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# CREATING AN INCLUSIVE LEARNING & TEACHING EXPERIENCE

EDU120 PGCHE Assignment 5 by Darren Whittington 04/15

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“Under the Equality Act 2010, it is unlawful for education institutions to discriminate against any student in any teaching and/or learning activities. Providers must ensure that teaching and learning is inclusive for all students, including disabled students. The anticipatory duty requires that teaching staff anticipate the needs of students regardless of whether or not they have disabled students in their classes and to make reasonable adjustments.”

## EXAMPLE:

The majority of teaching undertaken within the School of Communication at Falmouth University is through group critique sessions known internally as learning teams. These are a valuable aspect of formative feedback for the students and also a time for peer group reflection on complex topics of communication.

These learning teams have become integral to the student learning experience and are designed to be supportive at an individual level ensuring a consideration of the Equality Act 2010 through a personalised approach to individuals needs, the environments in which they are taught and the manner in which the feedback is delivered.

“The Act permits, but does not compel, organisations to undertake measures to alleviate disadvantage experienced by people who share a protected characteristic, reduce their under-representation in particular activities, and meet their particular needs.” (1. Equality and Human Rights Commission 2010)

The protected ‘disabled’ characteristics defined by the Equalities Act 2010 and noted within the Schools HESA student records include Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, ADHD, Visual Stress, OCD, CFS, ME, SPLD, Partial hearing, Fibromyalgia, Anxiety, Depression, Crohn’s & Aspergers.

With such wide ranging disabilities the School has tried to make reasonable adjustments within the learning team environment to ensure that feedback is delivered in an empathic and personalised way that ensures that the individual gets quality feedback that improves the students learning journey without exclusivity.

## REFLECTION:

The diagnosed disabilities of under graduates within the Creative Art & Design sector of higher education now stands at 15.7% per annum (2 Equality in Higher Education: Statistical Report 2013), at Falmouth University with it’s focus on creative education this number is closer to 25% (Appendix 1). When including undisclosed disabilities this number could actually be closer to c.30% of the School of Communications student intake per annum, this is an increasing trend and therefore becoming the norm to which the School should engage in it’s teaching practice and the learning environments it creates.

The personalised approach to learning teams/crits is reliant on the ability of tutors to work with small groups of students of c.6-8, allowing the time to cater for individual needs and flexibility in an approach to communicating peer feedback.

With the increasing numbers of disabled students attracted to the School, an increase in overall annual student intake and the diversification of a lecturers role within the business of the University the pressure is now mounting to increase the sizes of these learning groups and decrease the time available to run them.

#### CONSTRAINTS ON APPLYING THIS GUIDELINE:

The 'crit' is a well documented fragile environment which is reliant on the teaching practices of an individual tutor to create stability, consistency and fairness in the way that feedback is delivered and how students engage in peer review of work within a group, it is also dependant on the individuals teaching methods most conducive to the fulfilment of creative potential as described by Dinean and Collins "which are those which encourage student responsibility through ownership, trust and low levels of authoritarianism, providing individual attention and opportunities for independent learning" (3 2005: 46)

The supportive need within a crit is also documented by Danvers (4 2003: 45) who says that "creativity, a critical aspect in all learning but especially in design, thrives in an environment where the individual feels psychologically and physically comfortable, in an atmosphere of trust, security and openness".

This trust is conducive to a smaller group crit where a personalised approach is much easier to maintain as inclusive but when group sizes increase there becomes a risk of creating anxiety and confidence issues commonly associated in group dynamics:

"The learning value of feedback students receive at the large crit is often affected by their perception of self. This, the study evidences, results in much of the verbal formative assessment feedback literally falling on deaf ears" (5 Blair 2006)

These studies shouldn't be ignored and when paralleled with the protected characteristics identified within the Equalities Act 2010 a new approach needs to be considered to ensure the crit is still relevant so that we can still comply even with larger group sizes in an inclusive manner:

"You must not discriminate against a student at your institution in the provision of education, or access to any benefit, facility or service, by excluding them or by subjecting them to any other detriment" (1 Equality and Human Rights Commission 2010)

The crit has traditionally followed a professional approach to parallel how feedback is communicated by industry figures within their highly pressurised environment, but as Blair outlines in an interview this paralleled world doesn't actually take place in large groups:

"In practice as a designer I don't know when you talk to a large group – occasionally, but I've never done this in practice. All my presentations were to 2, 3 or 4 people, max. 6 people. I have never been involved as a designer where you talk at large groups. It's always been a dialogue" (5 Blair 2006)

With this in mind we can re-look at the traditional notions of a crit and turn to Barrett (6 Barrett) who suggests a different approach as 'Mentor' to create a level playing field to inspire and protect students, one that encourages multiple interpretations from tutor and students in an environment that is reciprocal based on mutual respect where mentor and student have benefits to offer one another.

This approach could foster an environment where students would participate more willingly and feel a shared responsibility to engage with the feedback and encourage respect for one another's opinions/ shared wisdom. The approach allows the student to model their education with the questions they want answering about their work in a supportive inclusive environment which is energising rather than destructive and a reasonable adjustment worth considering to pre-empt the increase in diagnosed disabled students and a potentially better way of running a large group crit that can still consider the learning

journey of individual students as defined by their own desires to learn, balanced with the use of online communication to deliver tailored responses by tutor and peer group.

## RESOURCES:

Courses with the School of Communication use of the online social platform Facebook to deliver one to one feedback outside of the learning team environment has become an essential way of tutor and student keeping communication channels open and give timely feedback when required on more specific tasks or individual requirements. Whilst this is still time consuming it can be responded to with targeted provision for individuals disabilities which “puts in place additional or bespoke provision to benefit a particular disadvantaged student group.” (1 Equality and Human Rights Commission 2010)

The use of this platform also gives the learning team the time to reflect on their feedback, discuss outside of the crit and pose additional questions to the group to clarify certain aspects of their critique and get immediate responses from peers in a controlled online environment that the tutor can monitor and intervene where required, mirroring the physical experience on campus.

The use of this platform may at first seem a free for all to abuse but it has actually created a secure environment where the students engage with one another 24/7 with the knowledge that the tutor will respond if their questions haven't already been answered by their peers.

“The head of our year used Facebook instead to communicate everything, and it was just so much clearer and everyone knew what was happening, like every day because you'd just join the group and you could email them back, whereas on StudentSpace it's really harder to sort.” (5 Blair 2006)

This resource is already saving admin time and out of hours conversations where student wish to pose similar questions and as such can free time to help those students that require more face to face interaction. Whilst this doesn't replace the learning team interaction on campus where body language can help judge a way to deliver feedback, it does give us the ability to talk on mass.

With larger learning teams predicted this resource will help tutors deliver additional feedback where required in an empathic way and focus on the individual needs, allowing the learning team environment to focus on professional practice and deliver multiple interactions with the student work to encourage supportive feedback to reflect on and implement in their working practice.

## STAFF DEVELOPMENT & LIAISON OPPORTUNITIES:

A new framework is required for tutors to follow and develop a crit environment that is focussed on the student taking responsibility for the direction of their feedback, take ownership of the learning experience, stay engaged and be reflective on their own professional practice.

This framework should have a clear focus on the delivery of a critique that can cope with group numbers of up to and exceeding 12 students balanced with the use of Facebook as a secondary resource for follow up questions and individual mentoring.

In order to remain compliant with the Equality Act 2010 it would also be a benefit to have an additional training programme for staff to help understand the varying complexities of student disabilities, symptoms and the issues relating to multiple disabilities for individual students. This will also help identify students who have not been diagnosed who can then receive additional help or reasonable adjustments made accordingly to the critique framework.

Disseminating good practice relating to this revised framework with an integrated training program would allow other educational practitioners at Falmouth University to consider this inclusive learning

experience in regards to their own School and collectively create a best working practice when considering the disabilities identified with the Equality & Diversity Act 2010.

## REFERENCES:

<sup>1</sup> Equality and Human Rights Commission, Technical Guidance on the Public Sector 2010. Available at: <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/legal-and-policy/equality-act/equality-act-codes-of-practice-and-technical-guidance> (Accessed 24 April 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Equality Challenge Unit. 2013. Equality in Higher Education: Statistical Report, Part 2.

<sup>3</sup> Dineen, R. and Collins, E. 2005. 'Killing the Goose: Conflicts Between Pedagogy and Politics in the Delivery of a Creative Education', Journal of Art and Design Education, pp. 43 -55.

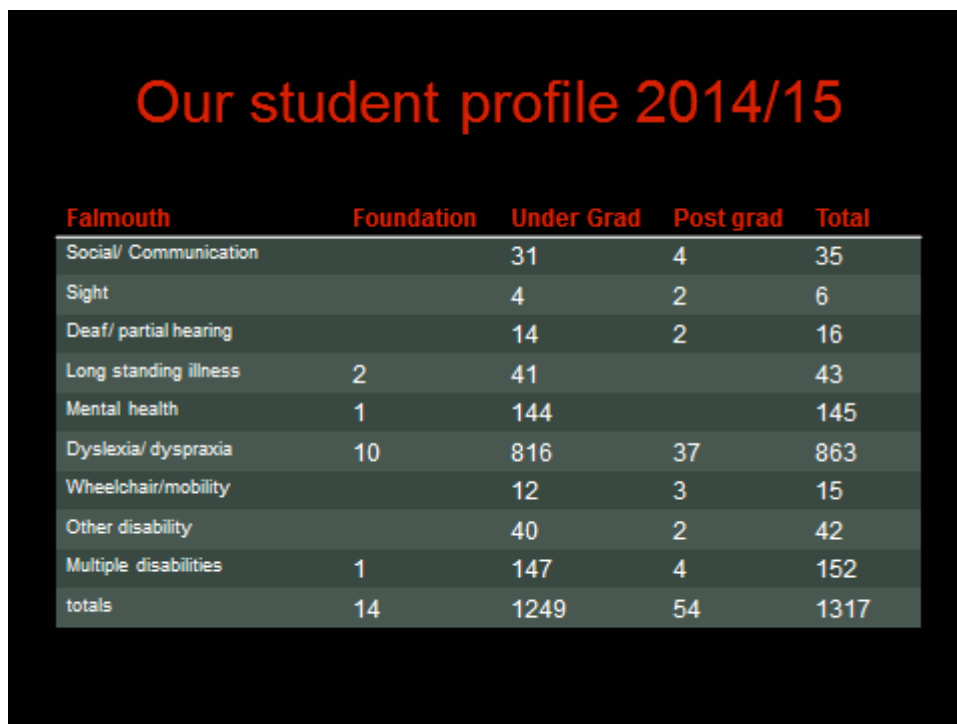
<sup>4</sup> Danvers, J. 2003. 'Towards a Radical Pedagogy: Provisional Notes on Learning and Teaching in Art and Design', Journal of Art and Design Education, pp. 47 -51.

<sup>5</sup> Blair, Bernadette. 2006. Art, Design & Communication in Higher Education Volume 5 Number 2. Kingston University

<sup>6</sup> Barrett, Terry. 2000. Studio Critiques of Student Art: As they are, as they could be with mentoring. Theory into practice 39, No.1 pp. 28-35. Wint

## APPENDIX:

<sup>1</sup> FXU disability report for Falmouth University Student Profiles 2014/15 based on a student intake of 4800.



### Our student profile 2014/15

Falmouth	Foundation	Under Grad	Post grad	Total
Social/ Communication		31	4	35
Sight		4	2	6
Deaf/ partial hearing		14	2	16
Long standing illness	2	41		43
Mental health	1	144		145
Dyslexia/ dyspraxia	10	816	37	863
Wheelchair/mobility		12	3	15
Other disability		40	2	42
Multiple disabilities	1	147	4	152
totals	14	1249	54	1317