

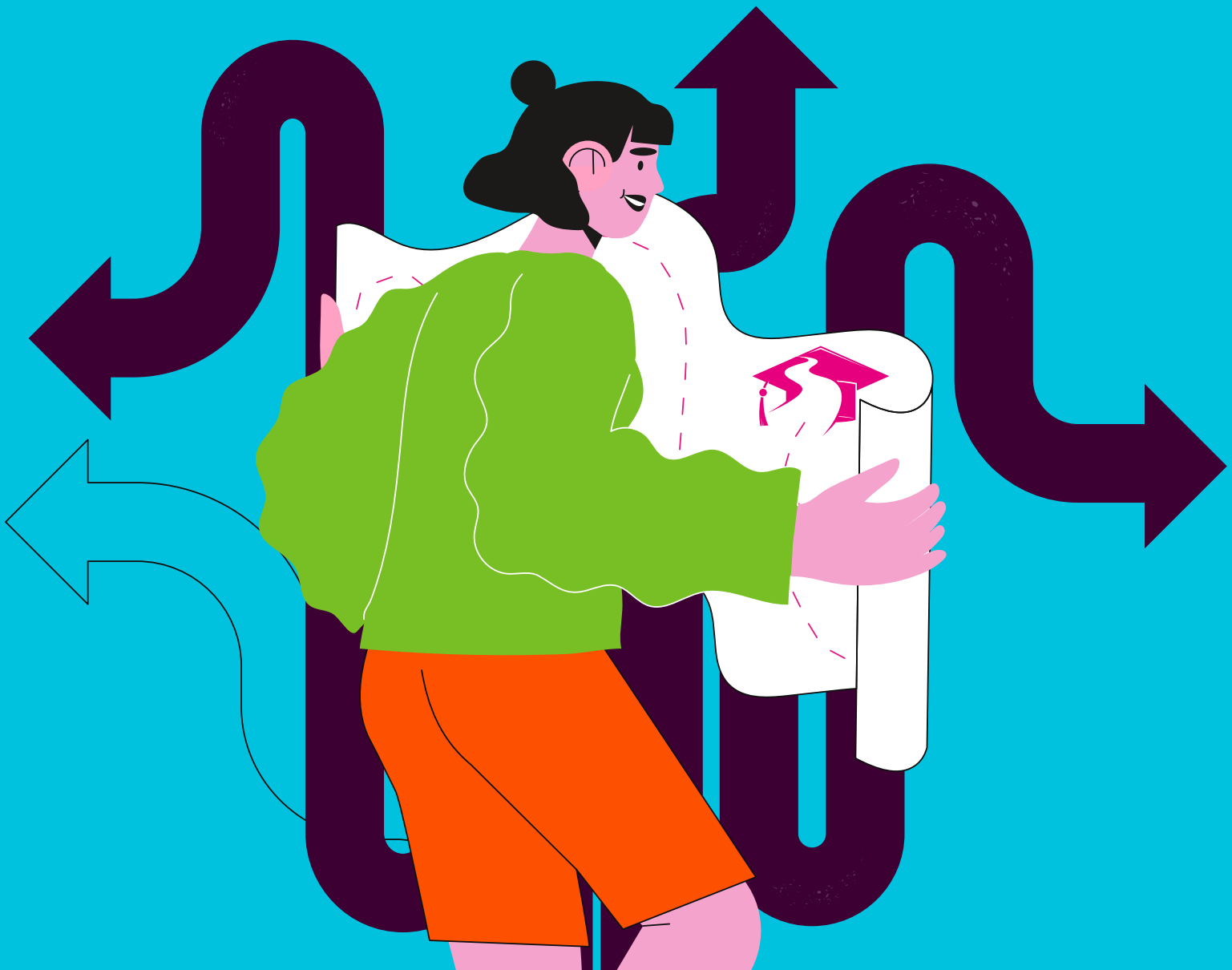
FORUM MAGAZINE



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Supporting the student journey



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EDITORIAL

Dear Reader

Welcome to the spring 2024 edition of *Forum Magazine*.

In June 2023, the Learning and Teaching Forum held its lively annual conference with the theme "Supporting the student journey through learning and teaching." This edition draws on the wealth of ideas presented in its engaging talks and workshops, and, in keeping with its theme, we consider educational journeys of a literal, metaphorical and virtual nature.

As Rich Cotterill contends in his excellent article, metaphors are a powerful learning tool for efficiently conveying intricate concepts. Visualising education as a landscape allows us to imagine the possible routes through it and the barriers one might encounter along the way. Maria Araxi-Sachpazian from City College, Thessaloniki, argues for an educational odyssey less like a train journey – linear and externally-controlled, and more akin to Minecraft – exploratory and self-directed; similarly, Steph Jesper of the Digital Inclusion Skills and Creativity (DISC) team advocates a more adventurous "get on the grass" approach to digital literacy.

As is evident to anyone visiting our wonderfully multicultural campus, educational journeys are not just metaphorical. This edition of *Forum* includes a selection of articles about knowledge-seekers who have made voyages to York, and those who have made outbound journeys seeking insights elsewhere. Both Hang Li from the music department and Louise Frith from the DACS team focus on the linguistic obstacles faced by international learners whose first language is not English, whilst Eleana Childs and Karisha George from the Department of Psychology describe how the Intercultural Committee seeks to dismantle cultural barriers and build connections between learners from diverse backgrounds. Claire Sinclair and Catherine Botting of the School of Business and Society champion the importance of educational visits, whilst Jillian Barlow, Alex Reid, Nita Pillai and Michelle Igiehon extol the benefits of off-campus internships for widening participation students.

We also consider virtual educational voyages: physicist Josie Rawes recounts how her students have used VR headsets to explore the cosmos or the decay of subatomic particles, while Enrico Reuter of the School of Business and Society reflects on the challenges of running a course for distance learners commuting to York electronically.

I offer my sincere gratitude to all of our contributors for their insightful content. This is my first issue as the editor of *Forum*, and I would like to express my appreciation to Alex Reid, the outgoing editor, for his work over three outstanding issues and valued support during the transition. Special thanks are due to Louise Rudd, the Chair of the Learning and Teaching Forum, Gemma Wheeler, the Administration Coordinator, and the *Forum* editorial committee – Lisa Clark, Kelly Devenny, Rachel Hope, Rebecca Hudson-Tandy, Claire Illingworth, and Josie Rawes, along with our Sub-editor Lucy Turner-Voakes. Acknowledgment is also owed to the skilled team at Design Solutions for the outstanding design of this issue. Thank you to everyone involved in making this issue a success.

Dan Jones
Editor



Partnering with students to integrate virtual reality within undergraduate physics teaching

Dr Josie Rawes outlines a partnership between staff and students to develop virtual reality resources for use in undergraduate teaching within the School of Physics, Engineering and Technology.

Virtual Reality (VR) has the potential to transform the way we learn and teach, from helping us to visualise and engage with complex subjects to facilitating discussion and hosting virtual tours (Tan and Waugh, 2013).

Working in collaboration with the School of Physics, Engineering and Technology (PET) outreach team, I am leading an initiative to work with students to introduce VR technology

into undergraduate teaching. It builds on an existing outreach project that focuses on addressing educational disadvantage through the use of VR. We have 32 VR headsets and we are now using the same kit to offer immersive virtual reality content to undergraduates within teaching and learning environments at the University.

We are aiming to use VR headsets within small group teaching sessions in order to provide a platform for discussion and engage students with content. Using a Learning and Teaching Fund grant and opportunities with the Careers and Placements team, we partnered with 8 undergraduate interns to create VR resources including:

- A 360 degree tour of our Astrocampus, featuring an audio tour, telescope simulations and a gallery of images taken with our telescopes
- A planetarium, showing constellations in the night sky of the Northern hemisphere from a virtual observatory
- A nuclear physics app featuring a flythrough of a nuclide chart and animations of particle decays
- A 360 degree tour of biophysics facilities
- Simulations of lunar phases, lens optics and other astrophysics concepts.

The aim of the staff-student partnership was to utilise the skills of the staff in identifying concepts and topics which would benefit from more immersive and interactive tools for learning, and the skills of the students who applied for the role with a specific interest in developing VR content and upskilling themselves in using this software. The staff involved have no specific knowledge of how to create VR environments and therefore the student partnership was crucial to the success of the project. The internship was promoted to the students by offering them the

opportunity to contribute towards materials used within their own degree programme, feedback into the resource design process and help to shape how we deliver small group teaching sessions using VR technology.

In anonymous feedback, the student interns reported developing a range of transferable skills in areas such as communication, organisation and team working, along with practical competencies in creating accessible materials and computer programming. They found the partnerships with staff and other students provided valuable support and mentorship, and felt that the use of VR would make learning more enjoyable and engaging by allowing them to explore and interact with concepts and spaces they could never experience first-hand.

The responses highlight the effectiveness of the staff-student partnership, the successful development of student skills and enjoyment of the VR internship for all involved. As a result, further work to develop resources is continuing through School funded internships, undergraduate and PGCAP projects. These resources will include 360 degree tours of laboratories, facilities and potential employers across the UK to provide accessible materials for our undergraduate students, as well as a library of teaching resources to visualise complex topics. The roll out of our materials to undergraduate teaching sessions will be piloted this academic year.

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Dr Josie Rawes,
Lecturer in the School of Physics Engineering and Technology (PET), member of the

T&L forum.
Email: josie.rawes@york.ac.uk

Unlocking meaning using visual metaphors

Richard Cotterill, a lecturer in the International Pathway College, explains the power of visual metaphors and suggests ways in which they can be incorporated into instructional design.



...a metaphor involves using a familiar and accessible **source domain** to explain a **target domain**; the target domain is often abstract or complex.

Introduction

In higher education, our academic subjects and associated literature are inevitably littered with challenging, often abstract, concepts. There is a danger that when we are presenting information to our learners we fail to recognise how difficult it might be for them to process or understand such concepts. If the meaning of these concepts is not unlocked, the sense of what we are trying to communicate is lost. For those learning in a second language, the vocabulary associated with abstract concepts may be especially unfamiliar (Costa, 2020) with interpretations shaped by cultural conventions that differ from those used in the UK (Deutscher, 2010).

A metaphor is a way of explaining a complex or abstract concept using something familiar or concrete

(Geary, 2011). Utilising an image to represent the familiar or concrete, a *visual metaphor*, removes a further linguistic or conceptual barrier, potentially enabling learners to gain understanding in real time.

My research has explored how visual metaphors can be used to communicate the meaning of abstract concepts, particularly in the context of lectures or expositions. I have worked with my students to establish what characterises effective visual metaphors, which involved pushing them to undertake the challenging metacognitive task of explaining *when* and *how* they were learning from these images. This required the adaptation of a range of research methods, including *metaphor elicitation* (Zaltman and Coulter, 1995) and *phased narrowing*. However, the most effective way in which rich

data was collected was through the development and use of *process interviews* (Cotterill, 2022) which are semi-structured group interviews punctuated by cognitive tasks. My primary finding is that, when chosen with care and employed appropriately, visual metaphors can be an effective and playful way to enhance teaching and learning.

Metaphors

A metaphor is a way in which the familiar is used to frame or explain the unfamiliar (Geary, 2011). More formally, a metaphor involves using a familiar and accessible *source domain* to explain a *target domain*; the target domain is often abstract or complex.

The importance of metaphors in communication was most notably explained by Lakoff and Johnson in their book *Metaphors We Live By*

(1980). The central message of what they term *conceptual metaphor theory* is that metaphors are not just interesting, clever, compressed, and articulate ways of expressing ideas but that they are a way of thinking. Conceptual metaphor theory argues that metaphors are far more than stylistic – they are a fundamental and important way in which we communicate and find meaning.

From Shakespeare describing the *world as a stage*, to the British government claiming we were *at war* with the pandemic and that the virus was spreading *in waves*, metaphors can capture our attention and have the power to communicate ideas in an evocative, meaningful and powerful way. Based on the assimilative theory of learning (Illeris, 2018) educators can use metaphors to introduce learners to new or unfamiliar concepts by connecting

them with what they already know (Deignan, 2005). The process of building new knowledge into and onto existing knowledge is entirely compatible with what we know about human cognitive architecture (Blakemore and Frith, 2005).

The power of visual metaphors

A visual metaphor involves using an image as the source domain (Forceville, 1994). The image is used to provide meaning to a target domain. Advertisers and branding experts are adept at using visual metaphors to sell. Implying that cars have the characteristics of big cats (speed and elegance), suggesting that insurance is like wearing a safety helmet, or explaining that tampering with the ecosystem is similar to playing a game of Jenga (as used by the World Wildlife Fund) are examples of particularly innovative

adverts that make use of powerful and striking visual metaphors.

Using a visual metaphor to communicate meaning has an important advantage over a written or spoken metaphor. With a visual metaphor the processing speed should be faster, provided that the metaphor is understood. In a teaching and learning context, this offers the benefit of helping an exposition to flow more smoothly (no pausing to check meaning) and may also help to make our instructional materials simply look more interesting, without relying on irrelevant seductive content. When a learner is presented with an effective visual metaphor it helps them make sense of a concept in real time, something that may be particularly useful to those studying in a second language.

Selecting visual metaphors

Teamwork and rationality are concepts used in my academic field (Business and Management). These are both abstract concepts that may be difficult for a learner exposed to them for the first time to quickly or fully understand. Based on my research findings, to be effective, when an image is chosen as a visual metaphor to help communicate the meaning of such abstract concepts it should:

- Be *familiar* to learners. The point of using the visual metaphor is to help make the unfamiliar familiar, so it is essential that learners know what the image is. For example, an image of ants to represent teamwork (Figure 1.) and an image of a robot to represent rationality (Figure 2.) are likely to be



Figure 1. Teamwork



Figure 2. Rationality



Figure 3. Adaptability

good choices; both images should be familiar to most learners.

- Be *relatable* to learners. The characteristics of whatever is depicted should resonate with learners in some way. Most people will recognise that ants work together to achieve their objectives and that robots operate in a rational and unemotional way. It is worth noting that images of animals can form highly relatable visual metaphors when chosen to reflect human behaviour and characteristics. Our natural tendency to anthropomorphise animals is perhaps a way in which we strive to find meaning in the world around us (Epley, 2018).
- Provide a clear, simple and unambiguous *connection* and comparison between the source image and the target domain. While more experienced learners may enjoy figuring out the connection, for novices or

international learners who are experiencing a high cognitive load in learning situations, the extra obstacle is unwanted and unhelpful. Teamwork and rationality are clear, perhaps obvious, target domains for ants and robots.

There are other factors that can help to create or choose an effective visual metaphor. For example, selecting an image that contains sufficient elements to communicate meaning, and ensuring the metaphor is transferable to the learner's academic context. When creating instructional materials, for maximum impact I would recommend clearly naming the target concept. If the image itself requires naming or explaining, then a more familiar and relatable alternative should be chosen.

Using visual metaphors in teaching
Practitioners should use visual metaphors judiciously; they are

an enhancement technique and not a substitute for high-quality expositions. It would be impossible to deliver lectures or provide explanations using them alone. However, here are two suggestions for impactful use of visual metaphors in instructional design:

- At the point a new concept is introduced in an exposition, display a visual metaphor on the screen along with the name of the concept. If the concept itself is challenging to understand (e.g. adaptability) then the visual metaphor (e.g. a photo of a chameleon – Figure 3.) might help to quickly unlock its meaning.
- Use metaphor elicitation (Zaltman and Coulter, 1995). Allocate learners concepts using a shared deck of slides. Ask them to find an image to represent the concept and to be prepared to explain it to the class in a seminar. When used regularly, you may be surprised

how clever and creative learners can be, and how competitive the process of finding interesting source domain images becomes. You will also gain some fascinating cultural insights from international learners who may select culturally-specific images. When teaching a model or framework that contains a large quantity of complex or abstract terminology, this can be an efficient and enjoyable way to access meaning and enhance understanding.

Conclusion

Visual metaphors are a simple and playful way to enhance our teaching. They are not a substitute for expert teachers providing clear explanations of concepts. However, effective visual metaphors can enable faster processing of material in a time-pressured learning situation (such as a lecture) and through metaphor elicitation can be

used to ease the learning of concept-heavy models and theories.

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Richard Cotterill has been a teacher for over thirty years. He teaches Foundation Business and Pre-Masters

Management to students in the International Pathway College and undertakes research into learning processes and assessment. Richard is a Fellow of the HEA, a Certified Management and Business Educator, a Certified Member of the Association for Learning Technology and holder of the Vice Chancellor's Teaching Award. Email: richard.cotterill@york.ac.uk

Bridging barriers between students and their courses: the provision of subject-specific language support

Hang Li from the Department of Music introduces the 'Talking about Music' sessions for MA Music Education students that target students' English language needs in a subject-specific context.

Language challenges for international students studying at Anglophone universities have received wide attention, and scholarship has addressed their negative impacts on students' learning experiences to highlight the significance of the host institutions' provision of language support (e.g. pre-sessional language programmes). Moreover, it is noted that students could also face challenges in using subject terminology essential to their English-taught course activities

(Eros and Eros, 2019; Wu and Hammond, 2011).

Some universities have established targeted language support for students on specific programmes such as Engineering (Freeman, 2003), Medical training (Hawthorne et al., 2004), and Music instrumental performance (Lesiak-Bielawska, 2014). For MA Music Education: Instrumental and Vocal Teaching (MA IVT) students at the University of York, subject-specific language support has been provided as an optional series

of sessions, 'Talking about Music' (TAM) from 2020/21. This article presents an overview of these in-sessional language support sessions, focusing on their provision of subject-focused facilitation, a safe space for students to practise language, and an interactive environment.

'Talking about Music' (TAM) sessions

TAM was initiated by a Music lecturer with considerable experience of working with international music students.

Noticing how students' concerns with the subject terminology undermined their confidence and engagement in MA IVT activities, they suggested informal small group 'conversation' sessions as an additional environment for students to develop this area with support from the course teaching team. Supported by the MA IVT programme leader, two other course staff contributed to design TAM. The learning outcomes include building up students' vocabulary of musical terms and ways in which they may offer specific feedback to their own instrumental/vocal pupils, and improving students' Socratic questioning skills, which are aspects tightly linked to the MA IVT modules.

TAM is delivered as three sessions in each academic year: 'Describing what you hear', 'Describing what you see', and 'Describing a performance'. In each one-hour session, six to eight students work in pairs and/or small groups to discuss the task-based questions addressing aspects of music (e.g. dynamics, rhythm) and instrumental/vocal teaching (e.g. giving feedback on pupils' performance). 'Useful Musical Terminology' and 'Praise Phrases' handouts are provided as supplementary materials, and include examples of MA IVT subject terminology and praise sentences that students could use within and beyond TAM (e.g. in their own teaching practice).

TAM tutors' encouraging approaches contribute to a **safe space** for students to practise their language.

Methodology

Non-participant observations of four TAM groups were undertaken by the author, focusing on the session content, tutors' approaches, and tutor-student interactions. Students were invited to complete an online questionnaire; 33 students responded (87% of the total number of TAM students in the 2021/22 iteration). Five TAM tutors took part in one-to-one interviews with the author, three of whom are TAM designers, who have led three iterations of TAM; the other two joined TAM in 2021/22. In the interviews, tutors shared their perspectives on the provision of subject-specific language support for students and how they approach the sessions.

Subject-focused materials and facilitation

In TAM, all the audio and video materials used for session tasks are selected and adapted from the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) theory workbooks. Additionally, students are encouraged to bring the music scores that they are working on with their pupils; scores of

traditional Chinese instrumental music (e.g. Guzheng) were brought to 'Describing what you see'. The use of authentic materials exposes students to a variety of instruments and terms and helps students' real-life communication (Marić, 2022).

TAM activities are designed to develop students' language skills that are transferable to their course activities. For example, 'Creativity' from MA IVT modules is incorporated into students' discussion of how they would describe the character of the music piece to their pupils. Connections are reinforced by TAM tutors' facilitation: building on students' responses, the tutors encourage students to adapt and apply the language they have used to their own teaching contexts (e.g. forming Socratic questions).

Nearly all questionnaire respondents found TAM helpful for their MA activities. Some further commented that TAM provides 'practical' and 'more focused' language support that is particularly helpful for their module assignments of recorded instrumental/vocal lessons. Through developing their musical terminology knowledge in



Talking about music

an English-speaking context, most students felt more confident in communicating with their pupils.

A safe space

As TAM is optional, there is no formal assessment. Instead, tutors' evaluation of students' understanding is conducted in a continuous informal way. Music examples and key questions are sent to participants in advance of each session. As one tutor noted, students 'were not frightened to talk' in sessions as they were able to prepare in advance.

TAM tutors' encouraging approaches contribute to a safe space for students to practise their language. As the TAM initiator noted, tutors and students share 'an equal learning partnership' in TAM, so the tutor's job is not to *tell* students what the words are but to provide more opportunities for students to 'try things out' in a non-judgemental environment. This is supported by tutors' empathy with students' language concerns, which feeds into their approaches when leading TAM.

In one tutor's first session with a group of Chinese students, she invited students to teach her the pronunciation of their names. This tutor reflected that '(Having students teach me Chinese pronunciation) might relax them ... I wanted to show them that I wasn't the teacher telling them "You don't know these things and I'm going to tell you"; I wanted to show them that I understood their situation'.

Tutors' reassurance, encouragement, and praise were observed throughout TAM tutor-student interactions, particularly when students struggled with pronunciation and finding words to form answers. Tutors' approaches received positive feedback from students, and most considered that their confidence with musical terminology grew with tutors' encouragement and guidance.

Interactive delivery

TAM's interactive environment is both helpful and enjoyable for students' subject-specific language development. Compared to the self-study unit (e.g. a learning package on the VLE), the presence of timely

guidance from tutors allows more space for the depth and extension of the target language. As one tutor noted: 'Delivering the sessions live allows us to build on what the student says, and then go a little bit deeper by asking a question in a way, modelling what the students should be doing in the lessons themselves'.

The face-to-face sessions also provide an additional opportunity for students' peer communication and spoken English practice. The interaction with peers was highlighted by some students as the part they particularly enjoyed in TAM; 'group discussion' was highly rated when students were asked which aspects of TAM are helpful for students' MA course and their English language development. Also, students commented that the interactive sessions allowed them to 'learn extra words' and 'learn from tutors' and peers' teaching experiences'. Most students considered TAM helpful in improving their English speaking and listening in this additional environment to practise their English skills.

Summary

TAM is successful in supporting students' development of subject-specific language skills in an interactive mode that also enhances teacher-student and peer communication. Tutor and student feedback showed that this in-session support meets students' language needs and increases students' confidence with their course activities.

Enrolling on an overseas programme, music students are 'under the expectation of having the knowledge of music content in a language that was not primarily the language of their music instruction' (Marić, 2022, pp. 142-143). International students commencing English-taught courses face a similar situation, and targeted guidance is needed as the general language training (e.g. IELTS exam preparation) and support (e.g. university-wide language services) that cater to students across disciplines might not be able to fully address this aspect. Therefore, subject-specific language support

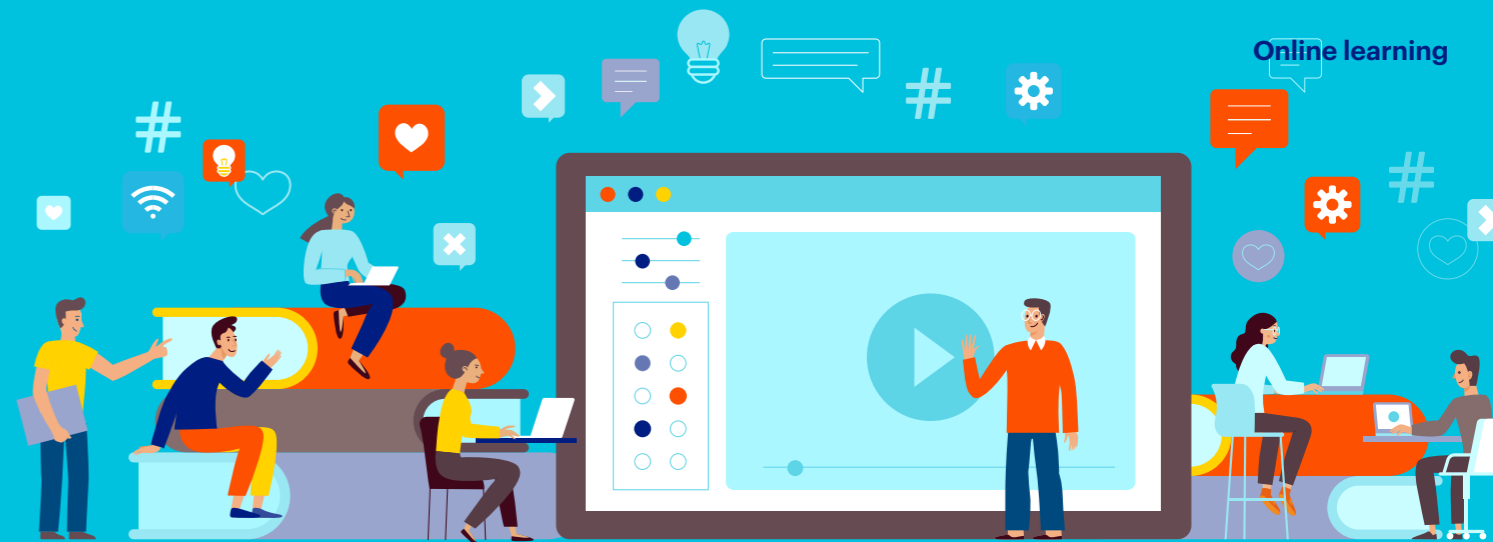
with the involvement of subject specialists is important to bridge this gap (Thorpe et al., 2017) – as one TAM tutor noted: 'If we're expecting the students to talk and use specific terminology, we do need to enable them to do that'.

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Hang Li (李航) is a PhD student and GTA in the Department of Music at the University of York, supervised by Dr. Liz Haddon. Hang's research investigates Chinese MA music students' language challenges on the host programme and explores the targeted language support. She has been working with the university teaching team to support students' language and academic development. Email: hl1301@york.ac.uk



Addressing challenges in asynchronous online learning

Enrico Reuter presents four key challenges in online learning, and outlines good practices to address them.

Online learning offers many benefits: it allows students to study flexibly and manage their academic work alongside private and professional responsibilities, while enabling universities to increase inclusivity and reach students that would be unable to study on campus. As online learning has become a core component of the educational offering in many universities, it is useful to reflect on challenges with this particular mode of learning and to discuss different ways of addressing them, with a focus on programme design, teaching practice, and study support (see also Reuter, 2023). This discussion is based on long standing experiences with postgraduate professional development programmes in social and public policy as well as public administration and management at the University of York.

Four challenges in online learning

Given the diversity of student experiences and of online programmes, identifying commonly

shared challenges is not easy. However, I would argue there are primarily the following four:

1. Students face substantive non-academic commitments

Students being obliged to work as they study is obviously not a challenge exclusive to online learning, but the scale of the problem is larger, as most online students may hold full-time positions with substantive managerial or leadership responsibilities. In addition to high workloads stemming from their employment, these students are also more likely to have caring responsibilities, be it for children or elderly relatives. Moreover, some international students can find themselves confronted by even more serious problems, such as war, civil unrest, or natural disasters.

2. Students have followed highly diverse educational and professional pathways

Students choose professional development programmes that meet their needs, so that the type

of their first degree (if any is held) is secondary. Students furthermore work in different organisational settings (whether it is the private, public or voluntary sector), at different levels of seniority. And students on online programmes come from a wide range of countries, all with their own educational traditions and particularities. It is therefore not surprising that online students are hugely diverse when it comes to their educational and professional trajectories.

3. Students expect applied learning, which bridges theory and practice

To serve its professional development purpose, students expect that their programme is of an applied nature, to enable them to link their learning to their own professional practices and contexts (Gillett-Swan, 2017). For some modules, this is a fairly simple task, but in others bridging theory and practice proves to be more challenging, given a higher degree of abstraction and complexity.

4. Students want to become part of a 'community at a distance'

A final characteristic worth highlighting is the commonly expressed wish by students to be part of a community, despite or possibly because of the geographical distance. As students inevitably miss out on the interpersonal interactions that are possible in campus-based study environments, there is a demand for substitute connections, whether within a given module, at programme level or between current students and alumni.

Addressing these challenges

In light of these key issues, what are pragmatic and effective approaches to address them? In my view, three main areas can be identified: programme design, teaching practice, and study support.

1. Effective programme design

An increasingly rich literature seeks to define good design principles for online learning, and it would be impossible to summarise all of these. Arguably though, six principles stand out, which can be encapsulated in the following requirements:

- Studies need to be asynchronous to ensure everyone can fully contribute (Gillett-Swan, 2017), but should also offer semi-regular synchronous learning opportunities on an optional basis. This can create the sense of community that is seen as important by many students, and provides room for more direct interactions that can be helpful in identifying students who struggle with their study work and in offering more targeted support (Crosslin et al, 2018).
- Programmes and modules ought to combine flexibility with a robust structure, to facilitate

...strong **study support** beyond the interactions within modules is essential

managed learning despite other commitments that students have. This should include guidance on which tasks are to be prioritised in periods of particularly high non-academic commitments – to “plan for flexibility” (Crosslin et al, 2018).

- The study process should be consistent and without surprises. Any milestones ought to be communicated clearly in advance, any unexpected changes should be avoided at best, and minimised as well as repeatedly communicated if necessary. In this context, tutors occupy managerial and organisational roles, in addition to their pedagogical and social roles (McPherson and Nunes, 2004).
- Core academic skills and topic-specific knowledge are best developed incrementally, building up competences layer by layer. This skills development should be integrated in modules, as mature learners with limited or no time for extracurricular study work will be unlikely to engage with separate training activities.
- Study activities, both on an individual and a group level, have to combine academic rigour with a strongly applied focus, to enable students to establish clear links between their learning and their professional experiences, to thus become reflective practitioners (Schon, 1999). This type of applied focus can be achieved via ‘simultaneous immersion’ (Brooks and Roberts, 2016), with students’ ability to learn and pursue their professional development enhanced by their involvement in study and work at the same time.
- Module and programme design should lay the groundwork for building a sense of community among students, notably by providing ample opportunities for peer-based learning and interactive engagement between students, for example in the form of role plays or guided group discussions.

2. Good teaching practices

In addition to the usual features of good teaching that we would like to see across all higher education, two points are worth underlining when it



comes to online learning, especially within professional development contexts:

- Teaching staff need to be able to foster applied collective learning in an online context, by helping students of all backgrounds to explore critically their professional practices. This means enabling students to fully understand the relevance of certain theories and concepts to their particular professional or national contexts, but also for tutors to connect the dots between the different perspectives presented by students and relating them to the themes of a module. For this, they ought to step back when an online community of learners is established around a specific task and when students are in the process of co-creating insights and knowledge. They ought to step in when this kind of desirable interaction is missing (or leading in unsatisfactory directions), being mindful of the key challenges in online learning discussed earlier. In line with the ‘community of inquiry model’ (Garrison and Anderson, 2017), tutors need to combine in the most effective way their teaching presence,

alternating between more direct delivery and encouragement of student interactions, their cognitive presence in sharing their subject expertise, and their social presence in creating conditions for a friendly and motivating learning environment in which all students feel welcome to participate.

- Teaching staff need to be able to identify and support students who struggle to engage sufficiently or consistently with study activities. The online context, in which students may choose to withdraw from active and visible participation, creates particular challenges here.

3. Robust study support

Last but certainly not least, strong study support beyond the interactions within modules is essential. Two points can be highlighted here:

- In one-to-one interactions, teachers, support staff and academic supervisors on online programmes need to be sensitive to cultural and personality differences, show awareness of professional constraints that can hamper a student’s engagement

with the study programme, and possess a basic level of understanding regarding the challenges that students in certain parts of the world may face in their day-to-day lives.

- Support should be focused on specific needs, and therefore has to be professionalised. Academic supervisors and student support staff play an obvious role here, but equally important is access to more specialist support systems, for example around mental health issues. In an online learning context however, barriers to accessing such specialist support have to be taken into account.

Online studies for professional development offer considerable opportunities for learners if key challenges are addressed effectively. However, any such attempts require substantive resources and are unlikely, due to the inevitability of the discussed challenges, to be entirely successful. Therefore, what constitutes ‘good practice’ should be continuously reviewed and adapted in its practical application, to find pragmatic approaches that maximise programme quality and student success.

Teaching staff need to be able to foster **applied collective learning** in an online context, by helping students of all backgrounds to explore critically their professional practices.

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Enrico Reuter is Senior Lecturer in Public and Social Policy in the School for Business and Society, University

of York. He has been teaching on online programmes for more than ten years, and acted as Programme Leader for four years. At present, he is joint Associate Dean for Teaching and Learning in the School. Twitter/X: @ReuterEnrico

Collaborating with external partners to promote experiential learning through the GenerationResearch scheme: an example student internship with Sense about Science

GenerationResearch



The GenerationResearch platform is an ongoing Widening Participation (WP) focussed initiative run through the Biology Department at the University of York that aims to provide summer internships for students across Yorkshire. Here we give an example of one such internship with the charity Sense about Science from the perspectives of the supervisor, host organisation and student.



Michelle (2nd left) outside the Palace of Westminster for Evidence Week

What is Generation Research? by Jillian Barlow

Experience, confidence, and engagement are key for students who wish to pursue a career in or connected to research science. This exciting field offers a staggering array of career pathways, from research and technical scientist roles to positions in science funding and policy. What happens though if you have no experience of these career paths and your particular background means you lack the confidence to find out?

The GenerationResearch programme is run by a team of academics and professional services staff from the Department of Biology at the University of York and provides authentic paid studentship positions in a range of technical and research projects, using a process that allows a focus on students from underrepresented backgrounds. This year, 35 students from the Universities of York, Leeds, Sheffield, Bradford, and Hull took up opportunities across the UK and overseas (including at Sense About Science, the Laboratory of Molecular Biology and Harvard Medical School). The successful students represented many different STEM disciplines, including medicine, physics, chemistry, engineering, and biology, allowing exciting interdisciplinary experiences.

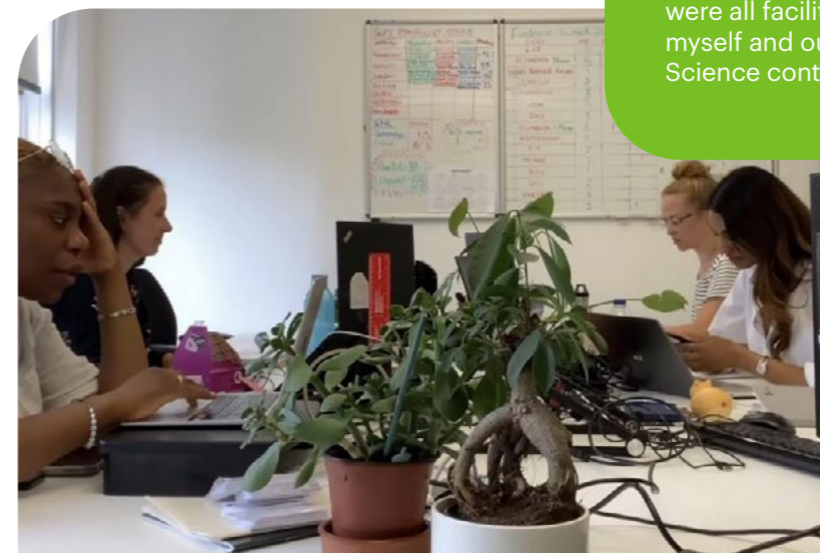


Supervisor perspective, by Alex Reid

Throughout my career in higher education I have been involved in teaching transferable skills, promoting student employability, and public engagement through STEM-related outreach and widening participation initiatives. I have developed a keen passion in all these areas and, after finding out about the GenerationResearch scheme, I immediately wanted to develop a collaborative project that would give a Widening Participation (WP) student the valuable chance to enhance their employability through a paid internship relating to public engagement.

To this end, I applied for £6k of funding to place our excellent WP intern, Michelle Igiehon, with Sense About Science, a charity whose work promoting evidence-based thinking I greatly admire. Funding was allocated to this initiative by Research England through the Enhancing Research Culture scheme at the University of York. In combination with an additional £1k of funding obtained by Michelle from the York Futures Scholarship, this meant she was able to undertake a salaried placement, allowing her to temporarily relocate to London. Recruitment, payment and intern selection were all facilitated by the GenRes team which included myself and our Sense about Science contact, Nita Pillai.

Below: Michelle (left) working with other interns at the Sense about Science headquarters in London.



Right: Michelle answering questions at the student symposium day with other GenRes students

Final thoughts + thanks



Host organisation perspective, by Nita Pillai

Sense about Science is an independent charity that promotes the public interest in sound science and evidence. We work with decision-makers, world-leading researchers and community groups to raise the standard of evidence in public life. For over 20 years we have worked to put evidence at the heart of the public discourse. In particular our work focuses on socially or scientifically difficult issues where the evidence is neglected, conflicting or misunderstood.

We regularly host interns to support our small London-based team and were delighted to welcome Michelle with the support of the GenerationResearch scheme and the University of York. Michelle joined us as we were preparing for one of our flagship events, Evidence Week in Parliament.

Evidence Week provides an opportunity for the public, parliamentarians, and researchers to discuss how evidence informs policy and how Parliament can promote evidence-based policies that consider the latest research findings. The week includes policy briefings, training sessions and lively discussions around cutting edge research and policy. Michelle had to hit the ground running – phoning MPs and Peers, reaching out to community groups and grassroots organisations, and providing all-round support to the team. Being present in Westminster for the duration of the event was an opportunity to witness firsthand the interactions and conversations between our parliamentarians and research partners.

Michelle assisted us in another important area of activity:

the Voice of Young Science programme, which works to inspire and support early career researchers (ECRs) to take responsibility for the public conversation around science and evidence, and develop the skills to engage and make an impact with the public, media and policy makers through our unique programme of training workshops and resources. She helped with the recruitment of panellists from the media and policy worlds and the promotion of the workshops to the wider ECR community.

We were grateful to have Michelle's support at such a busy time. I gained valuable first hand experience across communications, policy and public engagement, helping her to develop professional skills and contacts that will serve her well in the future.



Student perspective, by Michelle Igiehon

My internship with Sense about Science, in collaboration with Generation Research, provided valuable insights into the realms of science communication, research culture, and evidence-based policy. As a third-year medical student, interacting with the public is a significant part of my role. Especially in the post-pandemic era, I've developed a strong interest in the notion of "public opinion." I've come to realise the pivotal role of informed decisions and evidence-based medicine in healthcare and aspired to investigate how this concept applies in a broader context. My primary goals were to explore the practical application of evidence-based policy, delve into the field of science communication, and contemplate the various factors that influence public opinion.

During my time at the Sense about Science office in central London, I had the privilege of working with their amazing team and supporting various initiatives, including the John Maddox Prize, Voice of Young Science (VoYS) network, and Evidence Week.

Through assisting with the prestigious John Maddox Prize award show, I gained a deeper appreciation for the value of sound science. My role involved researching scientists from around the world who embody a passion for sound science despite facing hostility and professional and personal consequences. This experience highlighted the importance of creating a positive environment for open discussion of scientific evidence. I believe as scientists, we should feel empowered to scrutinise and question the evidence we receive and provide to the public.

Evidence Week allowed me to witness interactions between the public, policymakers, and researchers, providing valuable insights into successful ways these conversations can take place. I supported the team by contacting MP and Peer offices, identifying and supporting keen members of the public, and assisting with post-event press releases. From the opening event, where members of the public directly presented their questions to their MPs, to the debate during the reception that discussed political trade-offs, Evidence Week offered numerous opportunities to observe interactions. I noticed how important transparency, a human approach and open dialogue were.

Through the VoYS network, Sense about Science provides early-career researchers with guidance and support in their pursuits to further public discourse with evidence. This resonated with me, as I find myself increasingly drawn to the field of science communication. One crucial insight I gained from my involvement in the Standing up for Science workshop is the significance of scientists in public discourse. It is our responsibility as scientists to communicate evidence in a way that enables the public to make informed decisions and form their own opinions.

I am grateful for the opportunities I had to contribute as they have further fueled my passion for science communication and my commitment to promoting evidence-based decision-making in healthcare and beyond.



Jillian Barlow is a senior lecturer in Biomedical Sciences and the programme lead for the Biomedical Sciences degree. She is the current director of GenerationResearch, the award-winning studentship scheme that is the topic of this article. Email: jillian.barlow@york.ac.uk



Alex Reid is a lecturer from the Department of Psychology teaching a variety of courses including modules on infant development and consciousness and free will. He has a keen interest in critical thinking and education which is what led to his involvement in this initiative. Email: alex.reid@york.ac.uk



Nita Pillai has over 10 years experience working for a range of non-profit organisations working across policy and research. Nita was previously at the World Federation of Societies of Anaesthesiologists (WFSA) where she oversaw their portfolio of projects focused on complex global projects and programmes and working with, and coordinating diverse teams. Nita also has a PhD in Microbiology and a Masters in Public Health Nutrition from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. Email: hello@senseaboutscience



Michelle Igiehon is a 3rd year medical student at Hull York Medical School with an interest in medical research and science communication. She is passionate about building representation in the scientific world for underrepresented groups. Email: mi805@york.ac.uk

How to get involved?

If you would like to suggest potential new GenerationResearch partners or project ideas, please contact us at gen-res-project@york.ac.uk. Our project call is open to tenured faculty, post-doctoral researchers, and technicians and is released annually in December. Chosen projects are offered as summer studentships in the next cycle. To see our summer studentship projects from 2023 go to www.generationresearch.ac.uk.

Digital curiosity: Fostering creative digital engagement

Steph Jesper from the DISC team in Library, Archives, and Learning Services urges us all to get creative with our use of digital technologies.

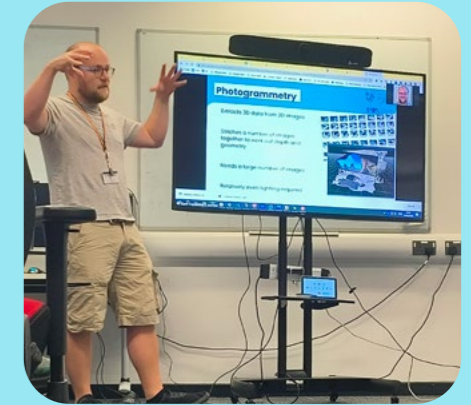
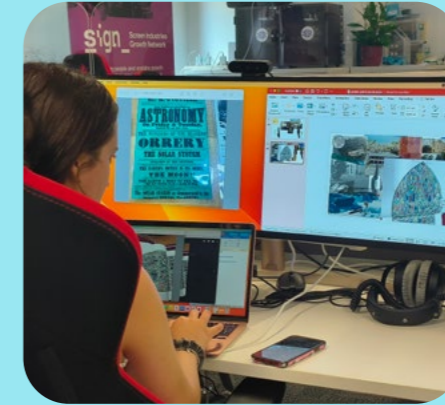
In our digital age, the ability to use, manipulate and produce digital content is becoming a requirement for participation in educational, social, economic and political activities. Essential to this digital engagement are creativity and critical thinking: required components of innovation and problem-solving. With artificial intelligence and machine learning moving from science-fiction to reality, creativity is often identified as the quality setting us apart from

robots, while the ability to detect fabrication from fact is becoming increasingly essential. For this reason, the Digital Inclusion, Skills, and Creativity team (DISC) in Library, Archives, and Learning Services has assembled a range of opportunities for members of the University to get digitally creative.

Getting on the grass

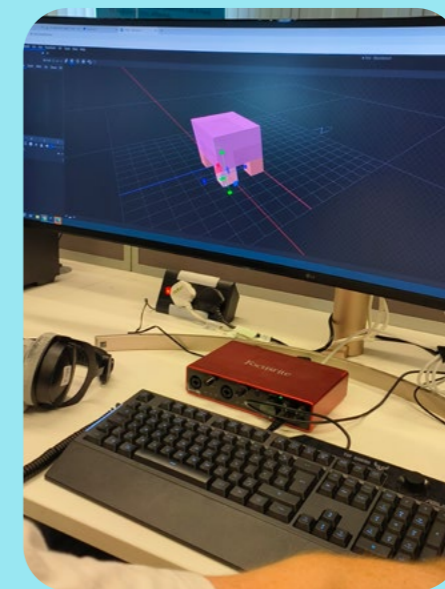
As part of the Library we're concerned with information literacy: negotiating information

sources and considering them critically. That criticality requires the ability to think creatively: to question sources from a range of perspectives and imagine the world from different angles. This extends to the broader topic of digital literacy. So much training in the past focused on "click here" walkthroughs which proceduralise and perhaps even gatekeep digital engagement by creating a blinkered, almost "keep off the grass" mentality. Users become fearful of doing the wrong thing — pressing a button that makes the computer explode. And then the tools change: menus move; Lotus gives way to Excel gives way to Google Sheets... Rather than memorising specific series of operations that limit our horizons and understanding, we're better off learning the conventions of software more generally, and developing the imagination to



apply previous experience to new programs and environments as they arrive. This digital 'fluency' — the ability to react to a changing digital world — is what we in DISC seek to instil: whether through our online *Skills Guides*, our embedded teaching, or our supplementary *Digital Skills Training* programme, we aim to equip students (and staff — most of our training is open to everyone at York since we can all benefit from expanding our digital horizons) with the digital, critical, and creative skills needed, not only in Higher Education, but in the wider world.

Our occasional *Digital Creativity Week* exemplifies this approach: a week of full-day sessions alongside the Borthwick Institute for Archives, the University Art Collection, and York Minster Library, where students are introduced to historic or artistic materials and a wealth of digital tools, and must then bring those



elements together to form artworks for an exhibition. We've had students with little background in (and a lot of nervousness about) arts and digital technologies, blossoming over the week to become creative (and confident) digital artists. And we've seen them win internships as a result of the skills they've learnt.

Learning through play

We can't run a week like this for everyone, but elements are built into the rest of our offering, not least our weekly *Digital Wednesdays* events. Conscious we're competing with students' valuable recreation time, we've pitched our Wednesday afternoon offering as part of that playtime: sessions that are primarily fun (but also secretly developmental). Whether it's making computer games in our *Learn to code* strand, inventing new memes, visualising

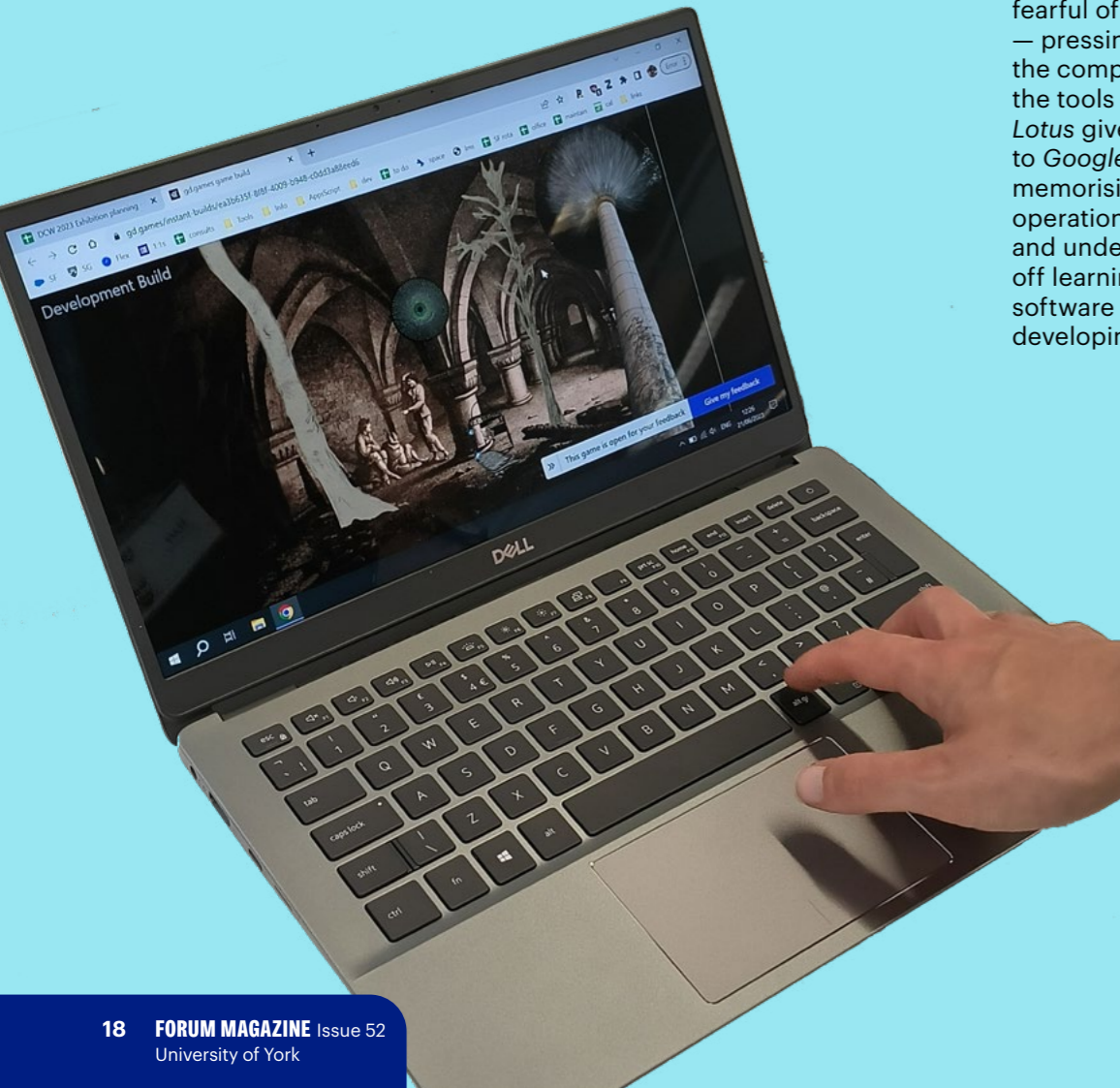
themselves with their personal data, or making art from bits of campus, we're getting students to consider digital technologies and our digital society in new ways, allowing space for creativity and play. It's about building confidence to try something new: opening strange doors and embracing the unknown!

This learning-through-play feeds into our two new labs, the *Creativity Lab* and *YorCreate*, launched last academic year. These offer space for members of the University to familiarise themselves with cutting-edge technologies like virtual reality, 3D printing, podcasting, and more. Again, the focus is on providing a space to experiment, expand personal horizons, and build that all-important confidence required to engage with the modern world. As technology evolves, just giving it a go can give all of us a head start with whatever comes next, and we're working to unlock that digital curiosity here at York.



Steph Jesper is a Teaching & Learning Advisor in the DISC (Digital Inclusion, Skills, & Creativity)

team in Library, Archives, and Learning Services. She coordinates the team's *Digital Skills Training* programme which runs in tandem with the *Academic Skills Community* and is open to all members of the University. She also edits the *Skills Guides* online resource. Email: stephanie.jesper@york.ac.uk X: @UoYLibrary Skills Guides: york.ac.uk/skills-guides - includes a listing of forthcoming training.



STUDENT STUDY TRIPS

Just a jolly, or a transformative learning experience?

Claire Sinclair and Catherine Botting reflect on their students' recent study trip to Greece and argue that in the post-covid recovery period, short-term mobility programmes, far from being a 'nice to have', can be an essential development opportunity for students.

Student study trips have long been known to have a beneficial impact on participants in a variety of ways; providing the opportunity for professional development (Giedf, Gokcek and Ghosh, 2015), enhanced cultural understanding (Brigham, 2011), as well as personal growth and increased independence (Cisneros-Donahue et al., 2012).

The evidence suggests that a study trip doesn't have to be lengthy in duration to be of lasting benefit to the student. According to a wide-ranging study by Universities UK International (2019), graduates who participated in mobility programmes of four weeks

or less had an unemployment rate of 2% compared with 4% for non-mobile peers. Further, 87% of students who took part in a short-term mobility programme were in a graduate job six months post-graduation, compared to 73% of non-mobile graduates.

With the unrelenting cost pressures faced by universities and students alike, it might be tempting to assert that similar benefits could be achieved through virtual or local connections, but the research is clear; direct exposure and cultural immersion is critical for study trips to achieve impact – Zoom just won't cut it! (Slantcheva-Durst and Danowski, 2018).

Pre-Brexit, the Erasmus programme accounted for over half of all short-term student mobility programmes of four weeks or less (Universities UK International, 2019), but this is no longer available to students at British universities, and so it is arguably more important than ever that Universities think creatively about how to offer overseas opportunities to students.

The University of York launched one such programme to its students recently. In May 2023, ten students from the University of York's School for Business and Society (SBS) were selected to take part in a remarkable study trip to meet professors and students from the Business

Administration & Economics Department at CITY College, Thessaloniki and participate in a two-day symposium.

The trip was fully funded by the department to ensure that the opportunity was accessible to all students. Participants in the programme had an enlightening learning and networking experience during their visit to Greece. They presented and discussed their own new venture ideas from their respective 'Business Planning' and 'Entrepreneurship' modules, were exposed to industry perspectives on sustainability and ESG trends through inspiring talks from CEOs of four large Greek companies, and visited Cisco's Digital Transformation and Digital Skills Centre.

Throughout the event, students and staff from the University of York and from City College made memorable connections, got to know the city of Thessaloniki and enjoyed some Greek cuisine and city nightlife! Anecdotal feedback from student participants was overwhelmingly positive and initial impact data suggests that the trip generated lasting benefits. One student participant stated:

"The trip to Thessaloniki fostered my personal growth in diverse

ways. Immersing myself in a new and vibrant cultural environment broadened my horizons and enriched my understanding of different perspectives. Interacting with fellow students from various backgrounds during group activities and social events not only enhanced my interpersonal skills but also nurtured a sense of collaboration and teamwork. Exploring the city's historical landmarks and engaging with local communities also deepened my appreciation for different cultures and the importance of cultural diversity in our globalised world".

Staff organisers observed some key characteristics of the trip that were critical to its success:

Directly linked to students' academic learning

Unusually, the study trip to Thessaloniki was department-led, in terms of planning, organisation and funding, and the itinerary was centred around a specific module on the students' programmes of study. The York students were introduced to City College students studying a module with similar learning objectives. Both modules required students to work in teams to develop a sustainable

business idea, which would be assessed via a pitch presentation and a written business plan. The trip enabled students from the respective modules to meet one another, present their business plans and peer review each other's ideas. Staff observed that this experiential exchange brought the modules to life, seeming to strengthen and accelerate students' learning. One participant stated: *"The trip to Thessaloniki proved to be incredibly useful in several aspects, significantly contributing to my development as a student and future professional. One of the major advantages of the trip was the enhancement of my presentation skills. Throughout the various activities and academic sessions, I had numerous opportunities to engage in public speaking and deliver presentations. These experiences allowed me to refine my ability to articulate ideas clearly, organise content effectively, and deliver presentations confidently. By receiving constructive feedback from peers and lecturers, I gained valuable insights that will undoubtedly prove valuable in my future academic and professional endeavours".*



87% of students who took part in a short-term mobility programme were in a **graduate job** six months post-graduation, compared to 73% of non-mobile graduates.

Universities UK International (2019)



Our trip to Thessaloniki gave the students so much more than just a “jolly” abroad.

An aid to post-pandemic recovery

Staff have observed a general deterioration in communication and teamworking skills among undergraduate students since the covid pandemic hit in 2020. Compared to the pre-pandemic period, fewer students among our current cohort have travelled overseas and may also have missed out on other confidence-building and skills development opportunities such as internships, work experience and charitable projects.

We offered an experience that, for some students, might not otherwise have been available. It was notable that at least one participant had never previously travelled overseas. Study trips such as this could play an important role in helping students to fill the skills gaps that continue to exist as a result of the pandemic.

Supporting student employability

Research shows that employers are more likely to recruit graduates with applied learning and project based learning experience (British Council, 2013). Students are 87% more likely

to be hired on graduation if they have participated in a field project in a diverse community with people from different backgrounds and cultures (Hart Research Associates, 2015).

Offering even brief opportunities to travel is beneficial to the student experience, but combining that with a project linked to the module they are studying transforms a “jolly abroad” into a cross-cultural collaboration that students will value, and can put on their CV to differentiate themselves in the graduate job market. One participant stated that the trip “proved to be an incredibly valuable and transformative experience that.... has undoubtedly positioned me for success in both my academic journey and future professional pursuits”.

An enriching experience for staff

It is clear that students were not the only beneficiaries of the trip: staff too commented that the experience had been enriching. They reported a strong sense of pride in what their students had accomplished over such a short period and appreciated



the opportunity to network with colleagues at City College and local entrepreneurs. Opportunities for further collaboration based on common teaching and research interests were identified during these discussions.

Aggeliki “IPapakonstantinou, Head of the Business Administration and Economics Department at City College said; “I would like once again to thank you and your team and these wonderful students for joining us here in Thessaloniki. We all had a wonderful time and we are still talking about this event! It brought us even closer and it is an experience of life for all students. I hope to talk to you soon and manage to sustain what we have started.”

Aligned with institutional strategic objectives

As with any investment, to gain funding approval the project needed to align with the strategic objectives of the University and the department. In this case, the trip supported the University’s strategic aim of establishing a collaborative relationship between the School for Business and Society and City College. Further, the trip aligned with the school’s bid to achieve the prestigious Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) accreditation, with the accreditors looking for evidence of innovative teaching practices and intercultural learning experiences for students.



order to offer mobility opportunities to students.

Our trip to Thessaloniki gave the students so much more than just a “jolly” abroad. Careful alignment of the purpose of the trip to the curriculum yielded innumerable benefits. Providing a task or project to fulfil meant that our students developed capabilities and had experiences that the pandemic previously deprived them of (Alghamdi, 2021), with the added benefit of offering something to enhance their CV. All in all, very much a transformative learning experience.

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Conclusion

As University finances become stretched ever further it would be easy for University budget holders to assume that the funding of such study trips for students is simply not an option at the moment. Certainly it would be naive to suggest that every department can find the budget to offer such opportunities. However, if our vision is to ‘provide an education that empowers’ students as well as ‘widen access locally and globally and eradicate achievement gaps’ (University of York, 2021), our experience suggests that the University must innovate in



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Claire Sinclair is a lecturer in management at The School for Business and Society. She joined the

University of York in 2018 following a 15 year career in management consulting, working on large-scale transformational change programmes for global clients across a range of industries. Claire is passionate about the practical application of theory and through her teaching aims to intertwine the acquisition of academic knowledge with the opportunity to develop employability skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, peer review and teamwork. Email: claire.sinclair@York.ac.uk



Catherine Botting is a lecturer in Management and Organisational Change. She joined the School for Business and Society in 2021.

Before becoming an academic, Catherine had a long corporate career as both a leader in large multinational organisations and as a Human Capital Consultant. Catherine still maintains strong industry links and as a result her teaching is grounded in contemporary practice, as well as being rooted in academic theory and research. Email: catherine.botting@York.ac.uk

Students' use of translation software in the classroom

Louise Frith considers findings from a small-scale study on students' use of Machine Translation Software in the classroom.

As a Departmental Academic and Communication Skills (DACS) Lecturer based in the Department of Politics and International Relations (DPIR), my role is to support students at Masters level to understand the academic requirements of their programme and to develop the academic literacy and communication skills that enable them to fulfil their academic potential. The department recruits masters students from all over the world: approximately 75% speak English as a second language. A growing number of students use Machine Translation Software (MTS), such as Google Translate, in the classroom to follow the content.

MTS has improved greatly in recent years; it is mainly accurate and gives students a direct translation of what the lecturer is saying which can have significant benefits for second language students. There have been useful studies which detail some of the ways in which students use MTS in their writing; for example, to patch-write assignments (Ivanic, 1998; Pecorari, 2003), to improve the quantity and quality of writing (Garcia & Pena, 2011), as a richer dictionary (Bahri & Sepora Tengku Mahadi, 2016) and to notice errors in writing (Lee, 2019). However, there has been much less research focused on how students use MTS in class and whether it hinders or helps students' language development. With this in mind, I undertook a small-scale research project within the DPIR.

The research took the form of an online survey which was

emailed to all Politics masters students (total 150) in April 2023. 25 students responded (20 Chinese speakers and 5 from other language backgrounds). Of these respondents, 12 (all Chinese speakers) said they used MTS in class all or most of the time. Students were asked questions such as how often they used translation software in class, which software they used, whether they wanted to decrease their dependence on translation software and what strategies they had to achieve this. Follow-up interviews were conducted with three of the survey respondents who reported using MTS all or most of the time. Each of the students interviewed commented they would like to be less dependent on MTS in the classroom, but none had developed an effective strategy to achieve this. The responses given about their reasons for using translation software fell broadly into two categories: academic anxiety and unfamiliar educational context.

Academic anxiety

- "I feel worried if I don't understand everything the lecturer says"
- "Sometimes the teachers speak too fast or I can't understand them"
- "Some native speaker students speak too quickly with strong accents"
- "The laptop is like a safe-space in front of me in the classroom"

Unfamiliar educational context

- "Although I passed the IELTS, I did not have any practice of speaking and listening"
- "In China we learn the correct answer, there is no training in critical thinking"
- "I don't like to ask questions in class because I don't want other students to know that I don't understand"
- "I am afraid to give the wrong answer"

Each of the students interviewed commented they would like to be **less dependent** on MTS in the classroom, but none had developed an effective strategy to achieve this.

MTS software in terms of weighing up the importance of understanding every word with the need to participate in classroom discussion.

2. Help students to feel less self-conscious about using MTS by encouraging them to ask for language support rather than hiding behind a laptop.
3. Encourage students who use MTS to sit near the front of the class because the software works better the closer it is to the speaker.
4. Once you get to know the students, try to identify sections

Implications for teaching

Based on these responses, the following points summarise some useful actions for teachers:

1. Talk to students about their use of MTS in class, especially to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of using

of your session where they can turn off MTS and just listen, in order to gradually reduce their dependence on the software.

5. Provide learning resources such as PowerPoint slides and reading materials (ideally in digital form to facilitate translation) in advance, so that students can familiarise themselves with the content and terminology before the lesson.
6. Provide opportunities for students to learn informally to help break down some of the power structures of a traditional classroom and encourage discussion between learners. Some of the approaches I have found effective this year include weekly "shut-up and write" sessions, five minute question time at the end of sessions, peer feedback sessions and project work.

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Louise Frith works as a Departmental Academic Skills and Communication Tutor in the Department of Politics and International Relations. She has recently published on student belonging, interaction and participation in the *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education*. Email: louise.frith@york.ac.uk

Supporting East Asian students at the University of York: Introducing the York Intercultural Committee

Dr Karisha George and Eleana Childs of the University of York Psychology Department explore the unique experiences of East Asian students and ask what can be done to maximise their academic and social experience whilst at the University of York.



It should come as no surprise either to academics or students that educational attainment is linked to mental health and wellbeing, nor that the demands of integrating into a very different society and educational culture mean that international students experience greater challenges in these areas, whilst home students, with their shared cultural heritage, are able to integrate and build social groups more rapidly. Research converges in highlighting this as

negatively impacting international students. For instance, Gomes (2017) states that studying abroad can be alienating, and Illeris (2007) argues that such alienation may negatively impact students' academic performance. He argues that students cannot engage with the content dimension of learning (what is being learnt) unless the incentive dimension is present (mental energy or space the student has in order for learning to take place). For example, the social and psychological demands of integrating into a new country might limit the cognitive resources international students are able to devote to their studies. Therefore, if East Asian students are experiencing the upheaval of an international move, a cultural change, and fear of anti-Asian discrimination following Covid-19 (Teng et al., 2023), it is possible that their academic performance will suffer.



Understanding our East Asian student's experiences is particularly important as they account for such a large proportion of the University of York's student population (4% of Undergraduate and 41% of Post Graduate Students), and are the largest group of international students in the UK (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2023). It is only through such understanding that we can know how to help students reach their full potential whilst studying at university.

Our study

We recruited 33 East Asian students to take part in a questionnaire administered via Qualtrics. A streams of consciousness procedure (Pennebaker and King, 1999) was used, as this enabled students to give their honest experiences of studying abroad, generating rich qualitative data. Questions covered both academic achievement and socialisation (e.g. socialising with home students and forming friendships). Through thematic analysis, we found five main themes including cultural differences, fear and anxiety, the effects of Covid-19, the presence of a language barrier and feelings of isolation. Many students described a desire to socialise with Home students, but an avoidance of doing so due to: 1) the fear of being judged because of their language skills, and 2) discomfort with the British university culture of drinking and partying. This led them to mainly socialise with other East Asian students, for example one student said, 'I don't understand what they are saying or how their things work (culture, clubbing etc), it's hard to get involved'. There was also a consensus among participants that they felt as though Home students would not want to engage with them and so they avoided 'wasting their time' by trying to say 'Hi'. However, some also reported intense feelings of distress as a result of the isolation felt when they considered integrating with Home students. These findings aligned with the literature, which highlighted that a key solution was to encourage connections between international and home students (Gomes, 2017). Based on this, we realised it was imperative to create a safe space

for Home and international students to interact without fear of being judged – a welcoming space for all. This research-led initiative was named the Intercultural Committee, and its main aim was to provide University of York students from around the world an opportunity to learn about one another's cultures. In order to maximise its effectiveness, the Department of Psychology also invited students from the Departments of Economics and Education.

Events and future plans

Our first event, just before the Christmas break in 2022 involved asking students to bring along their favourite mug for a hot chocolate and chat evening, which was attended by almost 40 students. By bringing along a personal item, students were able to start conversations about this topic without fear of having to find something to say. Feedback from this event showed 89% of students felt more confident to approach someone from a different culture and 68% had learnt something about a different culture, meeting our goals of creating a space where people are able to comfortably engage in conversation with others from a range of backgrounds. Since our inaugural event, there has also been a movie evening which encouraged students to talk about what they had watched and a board games evening.

Our remit has since expanded to include the newly-launched 'conversational afternoons' initiative, which aims to help international students and staff understand informal British language in a relaxed setting. This initiative has been driven by students' desire to engage more fully with local culture. One student was shocked to discover that Yorkshire pudding was not a dessert! She stated that understanding British culture and language was one of the reasons she came to university in the UK and, until this point, she had no experience with home students, so setting up a space where people can discuss their cultures and colloquial language was of the utmost importance. The initiative focuses not only on international students, but seeks to empower all students by giving them the opportunity to

teach others their languages – from Igbo to Mandarin to Trinidadian. The hope is that all these intercultural exchanges will lead to the creation of a University of York 'Multicultural dictionary' by students, for students!

The Intercultural committee has evolved from its initial purpose of helping international students with their isolation (with a view to improving their academic performance) into an empowering tool of diversity that will enhance the University of York's multiculturalism.

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Dr Karisha Kimone George is an Associate Lecturer in the Department of Psychology. She has a

particular interest in understanding the experiences of BAME students and what can be done to increase their involvement at university. She is the BAME staff champion within the department and has directed multiple student-led initiatives to make the department a more inclusive environment.



Eleana Childs is a former integrated master's student in the Psychology Department. She has completed various roles within the department including Department Community Coordinator where she assisted in research regarding different student experiences and how they can be improved.

Mapping the journey to learning in the 21st century: Spotting friends, foes and falsehoods

In a climate of uncertainty about which skills employees will need in the future, how can tertiary level institutes educate future graduates without being imprisoned by the present?

In his iconic TED Talk *Do schools kill creativity?* Ken Robinson (2007) described education from what he calls a 'bureaucratic aspect', explaining that it was initially set up to provide new spare cogs to sustain the system. With the new financial climate, and new professional fields being created as we speak, we may be inclined to agree with Robinson that the future of education seems uncertain. Robinson goes on to explain that education is meant to take us into the future but, since we do not know what type of needs the employees of the future will be asked to cater for, we cannot comprehensively outline the skills education needs to develop. Therefore, education is a tool that is meant to take us into a future so uncharted that all we can do is keep educating generations with the present in mind. Harari (2018) calls this "making decisions for the future, based on present knowledge."

Examining all levels of education, it may appear that not much has changed in the 21st century. Despite some changes in methods and syllabi, many educational systems still thrive on information cramming and memorisation. We insist on equipping learners with predetermined skills, but we do not work enough on honing their ability to make sense of the parts that make the whole so that they can create a cohesive narrative of the world around them (Harari, 2018).

One might wonder exactly how the tertiary level journey has changed. To illustrate this, we will use the analogy of a train journey. In the past, students got on the train (university department), which took them through different stations (stages in their studies) until they got to the terminal station where they disembarked (graduated) and potentially never looked back. If they had taken the Law train, they would now be lawyers and they would stay lawyers forever. This used to be our reality until the late 1990s. Now, Harari argues, soon after embarking on the train, the students

realise they are meant to stay students forever, as there is no terminal station where to disembark. To get to the next station, students need more skills, since those accumulated so far are not enough (Harari, 2018). Additionally, as the train journey progresses, the travellers become increasingly aware of the need to drive the train themselves and plan the route through the landscape of education.

Digital natives

This analogy perhaps brings us closer to outlining the profile of the 21st century student. Often described as digital natives, Schaberg (2022) uses a different term: *Digital slaves*, as they end up being led, and defined by, technology. Janschitz and Penker (2022) argue that this generation exhibits *selective transference of digital literacy*, a phenomenon that may be apparent to educators in the contrast between their rapid progress in gaming and less enthusiastic use of technology for their education. These young people often have to embark on their tertiary learning away from home and, for many, this is the first time they will have to take care of themselves, get a part-time job, and engage with other aspects of 'adulthood'. They need to create a self-organised learning environment, in most cases without the foundation of prior knowledge. Finally, this generation finds it increasingly difficult to commit to lectures on modules they do not find intrinsically interesting.

When these students enter tertiary level institutions, they are expected to participate in their lectures by listening and doing as they are told, to memorise materials, to pass exams and achieve high scores, to compete with other students, and to finish their degree in their chosen field. Timms and Heimans (2018) compare this to the game TETRIS, where players can rapidly become overwhelmed if they do not deal with the approaching blocks fast enough. A change seems necessary. Students should be expected to attend

lectures in a personalised and meaningful way that leaves room to speak, rather than listen, even if it is only to ask questions. That will make them stay actively engaged to critically examine and research their field.

They should also choose how they participate in lectures. Instead of memorising, students should be encouraged to learn experientially and critically. Through projects that permit this they could build diverse portfolios that showcase their learning and progress. They should be encouraged to collaborate, instead of competing. Since their train journey has no terminal stop, they should get used to the idea of life-long learning and invest time in developing the personal tools to do this. Following Timms' and Heimans' (2018) gaming analogy, 21st century students would be better served by a game such as Minecraft, which is open-ended and allows for the design of their own learning universe.

In this personalised learning universe, learners will need to forge alliances: they will need friends. The first 'friend' is the value found through different kinds of resources (human resources, libraries, technology). In human resources we list lecturers who will share their passion with their students and open previously unsuspected career paths as well as pathways to learning. Secondly, technology has to be seen as a major ally, provided students realise how deskilling it can become and opt to control it, rather than be led by it. Finally, students will find a great ally within their own mind as they develop a growth mindset.

University departments can aid this endeavour by progressively linking academia to the world of employment, either by encouraging more extensive internship programmes or by devising tools that help students understand how each module makes them more competitive. For this reason, CITY College has designed a set of badges which make up a 21st century employability profile. These badges represent skills the students have to develop. These icons are found in almost any activity students are asked to do, from syllabi, to assessment handouts to company visit posters. They clearly indicate that whatever is done at university has a clear aim connected with the real world.

Foes are factors that hinder or slow down learning, of which there are many with some posing as friends. Chief among these may be the students' inability to adjust, which could be due to their deep-rooted ideas about learning which are slow to change. Therefore, a greater connection is needed between the last classes of secondary school and university, so that future students can start developing greater flexibility and self regulation to avoid the

propensity towards a *surface approach* to learning (Asikainen et al., 2022). This tendency could be related to the students' desire for a degree at all costs. Students need to realise that what matters now is how one graduates and what one has to show upon graduating.

In among the friends and foes, students will encounter many **falsehoods**, which include whatever makes empty promises. One such claim is that studying can be avoided or that knowledge can be truly constructed in the absence of an active mind consciously engaged. An example to illustrate this would be the current infatuation with AI.

It is clear that we are educating future graduates for a society and a working environment about which we know very little. From what we can see, we need to invest time, effort and financial means to make university education less top-down and more bottom-up (Timms and Heimans, 2018) so that it becomes more geared towards the future.

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Maria-Araxi Sachpazian is an EFL Teacher and a Lecturer in the Department of Humanities of CITY College, University of York Europe Campus. She is the Managing

Director of *Input on Education*. Maria's interests lie in materials' evaluation and adaptation, digital teaching, and the construction of teacher identity. She is the Secretary to the Board of Trustees of IATEFL and the Chair of TESOL Macedonia-Thrace, Northern Greece. Email: msachpazian@york.citycollege.eu



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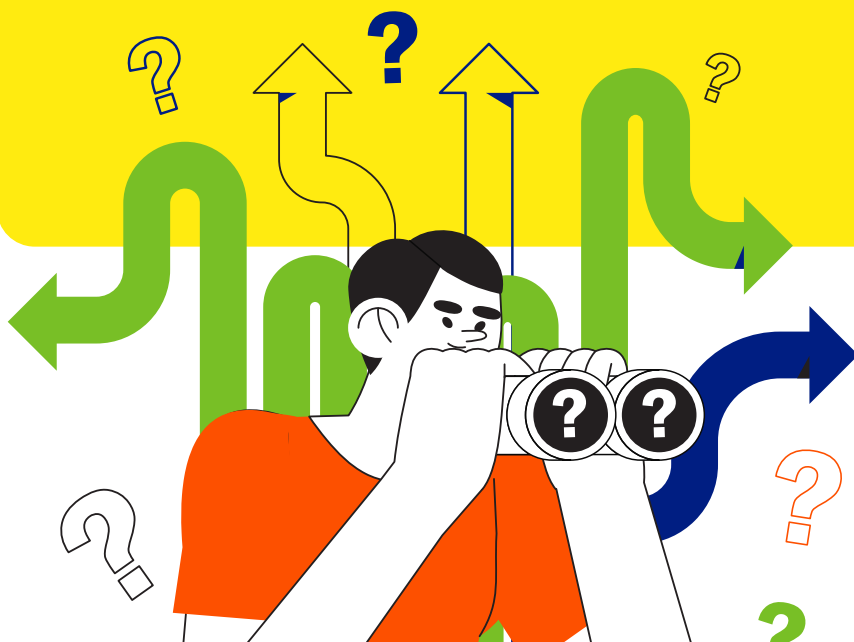
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