of creating a holistic learning experience that extends beyond traditional education, leaving a lasting impact on both students and their academic journey. I still receive emails from this group of students even though I am no longer their tutor. So I feel I was able to create a good connection with them this way despite only having three in-person sessions.



Figures: Pages from student work Ellie Wooster FDD Intro to 2024

BLOG POST 2: ON INCLUSIVITY & HEIRACHIES

Personal experience:

While I was studying for my Masters at the Royal College of Art (2017-19) Having already been a lecturer since 2011 at Kingston University. A number of people asked me whether it would be strange being a student and a teacher at the same time. I thought about this and decided that in fact my tutors were just like me ... continuously learning and my students were just like me ... continuously learning. And that we both have things to learn from each-other. I did away with the concept of teacher being in any way 'above' the student. And this idea, now absolutely core to my teaching practice, has served me, and I believe my students, very well. In addition to the idea that comparison is unhelpful, as we are all on different paths with different life experiences, and no one path can be directly compared to another. I certainly have things I can teach and more experience than my students in some areas. But in others they have more than me. With this in mind, some of my reading led me to think about why students are often quiet or don't appear to engage in sessions.

On Silence in the classroom:

Chavez' work on sheds light on the complex dynamics surrounding silence in the classroom in relation to inequality

. 'Even though I am the commander of my own experience, my heart tells me to choose subservience out of fear that my narrative might ricochet off of institutionalised white power and smack me upside the head'. (Chavez 2021 pp12-13) Explaining that individuals may feel compelled to remain silent out of fear that their personal narratives will collide with institutionalised white power structures. This fear of repercussions can lead to self-censorship and a reluctance to speak up, perpetuating the quiet and inhibiting genuine discourse in the classroom. This is why creating an inclusive environment is vital in my teaching.

However, In the post-pandemic landscape of online learning, silence can be incredibly valuable, Reading the piece on Signature Pedagogies led me to think about the concept of the studio as "a state of mind" rather than a specific physical space (Orr & Shreeve, 2017, p.90). Within this framework, the studio transcends physical boundaries, moments of silence can facilitate deep reflection and individual exploration, mirroring the introspective atmosphere often associated with in person creative studio work. Silence can be the place where real learning takes place without interruption.

Conclusion:

Ultimately, effective communication between educators and students is crucial.

I think my personal experience that led me to dismantle some educational hierarchies will help me to foster an inclusive environment and embrace silences where needed. I always aim to approach students with empathy and sensitivity, acknowledging their individual learning styles and needs. And use regular check-ins and open-ended questions to clarify in conversation students' understanding so as to address any concerns they may have about participation. I also think that offering praise for contributions, no matter how small, can empower hesitant students to engage. By fostering a culture of trust and understanding, I hope to better discern between students who are too afraid to contribute and those who are actively engaged in the learning process.

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Blog Post 3 On Technology for Change / Complexity vs Simplicity

I think it is useful to have a space outside the curriculum where students aren't being judged against set criteria to think about some of these bigger issues. I set up the Technology for Change event (as shown in my teaching observations) To share knowledge and work differently and to work on real world problems. I think there is nothing that cannot be achieved if you get a bunch of creative, clever dedicated people who are open enough and kind enough to share their ideas. It has been very useful to reflect on this event as part of my PgCert and Ron Barnett's piece, 'Towards the Ecological University' resonated strongly with my reasoning for setting up the event.

The world is moving very quickly, the rate of change that we are experiencing is beyond anything we have seen before and adapting is vital. Many of the issues and challenges that we face at the moment can seem so overwhelming when we try to address them alone or when we even think about them alone, so I think it's important to come together and share ideas because between all of us, we have all this knowledge so how can we use the tools and the new toys that we have to make things better?

'Over recent decades, a vocabulary has emerged that reflects a new sense of the interconnectedness of the world, with terms such as complexity, emergence, contingency, motion, entanglement, indeterminacy, instability, with large literatures attaching to these concepts. The story here is that of humankind being faced with a 'runaway world', now barely beyond rational control.' (Barnett, 2021)

Some of the aims of Technology for Change:

1. Entrepreneurial Skills: Equip participants with skills to turn ideas into impactful ventures addressing contemporary problems.
2. Updating students' knowledge on e-textiles, soft systems and disruptive fashion business models to feed into their projects.
3. Improve quality of students work bringing it into line with international standards.
4. Enabling use of playful investigative. fashion design approach to consider serious pressing contemporary problems.
6. Similar format to the mayors Design Hackathon so good practice for students who might lack skills to pitch new concepts and business ideas.
7. Online Resource Library: Create a shared digital repository to showcase students innovative collaborative projects.

Barnett's approach that, 'learning should be characterised by their being placed on the spot, where they are required to come to their own judgements; moreover, their own judgements in situations that are understood to be contentious.' Is exactly my thinking as in using into fashion's potential as a tool for addressing pressing issues such as climate injustice, disinformation, structural racism, and economic inequality, students are empowered to become agents of change in their communities. Through playful design methods and the frameworks provided by the Transitions Project Toolkit, participants are equipped with the tools and mindset needed to create positive futures for themselves and for fashion as a whole.

By bridging the gap between academia and real-world challenges, the Technology for Change event embodies Barnett's vision of the 'Ecological University,' where learning extends beyond the classroom and into the broader socio-economic landscape. It serves as a testament to the

transformative power of collaborative learning and collective action, demonstrating how universities can play a pivotal role in shaping a more sustainable and equitable future.

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LOOPHOLES: <https://circularloopholes.net/>

BLOG POST 4: On Mindfulness

During my time at the RCA I was thinking about neural pathways working on a project designed for people with dementia, because I found some research that showed that music bypassed Alzheimer's and even though much of the short term memory was gone they could still remember Frank Sinatra and the Beatles. I was trying to bring about this magic moment between family members. And at the same time I was getting into meditation. This progressed and increased and during lockdown, I became a meditation teacher with Imperial College and ended up training with Zen master Daizan Skinner.

Mindfulness is described as paying attention in the present moment, on purpose, and without judgment (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). I know that this state, and the values of mindfulness in terms of, being curious, being able to let go of overthinking, and being in the moment, lead to a much better environment for teaching and learning. There is also evidence to show that a continued mindfulness meditation practice has a positive impact on our immune systems (Black, 2016) and I look forwards to bringing this further into creative teaching and creating more meditators who can have a positive affect through their attitude and teaching.

During the lockdown period and subsequently, my engagement with meditation deepened as I underwent training to become a meditation teacher, eventually receiving guidance from a Zen master. This experience illuminated the profound effects of meditation on the brain, offering benefits for the immune system, sleep and self-confidence. Through practices like body scans, I witnessed first-hand the power of interoception in aligning brain and body pathways.

In my pedagogical approach I use mindfulness, striving for a dual, symbiotic flow of information. I consider my teaching to be like giving a gift, and I keep in mind the knowledge that sometimes it's possible to give a gift to someone that just doesn't work for them, maybe it's the wrong size or colour, or they can't make use of it at the moment. In tutorials, I aim to listen more than I speak, to enable a student to have the space to express themselves and guide them to freely articulate their thoughts and navigate their own learning journey.

Barnett talks about interconnectedness in the context of super complexity. However Thich Nhat Hanh describes it as 'oneness' A simplicity. We are at one with everything and we depend on everything and everything depends on us. Embracing this interconnectedness is tricky and doesn't match with western ways of thinking. However I think of the BA in terms of Bruner's (1960) spiral curriculum. Our units are structured so that each design project for students has a similar structure of research, design and making, so each unit builds on the last. So that each turn round the spiral of action and reflection brings in more information, more ideas, more experience, and more learning for us as well as the students.

Ultimately, my integration of mindfulness in education aims not only to enrich individual learning experiences but also to foster societal and economic prosperity. By nurturing mindful practices and embracing interconnectedness, we pave the way for cultural enrichment and collective wellbeing, recognising the inherent symbiosis between the individual and society and making a contribution to wellbeing.

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