Meraki

MERAKI

Towards transformative learning in higher education

CHRISSI NERANTZI

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Dedicated to all my amazing colleagues, students and friends who inspire me every day.

LICENCING

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Dr Damian Mcdonald (FHEA) has spent almost two decades in digital education, working with students and academics to improve the student learning experience using digital pedagogies and technologies. With a PhD in e-Research and Technology Enhanced Learning, Damian's research interests lie in the space where humans and technologies meet, and the study and improvement of their interactions. Recent work has focussed on the educational use of Artificial Intelligence and reflective poetry, and supporting the innovations of the academic community.

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Dr Chrissi Nerantzi (NTF, CATE, PFHEA) is a Professor in Creative and Open Education in the School of Education, the Academic Lead for Discovery and a Senior Lead of the Knowledge Equity Network.

Her innovative contributions, such as cross-boundary learning and open professional development, foster collaborative, creative and inclusive education. A National Teaching Fellow, multi-award-winning educator, and prolific researcher, Chrissi integrates creativity, playfulness, and openness to inspire transformative learning experiences across disciplines and communities. She is an internationally recognised leader in creative and open education, with a career spanning roles as a teacher, programmer, translator, academic developer, and education innovator in Greece, Slovenia, Germany, and the UK. Chrissi is a GO-GN alumna, the founder of the international open #creativeHE community and has co-created many OER and initiated a range of further open professional development courses, networks and communities that have been sustained over the years. Chrissi is the author of Part 1 of the book and the editor of Meraki. The invitation to submit thought-provoking contributions that align to Meraki is open to all.

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Dr J Simon Rofe (FHEA) is a scholar of Diplomacy at the University of Leeds. He is dedicated to student centred co-creating of learning; appreciative of the value of working collaboratively with a range of stakeholders; and a keen advocate of reflective practice. He held the role of Deputy Director of the**Centre for Online**and Distance Education (CODE) at the University of London 2020-24, including time as Acting Director (2021-22 & 2023-24). Simon was the inaugural Programme Director for the **MA Global Diplomacy** at SOAS University of London, and was the institution's head of Knowledge Exchange and Enterprise (2020-22), and before then Head of Digital Learning between 2016 and 2020; devising the institution's first Online Learning Strategy in 2018, and led in the strategic response to COVID 19. He has designed, developed and delivered (3Ds) numerous online and digital learning programmes under the aegis of the IR Model (Rofe, 2011) at a variety of HEIs, NGOs and other organisations including members of the UN family; he developed MOOCs in their first wave with **Understanding Research Methods** MOOC and then **Global Diplomacy: Diplomacy in the Modern World** and, having been widely published in the Scholarship of Learning and Teaching, has been at the forefront of digital learning for many years.

Simon Vallance (FHEA) is a Digital Education Manager within the Digital Education Service. He is an experienced learning designer having worked in a variety of educational settings in a long and varied career. Simon leads the Digital Learning Design team who support and enable academic colleagues to use technology to enhance the student experience at Leeds. He is particularly interested in exploring how digital tools can support the creation of active, learner-centred learning experiences.

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PROLOGUE

In September 2023, I started an internal secondment as the Academic Lead for the institution-wide Discovery initiative. Discovery is an offering operating at the University of Leeds since 2009, with thousands of students benefiting over the years. It broadens students' university experiences through their engagement in diverse learning experiences that go beyond the boundaries of their programme of study.

At the time of writing this book, the Discovery initiative consists of hundreds of modules offered by Schools and Faculties during timetabled semester time. Discovery modules are available mostly to undergraduate students whose programmes are designed to accommodate Discovery modules.

As part of the Discovery work undertaken between September 2023 and August 2025, and together with many committed colleagues and students from across the institution, including from the School of Education, the School of Design, School of Politics and International Studies, the Lifelong Learning Centre, Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences, Faculty of Business, Faculty of Biological Sciences, Faculty of Environment, the Sustainability Research Centre as well as Professional Services: Organisational Development and Professional Learning, Digital Education Service, Helix, Learning Design Team and The Library. We have come together as the Discovery Delivery Group, and have been inquiring into how the current Discovery provision could be complemented to further diversify the offer and extend its reach. We are imagining and co-designing new credit- and non-credit-bearing provision to expand opportunities for flexible, experiential, inclusive and transformative learning that is lifewide and lifelong. Learning that would be attractive for our undergraduate and postgraduate students and beyond, create opportunities for personal and professional growth and create opportunities to bring extra- and co-curricular learning into the curriculum via the new SOUL modules (Structured, Open, Unbounded, Learner-led) developed during my secondment based on the openly licensed practice-based professional development programme FLEX for those who teach or support learning at Manchester Met and the openly licensed SLICCS modules for students at Edinburgh University. Our aims are to expand our students' horizons and help them grow as individuals and professionals. We would also like to inspire them to recognise and harness their power as active citizens to contribute positively to communities and society throughout their lives.

We are delighted that at the time of the publication of this book, that specific SOUL modules with input from further colleagues and teams of the institution have been shaped further, embraced and approved and will be trialled within the Lifelong Learning Centre from 2025/26.

Part 1

Part 1 of this book captures many meandering thoughts, wanderings and wonderings I explored with love, care, and attention during my secondment to gain and share insights into how learning can be truly stimulating and transformative. Only when we look deep inside ourselves and critically (self-) reflect on our own habits, views, feelings, actions can we frame and re-frame our assumptions (Mezirow, 1978), can we feel empowered and alive to take on personal and social responsibility and act (Boström et al., 2024).

I decided to include the personal creativity manifesto I wrote in 2019. This provides valuable framing of the collection of articles and my own positionality in relation to creativity, openness, and collaboration in education and life. This is why the book is named meraki.

Meraki or μεράκι in Greek, pronounced me-ra-kee, means doing something with soul, filling the process and/or product with warmth, love, and care, and adding something from yourself to it. This is what happened with Discovery, the prototype versions of the Structured, Open, Unbounded, Learner-led (SOUL) modules we created and all associated work, including the scaffold designs in Jam, Open and Block format. I am delighted that the university embraced these and is preparing for implementation. According to (Babiniotis, 1998, 1079) meraki comes from the Turkish word merak, where it seems to mean curiosity. Reading on, I found that the Turkish word merak may have its roots in the arabic marakk. Meraki has no direct translation into English (and no proper or fully developed Wikipedia entry yet!). I decided that Meraki is a suitable title for this open book and captures the spirit and ethos of its creation.

During the time of my secondment and specifically two months into starting it, generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) propelled rapidly into the world of higher education. It was impossible to escape or ignore related ideas, practices, and dilemmas in the articles included in this book (Nerantzi, et al., 2023; Abegglen et al., 2024; Bozkurt et al., 2024). There are 13 articles in this book presented in Part 1, together with a prologue and an epilogue. Some of the articles have been shared in their original format via the Media and Learning Association and the Knowledge Equity Network. The creativity manifesto appeared for the first time in Creative Academic. I am grateful to these networks, organisations, and individuals involved for sharing some of my ideas openly. The articles have been further edited for this collection, some more extensively than others.

Voices

In order to create opportunities for dialogue and harness the affordances of digital technologies, short video vignettes with responses from dear colleagues I worked with during my secondment have been added to each chapter to bring their voices alive. The transcript is available for each of these. I am grateful for their contributions. The vignettes follow loosely the "What? So what? Now what?" model (Rolfe et al., 2001 inspired by Borton, 1970) and pick up a seed from each chapter.

Voices

Video with [colleague's name]. Transcript.

The Meraki voices playlist – all the clips in one place

What if?

Reflective triggers using the "what if" format inspired by possibility thinking (Craft, 2008; Craft et al., 2008) have been added to the chapters to feed curiosity, imagination and wonder and create opportunities for you to explore possibilities, questions and connections. Reflection is however incomplete if it doesn't lead to change, to action. I therefore hope that the triggers will provide you with an anchor for deeper meaningful exploration and questioning of your own approaches and practices... and generate further questions that you are open to discuss with others to uncover new insights and tickle your curiosity to make adventures happen in your teaching and/or learning.

What if...

we had such boxes in the main part of the book, you could use as reflective triggers?

We have 🙂 Look out for them and engage.

Thank you

I am thankful to all critical scholars, students, and friends who have over the years challenged, stretched and helped me shape my thinking through their and our collective work and lives and in conversation, but also via active and playful experimentation. I am grateful to Professor Kenny McDowall, Dr Margaret Korosec and Professor Anne Tallontire for their trust and the opportunity to lead the design of a complementary provision

for the highly successful Discovery initiative at the University of Leeds and everybody I have worked with on this exciting project.

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Finally, I would like to thank everybody I worked with during my Discovery secondment, all those colleagues who contributed their wisdom to the video vignettes and everybody in the Discovery Working Group for our fruitful collaboration over the last two years.

Part 2, an open invitation

Meraki is made available under an open licence. It is a living book that is intended to grow and evolve if we handle it with care and nurture novel ideas around critical, creative, and open pedagogies and practices.

Contributions by colleagues and students written with *meraki* are invited to this book in Part 2. These will be openly peer reviewed on a rolling basis.

Consider capturing and sharing your thinking around critical, creative and open pedagogies, learning, teaching and supporting students' learning in response to any of the articles included or contribute something completely new that excites you and challenges and stretches our collective thinking and practice.

I would love to hear from you. Please email me at c.nerantzi @ leeds.ac.uk without the gaps.

Chrissi Nerantzi

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AI MERAKI PART 1 PODCAST

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://leeds.pressbooks.pub/meraki/?p=238#audio-238-1

This Podcast was generated using NotebookLM and a pdf file of Part 1 of the book. Please note that not all the podcast may be accurate and no claim is made by the author of the Meraki book that they are the originator of all ideas presented in this as the work of others is unfortunately not acknowledged. Full references are provided in the book itself.

If you would like to create your own interactive podcast of the book or sections of it, check out NotebookLM.

PART I

PART 1

1.

LIVING IN THE UNCOMFORT ZONE OR TOWARDS A CREATIVITY MANIFESTO

Curiosity to explore.
To experiment.
To play.

Searching for questions and answers.
More questions.
Questions move us,
move us into new/alternative directions.

Ideas are born through questioning,
through imagining things,
through novel connections.

Linked to desires, a need, a mission,
an opportunity,
a challenge AND adversity.
They signal hope.
They push boundaries.
They (can) rattle normality, tradition, conformity.

Resourcefulness is the oxygen of life.
Without imagination and creativity it doesn't mean anything.
To make things happen for the better,
with nothing, very little, or everything we have.
For us (and for others).

And there is *joy*. **The joy of life and being alive.**
Sun. Sea. Mountains.
Blueberries. Tomatoes. Watermelon.
Rain. Snow.

Sight. Smell. Taste. Sound. Touch.
Adventures. Art.
Friends. Family. People.
Warmth. Love. Care.

Disappointment.
Rejection.
Loneliness.
Emotions in abundance.
Highs AND lows.
All four seasons in a moment or two.

Create and live in your *un*comfort zone (for a little while or a bit longer).
Be comfortable there.

Challenge and be challenged.
Stretch. Risk. Fail. Pick yourself up again. And again.
It is a rollercoaster. Not on a fixed track.

Surprises are just around the corner.
Go for it! Make things happen. Transform.

Creativity doesn't mean being loud or visible or artistic.
We can be bold in a quiet way.
Whatever we do.
With our thinking, ideas and actions.

Immerse into *(im)*possibilities
Make surprising discoveries
about ourselves,
others
and the world we live in.

Voices

Video with John Hammersley. Transcript.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://leeds.pressbooks.pub/meraki/?p=63#oembed-1

What if...

I created my own creativity manifesto? And what if I invited my students to come up with their own?

Note: The above was first published in 2019 and is the only contribution in this collection that was written in advance of the Discovery secondment.

Nerantzi, C. 2019. Living in the uncomfort zone or towards a creativity manifesto. in: Jackson, N. & Willis, J. (Eds.) (2019) *Encouraging Imagination and Creativity in Higher Education. Personal Manifestos*. Creative Academic, 13b, 22, April 2019. http://www.creativeacademic.uk/manifesto.html

2.

TOWARDS FREE-RANGE LEARNING

What is education for? Radovic-Markovic & Markovic (2012, 97) wrote that "A good education system gives students the freedom to recognize their capabilities and individual potentials." Sounds wonderful and so important! Who wouldn't sign up for this! However, arriving at university can be daunting for students. After years of being part of a very structured and prescriptive experience in school, there is suddenly a lot of freedom. Suddenly the student has arrived in a massive university with thousands of other students and staff. Research suggests that the majority of students in higher education experience loneliness, more so in their first year (Zahedi et al., 2022; Neves & Brown, 2022; Lovell & Webber, 2023; YouGov, 2023).

While universities are greenhouses for new knowledge creation and dissemination, universities wouldn't be anything without people. Helping students to find themselves, to feel that they matter and are connected and belong, to learn to use their curiosity and imagination, to contribute, to make a difference, to become and be lifewide and lifelong learners and active citizens of our world are so important for growth and transformation individually and collectively.

Below, I will explore freedom, choice, and scaffolding in the context of free-range learning. I have many questions and am seeking potential pathways we can consider for learning to celebrate freedom, empowerment, and transformation.

Freedom

Breaking free from constraints, being able to do what we want, when we want it, and how we want it. In higher education, too? Academic freedom on steroids! Sounds truly amazing! But does this sound utopian in today's higher education context? Higher education institutions are massive businesses. There are rules, regulations, and policies everywhere and learning to navigate the complexity of the systems is not an easy task.

However, we do love our freedom! And Dewey (2015), a classic originally published in 1938,acknowledges its importance for learning. Some seem to love and crave that freedom more than others, perhaps. The inquisitive, the experimenters, the rebellious, the curious spirits and minds. Nobody can stop them. They often create freedom zones themselves.

We are familiar with the concept of free-range farming, also parenting in some countries, and understand that

it is beneficial for the welfare of animals. Applying the concept in educational settings can be equally rewarding for students and educators. Not just for the inquisitive, the experimenters, the rebellious, the curious spirits and minds. We all have the capacity to be and become!

McKenzie (2000, 13) defines the free-range student as "a student fed on the wild grains and fragments available in the magical world made accessible by the Net. [...] Students will learn to make sense out of nonsense and order out of chaos. They will ask essential questions and solve complex problems. They will join electronically with brothers and sisters around the globe to cast a spotlight on earth-threatening issues which deserve attention and action." These words remind me of Illich (1971) and the concept of de-schooling society and learning within that society that is experiential, collaborative, and happens anywhere, anytime and anyhow outside educational institutions. It seems that this learning does not require any teaching and is purely based on the agency of learners, highly personalised, contextualised, and imaginative. But are learning and teaching two separate and distinct activities? Do they have to be? What if we saw them as one? We are all learners and teachers at the same time, we take and we give. We learn, and we teach. We are co-learners and co-teachers. We come together to learn and help others learn.

This raises an important question for me: Do we need a fixed and crammed curriculum? Jackson et al. (2006) encourage us to think of an imaginative curriculum instead, with freedom spaces built-in. What role can lifewide and lifelong learning play? And open education? Discovery learning? What all these forms of learning have in common is learning that is in the world with others, explorative and inquiry-based, driven by curiosity and wonder. There are so many alternative experiential opportunities for learning. Is there more that can and needs to be done to harness the value of such experiential learning opportunities for all students? Peixer (2024, 14) reflecting on the COVID-19 pandemic and the post-pandemic opportunities reminds us that "it is time for us to take meaningful action to bring about space for the education we want for people, inspired by the principles of freedom and the ideals of human solidarity."

McKenzie (2000, 1) acknowledges the multiple benefits of free-range learning but also highlights the important role of the educator: "We must teach students to graze and digest the offerings thoughtfully in order to achieve insight." (McKenzie, 2000, 1). This illustrates that free-range learning requires openness, criticality, decision making, and knowing what to do and where to find help if needed. Free-range is very much self-directed learning with the student in the driving seat. It can all feel and be a bit chaotic. Haney (2017) suggests that learning plans can help to boost learner autonomy and responsibility.

Free-range learning sounds like the perfect recipe for learning, but is it the perfect recipe for all? So much freedom can be liberating but also overwhelming and disorientating. The freedom to experiment and be creative! To learn what I want, how I want, when I want, with whom I want. Too much freedom? Is there such a thing? Constraints can have magical powers for creativity and innovation; we should not forget that (Thomas & Seely Brown, 2011). And we know that freedom should not and does not mean isolation and

separation from others. On the contrary, collaboration is essential for progress, growth, and evolution of ideas and learning. So how can educators create freedom spaces for learning?

How can we help our students not to feel lost and overwhelmed? How can we design imaginative curricula that let minds and hearts wonder and wander and enjoy the freedom? How can we design learning to boost stimulation, to boost participation, to boost meaningful and novel connections to be made, to boost transformative learning?

Choice

Ok, not total freedom, but choice? Choices? But can there be too much freedom and too many choices? There is a saying in German, "Wer die Wahl hat, hat die Qual!" A loose translation is: the one who has many choices struggles to decide! Indeed! Research by Katz and Assor (2007) suggests that when there are choices that need to be made, this can be too much for students in higher education. Especially when choices are not connected to their interests, aspirations, and values. It seems to be demotivating and lead to disengagement, as their research showed. When, however, choices are manageable and connected to the student's interest, aspirations, and values then these seem to have a positive impact on students' learning and wellbeing. A more recent study by Galpin et al. (2022), with a focus on co-creating the curriculum with undergraduate psychology students, also found that students really welcome choice and that this has a positive effect on their learning autonomy and increases their sense of freedom and ownership of their learning. However, their findings also echo Katz and Assor's (2007) findings, suggesting that too much choice can be problematic for students. In order to avoid this, the researchers suggest to scaffold choice across the academic programme of study, which would mean progressively more choice for students in learning and assessment. Scaffolding within a module or course is, I think, equally important, especially when we think about non-credit-bearing learning opportunities or solo modules in the form of microcredentials for example.

Scaffold

So much freedom and too many choices can create challenges, at least for some students. Furthermore, when educators leave students to their own devices and provide minimal or no help or support more generally, this can also demotivate students and lead to disengagement (Kirschner, Sweller, & Clark, 2006; Nerantzi, 2017; Gaszak, 2014). A learning scaffold that progressively disappears when no longer needed can help (Bruner 1983). Such a scaffold would be a bit like stabilisers that we attach to a bike when we learn to ride it and then remove them when no longer needed. Some, of course, learn to ride a bike without them.

Macmurray (1950, 74-75) noted, "to achieve freedom and equality is to create friendship, to constitute community between men." It reminds me of Aristotle's works that we humans are social creatures. Educators

play a key role in making this happen and design learning scaffolds carefully and with care to help students to create valuable connections. Palmer (2007, 11) wrote about these connections and said, "good teachers possess a capacity for connectedness. They are able to weave a complex web of connections among themselves, their subjects, and their students so that students can learn to weave a world for themselves." This made me think about learning as knitting or weaving webs of and for connections. For educators to position themselves within a learning community is important (hooks, 1994). To help students get to know educators and their peers, experience learning as a social process, learn with and from them and increase engagement within and beyond the classroom (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Kerr, 2024). We know that learning can happen anywhere, anyhow, anytime, but to harness the learning diverse experiences bring, it needs to be illuminated and supported by educators and others.

What role does experiential learning in its broadest sense play in further enriching and creating stimulating and diverse freedom spaces and choices for learning? Spaces for personal, professional, and collective growth, and do I dare to say, happiness? I wonder if the focus of experiential learning often appears to be leaning more towards preparing students for work Beyond this important aspect of experiential learning, what are the connections between wellbeing and experiential learning, for example, and what role does the social dimension of learning and life play for meaningful engagement in experiential learning? Or what Dewey (2015, 25) called "the organic connection between education and personal experience"? Herbert (2024), for example, presents wellbeing as experiential learning and recognises the positive impact it has on active participation in learning and social life. For me, this very much also links to what Freire's (1970) says about learning grounded in critical pedagogies and social praxis and how transformative this can be. This type of experiential learning creates fireworks, literally! All students can generate such fireworks! All students want to be happy. All students have interests. All students have aspirations. All students have something valuable to contribute!

Continuing exploring experiential learning Gaszak (2024, 70) notes that "experiential education is a powerful, meaningful way to support the personal, academic, and professional growth of students. All students should have the opportunity and access to benefit from such learning opportunities, and the opportunities should not be definitionally or functionally limited to only students who have the means and privilege to benefit." So not a privilege for the few. In higher education, we talk a lot about access, inclusion, and equity, and there are a plethora of initiatives across the sector to improve experiences in these areas. Gaszak (2024) notes the importance of making experiential learning accessible to all students, not reducing it to activities that require third parties, for example, or unpaid internships, and calls scholars to redefine and broaden their understanding of experiential learning to create truly equitable experiential learning experiences for all students. These are important points! Interventions and pathways to transition towards more equitable experiential learning. Recognising not only the benefits these would bring for developing capabilities for a job or a profession, but also for life and their social value in active citizenship. Educators can design such diverse and authentic experiential learning activities into the curriculum and beyond that make them truly inclusive, scalable, and available to all students. Gaszak (2024, 60) says characteristically "If educators and institutions can adopt

more forms of experiential learning and apply theory and best practices, then experiential opportunities can be fostered across all corners of an institution, meeting students where they are currently and providing pathways to new experiences."

Food for thought and action

If we as educators are committed to making learning possible for our students (Ramsden, 1983) and move away from telling, prescribing, and fully orchestrating their learning experiences, we need to learn how to do this well so that our students can flourish and feel empowered to act and transform their own lives, be happy and fulfilled, and make a positive contribution more widely. Over the years, scholars have studied experiences and designed conceptual and empirical frameworks to scaffold learning supported by digital technologies, which are an integral part of the fabric of learning and teaching in higher education today. A review of such conceptual and empirical frameworks revealed four common design characteristics that matter the most in fully online, open or blended, informal and formal further and higher education settings: choice, activities, facilitator support, community (Nerantzi, 2017). How could these characteristics be utilised as a scaffold when designing freedom and choice into our curricula, our programmes, modules, and courses so that they are imaginative and nurture free-range transformative experiential learning based on informed choices in a supportive environment that leads to praxis based on critical reflection and action (Freire, 1970)?

Voices

Video with Luke Mawer. Transcript.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://leeds.pressbooks.pub/meraki/?p=65#oembed-1

What if...

I introduced more choice for my students? What if I could be supportive and provide freedom at the same time?

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3.

WE ALL MAKE MISTAKES!

Learning is an adventurous experience with ups and downs, excitements and disappointments, discoverings, uncoverings and recoverings from failure and mistakes. Learning is messy, chaotic and entangled. This is how it is. The more adventurous we are, the more mistakes we will make, the more we can potentially learn. People who don't do much, don't make many mistakes. This is just how it is. The doing really matters in learning. Getting our hands dirty, being confused, making mistakes and feeling lost at times too. Also feeling excitement, happiness and fulfilment when we have learnt something new. Our learning adventures boost our creative and critical being!

Mistakes: What can we learn from research, play and GenAI?

Often, we hide mistakes from plain view when we talk about learning. High-stakes mistakes and low-stakes mistakes. Any mistake! What role does the way we work with students, support their learning and how they are assessed play; what are the effects of culture, norms and traditions? Is the emphasis on assessment of learning and judging students' performance what stands in the way of recognising the value of mistakes for learning?

Let's focus for a moment on research. It seems that mistakes are seen as part of the inquiry and experimentation (Peters et al., 2018). When we engage in research we are expected to refer to limitations of a research project and things that didn't work well for example and things we would do differently. We are looking for related information in other researchers' work. Dawson (2016) referring to failure in pedagogic research argues that it is not uncommon that failure there remains hidden, as a process and output. Dawson 2016) notes that power asymmetries potentially play a role in this together with the entangled reality of research, scholarship and teaching. Jancovich and Stevenson (2023) recognise this challenge and their research in the area of evaluating cultural practice is very much about learning from failure.

Ok, now let's have a look at play. What happens there? Failure and mistakes seem to feature naturally in play activities. We make mistakes all the time when we play. And it is ok. We take risks, are inventive, try to solve problems (Whitton, 2018)? What could this mean for learning? Playful learning has been labelled as childish and naïve, something we should stay away from in higher education, but things are changing (James and Nerantzi, 2019; Walsh, 2018). We have started recognising the value play brings to learning and

the evidence-base in this area keeps growing (James & Nerantzi, 2019). The playground model may provide a useful guide for educators interested in introducing, growing and nurturing learning through play (Nerantzi, 2015; Nerantzi, 2019).

And what about GenAI? Many students are exploring how GenAI could help them in their learning. They don't need to be encouraged by educators it seems, and they feel that they can share their questions, thoughts and ideas with a GenAI tool without being judged perhaps (Wiersma, 2024)? They don't mind sharing their imperfections, their work-in-progress and mistakes there while they wouldn't share their work with their peers as easily.

What can we learn from research, play and the use of GenAI regarding making mistakes?

Mistakes in teaching and learning remain largely hidden treasures

We can learn so much from things that haven't worked (yet) and things that went wrong in a specific situation. Things we did and others, too, individually and collectively. What can we learn about learning from mistakes when reflecting on practices that link to research, play and genAI?

Mistakes play a special role in learning. We see this in more experimental, playful and discovery learning where the boundaries are pushed, and novel connections are made (Brown, 2009). When we dare to think and do the unthinkable. When we dare to be wrong and admit it. When we dare to try again. And again. This is for example what is happening in hackathons, fast-paced collaborative learning spaces for computing students to take risks, fail and try again (Hardin, 2021).

As students and learners we will all make mistakes. As humans we make mistakes every day. Mistakes enable us to become better at problem-posing, analysing and problem solving! But not automatically just because we made a mistake, or two or more. Investigating our experiences plays an important role in learning also from mistakes. When we are not afraid to make mistakes, we become more spontaneous and responsive to what we experience and actively participate in our lives instead of being spectators and too afraid to do anything. Learning is definitely not a spectator sport! However, this meandering, wandering and wondering in, with and about the world and many questions literally in our head, can make us feel confused and what (Kleiman, 2011) defined as operating "at the edge of chaos". Learning can feel this way for all of us!

Remember, this is what has been driving humanity forwards for millennia.

Whitton (2018, 3) writing about playful learning notes that "The positive construction of failure and the creation of learning environments where students feel able to fail is perhaps the most important characteristic of playful learning in the magic circle. In the contemporary higher education context, learners are under

increased pressure to perform, owing to the rising costs of education and the increased competitiveness of graduate outcomes." These words made me think about assessment and the role it potentially plays when making, disclosing and discussing failure and mistakes. Nobody wants to fail a module or programme or being seen as a failure.

How much of the associated fear of failing relates to the way we assess, what we assess and why we assess? Do we still overly focus on the product and expect something polished, something perfect? And is all that assessment high-stakes? Would things look different for learning from mistakes if we would focus more on the process of learning? What if the focus was more on the process and related experimentation and reflecting on the experience itself would be illuminated as something more substantial, something that is of value? Even when something fails or we make mistakes, there are so many learning opportunities and take aways! Do we actually learn more when things don't work out? Does it also frame learning and success in learning in a different way?

I explored portfolio-based learning and assessment in my personal meandering I identified four dimensions that I feel are important to consider creating rich and embracing learning experiences for our students: Purpose, process, people and product (Nerantzi, 2004b). Would a rethink about assessment and specifically questions around value, volume and variety help to reconsider assessment as learning or learning as assessment (Nerantzi, 2024a)? I have also been asking myself to what extent grades disorientate students from what really matters which is learning.

In high-risk environments, students may fear humiliation and feeling silly or stupid if they engage in activities that go beyond what everybody else seems to be doing and where there is a risk that what they are doing may lead to failure. On top of this genAI is available 24-7, so very convenient and quick. Is this why genAI may seem attractive to students but also to educators? We can share our half-baked ideas without being judged while engaging in critical and creative conversations about these with the machine (Nerantzi, 2024c; Wiersma, 2024)? Sutherland et al. (2024) illuminated in their study the important role trust relationships play for learning. This research, while not explicitly referring to playful learning practices, made me think about the role of trust relationships and play. Mardell et al. (2023, 8) in their book about the pedagogy of play make this connection and state "Without psychological safety and trust, playful learning will not thrive." The authors celebrate learning from mistakes when using playful approaches and acknowledge the role of reflection as well as collaboration (Brown, 2009). Etchegaray et al. (2012) in their study in healthcare settings provide further related insights regarding what aids the disclosure of errors and speak about the important role trust and culture play to open-up and connect. How can we design for learning that is adventurous, and spaces that build trust and encourage playful experimentation?

Experiencing learning in diverse ways is important. It is equally important to acknowledge the value of reflecting in and on that experience. When things go right and when things go wrong. There is a lot of learning in reflection. This applied to students as well as educators. A study on experiential education by Gaszak (2024) suggests that educators new to reflection saw less value in reflection. What are the potential implications for

them, their practice and when supporting students to develop reflection? This is something to think about and consider the importance of professional development in this area. The study by Yaacob et al. (2020) in Malaysia with MA Education students, who were teachers, illuminated the positive effects on collaborative reflection with their peers for example and how it led to increased openness, criticality and empowerment. Team-teaching and peer review of teaching and co-creation in open education provide further opportunities in this area (Nerantzi & Moravej, 2020). This first-hand experience of these teachers will enable them to shape their own practice accordingly and maximise reflective learning by their own students. How can such opportunities for development created for all practitioners in higher education?

When the reflective process is infused with creativity, play and imagination it will further enrich learning (James & Brookfield, 2014). But also when the reflection is shared, discussed, debated with others, peers, educations and others outside the course, and not a navel-gazing activity it can be a powerful strategy for personal and collective growth. But again it goes back to trust relationships, accountability and culture.

Be curious!

I would love my students to feel empowered to dare to approach learning as an adventure. To be curious, creative and imaginative! To learn and make a difference! I would like them to feel supported and stretched in their learning and be ambitious. To embrace experimental learning and be playful. To feel free and explore (im)possibilities. To feel empowered! Their curiosity about GenAI and experimenting with it is part of it. Not everything will work, of course but all experiments provide opportunities for reflection and learning. Learning can be extremely exciting, stimulating and rewarding. Especially when we feel connected to ourselves, others and the world around us.

The late Professor Anna Craft introduced us to what she called Possibility thinking, a way to generate questions during the learning process that bring curiosity to the fore through 'what if' questions (Craft 2000; 2001; 2002). Try it! I suspect Socrates and Plato would recognise some of their ideas in possibility thinking especially the power of questions. While Craft's work originally related to Early Years, its relevance for higher education is equally valuable (Craft, 2008; Craft et al., 2008). We don't want our students to be or become less curious as they go through the education system and have no appetite for creativity left when they arrive at university.

Normalising mistakes in higher educational practice is vital. It is ok to fail. Failing is part of learning even at university. Uncover them. We fail and then we can pick ourselves up again. And again. And again. We learn. Of course we need support, a scaffold to help us when we need help. The truth is that we struggle with the term "failing" (Jancovich & Stevenson, 2023) not just in cultural participatory practice. We are even less comfortable with the idea of failing in teaching (Johnsen et al. 2009). But if we want our students to use their

curiosity, to question, imagine, invent, be resourceful, take risks, be creative and collaborate, we need to create the condition for these to happen.

Students, of course, need to be supported and there needs to be a culture of trust. This means less focus on high-stakes assessment of learning. Less judgement! More experimental practices. Trying things out! While we talk about students, educators need to feel supported too when pushing the boundaries, when being bold and daring to engage with more unusual and uncommon and novel learning and teaching approaches including learning from mistakes. And making mistakes.

How can we transform higher education practices to harness the learning power in mistakes?

What can we do to design learning, teaching and assessment that foster more experimentation, less judgment and more relationships?

What can we learn from research, play and engagement with genAI?

How can we establish trust that gives us wings and frees us from our fear of failure?

Voices

Video with J Simon Rofe. Transcript.

Video with Simon Vallance. Transcript.

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What if...

I focused learning more on the learning process and its messiness? What if mistakes become opportunities for learning?

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4.

SAY GOODBYE TO GRADES AND HELLO TO CONVERSATIONS

A lot of what we do in higher education is about assessing and measuring (Price et al., 2008). We spend a lot of time judging our students while learning is, to a large extent, relational. Learning can bring happiness and joy and be a struggle and discomforting too! We talk about students as partners, but there are power asymmetries. We need to acknowledge these and find ways to eliminate them and help our students feel and be connected to themselves, the subject they study, their peers, tutors, and others outside their course, and feel empowered to learn critically and creatively and make a positive contribution to the worldwith others. Ahmed (2017, 1) asks us how we can "create relationships with others that are more equal?" I am exploring this question and propose two ideas.

Grades don't help

They don't help our students, and they don't help educators. They also don't help our relationship with students. Do they help employers? Parker (2020) states that employers seem to be looking more for social skills in graduates... They don't seem to say we want graduates with higher grades! It is a reality that marks focus students' attention on assessment. Assessment of learning! However, it wasn't always that way. Up to the massification of higher education and the shift of focus on economic gains, the assessment landscape was based on conversational peer-review approaches as formative assessment (Saliyeva & Levesley, 2018). Today, formative assessment, or assessment of learning, while we recognise their importance to drive learning, are under-utilised (Price et al. 2008; Saliyeva & Levesley, 2018). Anything that is not assessed does not warrant their attention, it seems (Carless, 2024). Marks bring the competitive side out in students. Some are really good at it and thrive in competitive environments. But do they chase the mark, instead of chasing the learning? And what about everybody else who may feel anxious? Do they just need to toughen up and become more antagonistic? Is this what we really want and need? What about discovery learning, exploration, and experimentation?

In conversations, students often ask how they can get a high(er) grade (the assessment criteria are shared, but how often do students use these during their learning for self-feedback for example, to push themselves further?) instead of how they can deepen their learning. What has happened to their inner motivation and drive to learn? This situation saddens me and I am wondering if grading plays a key role in this and makes them feel this way. How easy it is to forget that it is about the learning.

Marking is a challenge for educators, even if we don't admit it openly, at least to our students. We are making a judgment. A judgement based on specific criteria and grade descriptors. Often, we focus on what has not been learnt (yet) instead of celebrating what hasand encouraging our students to stretch further! Why do we keep doing this? I feel uncomfortable about such practice. Am I the only one? I have not found anybody else yet who actually enjoys it (Nerantzi, 2024a). Of course, there are standards and benchmarks that students will need to meet; nobody denies this,but do these really need to be translated into and communicated as grades? Have we explored alternatives (enough)?

Saliyeva and Levesley (2018, 180) say it loud and clear: "It must be acknowledged that our current system of assessment, which focuses on marks and grades, is not working."

We may talk about no grades or ungradingand recognise the value of a grades-free space for students to experiment and learn from the process and mistakes (McDowall, 2022) but how often do we follow it through (Stommel, 2023; Sorensen-Unruh, 2024)? The whole higher education culture is based on individual progress, competition, and grades (Gravett et al., 2021). In such an environment where it seems to matter to be seen and be better than anybody else, who would like to get a note on their transcript that they "just" passed a module or whole programme of study? How does this help them stand out? O'Keefe et al. (2018, 77) make an interesting proposition. "... if the term pass is an imperfect expression of achievement, how can we express student achievement in a better way? Other academic developers have suggested the use of the term 'success' rather than 'pass'."

What would it be like if we had no marks and focused our exchanges on learning instead? Also assessment for and as learning? Dron **(**2023, 231) suggests the following "Getting rid of grades and replacing them with opportunities for discussion and feedback are a good start." Sorensen-Unruh (2024, online) goes further and links ungrading to emancipatory and critical pedagogies through which power asymmetries are reduced. She states characteristically that "In emancipatory pedagogies, including ungrading, this practice also includes the critical questioning of authority figures. Ungrading uses dialogic engagement to foster learning between student and higher education instructors, student and peer, and student and self. Some of this dialogic engagement happens orally in conversations regarding the student's progress, and some of this happens via text-based feedback."

Conversations can do wonders!

Having the curiosity, asking questions, and engaging in conversations can provide strong foundations, motivation, and a drive for learning. Helping students to develop their critical and creative capacity and capabilities in this area is important. It will help them sharpen and expand their desire and commitment to learning, growth, and making a positive contribution. It is about connections and connecting.

Educators recognise this. They are in education as they deeply care for others and have a strong commitment to help students learn, to help them make connections. Educators invest in learning relationships and partnerships to foster such conversations, often despite the challenges and pressures they face, such as increased workloads, redundancies and casualisation (Walker-Gleaves, 2019; Gravett et al., 2021). Connecting with students remains important, and sustainable ways need to be found within higher education to create the space for learning conversations to happen and educators to feel supported in this important endeavour. Genuine conversations that provide space for open exploration into multiple directions, ideas, dilemmas, and aspirations when there are trust relationships. Sutherland et al. (2024, 1) state characteristically: "Trust is commonly understood as a key element for the development and sustenance of positive educational relationships that result in student learning, motivation, well-being, and degree completion."

While nobody can do the learning for anybody else, we desire to learn with and from others and see value in the connections and the exchanges we have. We challenge and are challenged. We ask and we are questioned. Opening up to such honest, open, and at times revelatory conversations and truly benefitting from thesemeans that educators must actively participate, not just expect students to disclose. With such practice and learning relationships of trust comes vulnerability (hooks, 1994; Brantmeier, 2013). Learning relationship and partnership can reduce power asymmetries, break free from hierarchies and make learning mutual possible (Zakharia, 2024). It is true, education does not mean that students are the only ones doing the learning. Educators are learning to, with and from students as well. Ahrenkorah (2021) acknowledges the difficulties narratives around safe and brave spaces create and how utopian these are. She suggests instead investing in accountable spaces in which individuals and the collective take full responsibility for their behaviours, actions and interactions. Such spaces lay the grounds for democratic participation and conversations for a plethora of diverse voices and practices to be shared, heard and considered.

I have not mentioned assessment yet in this section but when we talk about conversations, we know that many of these are focused on assessment due to the assessment-driven nature of higher education. Assessment remains a hot topic! The pandemic does not seem to have brought significant assessment changes (Nerantzi, 2024a). Gravett et al. (2021) propose a shift in our thinking and practice that could help students truly feel connected with assessment and invest in it in authentic way as they would experience assessment as something that matters to them and is therefore seen as meaningful learning. Gravett et al. (2021, 399) state that "making assessment a more lively affair by enfolding into it the things that matter to students. This, of course, means we may need to take time and create space to get to know and appreciate students' lives and contexts beyond the classroom. However, if that is possible, then assessment might become a means for students to embody and affectively experience knowledge, rather than seeing it as an impossible to attain standard external to them."

While we recognise the important role educators and their learning relationships with students play (Armellini et al., 2021), students seem to have been turning almost exclusively to educators for feedback on their work. This can easily create dependencies. The educators give feedback and the students receive it. It seems like a one-

way street. It is about time to turn feedback into a dialogue, a conversation – an ongoing learning conversation (Robinson et al., 2023). Peers, self, others outside a course of study, can and should be part of dialogic forms of feedback conversations (yes, conversations) as these will further enrich and diversify connections and learning (Gravett et al., 2021; Dunbar-Morris et al., 2023). Gravett et al. (2021) look at this from an angle of mattering and state "pedagogies of mattering foreground the need to incorporate more flexible opportunities to connect with students." Human and beyond human connection can make a real difference also connection to space and materials including, potentially, genAI. This has started happening as students can easily and quickly turn to genAI to discuss their work at any time without being judged (Wiersma, 2024; Nerantzi, 2024b).

Educators are deeply invested in learning and helping their students learn in critical and creative ways. How can we say goodbye to grades and competition and say hello to diverse conversations, relational pedagogy, practice and collaboration that place transformative and mutual learning at the heart of higher education and make a wider positive contribution to the world?

Voices

Video with Dimitra Mitsa. Transcript.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://leeds.pressbooks.pub/meraki/?p=69#oembed-1

What if...

I could remove grades from my modules? What if there were no grades at university?

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5.

"I DON'T LIKE IT, WHAT IS IT?"

The phrase that my youngest used to say when he was little, when I was introducing him to a variety of food, comes to mind ... "I don't like it! What is it?" Only to hear later "Mummy, mummy, tomatoes are my favourite". He was terrified when he saw tomatoes for the first time and refused with profound stubbornness to eat them.

Problems are opportunities

Jackson's (1996) words on problems as opportunities have been useful framing for me. For me, his words are also a valuable reminder when thinking about generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) in higher education. GenAI is literally everywhere (Southworth et al., 2023). Is it wise to even attempt blocking AI in (higher) education? Could we instead invest our collective efforts and creative energy to understand how we can use AI responsibly for learning, teaching, and assessment? Will we not all need to be(come) AI literate to fully function in society?

Students are openly asking, and educators often don't know exactly how to respond. While some educators are experimenting openly with their students in using AI, there is suspicion, anxiety, and fear among educators about if they/we should be encouraging its use or if this is a no no zone. Students have started sharing their thoughts on events such as the student-led AI panel organised by the School of Education at the University of Leeds and UCL and the related publication (Brew et al., 2023). Early on the parody account by Bantshire University (2023, online) probably dared to say what many want to say but don't dare?

"NEWS: Bantshire University to allow students to use ChatGPT when writing assignments, academics to use ChatGPT when marking assignments, and the Academic Misconduct Team to use ChatGPT to write warnings about the overuse of ChatGPT when writing assignments."

Don't block!

While curiosity and imagination can't be stopped, nor have rebels, innovators, and experimenters been waiting for permission to explore AI in their classrooms as the plethora of activities illustrate that are shared (Abegglen et al., 2024; Nerantzi et al., 2023), many educators and students would welcome an institutional position on

the use of AI, and institutions are working on this. The Russell Group Principles on the use of generative AI tools in Education (2023) are a dynamic response. No to blocking, no to ignoring, no to fearing GenAI. Yes, to be critical and creative, to rethink the what, why, how, what for, and with whom, yes, to learn to use AI to enrich and diversify learning, teaching and assessment. Assessment has been one of the sticking points in this debate so far. But isn't there a need to rethink assessment anyway? Richardson (2022) in her book Rebuilding Public Confidence in Educational

Assessment invites educators to do exactly that and harness the power of creativity for meaningful assessment. Could McArthur's (2022) proposition on authentic assessment with social value aid educators explore and consider new assessment possibilities together with such examples from open education (Nerantzi & Atenas, 2022).

We can't deny that the pandemic has helped educators become more accustomed to the term "creativity" and creative practices across disciplines and professional areas, as the need and appetite for experimentation in teaching increased. Educators seem to have recognised more widely the value and importance of creativity for diverse, flexible, inclusive, and sustainable higher education learning, teaching, and assessment and have (finally) come to realise that everybody has the capacity to be creative, that everybody is indeed creative.

Creativity in the everyday

For me, creativity is linked to the everyday. Making a change that makes something better, that solves a problem, introduces a smoother way and a more efficient way of working in a specific setting. Often, we still see creativity as something that is extraordinary and so novel that it is only possible for some. Others still think that it has to do exclusively with work that is artistic. We are all creative. What is creative or even innovative in one context and for one individual or a group of people, may be normalised practice a long time ago. So, yes, to what I heard Grayson Perry say on the 4th of May 2020 on telly, "Creativity is a way of dealing with everyday life." Invited by Professor Norman Jackson, I explored lifelong-lifewide learning within professional development and the concept of novice and expert came up, which reminded me also of Lave and Wenger's (1991) communities of practice. I brought into the inquiry one of my students, Alex Winder, on the MA in Digital Education in the School of Education at the University of Leeds, and our inquiry led to an article in the Creative Academic Magazine (Nerantzi & Winder, 2023). In there we propose a creative-o-meter, if you like that is very much about the human capacity we all have to be creative in our everyday lives and that we probably do it without even realising or calling it "creative".

Open-up to diverse ideas

AI presents opportunities to illuminate further the uniqueness of human creativity, and openness to diverse

ideas plays a key role in this. Eaton (2023) in her post illuminated this beautifully together with the importance of transparency, openness, and respect as essential ingredients. Her "6 Tenets of postplagiarism: Writing in the age of artificial intelligence" provides a useful framework to explore human creativity and its role in AI. Her ideas made me also think about uncreative writing and open education. Uncreative writing, a literary genre developed by Goldsmith (2011) came into my vocabulary and life not so long ago when I was a student in an MA Creative Writing programme. His thoughts sounded radical and provoked new thinking and new connections for me within and beyond creative writing. Kenneth talks about using the web as a source and re-using and re-combining text to create something completely new. Does this sound familiar? But also, it is useful to remember that the vast majority of creative ideas build on existing ideas. The link between uncreative writing and open educational resources surfaced in my inquiry. The key difference is that acknowledging the source(s) explicitly and being open and transparent about where the idea came from is at the heart of open educational resources and open education more generally (UNESCO, 2019; UNESCO, 2024). The marriage of uncreative writing, open education and creativity led to what I call uncreative teaching (Nerantzi, 2023).

What makes us uncomfortable about AI? The ethical, legal, and privacy implications? The harvesting of data sets the machine is using to generate responses without permission and consent (McGowan, 2023)? I heard Clark (2023) challenging this at the first Online Learning Summit organised by Dr Margaret Korosec and colleagues at the University of Leeds this year.

Universities as greenhouses

If universities are social greenhouses of and for experimentation and diverse emerging ideas, what role can institutions and educators in collaboration and in partnership with students, industry, and society play to build an evidence-base for the responsible use of AI in higher education and society that contributes towards breaking down inequalities, eradicating misinformation and solving some of the biggest challenges of our times?

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Voices

Video with John Hammersley. Transcript.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://leeds.pressbooks.pub/meraki/?p=71#oembed-1

What if...

I could help my students see challenges as opportunities? What if I could work with my students in exploring these also around GenAI and the power of being human?

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6.

LEADERSHIP IN THE AGE OF AI AND POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION

I had the pleasure of attending the ICDE Leadership Summit 2024, "*Ethical Leadership in the Age of AI: Rethinking Futures of* Education," in Geneva with my colleague Professor Antonio Martínez-Arboleda, thanks to my colleague Dr Margaret Korosec, Dean of Online and Digital Education at the University of Leeds in the UK.

It was a truly fascinating event! I met many inspirational leaders from different parts of the world. So much food for thought and so many calls to action. During the event, I took notes to keep the little treasures that were shared by so many leaders and find a way to share them back.

After returning, I thought perhaps uncreative writing (Goldsmith, 2011) could help me with this. So what did I do? I recycled and remixed words and phrases, thoughts, and ideas (not randomly, I should state) that were generously shared by many contributors at the summit, which I had captured in my notes. I used these to conceptually create a new piece of writing based on the amalgamation of ideas communicated by many inspirational speakers at the summit that stood out for me, to organise my own thinking, keep some of my memories alive, and share with you today with the hope that this output will make you reflect. Check out Goldsmith's work on uncreative writing. I suspect you may connect it in some way to a manual version of generative AI. But is it? Read Hicks et al. (2024) and find out for yourself. Thanks to Dr Rob Farrow for bringing this publication to my attention. Perhaps instead, you are interested in how I attempted to connect uncreative writing to uncreative teaching and open education before the big AI boom happened (Nerantzi, 2022).

The below belongs to all contributors of this summit. I see myself as the seamstress stitching their words and ideas together into a new collective tapestry arranged as a triptych in which I organise and synthesise my conceptual understanding and interpretation of the collective wisdom using what Goldsmith calls "uncreative writing."

AI is a top priority together with peace and sustainability,

a triptych using uncreative writing

Educational challenges

The digital divide is much bigger now
Fear
Falling behind

Not preparing graduates for the future

AI THE monster!

A BIG elephant?

Damaging

We can become overly reliant on AI

Looking for shortcuts

Shortcuts breed atrophy

Laziness, dependency

Plagiarism, cheating,

Punishing

Risks

Enormous risks…

English… linguistic and cultural monopolisation

Biases

Sources of data – unknown

Reflecting voices of power – dominance

Panic

Educators defensive

Students worry,

Feeling stressed, fearful

Can we trust what we read?

Can we trust what students give us?

We are nothing without trust!

Gen AI based on data

algorithms

Mathematical functions,

Should these really determine education?

Bored to hear about all the challenges

Don't let the conservative people take over the agenda. Don't!

Educational opportunities

AI is here to stay

Education for all,

Include AI

Highlight the positives

Address the negatives

Help students and educators who need help

We can't control AI.

Let's reflect on how we use technology,

the impact it has on people, society

Guidelines instead of rules

Less regulation for more creativity and innovation.

Nobody is an expert in AI in education. Nobody!

We can do so much with AI.

AI can help us reach students we couldn't reach before

Articulate good questions

Openness fosters collective agency

Diverse responses

Listen

AI as a collaborative critical thinking tool

Lifelong learning is vital

For all

AI can support personalised learning

Experimentation and application are important

Don't be afraid!

Give it a go!

We are adventurous!

Resistance will always be there

Embrace what is good about AI
AI will change how we see our world,
our curiosities and creativities

Everybody should have a say
For innovation we really need diverse voices around the table

To build bridges

We need inspiration, to imagine,

to imagine the world, we want

Solidarity, equity, inclusion

Respect

Accountability is important

Better ethics

Upskilling and reskilling

Staff development

Learning and development for all

Scholarship

Research

Application

Empowering all ages to be responsible citizens!

Bring back the soul into higher education

To transform higher education

We need

Values driven organisations

Values driven leaders

Ethical leaders

Values driven educators and students

Integrity, passion and compassion

Leaders assemble great people, inspire, motivate

We need to bring all people together

AI is reshaping perspectives

Inclusive platforms are the way forward

to come together to find solutions for our world

Centring education around humans

Higher education an open community

for the common good

Becoming and being

Nurturing the human being

Ethics at the heart of education

Higher Education has a responsibility towards humanity, our planet

To prepare students to be critical and creative

Not to leave anybody behind

Learning to live together in the digital world

AI for good!

Voices

Video with Patricia Quinn. Transcript.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://leeds.pressbooks.pub/meraki/?p=74#oembed-1

What if...

I created my own leadership manifesto in the era of GenAI for my professional context?

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7.

RETHINKING VOLUME, VARIETY AND VALUE OF ASSESSMENT IN THE ERA OF GENAI

The global unfreeze, a term borrowed from Kurt Lewin's change theory, happened during the pandemic when we experienced an explosion of experimentation, resourcefulness, and creativity that led to rapid changes (Grattan, 2023). Higher education institutions turned into greenhouses of and for experimentation in learning, teaching, and assessment to some extent. We experienced firsthand that openness and diverse collaboration boost creativity, make us more resourceful, and play a key role in coming up with inventive solutions. The post-pandemic years, however, seem to be moving us back into re-freeze and our nostalgia is telling us to just keep things as they are or how they used to be. We are creatures of habit.

However, the world does not stand still. Generative AI (GenAI) has come into higher education, it seems through an open window when we were already exhausted by change, at least most of us, and we said, "Please, no more!". The advocates, the followers, the indifferent, the blockers, and the opponents all showed up, like they do every time (Levitan, 2009). Mezirow (1997, 5) puts further oxygen into the fire and reminds us that as humans "we have a strong tendency to reject ideas that fail to fit our preconceptions, labelling those ideas as unworthy of consideration—aberrations, nonsense, irrelevant, weird, or mistaken". We just need to learn how best to use our superpowers! Critically and creatively! The advocates, the curious and rebellious innovators, are experimenting with GenAI. Nobody can stop them; they don't need encouragement, educators and students, pushing the boundaries. If we were in unfreeze, we would all be doing it! But now it can be a headache, a minefield, for many. It is however true, that the weird, the unusual and the novel connections we make are the ones that boost breakthroughs!

Assessment is now (again or still?) one of the hottest topics. What the pandemic didn't manage to change (and yes, some change did happen during the pandemic; see for example, Brown and Sambell's (2020) work and many curated resources), more radical change may happen now because of or thanks to GenAI. Too optimistic? Or will we find (again) ways around GenAI to secure the status-quo? The reality is that assessment practices are under the microscope. Mistrust and suspicion regarding the use of GenAI are in the air which has an impact on learning relationships (Gorichanaz, 2023).

Volume

The reality is that we often seem to ask our students to cram a lot of stuff into an assessment, an essay, a report, a dissertation, a portfolio, or anything really. And often we ask them to submit multiple assignments at the same time. If you work in higher education you will have heard of assessment bunching (Knight & Ferrell, 2022). It is not ideal and can create a lot of anxiety and stress! The **volume** can be mind-blowing! The more, the better it seems. But is over-assessment healthy for anybody? I guess with GenAI, students are able to more easily and quickly respond to the volume requirements at least... I tried it with reflection even! But what is the point? Is easy the answer? What about learning? And then of course, there is marking, and let's not forget feedback. While nobody enjoys marking (please correct me if I am wrong), we are often reluctant to reduce the word count of assessments. Related conversations become battlefields among academics. But would we happily surrender our marking duties to GenAI? I am wondering... Could GenAI help us wean ourselves off assessment volume and focus more on value? Is this what has started happening?

Value

Speaking about value... Students don't always understand the **value** and purpose of the assessment they must complete to pass a module. The lack of clarity can be confusing, disorienting, and demotivating. Part of this is the fact that often the work the student has done on the assessment is deemed as redundant beyond (I hope) that something has been learnt from the process. In the world of Open Education, we collaborate and share, we use and adapt resources and practices (UNESCO, 2019) harnessing the opportunities digital technologies including GenAI bring towards equitable learning (UNESCO, 2024). We create with others in mind. For us this is a way to make a wider contribution, to add value so that others can benefit too. Looking at the SDGs, SDG 4, Quality Education for all can be a strong motivator. All SDSs can help contextualisation, personalisation, and adding choice and **variety**. How can this work for assessment? And how can this work across disciplines and professional areas? Wiley (2016) talks about renewable assessments, outputs that will be useful for others, and how this type of assessment adds social value. Lazzara et al. (2024) recent study in this area illuminated how renewable assessment can indeed have a positive impact on student motivation and engagement with it as it is designed to be of value for others. According to the authors, the challenges identified in this study could be overcome by a simple assessment design, clear instructions and further deepening the understanding among students around renewable assessment and their value for society as an authentic way to engage with assessment.

Similarly, McArthur (2023) illuminates the importance of rethinking authentic assessment in a more embracing way and not just focus on the world of work. Individuals want to contribute to their local community, to the wider good, to add social value, as this helps them find themselves, activate agency, and

feel well. The Inner Development Goals also come to mind. How can these ingredients all work together in harmony also with GenAI?

Variety

Variety is the spice of life, I will add, of learning, teaching, and assessment too. Variety can boost engagement if it is meaningful, manageable, adds value, creates hooks for learning, and has a clear purpose. This variety could mean that we introduce (more) choice, not just regarding how students respond to an assessment brief and the format. There are also opportunities to engage the students in designing their own assessment brief and learning journey to address not only ideally loosely framed learning outcomes (Check out Kleiman, 2017; McCreary, 2022 for alternative propositions) but more importantly to contextualise these and make space for curiosity, wonder, imagination, personalisation, and meaning-making to identify real value in the assessment and therefore see learning itself as assessment and not an add-on. I would add GenAI to the mix organically, as a tool in the toolkit. How could these changes influence and shape more creative, critical, inclusive, and equitable assessment going forward that is meaningful and truly transformative?

Voices

Video with Damian McDonald. Transcript.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://leeds.pressbooks.pub/meraki/?p=76#oembed-1

What if...

I could rethink my students' assessment and consider volume, variety and value when considering GenAI?

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8.

DIGITAL PORTFOLIOS AS FLYING CONTAINERS WITH OPEN WINDOWS

What is this about? Well, when I think about digital portfolios, the word "container" comes to mind. Abrami and Barrett (2005) have used the term "container" in relation to digital portfolios long before I did... Today, I would like to attempt stretching this metaphor a little bit further to start reflecting on the ***p****urpose,* ***p****rocess,* ***p****eople, and* ***p****roduct* dimensions of digital portfolios.

While containers feel rigid, dark, hard, and super heavy, they can be so much more for learning and assessment in higher education.

Digital portfolios as containers store stuff

They resemble elastic, super-stretchy and expandable storage boxes that live and grow in the digitally interconnected ecosystem or a personal device, not always shared with others. The *purpose* of such digital portfolios may vary. It can be for documenting, gathering, reflecting, curating, collecting, and stitching together things we have grappled within a module or a programme and other things that interest us more widely. We can also capture what we have done to showcase outputs and *products*. Also, what moves us. The *process*. We can also, based on the *purpose*, gather reflections in, on, and/or for action (Schön, 1983; Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Schön, 1992). We write about our experience and reflect, draw it, say it with a song, a poem, a story, a model, or a cake even. Some would argue that GenAI can do all that for us. Yes, it probably can. Even cake I suspect... But what is the point? This question takes me back to something I wrote recently about rethinking assessment in relation to its value, volume and variety (Nerantzi, 2024)

The plurality and diversity of formats of digital portfolios to share our learning-in-progress, stories, document, and showcase our work have been enabled through participatory multimedia (Quinn, 2024). We are all natural storytellers and makers. It is true that a portfolio can be varied, a rich patchwork indeed, inclusive and equitable when we know how to harness the power of digital and multimedia for our learning and assessment! Creative and arts-based approaches help us notice and express our lived experience and associated reflections with greater richness and diversity (Younie, n.d.). Digital media provide additional opportunities in this area making our work sharable more widely. It also helps those at the margins. Remember the drawings, poems, songs, stories, and models we just mentioned? See applications of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® in higher education,

for example (Nerantzi & James, 2022). Reflective practice is so much more than just writing. Check out some of the creative activities included in the guide by Harvey et al. (2020) for inspiration.

Digital portfolios as containers with windows

Windows that open and through which we explore (im)possibilities. The open windows could indicate exchange, connection, and cross-fertilisation. Windows lead us to expansive playgrounds to question, experiment, explore, try, fail, try again and again, and learn. Questions remind me of Socrates (Wikipedia, n.d.), Freire (2011), and hooks (1994). To reflect! To capture the *process* of learning. A landscape of messy challenges, a "swampy lowland" as characterised by Schön (1983, 42), emerging ideas, worries and dilemmas, things we tried that worked, and things we tried that haven't worked yet (... and may never work). Things that feed our imagination, curiosity and journey. The eureka moments, the breakthroughs! Things that illuminate the critical and creative thinker and maker in us, the doer. The problem poser and problem solver. Does all this happen in isolation from others? The world?

The recipes we often use to develop reflection are predominantly cyclical ones and seem to portray reflection as a highly individualised experience. An experience that is followed by reflective writing in a linear way, in prose using academic writing conventions. Too much structure and rules can be problematic. What about poetry? Could this give us more freedom to express? To make words and meanings dance on a page? How about drawings, pictures and artefacts?

Asking students to reflect and reflect and reflect can also cause fatigue. Reflective models as recipes have been questioned (Cowards, 2011; Fallin, 2021; Seaman, 2008). However, we continue using many of them routinely. Reflection is messy. Reflection is not just reflective writing. It definitely isn't! Reflection is interconnected with others and the world. We know this. James and Brookfield's (2014) reflective model provides an alternative to the dominant linear and cyclical approaches. Their model aims to awaken imagination, creativity, criticality, and playfulness within what they call "the whole person" and illustrates interconnectedness among academic, work, personal, and social life. Connections among people, perspectives and ideas. The whole learning ecosystem! These dimensions mean that the windows in our container are open and that the container can and will travel, which takes us to the next point.

Digital portfolios as travelling containers with windows

Containers are built to store and to travel. Not travelling may trap us in our own thoughts. While negative and positive thoughts and emotions provide insights, they can cloud our judgement if captured in isolation. There is a need for dialogue, debate, and connection. In networks and communities. With *people*. We are social beings, remember? James and Brookfield's model shows this with clarity (see earlier). Furthermore, Brookfield's Four

Lenses (1995), with a focus on developing critical reflection in teaching, also emphasises the importance of voices and practices of others. He speaks about lenses and the role they play to aid reflective thinking. I think that Brookfield's Four Lenses are useful beyond developing reflective practice in teaching, as they illuminate "others" and the key role they play in our own development, therefore framing reflection as a social and situated practice.

If creative and critical problem-solvers, active citizens, and lifelong and lifewide learners (EUA, 2021; Jackson, 2021) are what our world wants and needs, **how can we transform digital portfolios into travelling or even flying containers with windows** that accompany us beyond the boundaries of a course, a module or a programme of study as lifewide and lifelong learning companions? The advantages of digital portfolios for students' learning, development and growth have been recognised (Lu, 2021; Mogas et al., 2023).

What is the role also of educators using portfolios for their own development and how can we encourage them to share these with their students? Can we really expect our students to do something we want them to do if we remain distant observers and don't engage ourselves in practices we encourage them to engage in?

Can thinking about the purpose, process, people, and product dimensions of portfolios help us design for truly meaningful engagement with these?

Voices

Video with Patricia Quinn. Transcript

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://leeds.pressbooks.pub/meraki/?p=78#oembed-1

What if...

I invited my students to open-up their portfolios? What If I had a portfolio too that I shared with them?

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9.

CAN MACHINES RESPOND TO STUDENTS' FEEDBACK NEEDS?

Universities are greenhouses for and of experimentation, intellectual and human connection, and learning that push the boundaries of what is possible. Not everything will work; not everything will succeed. While we love learning to be fun and filled with happiness, it is also messy, confusing, disorientating, and discomforting. Hard. Lonely at times. Sometimes a struggle. As learning also means unlearning and re-learning. And learning from (our own) mistakes. Sometimes(?) we wish learning was easier, much easier, and the pain of learning would go away.

Learning relationships

What role do **learning relationships** play in celebrating the ups and helping students get through the downs? How can we learn from (own) mistakes? We often talk about creating safe spaces and that we need to be brave, but Ahenkorah (2020) warns us against such narratives. For her, accountable spaces are the way forward, where each one of us takes full responsibility for our actions.

How can we foster and nurture diverse learning relationships to create a respectful learning culture characterised by openness, humane and intellectual connection?

These learning relationships between educators and students are also experienced through feedback, which can create challenges, as research shows. Feedback is not always understood and can create anxiety (Fong et al., 2023), and other times students don't know what to do with it, or how it is useful for them (Little et al., 2023). It seems to be the case that feedback satisfaction remains low in higher education (Ferrell & Knight, 2022). But is it about feedback satisfaction or recognising value in feedback for learning? For some years now, educators have been engaging with diversifying feedback approaches, often using the affordances of digital and networked technologies, including multimodal formats.

However, one element that seems to matter in how feedback is experienced is the strength and nature of the learning relationship. This is no surprise as we are social beings. Carless (2019), for example, speaks about the value of feedback partnerships, and Robson et al. (2023) recognise the importance of dialogic feedback. We recognise the value of multidirectional feedback and know that when the exclusive source of feedback is

the tutor, it can create dependency (Dunbar-Morris et al., 2023). While we talk about the value of feedback partnerships and mean the involvement of others, Nicol and Kushwah (2023) bring our attention to the importance for students to engage first critically with their own work through what they call self-feedback before reaching out for feedback from peers or their tutor. Does this mean that a feedback partnership with themselves is equally important, perhaps?

Emerging feedback practices

New feedback practices are emerging, which I think links with the above and how we would like our students to have agency and deeply engage with their own work in critical ways. Yes, students are proactively seeking feedback on their work-in-progress from the machine, GenAI tools, to support their learning (Wiersma, 2024). **There is an opportunity for human-to-machine feedback conversations**, always, however, initiated by the human (at least for now) and switched on 24/7. **Available on demand and command.** Is this a good thing? Does it create new dependencies? And voice chatbots are here too, and some talk about synthetic relationships and the associated dangers. However, could we also see these conversations as a form of what Boud and Molley (2013) called Mark 2 feedback? Where the student takes responsibility for their learning and (pro-)actively seeks ways to critically and creatively engage with their own work in order to learn? Could this move reveal agency? An inventive and resourceful way to learn through questioning and from one's own mistakes? To share work-in-progress, students are often reluctant to share in a less exposing way. Could it therefore make students feel less vulnerable perhaps? Even when students articulate the prompt or question (The Innovating Pedagogies 2024 report (Kukulska-Hulme et al., 2024), published by the Open University, talks about a resemblance to Socratic questioning and recognises the conversational nature of student and GenAI interactions for learning) with precision on which aspects of their work they wish the machine to provide feedback, there is detail and sharpness that students are perhaps less used to including in their message when they seek feedback from their peers, tutors, and others.

Are new feedback practices emerging that have the potential to transform how students engage in feedback to deepen their learning and get some of the support they feel they need? When they need it? Er et al. (2024) comparative study with 2nd year undergraduate students (n=54) on a Java programming course illuminated the potential and challenges regarding AI generated feedback and propose a hybrid system going forward to retain the benefits that human feedback brings such as depth in contextual knowledge and effective feedback personalisation strategies while using models that are trained on educational data to make AI generated feedback more useful and relevant.

How can we help students develop AI literacy to use it responsibly and be aware of the pitfalls? How can we nurture accountable spaces where we are all responsible and respectful towards each other and ourselves also?

How will human-to-human and human-to-machine learning relationships evolve with GenAI as a new study buddy? Is this even possible?

Voices

Video with Radhika Borde. Transcript.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://leeds.pressbooks.pub/meraki/?p=80#oembed-1

What if...

I stop tomorrow giving feedback? What if the machine does it all for me?

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10.

EDUCATOR APPEARS PERPLEXED WITH STUDENT'S STATEMENT IN ASSIGNMENT THAT GENAI WAS USED TO SUPPORT THEIR LEARNING

What follows actually happened. At this stage I have many questions, which made me think.

An undergraduate student tells an educator that they pro-actively used generative AI to support their learning, and the educator shows that they are somehow perplexed that the student includes a statement regarding their GenAI use in their assignment. What do we do with this? What makes it unimportant or irrelevant to the educator? When a student openly shares that they have indeed used GenAI without being prompted and explains how and why, educators can appreciate and acknowledge it in a positive way. Is it important to also think about the student and what it took for them to be open and transparent about how they used GenAI?

Vulnerable and fearful?

In the age of GenAI, many students may feel vulnerable and fearful of admitting that they have used or are using such tools as what they predominantly hear is that their work will be submitted to an AI detection tool and that they may be in danger of academic misconduct. Students don't want to be called cheaters, but they have been and are asked to prove their innocence (Gorichanaz, 2023). Also, they can probably sense that many of their tutors still feel uncomfortable about GenAI and don't really know how to handle it. After all, it is new to most of us in the context of learning and teaching. This uncertainty may keep students away from GenAI or encourage them to keep what they are doing with it under the radar. I think it is probably more about keeping such activities under the radar than staying away from GenAI.

We are nothing without trust!

We know this! Students are proactive and are reaching out for help and sometimes it does come in the form of GenAI. We definitely want our students to have a curious and inquisitive mind, so actively exploring and

experimenting should be something that is at the heart of their university experience. How can we foster transformative learning?

The inclusion of an AI statement demonstrates the student proactively taking responsibility for the use of AI. Isn't this what we would like all our students to do? Not just students, all of us? My thoughts take me to what (Ahenkorah 2020, online) calls "accountable spaces". She moves our thinking from safe and brave spaces (they are problematic) to accountable ones and says characteristically "Accountability means being responsible for yourself, your intentions, words, and actions. It means entering a space with good intentions but understanding that aligning your intent with action is the true test of commitment" (Ahenkorah, 2020, online).

How would other educators react if a student would let them know that they have used GenAI in their assignment without being told they have to state it and used it for their learning in a resourceful way. How can we make it work for students and educators?

This particular student is now suspecting that they have lost marks because of this statement and won't acknowledge that they have used GenAI to support their learning in their next assignment, even if they did.

Many institutions have introduced GenAI guidelines. At the University of Leeds we are currently using a GenAI traffic light system (red = no GenAI, orange = can use GenAI in supportive role as defined by the educator, green= must use GenAI). While this system is useful, there are many grey areas and a lot of room for interpretation. The easy way seems to be to go with "red" and not allow any use of GenAI.

Did we experience similar challenges and suspicion in the early days of the web and later also with Wikipedia for example (Fister & Head, 2023)?

Questions to consider

1. How can we, instead of ignoring, blocking and policing, foster critical and creative exploration during the learning process in harmony with GenAI towards transformative learning?
2. What academic referencing conventions do we need to acknowledge the use of GenAI and model good academic practice?
3. Is it about time to rethink how we define "originality" and what we mean when a student claims "this is my work"?

The following openly licensed crowdsourced collections may be valuable for educators and students who would like to learn a little bit more about emerging GenAI supported creative practices together with critical perspectives:

Abegglen, S., Nerantzi, C., Martínez-Arboleda, Karatsiori, M., Atenas, J. and Rowell, C. (Eds.) 2024. Towards AI literacy: 101+ creative and critical practices, perspectives and purposes. #creativeHE. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.11613520%C2%A0

Nerantzi, C., Abegglen, S., Karatsiori, M. and Martinez-Arboleda, A. (Eds.) 2023. 101 creative ideas to use AI in Education. A crowdsourced collection. #creativeHE. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8072949

Voices

Video with Iria Lopez. Transcript.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://leeds.pressbooks.pub/meraki/?p=82#oembed-1

What if...

I stop being suspicious and judgemental? What If I focus instead on building and nurturing learning relationships?

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11.

UNHEALTHY GENAI NARRATIVES IN HIGHER EDUCATION: SHORTCUTS, CHEATING AND POLICING

Prologue

In this article I am capturing some thoughts relating to my online postgraduate students studying towards an MA in Digital Education in the School of Education at the University of Leeds and our use of GenAI, individually and collectively. I have been wondering if it is helpful to talk about shortcuts, cheating and policing when it comes to GenAI use by our students when what we really want is to help them on their path towards transformative learning.

Students are using GenAI, probably more than educators in higher education and more than educators know or want to know. Students may be told to avoid using it for learning and assessment explicitly; others are fearful of being labelled cheaters, penalised, and receiving lower marks for their work if they confess to having used GenAI. Some educators are perplexed when students state openly that they have used GenAI to support their learning (previous chapter). We are all still very new to GenAI in education.

A recent survey study at Harvard University showed that almost 90% of undergraduate students (n=326) who participated are using GenAI in their learning (Hirabayashi et al., 2024). The most frequent use, according to this study was for asking questions followed by getting writing support. Students expressed their concerns about equity, as not every student can afford to pay subscriptions to use the full functionality of a specific GenAI platform. The Digital Education Council (2024) Global AI student survey revealed similar results for undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral students (n=3839) from 16 countries. It was noted that for 80% of students, universities did not meet their expectations regarding AI; 71% expressed an interest to being involved in related decision-making; over 90% of study participants expect to have access to related development opportunities to become AI literate and AI to be used in their courses. Universities have an important role to play in this area. What are they going to do?

Shortcuts? I don't think so, or who are my students

Postgraduate students engaging in online learning are **intrinsically motivated**. They are interest- and goal-driven. We know that this aids learning (Anggraeni et al., 2024). My students know why they are on a course and what they want to get out of it, and they are keen to apply what they are learning!

Taking shortcuts could be seen as strategic manoeuvres, perhaps. It has however negative connotations. Looking at learning from the angle of surface, strategic, and deep learning (Säljö, 1979; Entwistle et al., 2001) may be more helpful. I am referring to learning. Not learners. We all move along the surface, strategic, deep learning continuum depending on the situation we are in, our response to it and what we think matters the most in a specific moment in time. We may, of course, not take the right approach, or the approach that would help us learn the most. My students are no different. Could the same be suggested about learning with GenAI? Related research could reveal valuable insights, and we need empirical evidence how it all works and what it means going forward.

My students are from different parts of the world. They often work and have other responsibilities. They are professionals. They recognise the value of learning and development. They are often time-poor and have conflicting priorities. But they are good at task and time management, and committed to learning. They want to apply what they are learning. They are focused on achieving their goals. When challenges come their way, they don't run away. **Students persist and succeed** (Shi et al., 2024). They are often confident in asking questions. They admit when they don't understand something and seek help. They may not do this publicly. They may have been outside education and need to catch up with technologies used to support learning. And they are willing to do so! They are more than willing; they are committed.

Some of my students may not feel comfortable with being seen as feeling lost or not knowing something. They don't want to waste their time. And they can get frustrated when they think this is happening. My students won't wait for long for a response from their tutor. They will search for answers to their questions elsewhere. They are resourceful in coming up with solutions that will help them move forward in their learning and the assessment they mustdo. It is just a matter of time until they reach out to GenAI. I would love to trial Plato with my students, a chatbot developed by a graduate of the University of Leeds. Plato is transparent about sources which distinguishes it from many other chatbots (Dumitriuc, 2024). The paper by Alsafari et al. (2024) relating to intent-based chatbots to support students learning provides an inspiration and made me think about this further and what such a move could enable. Wondering what Weller (2024) would make of it, especially in relation to his thoughts about open licencing. I would like to find out how it links to open data, open education and open research more widely. How would my students engage with it? I am wondering and would love to find out.

For many students, GenAI can become a valuable study buddy to help them learn, to help them with their

assessment, and to help them achieve their goals. I have seen my students using GenAI in diverse ways. Even in their dissertations. They demonstrate that they are inquisitive, inventive and critical, and that they will not take GenAI outputs at face value. They will question, they will critique, they will inquire! They will also reject.

Cheating? I don't think so or how learning with GenAI looks like for my students

My students are willing to give GenAI a go. For them it is an extra tool in their learning toolkit. They know what matters is that they are learning and exploring ways to do this as best as they can. They don't really look at GenAI as a tool to help them cheat (Gorichanaz, 2023). They know learning doesn't happen through cheating and plagiarism. If I think they're using genAI to cheat, that shows I haven't understood my students and don't trust them. Trust is everything. Dawson et al. (2024) encourage us to focus on validity instead of cheating when it comes to assessment.

My students are experimenting with GenAI to see if it can help them in any way. Not for shortcuts, but to help them learn. One of my students used GenAI in diverse ways for his dissertation, including data analysis. I experiment too with GenAI, and they know it. We also experiment together in the open. Many of them appreciate the values of open education, such as sharing, diversity and collaboration and contributed also to two crowdsourced open collections (Abegglen et al., 2024; Nerantzi et al., 2023). These students know that learning can be hard. Learning *is* hard. If they feel they are losing too much time with GenAI, they will quickly move on. If they get something out of the use of AI for their learning, they will continue using it, become more sophisticated and critical, and expand areas they will consider using it.

Remember, one idea generates another idea and another one. Ideas are like chains. A chain or network of ideas. Exactly as it happens in creative thinking.

The more we play and experiment with ideas, the more novel ideas we will come up with as we have opened our minds to not just the obvious connections but also the most unusual ones. This is also what happens when we use GenAI.

Not everything will work, but that is fine. My students recognise this and even if something doesn't work, reflecting in and on the experience can provide useful insights. It may lead to a modified approach and change in direction based on these insights.

Policing? I don't think so or how I support my students

Supporting committed students is a pure joy. Trusting them is important, as is being flexible and open.

Enabling experimentation and modelling effective GenAI practices can make a real difference. I work with my students. We experiment with GenAI. For example, I used it to construct Problem-Based Learning scenarios and introduce feedback poetry. We share openly. We are all new to GenAI. We learn together. I also learn from my students. Human to human connections is and will remain fundamental to learning. Valuing these is important! Together we engage in open scholarship (Brew et al., 2023; Taylor et al., 2023). As an open educator and scholar, my practice is open, open also to GenAI.

I avoid policing. I avoid saying, "don't use it." We use a traffic light system for the use of GenAI in assessment at the University of Leeds. Red means don't go near GenAI; orange is use it if you wish to support your learning; Green you must use it! Policing the use or prohibiting it is not the answer, at least for me it isn't. What I think could work is being flexible and elastic in our thinking. Just expecting it from our students doesn't feel right.

Openness, transparency, collaboration, and questioning are key. I feel that what is important is helping our students **develop critical AI literacy for responsible GenAI use** while also developing our own as educators. Biases in the data, ethics, and legality of data harvesting, ownership, exclusion, accessibility, equity, trust, and sustainability remain big concerns. Williamson (2024) makes us think critically about GenAI and makes a case against its use in education, while Beetham (2024) invites us to consider helping our graduates develop AI resilience and take a critical, values-based stance that guides their engagement with GenAI. Could AI resilience be part of AI literacy? Utochkin (2024) reminds us that we can imaginatively shape alternative realities and futures we will live in and calls his institution "to cut the 'AI' bullshit".

What are your thoughts on all this?

Let's keep questioning!

Epilogue

In this article I explored the unhelpful and damaging narratives around shortcuts, cheating, and policing in relation to GenAI use by students and my role as an educator and how I support my students in their learning. Trust, openness, collaboration, and sharing are important to encourage, foster, and nurture responsible, critical, and creative use of GenAI based on our moral compass and values towards transformative learning. Together we explore, experiment, and learn, and I am excited with what we may discover and uncover together.

Voices

Video with Nathan Loynes. Transcript.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://leeds.pressbooks.pub/meraki/?p=84#oembed-1

What if...

I show that I trust my students and explore with them GenAI for learning? What If I co-design the assessment with my students so that it is meaningful and helps them learn?

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12.

COLLECTIVE ACTION AND COLLABORATION: WHAT IS IN IT FOR US?

Inspired by and reflecting on a conversation with Professor Anne Tallontire about collaboration, I felt the desire to capture my related meandering thoughts, which grew further after our conversation. So thank you, Anne.

Being with others

As human beings we enjoy the company of others. We seek to be with others when we feel happy and excited, unwell or down, but also when we realise that our life experiences are so much richer and we can achieve so much more when we are part of something bigger than ourselves, a diverse group, a community, or even a movement... with a purpose. Can something similar be said about education and learning?

Learning is relational, at least for many of us. We regularly search for learning relationships of trust with our peers, students, and researchers. But also, with others outside a course we study: friends, family, and work colleagues, as well as connections in our discipline or professional area, the place we study, work, and live, and the environment. Digital networked technologies, participatory media, and open educational practices create new opportunities for human connection beyond boundaries and geographical limitations. We can meet others and we do, regularly, and harness opportunities for human connection, for sharing, for growth.

Shared purpose

While we must acknowledge the important role our inner glow and drive to learn, develop, and progress play. Feeling part of something bigger, where our contributions matter and having a shared purpose and contributing to the wider good will propel us further. It can bring personal and collective fulfilment and create a sense of dynamism, agency, and empowerment that will make everyday life more joyful (yes, full of joy!) and meaningful, and do I dare to say happy and hopeful? We see this in the open educational movement and open scholars who are united by social justice. Young people also seem to be motivated to make a real difference to the world they live in. In a study conducted in the UK for example, young people expressed their desire to learn

together creatively and across disciplines when at university to solve some of the biggest challenges of our times (British Science Association, 2022).

Collaboration brings harmony

Collaboration, while often seen and experienced as challenging and still under-used (Jisc, 2023), is the vehicle that can lead us to a life that places our collective interests, curiosities, imaginations, priorities, and gains before individual ones to achieve something we wouldn't be able to on our own. Nobody says it is easy. But it is worth it and can be so rewarding! In a world where competition is king and primarily individualism is celebrated and rewarded, collaboration may seem like an impossible endeavour, something that could easily and quickly be reduced to wishful thinking, an idea we should abandon.

However, we can model a collaborative alternative throughout education (it is our choice) and illuminate what is possible and the real difference it can make to us collectively. When we stop thinking about what is in there for "me" and what is in there for "them" and start thinking and focusing on what is in there for "us, me and them, all of us, collectively, we may be getting to a new place. Will such an approach enable us to move beyond expected reciprocity, perceived obligation, and blind loyalty? It may sound like a utopian proposition, but is it? Does it have to be? Should it be? Remember, we are all here for a little while only... travellers, explorers, and adventurers. The true richness in life is not really what we accumulate, that turns to dust anyway (we easily seem to forget this!), but what we give, what we share... and the experiences we have together. The memories we co-create. Our smiles, our tears, our ups and downs. The difference we can make to others when we work and live together in harmony.

Opening up to genuine connection, otherness, people, perspectives, experiences, and ideas is vital for collective growth, freedom, solidarity, and respectful and equitable communities and society. We are all unique, and that is the real beauty, as Treviranus (2016, 7) highlighted that "it is this variability that gives us collective strength." When we focus on what we have in common, what unites us instead of what divides us, and celebrate our differences as opportunities for enrichment, could this help us also to co-create a more respectful, caring, and compassionate world and a healthy, embracing human race and planet for current and future generations?

Let's work towards a more collaborative higher education, a higher education for good (Czerniewicz & Cronin, 2023), and harness the power of diverse togetherness instead of territoriality, egocentricity, exclusionism. How can we genuinely transform higher education into a fountain for and of more diverse and boundary-crossing collaborative experiences and model a way of being and becoming that is truly embracing of otherness within the curriculum as well as in co- and extra-curricular learning experiences we co-design and offer with and for all our students, staff and the wider community to make a real difference and positive contribution based on equitable togetherness, collaboration, and mutually beneficial partnerships?

Voices

Video with Vasiliki Kioupi. Transcript.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://leeds.pressbooks.pub/meraki/?p=86#oembed-1

What if...

I found ways to connect my students on a module or programme with others beyond boundaries? What If I design such possibilities into the curriculum collaboratively?

Note: An earlier version of this article was published as

Nerantzi, C. 2024. *Collective action & collaboration: What is in it for us?* Knowledge Equity Network blog. 8 August 2024. https://knowledgeequitynetwork.org/casestudies/collective-action-collaboration-what-is-in-it-for-us/

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13.

OVERCOMING THE FEAR OF SHARING

In conversations with educators, I often hear about their fear of sharing. Sharing what happens in their sessions, sharing resources, sharing ideas. The below thoughts were triggered by such recent conversations as I wanted to explore what their words could mean.

Teaching, a solo experience?

Still today, many educators in higher education work on their own in the classroom with their students, behind closed physical or virtual doors. Sometimes they work with doctoral students or demonstrators or technicians. Sometimes they are observed teaching. But regular peer review of teaching in a collegial and developmental way is not the norm, nor is team teaching. What role does cost and workload pressures play in this? Recordings of teaching sessions, about which many educators feel uncomfortable, shed some light into what is happening behind these doors, but out of context they can easily be misinterpreted, and educators may feel judged.

Opening-up classrooms

Digital networked technologies, and Virtual Learning Environments, and even social media platforms are opening up classrooms to some extent. Reflections on teaching will happen in educators' heads before moving quickly on. Some will keep reflective blogs that they share, but not that many. Do they feel vulnerable? Thornton's (2010, 167) words may provide some useful insights. "In describing the difficulties we find in our professional work, we risk feeling ashamed; we can fear that others will criticize or think less well of us if we relate the things of which we are least sure about ourselves." How often are their experiences, their reflections discussed openly with other educators and with students? How many missed opportunities have there been for exchange, sharing, and development?

Educators often prepare the resources for their teaching and supporting students themselves. Sometimes (often?) they struggle using somebody else's resources and also don't or can't always easily share the resources they put together with others. Educators use various strategies when working on resources and often recycle and upcycle resources they have used before. They stitch things together, from their own work and bits borrowed from elsewhere, and design something they feel will work for their students (Atenas, et al. 2024). I think the fact that these resources are for their students is important to them. They are tailor-made, or at least

claim to be? Why would someone just provide their resources on a plate to somebody else or many others after spending so much time on creating these? What if somebody else just takes the resources and presents them as their own? We are often sceptical and cautious! And are asking ourselves how these would even be useful or relevant to another educator and their students? And what if they are not good enough? If the quality is poor, will I be judged? The fear of saying or doing the wrong thing and being punished or isolated is a strong barrier to sharing

Sharing, start small

How can we overcome our fear of sharing? Definitely start small and with low-stakes actions and activities. Check out the award-winning "We like sharing" initiative brought to us by Dr Bea de los Arcos and TU Delft in the Netherlands and start by using a picture you find there to spice up a resource or even share one, of course! Creating opportunities to collaborate with other educators can help. Creating cultures for collaboration to grow and flourish within and beyond institutions is important, as well as recognising the value of sharing for the "givers", the "receivers," the "sharers" and the "sharing backers". In vibrant communities and networks of and for educators.

Connect and co-create

Palmer (2007, 146) reminds us, "If I want to teach well, it is essential that I explore my inner terrain. But I can get lost in there, practicing self-delusion and running in self-serving circles. So I need the guidance that a community of collegial discourse provides- to say nothing of the support such a community can offer to sustain me in the trials of teaching and the cumulative and collective wisdom about this craft that can be found in every faculty worth its salt." So community is really vital! We are stronger together, remember (Nerantzi, 2024)? Celebrating together the difference sharing makes for all. And while sharing resources can save educators a lot of time and energy it can do so much more. The co-creative process and the sharing itself can diversify resources and practices, enable educators to work more closely together, establish valuable connections and alliances, set their ideas to travel further, and therefore enrich the student and teaching experiences and be more impactful. And this injects excitement into teaching and supporting students' learning. We know that educators are motivated to try different things and innovate if they think they can help their students learn. This is often what drives them! Pedagogical ideas may start within an individual but sharing them with others and growing them with others is what makes a real difference (Nerantzi & Thomas, 2019).

Such connected learning and development can happen through open educational practices and when educators become part of professional networks. These bring educators together, boost collaboration, creativity, and innovation as well as sharing for the wider good (Nerantzi et al., 2021). Open education is a way to democratise education and make learning accessible to all (Veletsianos & Kimmons, 2012). Open education

is activism that has societal impact (Weller, 2010; Czerniewicz & Cronin, 2023)! Sharing is therefore designed into the fabric, into the culture of open education. Open educators are driven by social justice. They want to make a positive contribution to society, and they know that they are stronger and can achieve so much more when they work together in teams, communities, and networks. They take risks, they innovate, and they share! Togetherness is what empowers them! Open educators take others with them! For them, it is no longer about "my students" and "your students" or "their students." They are all "our students."

There is no teaching behind closed doors in open education, and peer review of teaching or supporting students learning happens naturally. Open education also fosters teaching with others: educators from the same institution and other institutions in different parts of the world, educators outside academia, often also with students. Open educators co-create, collaborate, and share. The work is often released using Creative Commons Licences that enable the ideas to travel further with their originators. The quality of open outputs, including Open Education Resources (OER), has been questioned. Listen to what Kessels (2016, 88) said, "Perfect *is* the enemy of good. Free yourself from the tyranny of perfection! Never surrender!!" The truth is that open outputs are peer-reviewed from birth and throughout their lifespan and keep evolving while in use. The beauty of them is that they are dynamic. They can change; they can evolve! Atenas et al. (2024, 6) in their paper discuss the potential OER brings, "In recent years, many have been convinced of the possibilities of improving the quality of teaching with the help of OER. The use of OER allows academics and students to work with resources created by others that can be shared, widening the spectrum of resources and practices available to students and embedding transversal skills (including digital and data literacy, alongside critical thinking, research, teamwork, and global citizenship skills). Moreover, students can be empowered to be critical and collaborative citizens."

Activities include developing together resources that are from the outset designed for wider reuse, to open courses, open scholarship, and open research that all happen with others, in collaboration with others. Openly and transparently with collegiality. hooks (2000, 93) reminds us that "Cultures of domination rely on the cultivation of fear." But what happened to that fear of sharing when we look at the open education movement? It has vanished, evaporated, literally! Open educators stick together, and sharing is at the heart of what they do.

Sharing presents a plethora of opportunities for connection, for critical and creative enrichment, for learning. Not just for students but also for educators. I always say we can't expect our students to learn if we don't model learning. Open educators model learning in diverse settings. Freire's (2011, 72) words are a powerful reminder: "Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other."

How can we nurture invention and reinvention, imagining and reimagining transformative learning through connection and sharing?

Dare to share!

Voices

Video with Nathan Loynes. Transcript.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://leeds.pressbooks.pub/meraki/?p=88#oembed-1

What if...

I started sharing some of my teaching materials with my colleagues? What If I would create some together, also with my students?

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14.

EPILOGUE RELATING TO PART 1

I enjoyed stitching this booklet together and hope that it will be useful for colleagues and students. It has been written to curate thoughts, ideas, perspectives and dilemmas triggered by my Discovery secondment and the work undertaken with many others during that time.

I will leave you for now with the following thoughts...

Let's remain fresh, open and forward thinking

In the way we design, teach, support, evaluate teaching.

Let's Imagine alternative opportunities for learning.

For lifewide and lifelong learning.

For freedom, exploration, adventure and discovery

For all.

Always.

Let's get to know our students.

Their interests, struggles and aspirations.

Let's create meaningful learning relationships

Respect is vital.

Care and compassion too.

It won't work if you invite them to open-up

While we remain closed, distant.

At times we are all vulnerable.

It is part of being human. Acknowledge this.

Create freedom spaces for growth

For all to grow.

We are all learners.

Let's Co-design learning experiences.

In and outside the classroom.

In the wild.

There needs to be choice and freedom.

Space for discovery and exploration.

Stimulate interest, excitement and curiosity.

Space for celebrations.

Think, un-think and rethink.

Experiment and question.

Not everything will work.

But a lot of it will.

Remember, we can learn from all experiences.

Maybe even more from things that trouble us, that haven't worked out yet...

Let's co-create resources, courses and happenings

for learning with our colleagues, with our students!

Share what we make and set it free to travel.

To travel to new spaces and places. People.

To help us all grow.

To make a difference.

Let's use a range of approaches, also novel ones.

Be embracing, inclusive, democratic

Keep pushing the boundaries.

Take risks. It is worth it.

Not everything will work. Mistakes will happen. Learn from them.

There will be resistance. Learn to accept it.

Don't sleepwalk into the future. Create it!

Let's design assessment into the learning process.

Not as add-on.

Make the assessment the learning itself.

Meaningful.

Is there choice? Not yet?

Assessment needs to be useful and immersive.

Useful. With a life of its own.

What contribution could it make? What could it change locally, nationally or globally?

Think about grading. Less grading more learning?

Marking is hard. Is it useful, the way we do it?

It is often not about the what we do, but how we do it?

Reflect in, around and about your experience, your practice.

Create a climate for democratic participation in learning.

Involve your students in the evaluation process but also when you design learning experiences.

Design them together.

Together is key!

Let's remember the value of sharing

Share your ideas, creations with your peers

Share your reflections on your practice, also with your students.

Share your inquiries, insights and creations. Your learnings.

Widely. Openly.

In networks and communities, at conferences and events

In publications and non-academic and alternative outputs to extend opportunities for conversation, conversation, change

Contribute widely and make learning happen for all!

You are not alone.

We are not alone.

Be bold!

Be daring!

Be kind to yourself and others.

Let's work with meraki

Towards transformative learning and teaching in higher education

Thank you for reading!

Chrissi Nerantzi

15.

TESTIMONIALS FOR PART 1 OF THE BOOK

Professor Kenneth McDowall, Professor in Molecular Microbiology and currently serves as the University Dean: Student Education (Portfolio and Curriculum) and Academic Lead for Curriculum Redefined, University of Leeds

"Meraki by Chrissi Nerantzi is a valuable addition to the world of open educational resources. Written with creativity, openness, and collaboration at its heart, this living book shows just how powerful education can be when it's approached with care, passion, and innovation.

Made up of 13 thought-provoking articles, Meraki offers a personal yet relatable dive into critical and creative teaching. It's rooted in Chrissi's work as the Academic Lead for the Discovery initiative at the University of Leeds—a programme that's all about broadening students' horizons and encouraging lifelong, lifewide learning.

What makes the book stand out is how it blends theory with practical ideas, such as finding ways to bring learning from outside the classroom into the curriculum. By combining personal reflections, interdisciplinary thinking, and input from scholars, students, and educators, Meraki becomes a lively space for discussion and growth.

The open-licence format invites staff and students to add their own contributions, so the book keeps growing as a collaborative project.

Meraki isn't just a book—it's a call to rethink education and embrace more creative and inclusive ways of learning."

Professor Anne Tallontire, Professor of Sustainability and Business, Sustainability Research Institute, University of Leeds

"Chrissi Nerantzi has approached this book with characteristic creativity and openness, inviting us

to think together to develop opportunities for student learning in new and exciting ways, both within and outside the classroom, always linked to a concern for transformation and rooted in solid educational theory. That Chrissi's leadership on Discovery has led to a strand called SOUL is not a surprise given the passion and personal insight she brings to learning opportunities developed in a collaborative, interactive way that contributes to global sustainability goals. It has been a joy to learn from, be challenged by and to also share ideas with Chrissi over the past few years, and I look forward to seeing her new open educational resource 'Meraki' sowing seeds for further journeys of co-creation, here at the University of Leeds, and with local and global communities."

Dr Margaret Korosec, Leading Open, Online and Digital Education, University of Leeds

Chrissi Nerantzi has once again surpassed new thresholds of creativity with this open publication. Meraki (re)presents a deeply personal, reflective collection of essays on teaching and learning giving us a glimpse into the creative energy that Chrissi lives and breathes. It inspires and engages readers to think differently in how they might shape the future of education for themselves, their communities, and the world.

At its heart, Meraki illuminates Chrissi's own metacognitive approach to inspirational and transformative learning by inviting us to wander through a labyrinth of her own human emotions, cultural curiosities, thought-provoking challenges, and futuristic perspectives. Indeed, this honest and personal account, surfaces how she approached a complex and institution-wide initiative with grace, openness and collaboration. By setting an example of her own way of working, readers are supported to work in tandem with their educational communities to co-design a future of education that sparks curiosity, builds connection, and encourages openness.

This work implicitly encourages us to hold ourselves accountable to be the best version of ourselves – as individuals, educators, and citizens. By exemplifying her commitment to fostering a community of practice centred on open education, she invites us all to continue the dialogue, reflect, share insights, research and contribute to shaping what this book will ultimately become. This is a unique opportunity to expand the future map of learning and teaching. I remain deeply inspired by this invitation to contribute and I am curious how it evolves.

PART II

PART 2

16.

FUTURE CONTRIBUTIONS

Contributions by colleagues and students within and beyond the University of Leeds, written with *meraki* that fit with the broader theme of the open living book, are invited to this part of the book. Submissions will be openly peer reviewed on a rolling basis.

Consider capturing and sharing your thinking around critical, creative and open pedagogies, learning, teaching and supporting students' learning that have transformative learning potential in response to any of the articles included or contribute something completely new that excites you and challenges and stretches our collective thinking and practice.

I would love to hear from you. Please email me at c.nerantzi @ leeds.ac.uk without the gaps.

Chrissi Nerantzi

This is where you can add appendices or other back matter.