# CITYLIT

Some highlights from Sharing Practice Day

In May, City Lit held a Sharing Practice event where tutors shared some of their best teaching ideas in workshops for other tutors. Three of the presenters describe the content of their sessions below. We hope to include content from other presenters in future issues.

Using Peer Feedback - Laura Baggaley, Drama tutor

Peer feedback is a valuable tool for tutors, but can feel daunting. I explored the topic in a recent session with other tutors and we identified some of the benefits and possible pitfalls, and discussed ways of managing it effectively.

One of the great things about peer feedback, particularly in subjects that involve creating something (writing, acting, art etc.), is that giving feedback to others sharpens the students' 'eye'. The detailed observation needed to offer constructive comments means the students are developing their understanding of what constitutes high quality work, and can apply this knowledge to their own practice. It enables them to articulate what they are seeing and learning, and gives them greater awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses.

It can also be a real confidence boost for students to hear their peers praising their work, particularly when fellow students identify in concrete terms exactly what they like about it.
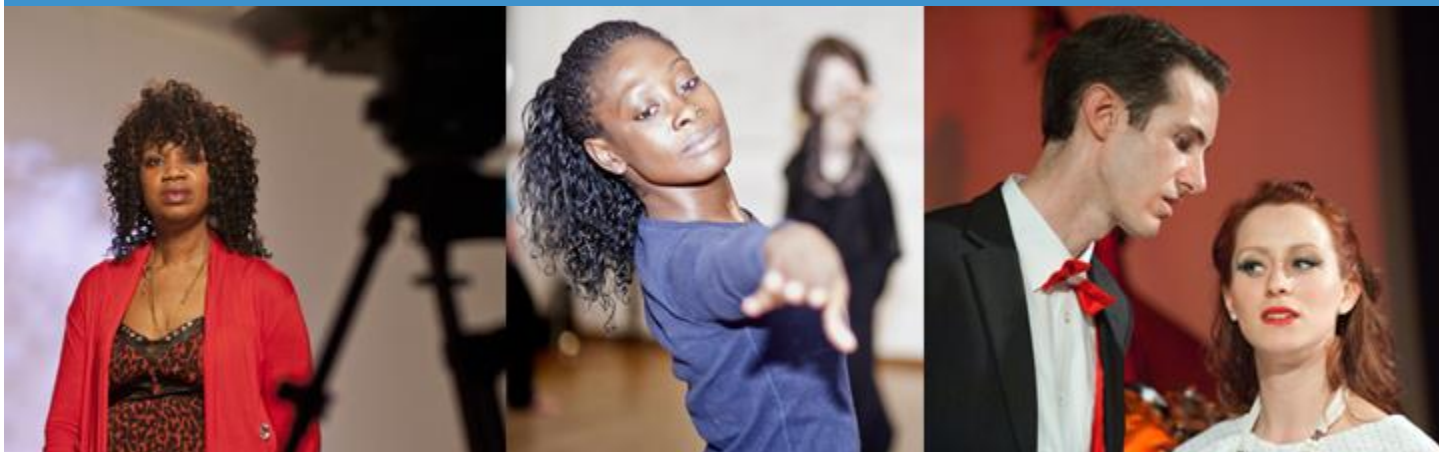
One of the most common pitfalls is to end up with everyone saying nice but woolly things about each other – pleasant, but meaningless! This is where effective management by the tutor is key. In our discussion, we agreed that it is essential for the tutor to establish clear expectations of feedback, either by explicitly discussing parameters in advance or by modelling the specific type of feedback language appropriate to the task. It must be positive, detailed and constructive.

It can be helpful to give students particular elements to focus on when considering their feedback; for instance, in an acting class, I might ask students to watch a scene and look carefully at "how the characters' intentions are conveyed" or "how the characters' relationships are made clear through physicality". A writing tutor might want to focus specifically on use of verbs, or differing sentence lengths. Students also often welcome the opportunity to identify themselves what in particular they would like to get feedback on.

I find peer feedback extremely useful when I am watching scenes performed by groups of students. Frequently, those observing with me will have noticed details in performance that I missed because my attention was elsewhere at the time – many pairs of eyes are better than one.

In addition to highly focused subject-specific questions, we identified some open feedback questions that can be useful for generating discussion of work.

- What did you like about this and why?
- What works and why? What could we improve?
- What did you find particularly striking? What stood out for you?
- How did it make you feel?

Peer feedback can contribute to group bonding and make everyone feel seen and heard. It can bring everyone's voices into the room, and help develop a trusting open atmosphere, where we are working together to grow and improve. I sometimes think giving genuinely useful, sensitive and constructive feedback is the hardest part of teaching. Feedback is also the thing students often say they value more than anything else. Sharing the job of giving feedback just makes sense!

Making Lectures More Interactive. Why? How? – Dale Mineshima Lowe, American History Tutor

We should first consider *why* we want our lectures to be more interactive.

There is an ongoing debate about the demise of the lecture. In this context, we are perhaps thinking of the lengthy, uninterrupted 'Sage on the Stage'. While this kind of lecture may be appropriate to larger public talks, many within teaching circles have begun to challenge the format – based on recognition of students' needs, psychology and pedagogical research about learning styles and attention spans.

A fundamental reason many of us are looking to see where we can 'tweak' our lectures is to get our students engaged with the material, and to get them processing this knowledge for themselves - to make sense of how it relates to them and their world in some way. So we should think first about the purpose of a lecture - what material is *key* for that session - and then about any possible barriers to our students' engagement in their learning. Below, the work of Rubenson (1986), Garland (1992) and Schilke (2001) is presented in a graphic from a blog post – Barriers to Learning and Development (2016). While the blog post itself is starting from a different educational situation, the concepts presented about barriers to learning, are important ones when we are looking to integrate new techniques and strategies for learning.

Barriers to Learning
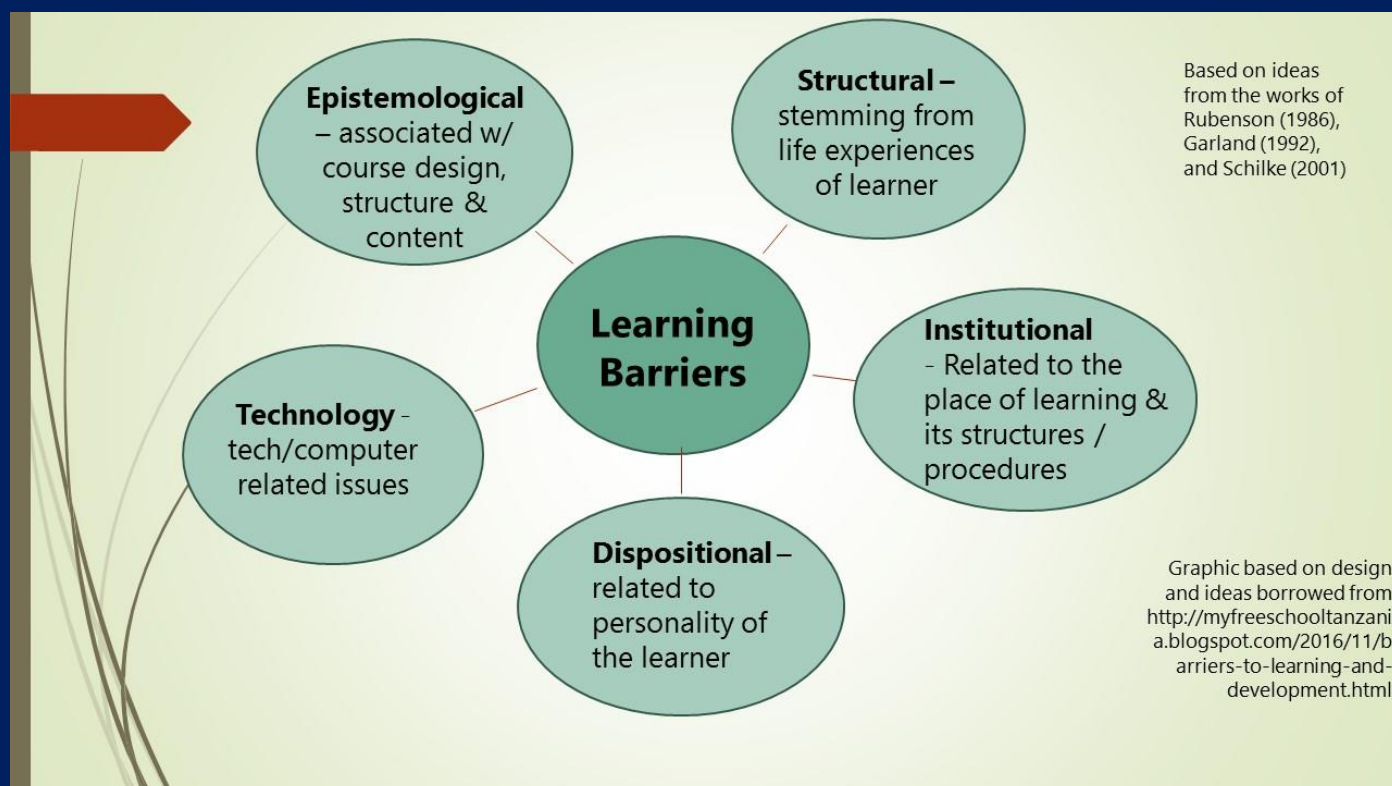
Some key barriers to student engagement at City Lit are:

- Prior educational experience and confidence with learning; learning differences.
- Course design and content: e.g. lots of talk without processing time, reading a long piece in class without first introducing it, assuming all have done pre-reading.
- Technological – having the digital skills to access materials and participate.
- Student's personal situation – family, work commitments etc.

When we are looking to make lectures more interactive, we should first recognise what we are already doing in our practice. For instance, 'Q & A' (Question and Answer) plays a major role in making a lecture interactive, depending on how this is used and when.

Some other key take-aways on techniques and strategies:

- Create an 'in' to immediately engage learners from the start e.g. an image, map, or word cloud of key terms or ideas related to the topic.
- Find a way to bring your students' prior knowledge and experiences into the session.
- 'Scaffold' questions from factual to more challenging within a task, or following a short reading.
- Pace the session and deliver material in 'chunks' and then give 'Brain Breaks'.   This creates opportunities for student self-reflection. This could be by using digital tools (polls, quizzes, word clouds) or the use of a quick focused reflective writing exercise (short, time-framed and using a quick, clear prompt).
- Remember the use of digital tools (or other tools) should be *enhancers* to learning, not a substitution for teaching. They can be opportunities to check learning and provide space most students do not recognise they need - to reflect on what they have just heard, seen, or read - before connecting their understanding to other ideas.

Finally, after reflecting on what one *can do* to make lectures more interactive, consider this question: What *are* the biggest barriers to changing *your* teaching style?
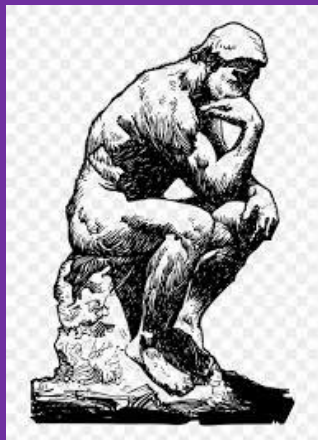
Further reading and examples of useful digital tools can be found at the end of the presentation 'How to Make Lectures Interactive' on Google Classroom here.

Image by Vince an

Image by Vince accessed from https://www.e-ir.info/2015/10/17/

Six Thinking Hats Parallel Thinking with Edward de Bono - Henry Martin, Creative Writing and Playwriting Tutor. www.henry-martin.com

Teachers ask students for their opinions and thoughts all the time, in class groups and in essays. Oftentimes group discussions can veer off topic, or negative (rather than constructive) feedback prevails. In such moments, Edward de Bono's Six Thinking Hats 'parallel thinking' method can be a useful tool to promote critical and multi-angle thinking rather than knee-jerk or habitual thinking. What person isn't guilty of the latter?

Edward de Bono developed the Six Thinking Hats method in 1985. Since then it has been adopted by various sectors, particularly the corporate sphere. For teachers, the method is agile in that it can be applied to any subject or topic, and can be beneficial in both short and long courses.

Critical Thinking

De Bono coined the term Parallel Thinking as one form of Critical Thinking. Parallel Thinking (Six Thinking Hats) is a method where all parties think in the same direction. It is thinking that is co-operative and coordinated. The 'direction' of the thinking can change, but all parties are always, to put it simply, 'on the same page'.

What's your favourite colour?

So, what is this all about? In a nutshell, de Bono would argue that each individual is, whether by nature or nurture, programmed to think in a certain way. Think of the person in your life who always sees the glass as half full (everything is wonderful, brilliant, excellent) and then the person who sees it as half empty (everything is awful, complicated, tiring). You might have students like this in your class.

The Six Thinking Hats method corrects this natural (but unhelpful) human habit by 1. Bringing one's attention to their way of thinking and 2. Setting them the challenge, or giving them the space, to think and respond differently.

The hats then, are approaches that the student adopts to respond to a stimulus or question.

The Six Hats are broadly described in the diagram below, or see this short video Edward De Bono's Six Thinking Hats.

Edward de Bono's Six Thinking Hats Model for Critical Thinking and Problem Solving

For example. What do you think of the TV adaptation of Sally Rooney's *Normal People*?

Using de Bono's method, you as the teacher, wearing the Blue Hat as the 'director' of the conversation, would allocate time for students to respond to the question, wearing one hat at a time. Because the group are all wearing the same coloured hat at the same time, 'Parallel Thinking' is being practised.

One thing to point out is that the black hat is not necessarily a negative hat; i.e. where a student gets to complain at length; if anything, it should be about identifying risks and problems, which can then be corrected by wearing the Green Hat etc.

The Benefits of the Six Thinking Hats Method

- Promotes clarity and breadth in group thinking, whilst in parallel.
- Less chance of one person dominating a conversation with only one subjective viewpoint.
- It is generative (i.e. generates ideas) and evaluative (evaluates ideas) simultaneously.
- Works in all sizes from solo to group work.
- It can be a useful approach to marking. Often tutors point out "errors" (and so are wearing the black hat) but it can be equally (if not more) beneficial to a student to get feedback from a green- or blue-hat-wearing tutor, specifically pointing out where and how the work could improve, and where it is succeeding, and how it might develop (if it was re-written in the future).

The Six Thinking Hats method may not solve all problems, but if used frequently, can stretch and challenge students, promote differentiation, and become a new tool they can bring to their future studies or real-life problems.

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