

# AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO WRITING PROVISIONS:

A CRITICAL PEDAGOGY FOR COMMUNITY  
& DIALOGICAL EDUCATION AT LSE

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# Outline

1. Brief introduction LSE LIFE
2. A critical pedagogy for community
3. Achieving community through dialogical education
4. How to achieve it – budding stories from LSE LIFE.
5. Engaging with challenges

# LSE LIFE



'LSE's new centre for academic, personal, and professional development.

'It is the place to come ... for support, guidance, and ideas about how to succeed in your studies and extend your learning and discovery outside the classroom.'

1-to-1 tutorials

Workshops

'Talks'

Special events

Mix departmental initiatives along with a generalist curriculum

# Writing as central to LIFE



65.8% of 1-to-1s focused on the writing process (as of 2 May 2017)



At least 33 unique workshops / talks related to the writing process (including dissertation-related topics).

- As compared to:
  - 13 on exam related skills
  - 11 on reading related skills
  - 8 on presentation related skills

# A need for pedagogy

LSE LIFE began with speed, as a response to a 'practical' need.

However, a wish to set our own pedagogy based on the values of the team. Not to become solely a place of un-theorized action.

A desire not to simply co-opt (or be co-opted) by the wider institution. To act with thought.

# A critical pedagogy of community

Drawing on the works of bell hooks  
(2003 & 2010)

# The value of community as pedagogy

Community encourages students to **trust** in their capacity to learn that they can meet difficult challenges with resilience and competence. (hooks, 2003)

Community and trust through community promotes **self motivated interrogation** rather than simply reacting against an outside challenge. (p. 107)

# Critical pedagogy of community

Community requires a genuine **commitment** to well-being for all students.

Cannot assume that just because we hold valuable information that students need means we can create a community automatically. (hook, 2003, p. 109).

While we are all part of a community, we not are the same – each person is unique with different experiences (and privileges). Community recognizes **diversity** as it creates a shared space.



# Critical pedagogy of community

Need to create **solidarity** within a structure of values, beliefs, and yearnings (in diversity – no false notions of lack of difference).

Creates an **ability to respond** to the unique concerns of individual students (hooks, 2010, p. 161)

**Generosity** to everyone present in order to develop trust.

Develop trust by showing we are not there to take over, and we are willing to be silent, to **pause** (hooks, 2003, p. 129) and acknowledge others' without dominating them.

# Critical pedagogy of community

In a pedagogy of community, teachers learning while teaching and students are learning while sharing. All are **co-creating knowledge**.

Promotes a **human partnership** model that invites an engagement of the self.

If we extend **care and respect**, we make it possible for students to address fears openly and to receive **affirmation** and support for the community (not just the teachers).

# Potential issues (critiques) of this community

## 1

### We are not therapists.

- In a community, if students can share openly, it allows us to witness what might remain hidden if the student thinks we don't care.
- Allows us (jointly) to prevent small issues becoming bigger
- Allows students to then be steered towards more professional help if needed (such as counselling).

## 2

### Conflicts with a culture of competitiveness

- A culture of competitive makes community near impossible as students begin to see each other as adversaries rather than comrades.
- Feel a need to prove that they are the smartest
- Leads to a need to protect positions rather than be open to creating new ones.

# Achieving community through dialogical education

The values and aims of dialogue and the qualities needed

# Dialogue versus discussion

## Discussion:

A series of monologues.

Teacher acts like a leader who ensures each person gets a chance to share their monologue.

## Dialogue:

Involves active listening and creating knowledge together.

It is an exchange between equals where communal knowledge is progressed.

Not necessarily all speak the same number of minutes.

(Brookfield & Preskill, 1999; Allman, 2010)

# Dialogue continued

In order to be involved in dialogue, it needs to be between 'equals' – students are joint creators / contributors to the process.

All parties involved in dialogue must be open to 'goal-revision' and seeing things in new ways, including a critique of what is being seen. (Nielson, 2013).

To be involved in dialogue is to become absorbed into what the other person / people are saying (Gadamer, 2004).

# The intended aims / principles of dialogue

**Knowledge creation becomes collaborative** – see knowledge or 'skills' like writing from multiple perspectives to create a more holistic and critically sound understanding.

Breaks the notion of a single right answer on 'how to do it'.

Creates a model for LSE LIFE focused on entering into **dialogue in order to develop**, not a customer-service model of providing a service, or a deficit 'fix weak students' model.

Breaks power structures to see **learning as joint** – values students' existing knowledge as a starting point for developing further (Brookfield & Preskill, 1999).

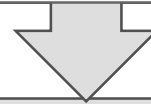
All about valuing **student voices** in dialogue, which in essence is the purpose of writing.

Creates a space that is a conscious alternative to LSE's larger culture of competition.

# Qualities needed for dialogical education

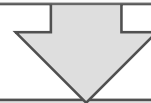
## Humble

an ability to admit we, as learning developers / writing tutors – do not have all the answers (hooks, 2003).



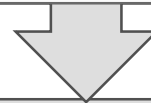
## Experience focused

A desire to get lost in a dialogue – in listening to others, and in learning rather than in receiving / giving the right answer (Gadamer, 2004).



## Trustful

Offer trust and care through listening (Brookfield, 2005; Brookfield & Preskill, 1999; hooks, 2003; 2010).



## Hopeful

Have & offer hope – hope in finding answers together, and hope for resilience through difficulty (hooks, 2003).



# How to be a community through dialogue in a writing provision

Examples and stories from LIFE's first year

# Dialogue doesn't mean speaking in monologues

Students engage in dialogues, not monologues to make meaning, and do not necessarily all speaking the same amount of time

Therefore, in workshops:

Analyse one students' 'knowledge object' (Allman, 2010) in order to understand the underlying 'issues' and background, and work together to imagine how to tackle it.

# Example: 9 December 2016 Workshop

## Writing Workshop last week of Michaelmas Term

- Reflecting on how their writing has developed over the course of one term.
- Reflect on growth and need for future growth.
- One student presents to group.
- Group unpick it together to deliver praise, question how the change happened, and how to continue the growth.
- Make mean of the writing process through exploring one student's experience and in parallel with their own.

# Being lost in dialogue & goal revision

This involves listening (actively) and engaging in questioning for understandings and exploration rather than prescribing answers.

Also means that student and tutor need to be open for goal-revision, recognising that the dialogue may lead to deep understandings.

Therefore, in 1-to-1 tutorials:

The focus is on listening, asking questions, and exploring ideas jointly rather than answer specific questions.

# Example: Walk and Talk Appointments

A new initiative that was piloted in March.

- Students come to these to discuss writing projects (for example, right now they seem to be focused on MSc dissertations)
- Discuss ideas, issues, and thinking behind their research – the connections of ideas.
- Walk for thirty minutes – out of LSE LIFE, around Lincoln's Inn Field Park, and back
- Return to LSE LIFE and jot down ideas.

Focused on idea exploration, trialling ideas, and asking question. On the experience of the dialogue, rather than achieving a specific, pre-set goal.

(Stansfield, 2017)

# Developing a community with trust, care & sharing

A space where students can come to talk to each other, dialogue, share experiences, generosity, and care for each other.

Therefore create 'workshops':

Centred around shared experiences, talking, and eating.

# Example: Snack and chat about your dissertations

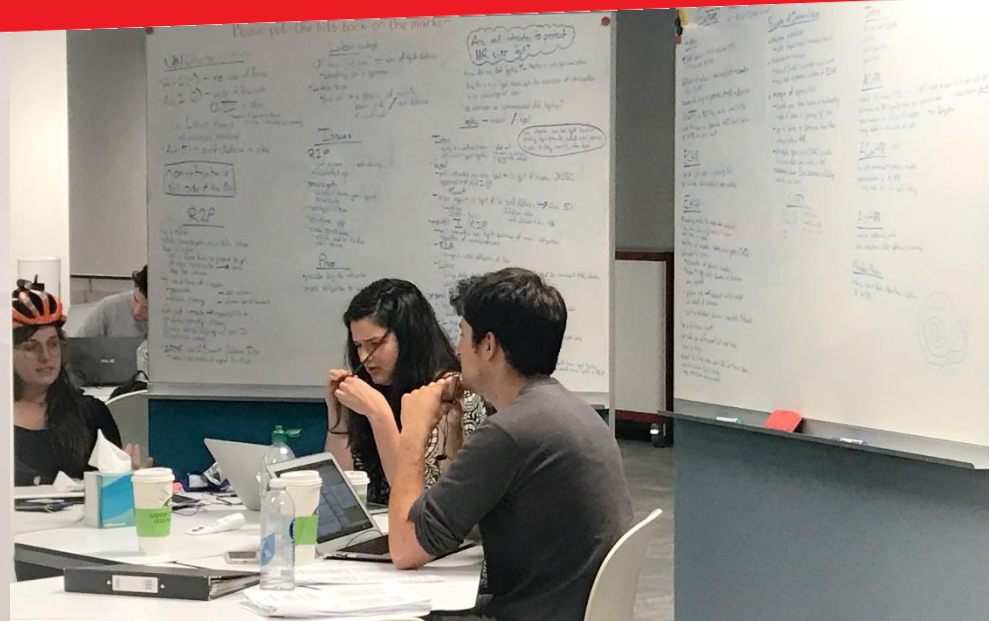
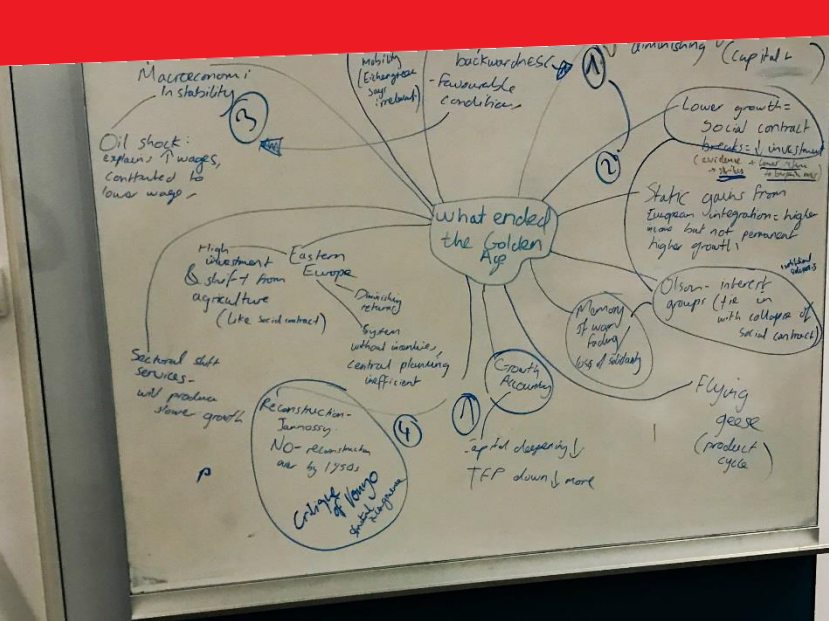
A series of three events focused on MSc students coming together to share their experiences in writing their dissertations.

- Snacks, coffee, tea, juice, are provided.
- There is no 'teaching' input nor any specific set goal or learning outcome.
- Students share challenges as well as ideas that they are working through
- They offer each other support, care, critical advice, asking questions, and generating new avenues of exploration.

Focused on working together and enjoying each other's company, while offering generosity through shared food.



# Example: Our flexible space





# Continuing Challenges to Community & Dialogue

The limits of these pedagogies at LSE

# Clashing values as an obstacle



## Individualism

- Distrust in other students and whether they know the 'best' answer
- Slow to engage with peer learning (much less forming a community).



## Competition

- Belief that they are being compared to other students
- Always in adversarial mode, not collaborative



## Perfectionism

- A belief that there is a 'best' answer that can be universally applied
- LIFE filled with experts who can tell them that single best way

# No set cohort of students

## Fluidity

- Not a course, where same group of students work together throughout the term or year.
- Students come and go. Never exactly the same.
- How to build trust and community between them even as they don't know each other?

# The nature of these challenges

Except for the fluid nature of the centre, all are about being a counter to LSE culture.

Establish our culture this year. Maintain it. Returning students will know now what we are.

We remain **hopeful** that we will become known as a place that is 'different'.

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