Unconference as a pedagogical tool for 'decolonising' teaching and curricula

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ABSTRACT

Challenges to traditional transmission models of knowledge are not new, but unconferences, resulting from an emphasis on informal connections, are a welcome addition to the toolkit for the education entrepreneur who thrives in the social learning paradigm and champions collaborative learning to (re)humanise higher education. In our paper we discuss the use of the unconference format as a pedagogical tool to 'decolonise' teaching and curricula.

Methodologically the paper utilizes a case study approach where data is collected through reflective journaling, participant observation, interviews and a survey. The case focuses on an event organised by the authors in July 2023 at the Institute for Creative and Cultural Entrepreneurship (ICCE), Goldsmiths, University of London, United Kingdom. The unconference subverted the expert-centred structure of conferences, at the same time as it sought to de-centre and disrupt the traditional teacher-student power relation of the transmission of knowledge.

Keywords:

Unconference; social learning; decolonising; higher education; entrepreneurship

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1. Introduction

Challenges to traditional transmission models of knowledge are not new, but unconferences, resulting from an emphasis on informal connections, are a welcome addition to the toolkit for the education entrepreneur who thrives in the social learning paradigm and champions collaborative learning to (re)humanise higher education. This ties in with current scholarly interest in decolonising and activities of many organisations all over the world pursuing that aim.

British universities and cultural institutions are facing an array of reasons to engage with decolonising movements. Goldsmiths college, where we teach in the heart of London, has a proud history of radical and resistant research, curricula and pedagogy. The current institutional discourse sets the aim of "academic decolonisation, developing decolonized and pluriversal curricula, and anti-racist and inclusive pedagogies" (TaLIC 2023). We find it important to note the structural / institutional discourse in which our thinking and actions sit but exercise our academic independence and freedom (GOV UK 2023) in our interpretation of it taking into consideration those with whom we engage.

UK Higher Education (UKHE) has been shamed for a lack of commitment to decolonising the curriculum (Batty, 2020) in the wake of global social movements including Black Lives Matter and Rhodes Must Fall. We feel that a great wave of decolonising literature (e.g., Abu Moghli & Kadiwal, 2021; Behari-Leak & Chetty, 2021; Bhambra et al., 2018; Dennis, 2018; Ghemmour, 2020; Hayes et al., 2021; Liyanage, 2020; Walton, 2018) is promoted in UKHE uncritically, often without connecting student experiences of oppression to lecturers' own experience. As non-white[1] lecturers, we find ourselves othered in many ways. Further, we are expected to redesign institutional practices without affecting the structural roots, thereby perpetuating a colonising system. Our institution, like all others in UKHE, employs us to teach with criticality and social justice at the fore without using the instruments of activism, advocacy, dissent, disruption and protest. Instead, we are invited to decolonise our own bookshelves[2], consider allyship and 'white fragility' in an environment where students as 'racialised scholars' are transient members of the university.

Our joint response, however, is to create spaces which allow for students and lecturers together to build "the counter-university inside the university, seizing any opportunity to innovate on the margins" (Santos in Guilherme and Dietz 2017:23). In this paper, we discuss the use of the unconference format as a pedagogical tool to 'decolonise' teaching and curricula. Grounded on a social learning theoretical perspective, we analyse the why, what, and how of setting up and implementing an unconference in person and reflect on its value for faculty and students. Methodologically the paper utilizes a case study approach where data is collected through reflective journaling, participant observation, interviews and a survey. The case is an event organised by the authors in July 2023 at the Institute for Creative and Cultural Entrepreneurship (ICCE), Goldsmiths, University

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[1] Here we are specifically referencing and problematising the context in which we live, the UK. Government refers to ethnicity, not race, and uses the expression 'ethnic minorities' to refer to all ethnic groups except the white British group. They "do not use 'non-white' because defining groups in relation to the white majority was not well received in user research." (https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/style-guide/writing-about-ethnicity)
[2] https://www.gold.ac.uk/study/creating-change/visibility/deirdre-osborne/

of London, United Kingdom, which brought together (among other characteristics) a nationally and educationally diverse group of 30 students, alumni and staff from four different programmes (MA Social Entrepreneurship, MA Luxury Brand Management, MA Tourism and Cultural Policy and MA Cultural Policy, Relations and Diplomacy).

The ICCE fUNconference[3], as the title suggests, sought to provoke the expectations of the organisers and participants. The unconference sessions were designed with cross-cutting solution-seeking in mind and most were lightly facilitated (planned in terms of form rather than content e.g. fishbowl, fireside chat, pecha kucha, world cafe). The authors applied an entrepreneurial mind-set to the exploration of shared practices and resources across the programmes, foregrounding the students' perspective. By challenging the accepted formats of teaching and learning, using co-creation and sharing learnings as we went, the unconference subverted the experts centred structure of conferences. At the same time, it sought to challenge the traditional teacher-student power relation of the transmission of knowledge by instead levelling out engagement, through a dynamic organisational process and by prioritizing participants voices (regardless of their roles outside of the unconference). We wanted to offer the students a way to value their newly-developed knowledge as worthy of academic recognition. The unconference was a social learning space designed to develop agency, as the ability to act and give meaning to what the participants did from their own experience (Wenger-Trayner et al 2020).

However, the focus of the paper is not on the students but on the teachers/organisers' perspectives – see Methodology – and we acknowledge that the event analysed is not a pure unconference, as there was some steering from the organisers in the shaping of the agenda. This may, for some, raise issues on the decolonising framework in which we broadly situate our paper. Therefore, it is important to outline here briefly, and then in more depth in the Theoretical Background section, our position on power. Our students and our own academic practices have taught us to value understanding of decolonising as beginning with the self and understanding institutional legitimacy and power as a function of proximity to whiteness. We use 'decolonising' invoking the current use of decolonisation as the process of changing something, such as a curriculum to be studied, in a way that considers the cultural beliefs behind it (such as the belief that European cultural production is better and/or more important than others), while understanding that 'decolonising' can be a restrictive (and loaded) label.

We believe that decolonising is a multi-level and layered process that is strongly anchored in self-awareness and critical consciousness (as *conscientização*, in the Freire (1970) tradition). Thus, the decision to focus the paper on us, as lecturers, those with the power in the (higher education) institution - well, at least in what concerns the immediate classroom environment. For us decolonising starts with the complex human individual self, as structures are built and destroyed by us, and it is a dynamic process in time and space that aims, in

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[3] The unconventional spelling 'fUNconference' is adopted in this paper. The capitalized 'UN' highlights the concept of unconference, while the letter 'f' in 'fUN' is in small caps to communicate the underlying playfulness to the reader. The visual identity developed for the fUNconference further played with the word, as you can see in Mosley (2023).

the higher education sector, fundamentally at (re)humanising it, collaboratively creating a "counter-university that actively pursues epistemic diversity as a pathway to alternative futures" (Dawson 2020:71).

The paper is structured in five main sections. The Introduction presents broadly the focus of the paper and briefly communicates our standing to the reader. The Theoretical Background outlines the two main areas that underpin our later reflections: social learning (and unconferences) and decolonising education. This is followed by a Methodology section which details the research design and the event used as case study. The Implications section is divided in four main sub-sections: Time, Trust and Talent focusing on the forming of the idea and the preparation of the event; Process as Practice reflects on the event itself; Are You Still Buzzing? considers the post-event and what next; the final sub-section Liberating Entrepreneurship Education brings it all together in a reflection. The paper concludes with a summary of the main findings reflecting on the use of unconferences as a pedagogical tool for 'decolonising' teaching and curricula.

2. Theoretical background

Our study is theoretically grounded in critical pedagogy and entrepreneurship education literatures relating to our teaching focuses on social entrepreneurship, international cultural relations and cultural policy. We review the social learning and decolonising theories which informed our data generation and analysis.

2.1. Social learning and unconferences

We are educational intrapreneurs who thrive in the social learning paradigm and champion collaborative learning to (re)humanise higher education. Social learning theory is a different type of learning theory, in which all contribute to finding a solution, it is intentional learning as the mutual engagement of uncertainty (Wenger-Trayner et al. 2020). Groups who chose to learn together informally have been theorised broadly as forming 'communities of practice' and 'social learning spaces', depending on wanting to make or not the same difference, over several decades (Wenger 2004, Wenger et al 2002, Wenger-Trayner et al. 2020, Wenger-Trayner et al. 2023). The social learning theoretical paradigm fits well with our pedagogical approaches within the core curriculum and our own professional development ('professional learning' in the Freire-ian sense of *praxis*). It also supports the development of entrepreneurial communities of inquiry (Seyb et al. 2019) where uncertainty can be explored in an engaging, prosocial and – importantly - fun way. We respond to Shepherd's (2015) call to 'party on!' and explore the microfoundations of working within a creatively entrepreneurial academic teaching and research community.

The use of the unconference format was for us a social learning experiment with the learning communities we work with, i.e. present and former students from four different MA programmes and colleagues working across various MA programmes within ICCE. Some of the students attending the fUNconference had prior opportunities to learn and socialise together, but not all. We could say there are distinct characteristics to the

teaching and learning in our department, ICCE, as well as, reportedly, to the broad approach to education at Goldsmiths. Students will experience ICCE as an extended network of practice; a 'looser' grouping of people who may never meet but may nonetheless share practices (Brown and Duguid, 2001). The idea of interconnected practices takes a view of practical understanding that transcends individual or organisational boundaries and involves learning. Wittel (2001:51) argues that 'network sociality' is more instrumental than notions of community, based not on enduring relationships but "fleeting and transient, yet iterative social relations; of ephemeral but intense encounters". Meaning-making is formed in shared moments within a learning community. This contrasts with the conventional interactions of individual students moving towards accreditation as a formal cohort of 'classmates'.

2.2. Decolonising education

We have already noted that, in our understanding, decolonising can be a restrictive (and loaded) label, often associated with racial and ethnic interactions, be it across countries and regions of the world or within societies. In our own institution, published discourse also highlights race, colour and ethnicity: "decolonization as ongoing, collaborative and reparative work to advance social justice, academic rigour and fairness towards our Black, PoC [People of Colour] and ethnic minority students and staff" (TaLIC 2023). The important task of dissecting and problematizing this set of labels is beyond the scope of this paper; nonetheless we embody them, we have our own issues with imposed categorisations, and have previously stated that we view decolonising as a multi-level and layered process anchored in critical consciousness. This ties in with our view of the individual as a complex agent, with identity being a multiple and further complexified by factors such as class, religion, race or gender (see for example Appiah, 2018). We do not see "being aware of these different factors as an invitation to essentialism – we do not believe that one single identity factor speaks for the whole person or for a whole social group; both dimensions encapsulate diversity" (as also noted in Figueira and Fullman 2019:6). In short, while students and colleagues illustrate and embody many 'protected characteristics' (EHRC, 2014), they cannot be expected to fully 'represent' any single attribute. Social categorisations are interconnected, creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination and disadvantage, as described by the concept of intersectionality.

Considering the above, we situate this paper as a personal exploration of a leverage point intervention (Meadows 1999) in a system within which we work, UK Higher Education, specifically that of Goldsmiths, and of the Institute of Creative and Cultural Entrepreneurship, our department in College. In this social/institutional landscape, we work towards a sustainable cosmopolitan and inclusive human society. We prefer to use these compassionate, appreciative terms instead of current popular expressions such as environmental and social justice because our own academic work requires a cultural/social understanding of entrepreneurship rather than legalistic and institutional defaults (see also Figueira and Fullman 2021). We see this shift in language as a form of "letting something go, namely the flows of energy that keep you attached to the colonial matrix of power, whether you are in the camp of those who sanction or the camp of those sanctioned" (Mignolo & Walsh,

2018:148). Inspired by this quote, we also align with the 'liberation' vocabularies used by Goldsmiths Student Union in their own decolonising work[4].

We see education as a fertile ground to inspire and affect change at individual and societal level. We "hold a view of higher education as both utilitarian (individuals study for a degree which develops knowledge and skills directly relevant for a job – i.e. a career individual focus) and a hub for the development of intellectual awareness of the individual and advancement of society (i.e. ultimately a broader societal focus), purposes which we see as being able to be conciliated" (Figueira and Fullman 2016:153). Thus, cultural management, policy and entrepreneurship education institutions and the sectors they serve are important actors in the systems we aim to be inclusive, diverse and representative of all voices. They are important especially because many of the changes needed are cultural and it is through educational processes that we can reach the core of the individual. Decolonising work in education needs to increasingly incorporate social learning theory, thus moving beyond transmission models, so that we can make a difference that allows for all participating to voice, act and make meaning departing from their own experiences.

Grounded on the above theoretical perspectives, we analyse in section 4 the why, what, and how of setting up and implementing an unconference in person and reflect on its value for faculty and students. Before moving to that analysis, we briefly present in the next section some information on the design of the research and on the event itself.

3. Research design

The ICCE fUNconference, as the title suggests, sought to provoke the expectations of the organisers and participants regarding teaching and learning and co-creating and gathering lessons to be shared. The unconference framework intentionally subverts the often expert-centred structure of conferences, and replaces it with a social learning space, inspired by Open Space Technology[5]. We planned to use it in Goldsmiths to:

1. evaluate its effectiveness for disrupting traditional teacher-student power relations in the transmission of knowledge,
2. offer students a way to critically appreciate their own knowledge as worthy of academic recognition.

Our reflexive analysis responds to these two fUNconference aims in a fundamental way. We use polyvocal narrative to covey 'decolonization on the level of the text' (Abu-Lughod, 2008, p.26). We agreed these two research objectives from the outset and so were able to design and deliver the event with data generation in mind. We were guided by three (of eight) principles of Appreciative Inquiry (below) which underpin the generative potential of the whole project (Cockell & McArthur-Blair, 2012):

- Words create worlds: the constructionist principle

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[4] https://www.goldsmithssu.org/activism/liberation/
[5] https://openspaceworld.org/wp2/hho/

- We can choose what we study: the poetic principle
- Free choice liberates power: the free-choice principle
  (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010)

We write this paper in the collective first person, foregrounding the 'us' and 'we' in claiming authorial voice. This shared position was core to the whole fUNconference project, as an experiment in 'epistemic collaboration' (Palermis, 2022). We draw on our own experiences of subaltern contestation as workers in UKHE, and (re)interpret our personal histories in a way the serves to 'break the colonizing and encrypted code of what counts as knowledge, redefining silence as a form of agency and positioning local knowledge as the heart of epistemology and ontology" (Spry, 2012, p.220).

Methodology for this paper is qualitative, utilizes a case study approach where data was generated through reflective journaling, participant observation, interviews and surveys. The journaling was only deployed by Roxanne and Carla, to take advantage of our ongoing commitments to reflective practice.

Of 24 registered participants, 12 completed the pre-survey and 8 completed post-survey. These are the heart of our data, Other data was collected from video call transcripts, email exchanges and research journals of the organisers. We also use Emerald Mosley's blog post "Making time tangible at the Institute of Creative and Cultural Entrepreneurship, Goldsmiths" (Mosley 2023). As noted, Emerald was the creative director / artist in residence at our fUNconference. For this paper, only part of the data set collected was used due to time and resources constraints to prepare and analyse the data and limitations with word count.

3.1 Producing the fUNconference

This section outlines the resources Carla and Roxanne planned and used, reflecting the varied work we did to accommodate the emergent nature of unconference agendas. Data and analysis of the fUNconference proceedings, including 'look and feel', are discussed in section 4.

In late May, as in many universities, budgets are being scrutinised with the financial year end in mind. At this time of year, small research projects pop up as lecturers reflect on the waning year and consider improvements. We were alerted to departmental funds and resolved to take advantage of the opportunity. Roxanne proposed an expansion of her planned workshop for MA Social Entrepreneurship and Luxury Brand Management students, and Carla agreed to collaborate and bring the students she convenes. We secured a modest budget and started work in early June. Emerald Mosley and Nuria Cortes Romero joined the team via our weekly online planning meetings.

We wanted to create a playful working environment that brought our complementary approaches together in a productive way. Emerald accepted the title of Creative Director with responsibility for visual direction and championing alternative representations of working practices. She created a reusable set of artwork (Mosley 2023) for the ICCE fUNconference and delivered research-practice workshops on the day. Nuria took charge

of the Padlet[6] and responsibility for helping participants browse and contribute to the digital resources collected during and after the main event. Carla and Roxanne adopted the role of impresarios with responsibility for recruiting participants and organising the event as a site of research.

The fUNconference took place on the 11th July 2023 in the 'home territory' of ICCE. As this is generally a quiet time on campus we had plenty of space. We booked two large (70 capacity) adjacent teaching rooms which connected to adjunct spaces. We used a nearby office to provide a private space for spiritual reflection. We planned catering and edible treats to be topped up at different points in the day. A kitchen, bathrooms, and a social area with comfortable seating were just a few steps away. We were all set for a good 'tea and toilets' experience. We wanted to be good hosts for the participants. The fUNconference would be the last time these people would all be in the room at the same time – we work with one-year masters and the summer term is mostly dedicated to dissertation work, which is a very individual learning process. We could mark the occasion by making the most of campus resources, including the wonderful views of London visible through every window.

We arranged for audiovisual equipment including room projection, video camera, portable sound system. We also provided a selection of stationery; the usual post-it notes and markers were topped up with craft materials such as wool, thread and needles. Carla and Roxanne also used the opportunity to promote the event informally around campus; we visited the career service and student union to collect promotional materials. We hoped to find excess or unwanted conference bags and materials which could be 'upcycled'. Emerald's design work would be used to accessorise and personalise them.

Within three weeks we were ready to go public. High quality graphic files were sent to print! Our ENCATC conference proposal had been submitted[7]! A tasty and healthy menu was ordered! We sent targeted emails to alumni and students on MA Social Entrepreneurship, MA Luxury Brand Management, MA Tourism and Cultural Policy, MA Cultural Policy, Relations and Diplomacy (referred to collectively henceforth as our MA programmes) asking for expressions of interest. Participants were a nationally and educationally diverse group of 30 students, alumni and staff from four distinctive postgraduate programmes in ICCE.

Even though we had well-established relationships with every participant, it took an enormous amount of energy to build confidence in the fUNconference.   We built a sense of anticipation with a 'save the date' email teaser ten days before the event, and a registration questionnaire asking about their expectations. In the spirit of the constructionist and poetic principles, we used open questions intended to direct and enliven participants' pre-thinking.

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[6] You can find the fUNconference Padlet here: https://padlet.com/mzcpfnkq2p/funconference-m07tqwqiilbfv5g6

[7] Presenting this paper at the ENCATC Congress is part of that important task of sharing, as we see our practice and experience as being high applicability and transferable to other courses, contexts and educational levels, and also to other cultural organisations beyond academia. As such, we are keen to gather feedback from others with similar experiences oriented by inclusion and diversity to improve the practice.

4. Implications of the fUNconference

We analyse here the why, what, and how of setting up and implementing our unconference in person and reflect on its value for faculty and students. We remind the reader that the perspective we are foregrounding is that of the organisers and their reflections are used as the guide for the implications (a better word to describe our 'findings'), presented as vignettes. This section is divided in four main sub-sections: Time, Trust and Talent focusing on the forming of the idea and the preparation of the event; Process as Practice reflects on the event itself; Are You Still Buzzing? considers the post-event and what next; the ending sub-section Liberating Entrepreneurship Education brings it all together in a final reflection.

4.1 Time, trust and talent

Time, trust and talent defined the working practices for the team involved in the preparation and delivery of the fUNconference. In this sub-section, Carla reflects on the process from her perspective.

Roxanne and I had been colleagues at ICCE for quite a few years but only in the last four months we started working more together, or I should say 'working in parallel together': we participate in a small buddying group of three people supporting each other in securing time for and developing writing for research publication. We have teaching and research interests in different (but sometimes overlapping) fields and we take great joy in working with our students. The decision to organise the unconference was taken in the setting of that buddying engagement: Roxanne suggested to organise the unconference and I said yes – then it was a matter of following the process (secure the funds, plan the event, organise the logistics, invite the participants). Trust the process, it will get you there!

When Roxanne first suggested the unconference, I was not sure what it was: a different way to do conferences?... I hastily googled the term to find out about the format, it seemed very loose, Wikipedia said "participant-driven meeting" (yes, academics do use – and also write - Wikipedia entries…). The truth was I did not have much time to learn about doing unconferences – we had roughly just over a month to prepare and I had a lot of work. I knew that pulling this off was going to challenge my favoured learning style, which involves quite a bit of reading before the doing, and also my working style – I do prefer to be in charge and working collaboratively and trusting others takes time (which I did not have). So, what better opportunity to dive deeply into personal 'decolonisation'?...

I was ready to trust Roxanne's knowledge and experience, and excited to work with a departmental colleague from a different field (social entrepreneurship) in developing an interesting activity for our students. Undertaking this common project was a way to get to know each other better in terms of our pedagogical approaches and work styles, a tester of the potential for the development of our working relationship. We were being academic (intra)entrepreneurs (Shepherd 2016), finding opportunities and resources in our close vicinity. Afterall, we were buddying to support each other in parallel scholarly production, so finding a way to also produce something together was an added value enabled by the buddying.

We did the event for us and for our students – and Roxanne tried hard to also to make the event with the students (i.e. holding space for them to shape the agenda in the convening call), but making the pure unconference format work is challenging when you are not used to operating in the social learning paradigm. In the Summer term, both of us have less teaching but continue to support our students in their dissertation work, providing mostly one-to-one supervision, while we try to focus on our own writings. Thus, the students and us are experiencing similar processes, in terms of research writing and thinking, but there is no space to talk about those experiences in more equal terms, i.e. outside of the supervision meetings, where the expertise element of the lecturer is expected to guide the student. The unconference became the format of the social learning space where we all could on a (more) equal level engage in our (common) uncertainty. I hoped it would be a breath of fresh air for everyone while we tried to cope with the stresses of research/writing and that it would make a positive difference to our different experiences.

When Roxanne first mentioned the unconference format, it sounded interesting and different. I was excited that I could learn something new, to add to my pedagogical toolkit. Fear of failure (it could go wrong, students/alumni/colleagues might not show up, or not enjoy being there) were present and besides trusting the talents of others (Roxanne; Emerald, our Creative Director, whom I only met in the preparation of the conference; while I had a close and trusting working relation with Nuria, and I knew the wonderful students and colleagues we had invited), I further calmed myself by having confidence in my knowledge and skills as an educator and having been an arts manager in my previous professional life, I knew I could deal with unforeseen circumstances and improvise.

Talent was in the room and I was going to trust the process of doing! On the day, I followed Roxanne's lead as 'chief unconferences impresario', Emerald's amazing creativity (do you know how much fun and what a great icebreaker activity is to decorate and customize your conference bag? And how this exercise can enable switching between conceptual and material / mind-work to hand-work and enable refreshing/new perspectives?), Nuria's encouragement to use Padlet to share our experiences and knowledge, the curiosity, generosity and warmth of our students, and also my instincts as an teacher/educator/facilitator (hooks 1994). For example, when I led some of the exercises, I did not stick to time (the unconference way), instead I ensured everyone spoke, when they were ready (even if I had to gently encourage). And if I was not doing that, I was focused on welcoming and connecting people.

In conclusion, and to be honest, I still don't know very well what an unconference is exactly, but I don't think it matters that much, what matters is to be in the room, in the moment, trusting those there with you, and if you have tea (plus some treats) and toilets nearby, you will be fine! In more formal terms, I hope to be able to incorporate my experience and reflections of it into the classic four basic stages of the cyclical action research process: reflect, plan, act, observe, and then reflect to continue through the cycle (Dickens & Watkins,1999). Further, the experience has confirmed my belief in the use of social learning, here using the unconference format as a social learning space, to hold space for the development of agency of the students, which then will contribute to the decolonising of teaching, curricula, and education in general.

4.2 Process as practice

Below we insert a braid of vignettes; excerpts from Emerald's blog, goldtop.org, where she documents "making, doing and finding things interesting...", and our reflexive commentaries.

Emerald's Vignette

> *It turns out one of the topics that came up for the agenda was wondering how to make academic and theoretical knowledge tangible in the real world, which tied in fortuitously with the POMpomPOM workshop I would be running with the students later on.*
>
> *We then divided into groups using the rule of two feet (ie, if you're not interested and aren't contributing, move to another group where you are, and can). Giving yourself, and owning permission was one of the themes that came up; along with:*
>
> - *Informal doesn't mean unprofessional*
>
> - *A useful way to frame 'disruptions' (in entrepreneur speak) can be working out just how a small a nudge can you do to move towards the direction you want to see improvement in*
>
> - *Setting up a non-fiction book group as a way of continuing interesting discussions for professional development*
>
> - *Although different people in the room may all be there to learn, they are not all learning the same thing (be aware of your different contexts / power)*
>
> - *"If I've mentioned interest in doing something more than twice and have yet to take a concrete step to make it happen, call me out!"*
>
> *The day was documented both in real time, and added to post-event, using Padlet. I'd never used this before and found it a great way for people to contribute in the round, ensuring insights across disciplines … and resources could be shared; break those professional silos! Will definitely use this again at collaborative workshops.*

Source: Mosley 2023

It was important to bring informality into the whole process, to help participants feel comfortable and part of a learning event customised to them individually and collectively. Emerald's work on the 'look and feel' illustrated how the fUNconference was conceived and developed. A 'scratch logo' (Mosley 2023) was used to invite students into session planning. This was refined into a versatile set of graphics which visually summarised the conference themes.

As described in the previous section, time, trust and talent were the working practices for the team – while two (or three) other 't' are also important to note, tea (maybe with treats) and toilets, are minimum standards for

the physical environment. I – Carla speaking - really appreciated Emerald's talent as creative director of the fUNconference – it elevated the event visually and experientially. As she notes, we worked collaboratively (in trust) in the preparation and delivery of the event. From her blog post, I would like to highlight the emphasis on doing (do give yourself permission to make a pompom and appreciate the tangibility of time) and notes about informality not meaning unprofessionalism which are something not that usual in the academic worlds I normally inhabit – although I am on a path that seeks to include it through my explorations of social learning and systems convening. Finally, I note her mention of different people in the room and how they are potentially learning different things depending on contexts/power. This is very important particular in higher education settings like ours where students (and staff) from all over the world come together. This also made me think, as noted by Dawson (2020:72), about "the potential of internationalisation to foster global solidarity through learning about and incorporating alternative epistemologies into the daily operation of universities". The more frequent adoption of the fUNconference format could be a useful tool to achieve this.

Hello! Roxanne here, with some observations from my journal. The first things I noticed in Emerald's reflective blog (Mosley 2023) were tea and tangibility. For me, this is a perfect extension of the time, trust and talent theme. I trusted Emerald to take the role seriously, as befits an 'artist in residence' exploring commonalities of practice and process She would probably not describe herself that way, though I know she is deeply experienced in making time and work tangible. Her talent with felt, wool and buckets[8] alongside her long-standing practice of 'documenting her making' contributed to the unique piquancy of the fUNconference as a social learning setting. I felt her participation would help to break down assumptions about the link between (un)professionalism and (in)formality which are, in my personal (English) experience are symptoms of institutional oppression. Imagine my delight reading Carla's analysis above! I realised how important embodiment can be as a route to epistemological aligned teaching and learning, i.e. using our bodies in different ways to support various modes of thinking. As you will soon read, we did indeed have tasty treats and bodily comfort in mind. Returning to Emerald's call for further iterations of the fUNconference approach, I have already started planning how to work with space and time, prompts and challenges in the MA Social Entrepreneurship programme. In particular, the 'law' of two feet (Owen, 2008) which derives from classic facilitation techniques, can be difficult to manage within a conventional classroom and curriculum.

4.3 Are you still buzzing?

In my experience – Roxanne speaking – and I think for most people, intentional disruption or breaking conventions is easier said than done, especially if you want the change to 'stick'. The key for me in the fUNconference was to provide regular moments of uncertainty and appreciation. The registration questionnaire was very short. We first inquired about participant expectations by asking 'what are you curious about'?'. Early responses were exploratory and optimistic, uncertain and open minded, practical and oriented to the working world. I was very excited to share these themes with fUNcolleagues (and wordplay is almost always fun!). I

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[8] https://goldtop.org/making/back-forth/

opened the first agenda-setting session of the day by displaying a summary of responses to the second question (figure 1).

Which activities are you least interested in?
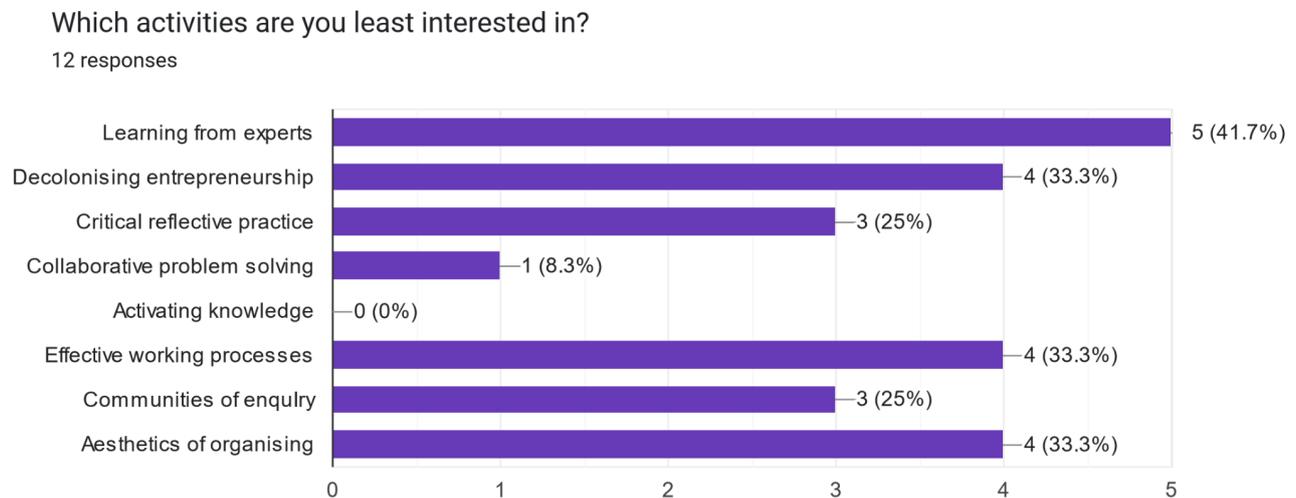
12 responses

Figure 1: Responses to multiple-choice question indicating (dis)interest in possible fUNconference activities. Source: Authors' own elaboration.

During the fUNconference design phase I hoped to create a space where participants felt safe to express doubts and uncertainty, by finding their own place in the collective creation of learning opportunities. As I displayed the graphic in the room, I imagined they might try to remember and re-evaluated their own responses. I expressed amazement at the zero interest in 'learning from experts' and received a wave of chuckles and murmuring. Perhaps, I wondered aloud, the question had been answered in haste? In any case, I mused, we could easily accommodate people who had not completed the questionnaire, and anyone who had changed their minds. Based on the fUNconference mind-set, I explained, 'everyone we need is in the room, so I'm not surprised that was the least interesting option, because we can take learning from experts for granted'. In this way, I assigned expert status to the assembled students and responsibility to 'be' an expert on their own practice throughout the day. After that, I tried to focus on time, tea and toilets, plus maintaining a festive vibe. I like to think of this style of facilitation as hosting a party… we made sure there was plenty of good quality cake. In the physical space, I was looking for butterflies and bees. Bumblebee behaviours are exhibited by participants who embrace the freedom and responsibility to move to wherever their participation is more meaningful (Owen, 2008). I did not see many bees buzzing in the room (maybe myself?) so was thrilled to see later that fUNcolleagues were pollinating in a virtual space, namely Nuria's Padlet board. Even better, I now get to share the product and process with other pedagogues. (Ooh, alliteration! Did I warn you about the wordplay?).

We were grateful to those who took time to complete the short follow-up survey, which we also designed as a pedagogical tool. We asked, 'what useful things did you discover that are helpful right now?'. Top marks to the person who told us about "way to frame tiny 'disruptions' to move towards the direction you want to see improvement in". Top marks also to whomever wrote "engaging with ideas around useful constraints to help make effective process for creative work, strategies to engage authentically at work and apply our critical knowledge in different systems translating into action, reminder of the usefulness of collective practice and community sharing and learning". There is so much richness interwoven in all the data we generated. We asked participants to describe the fUNconference in five words and present the answers in wordcloud form (figure 2). Even this snapshot is energising – I could read it as the beginning of a manifesto of sorts. Certainly I view it as a fair summary of my approach to various kinds of academic work (research, teaching, professional development, service).

Figure 2: fUNconference feedback in five words. Source: wordcloud with data feed by the authors.

This is feedback, not a formal evaluation – it's not that kind of research. Of course there is bias. We cannot speak for those who stayed silent or felt unseen, we know this from our own experience. Carla and I know how much effort went into preparation, how much was left undone and unsaid, how much we rely on trust in each other's craft and vocation. What I really want to say on record, is thank you.

4.4 Liberating entrepreneurship education

Our concluding discussion weaves the themes of this paper together within the institutional context of our pedagogical work. It is clear to us that collaborative working cannot succeed without interpersonal trust. In

this section we offer a critical reflexive analysis which highlights key implications of our research. We resist the word 'findings' in favour of less constraining vocabularies; the word 'implications' opens the focus of inquiry to more diverse epistemological possibilities in knowledge generation.

Decolonising teaching and learning

We experimented with unconference approach according to a shared understanding of 'the Goldsmiths way' which attempts to resist rather than endorse students' unaware acceptance of an oppressive discourse (Shor and Freire, 1987). Following the Goldsmiths Student Union, we understand liberation as 'the act of working to challenge and reverse the effects of structural oppression in society'[9], and present the fUNconference approach as a route to both decolonising and liberating ourselves and holding space for our student-colleagues. We are in a department which celebrates scholarly creativity and innovation in the 'real world' and strives to discover entrepreneurial responses to academia. Decolonising our conventionally trained academic minds (which is an ongoing task) involved radical pedagogies as we invited current and former students and colleagues to 'question teachers and texts' (Johannisson and Achtenhagen, 2018, p.76) and position students as reflexive practitioners.

Sharing challenges and difficulties related to dissertation work was seen as valuable and helpful. Hearing about others' experiences provided validation and relief from personal stressors. Responsibility to take the initiative and give oneself permission to follow up on opportunities was emphasized. Collective practice and community sharing were seen as beneficial for learning and growth.

Trusting 'others'

Students and alumni expressed an appetite for fUNconferences earlier in the academic year. We feel the need to familiarise each new cohort of students with the principles and practices of unconferencing through seminar activities integrated with the formal curriculum. Given our longer perspective on the annual cycle, we understand it is important to 'reset' our understanding of the student experience. We see how institutional processes shift and mutate over the years, in a complex socio-political environment. We can recognise how their learning conditions are intertwined with our working conditions. Most important, we believe the fUNconference is most effective towards the end of the year, once trust has germinated and the institutional power imbalance between students, alumni and staff is at its weakest.

We argue that a fruitful approach to decolonising is appreciative reflexive inquiry which constantly reinforces the idea that participants' situated knowledge is valuable. Individually, we were able to share our own experiences of being 'other' in order to demonstrate alternative ways to interpret and navigate feelings of isolation or confusion. Collectively, we were lucky that participants chose to make space in all fUNconference sessions to explore the potential of an 'outsider' way of thinking. Insiderness, especially if it feels 'wrong', could be the key to a strong authorial voice and coherent critical appraisal. Roxanne sums this up in a different way; declaring that the fUNconference work was 'a good way to counter imposter syndrome by putting yourself in a tight spot with trusted colleagues'. Self-efficacy and self-confidence are hard-won in UKHE, and

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[9] https://www.goldsmithssu.org/activism/liberation/

wholehearted sharing of those precarious and uncertain moments created a learning community of fUNcolleagues. A simple insight we can use in our future teaching is the key task for students is not to become a convincing insider within academic circles, as many strive to do. Instead, they should learn to be able to evaluate information, plans and ideas in a way that satisfies institutional expectations, and trust themselves to collectively explore creative, satisfying and enduring ways to extend their knowledge.

We find that other Appreciative Inquiry principles (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010) were manifest in the fUNconference. Powered by the free-choice principle and animated by the 'law of two feet', participants explored their creativity and collective capacity in ways that brought the best out of their efforts (the wholeness principle). It appears that commitment is enhanced when participants have more freedom to choose how and when they contribute - they (mostly) stayed for the full day![10] How this can be introduced into core curriculum teaching, which is already an intense and regulated activity, we are not yet sure. We will explore fresh critical pedagogies in entrepreneurship education (Verduijn & Berglund, 2020) extended to andragogy and heutagogy as befits our adult postgraduate learning community (Neck & Corbett, 2018).

(re)Humanising the institutional environment

Discussing the decolonising agenda with participants provided an opportunity to reflect on institutional expectations to consider ourselves in racial terms. One student remarked that the UK seems 'obsessed' with race and 'box-ticking' resonated strongly in our reflections. This prompted us, in our post-event discussions on decolonising, to share experiences of being racially othered by Goldsmiths and UK institutions in wider society and everyday life. We developed an intentional focus on our personal and emotional responses to being 'bent out of shape' or 'forced into boxes' according to UK population statistics. Again, this idea is nothing new, but certainly exploring with fUNcolleagues seemed to be a liberating experience. Routinely drawing attention to the emotional responses expressed by participants, when discussing the challenges of academic work, does not solve the problem: the lesson here is not 'a problem shared is a problem halved' but a more scary 'look at how all-pervasive this problem is'. We thus suggest that the participants, by sharing or listening and reflecting, can accelerate their learning about ways to deal with such feelings. We were able to share our own experiences of being 'other' in order to demonstrate alternative ways to interpret and navigate feelings of isolation or confusion.

The ambition we had for our students was to come to a realisation; perhaps the test of successful postgraduate education is not to become a convincing insider within academic circles, but to be able to evaluate information, plans and ideas in a way that academics will understand and respond to. What if their task in the coming months is to take the skills and knowledge that they have developed while studying and use it to make their working life more interesting, creative and entrepreneurial? What each student has taken from their experience of the fUNconference is unique, and collecting those value creation stories is outside the scope of this paper. Our own value creation stories will, perforce, focus on the environment in which those stories can germinate. In less flowery terms, we need not appropriate or even re-tell student stories in our pedagogical work because

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[10] We started at 14:00 and finished at 20:00, which is a long and unusual time period for academic engagement, bridging the normal work day with social/private time.

we need not de-centre ourselves. Indeed, our particular proximities to 'whiteness' in UK society and institutions give us more insight and power to generate lines of critical thinking in seriously playful and human ways.

5. Conclusion

Drawing on our teaching and learning experiences within Goldsmiths and wider UKHE we addressed two of the areas for which our own training and reading of literature left us ill-prepared. We focus first on the ethos and process, and second on the contributions critical reflective practice can make to our professional development.

We approached this paper in the spirit of collaborative reflexive inquiry, exploring ways to express our vision and action of a building a learning community that would interrupt and invigorate current thinking, and open a space in ICCE for ongoing critical dialogue amongst alumni.

We wanted, as 'enterprise educators', to apply a creative method and entrepreneurial mind-set to pedagogical development across the programmes, foregrounding the student perspective. We quickly realised the value of an appreciative evaluation of shared practices and resources.

We are delighted to offer a glimpse of our efforts to build a new community of fUNcolleagues within and outside ICCE. We encourage students and teachers of entrepreneurship to appreciate the value of social learning spaces and the generative richness and variety in compassionate and trusting interactions with colleagues, for it is these activities which shape our development as researchers, while enabling space and mechanisms for the decolonising of teaching, curricula and education in general.

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