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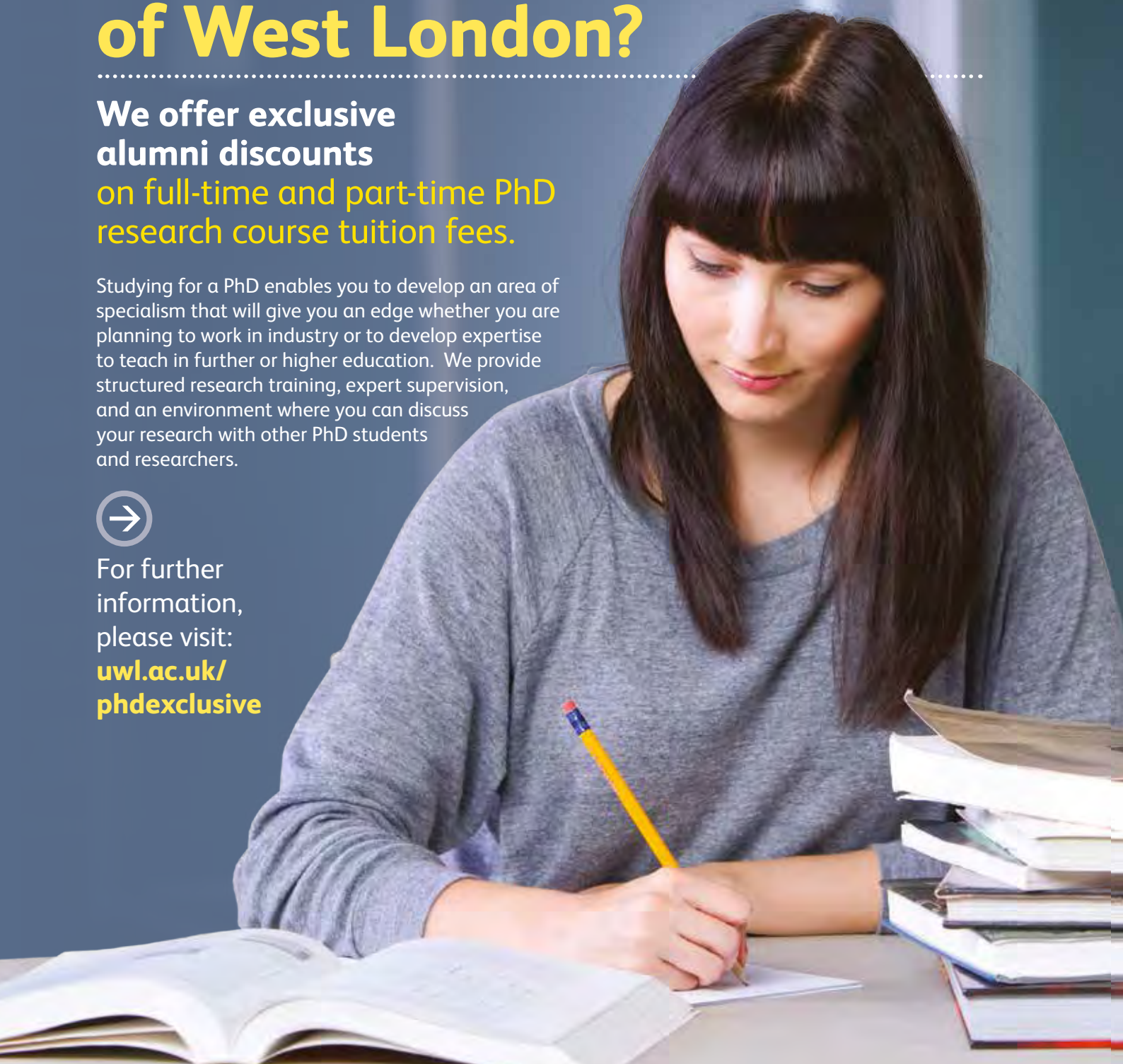

New Vistas | Policy, Practice and Scholarship in Higher Education

EDITOR'S NOTE

Volume 6 | Issue 1

In an age of fake news, fake tans and alternative facts, it is reassuring to read work that seeks to explore and cast a critical eye on the world around us. Such exploration is not just a matter of poking a stick under a rock to see what lies beneath – our authors go further and show the significance of knowledge. Knowledge is not simply 'knowing stuff' – real knowledge is knowing what to do with stuff. This application of knowledge is a meaning-making process that feeds the thing that makes us human. For me, humans are fundamentally nosey creatures; however, unfocussed nosiness is not as powerful as focussed nosiness. The focussed nosiness presented in this edition of New Vistas offers us the power that comes from understanding complex issues. The articles in this edition cover a wide range of topics but three empowering themes seem to run throughout: (1) the importance of being informed; (2) the need to be critical with this information, and (3) the significance of making informed decisions.

We open this edition with van der Sluis who makes an argument for Slow Higher Education - encouraging the development of students who are mindful and well informed, rather than simply seeking to plug holes in the job market. Ideas of mindfulness and balance are further explored by Jayman and Ventouris as they report on their work to improve mental health in primary schools through a mental wellness card game, the Book of Beasties. Strong adds to the theme of supported growth and reports on a computer game aimed at helping children understand the complex and interconnected ideas of sustainable development. From this we segue into the work of Kulasi who also explores the importance of developing resilience in students – this time students in Higher Education – as she reports on a project on developing students' ability to construct and evaluate critical arguments. Lelis also explores the empowerment of students in Higher Education in her analysis of an intervention aimed at giving postgraduate students a sense of progression whilst developing confidence in their own work. Wider exploration of personal agency comes from the work of Antova and Manyande who examine the effect of sex and ethnicity on the levels of psychological distress in heterosexual couple therapy. Chappell then offers a more biological perspective on the human condition through a detailed insight into the processes, drivers and treatment of cardiovascular disease. Finally, we close with a profile of PhD student, Agata Kubiak-Kenworthy, whose research on creativity in new music for stringed instruments developed two new typologies that help us understand creative interaction.

I am so pleased with the work presented here - it is varied, insightful and stimulating. Our authors are clearly nosey individuals. But they are not simply the kind to watch the lives of others as they cavort on some desert island or make fools of themselves in a jungle. The nosiness of our authors is focussed and positive. They seek to find truths in the human condition and they seek to make sense of these truths. And, through their work, we are able to make the world a more informed place – and hopefully a better place. Real facts, real information and real answers are more important today than they have been for quite some time. I hope that, like me, you feel empowered by these articles – the kind of empowerment that comes from understanding complex issues. And I hope that you consider using this knowledge.

Dr Erik Blair
New Vistas Editor

MISSON STATEMENT

***New Vistas* is published by the University of West London (UWL) and provides a forum to disseminate research, commentary, and scholarly work that engages with the complex agenda of higher education in its local, national and global context.**

Published twice a year (with occasional special issues), for a broad (academic, international and professional) audience, the journal will feature research and scholarly analysis on higher education policy; current issues in higher education; higher education pedagogy; professional practice; the relation of higher education to work and the economy; and discipline-specific research.

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CONTENTS

Volume 6 | Issue 1

Hendrik van der Sluis | University of West London, UK

SLOW HIGHER EDUCATION

Slow education appears in the printed media at regular intervals as a metaphor to counter the constraints of target and assessment driven education, and this article explores whether the notion could travel to Higher Education

Over the last two decades, building on the slow movement, slow education has been put forward as an alternative to conventional 'standards-driven' education and its one-size fits all approach, offered through 'packages of test-shaped knowledge' that are 'swallowed, but never properly digested' (Barker, 2012, npn). Instead slow education aims to put the student at the centre of their learning. It considers that education is fundamentally a social experience and that the relationships between peers, teachers, the institution and the community are at the 'core of the learning experience' (Harrison-Greaves, 2016, npn). As such, slow education might hold some tantalising arguments, providing a standpoint to critique contemporary Higher Education.

One of the prominent names associated with the idea of slow education is Professor Maurice Holt, a British-born progressive educationist who moved to America. Holt introduced the notion with reference to the slow food movement. The slow food movement was established as a reaction to the introduction of fast food restaurants in Italy in the late 1980s where the prominent journalist and culinary writer Carlo Petrini took part in a campaign against the aggressive introduction of a common fast food chain. Petrini and his colleagues developed the slow food movement, which signed its Manifesto in 1989 (Honoré, 2005; Petrini, 2003). The Slow Food Manifesto was not the only reaction that took place that year. The drawing back of the Iron Curtain, which led to the reunification of East and West Germany, was a watershed point in a time of rapid economic and political change, and provides the background against which the interest in slow education might be understood.

Slow food

The slow food movement was founded on the principles of ecological sustainability and social ethics – promoting sustainable, local and health products over globalised mass, and industrial processed fast food. The principles of slow food have been adopted globally, resulting in a slow movement, and have been applied to other aspects of social life including leisure, health, wellbeing, education, finance, parenting, and sex (Honoré, 2005). The movement might be understood as an ontological reflection on our high-paced, economically-driven, post-industrial world. It expresses a way of being and engaging with the world around us, away from the adagio that sameness, efficiency and 'fast is always better', and is paralleled by an anti-globalisation political agenda (Honoré, 2005, p.14). As such the slow movement might be understood as a nostalgic reaction against the neoliberalism that came to dominate national and international politics from the late 1980s. Neoliberalism has driven governments to stimulate marketisation, privatisation and deregulation, maintaining oversight through standards, target setting and outcome funding (Steger & Roy, 2010). Instead of this 'free market' agenda, the slow movement puts forward an alternative social, political and economic model that favours local communities and values diversity, heterogeneity and cooperation, in alignment with local, cultural and historic traditions and the natural world.

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SLOW
SLOW EDUCATION
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Slow education

Smith (2017) locates the writing of Holt (2002) with the emergence of slow education in England in the late 1980s – where slow education was a reaction to the constraints of the National Curriculum introduced in 1988, which emphasised standards and outcome-driven programmes. Holt felt that such neoliberal curricula were underpinned by supply-side economics in order to develop individuals for the labour market and narrowed students' future opportunities by focusing on their performance in reading, writing and maths. The slow education metaphor, according to Holt (2002, p.267), offers an opportunity to put forward an alternative that respects our 'cultural inheritance and the variety of ways of interpreting'. Instead of an education that results in short-term rewards, Holt emphasised the long-term implications for individuals' lives and social engagement in society: 'we remember from our school days not the results of tests but those moments when a teacher's remark suddenly created a new perception'. In this way, slow education offers a philosophy of education that respects traditions and stimulates the development of a moral individual. For Holt (2002, p.268) the aim of slow education is the formation of a civically-engaged moral agent – a characteristic that is not easily measured and requires careful nurturing. The focus of education should not be on the memorisation of facts and figures 'to deliver the knowledge and skills that businesses needs' but should include the shaping of personal attributes, such as critical thinking, self-awareness, discipline, resilience, leadership, empathy and compassion.

The principles of Holt's slow education have not found much uptake among mainstream educational approaches except for a few partnerships and initiatives (Barker, 2012). It might come as a surprise, considering the progressive roots of the slow movement, that instead it has become associated with private education in an elite environment. Slow education has been further popularised by Mike Grenier of Eton College, who has shared his view that education is over-regulated and too focused on exams and assessments (Hodgkinson, 2012). Slow education, according to Grenier, values the 'old-fashioned idea that a teacher has some knowledge and skills which he or she can pass on to the child' (Hodgkinson, 2012, npn). It focusses on teaching 'proper' grammar, handwriting, and instilling basic rules, attitudes and values. Slow learning is about offering children 'the things they need to live in society' (Barker, 2012, npn), and producing 'self-reliant children and adults' (Hodgkinson, 2012, npn). Slow education is well-resourced and tailored around the developmental needs of individual students. It is provided in small groups with dedicated tutors, with the purpose of cultivating self-confident individuals in the light of classical idealism. For Grenier, slow education is concerned with the training of character and the shaping of impressive minds, through amassing knowledge and mastering reason for its own sake (Smith, 2017).

Slow Higher Education might offer a metaphor to question the 'fast' educational provision, which focuses on attainable facts, vocational skills and competencies, offered in large cost-effective classes, with little attention being paid to students' individual context, questions and aspirations

To some extent slow education seems to have become linked to the notion of social-constructivism, which considers that knowledge, understanding and meaning are developed through interaction with others. Different social relationships, including those with peers, teachers, parents and the wider community, 'provide support and challenge', and 'present the learner with opportunities to explore different experiences or world-views' (Harrison-Greaves, 2016, npn).

A case for a slow Higher Education?

Building on the above, it might be possible to see how the principles of the slow movement might apply to Higher Education. The Dearing Report (NCIHE, 1997) might be taken as a tipping point, as it was the first in a string of policies that have led to increased political oversight of Higher Education, and introduced various instruments and policies that we are familiar with today. Dearing facilitated, for instance, the increased expansion of, and access to Higher Education. The report introduced the idea of student fees to share the growing cost of Higher Education, and the framework for qualifications with credits, programmes specifications, learning outcomes and the governing body, the Quality Assurance Agency.

It is probably fair to say that Higher Education has been transformed under the policies that followed Dearing. Higher Education has become governed by marketisation and competition in terms of funding, students and research. Influential methodologies such as the Research Excellence Framework and the Teaching Excellence Framework, and metrics such as the National Student Survey and Destinations of Leavers data have come to determine institutional reputations in the league tables.

The marketisation and competition among universities may have adversely driven policies and processes to protect institutional reputations, and provide fee-paying students with the services and experiences that have a positive effect on the National Student Survey. To enable undergraduate student progression and attainment, subject specific curricular, instead of being intellectually emancipatory and transformative, have become standardised and formulated in terms of minimal levels of skills, competencies and knowledge through the use of learning outcomes (Magnússon and Rytzler, 2019). The content of modules is offered in easy and bite-size blocks, which barely lift or distinguish themselves from the accompanying textbook, and are assessed in a way that does not fundamentally challenge students' ways of understanding and seeing the world.

The increased emphasis on the 'delivery' of services and attainable curricula might compromise what is central to the value of Higher Education. It might undermine academics' expertise, guidance and passion for their subject, and diminish students' interest and commitment to the advancement of their subject or profession. Instead, Holford and Michie (2019) argue we need an educational system that is capable of addressing contemporary issues, such as climate change, inequality and social participation. This requires a model of Higher Education that enables vocational participation, but more importantly develops well informed civic agents that understand the wider issues in society, and are capable of electing integral leaders, as well as taking lead, to 'combat and deal' with environmental and social threats (Holford & Michie, 2019, p.6). Students need to become 'aware of themselves and their potential in a world that is open, fluid, contested and in need of courageous actions' (Zepke, 2017, p.145).

Slow Higher Education, building on the principles of the slow movement by Honoré (2005) and Petrini (2003), might offer a metaphor for critique, first in terms of provision and delivery, and secondly in regard to the objectives of the current Higher Education system. Slow Higher Education could create a space to put forward an alternative to the current, vocationally-orientated Higher Education (in which value is measured through league table positions and graduates' future earnings). Slow Higher Education might offer a metaphor to question the 'fast' educational provision, which focuses on attainable facts,

vocational skills and competencies, offered in large cost-effective classes, with little attention being paid to students' individual context, questions and aspirations.

Higher Education under the current neoliberal value system leaves a development-shadow over our graduates. The premises of slow Higher Education are about the question: who do we want our students to be? A slow Higher Education would aim to develop graduates that understand the relevance of their profession and vocation within its ecological, social and cultural context. In terms of character, slow Higher Education would stimulate future graduates to develop their self-efficacy and self-confidence. But unlike Holt's and Grenier's interpretations, from the perspectives of conservative liberalism and classical idealism respectively, slow Higher Education would encourage the development of individuals that are courageous, mindful and well informed. Individuals who value diversity, heterogeneity and cooperation. As an educational movement, slow Higher Education would aim to offer accessible lifelong learning opportunities; stimulate individuals to become and remain inquisitive, and to inspire students be open to different views and perspectives; civically engaged, and sustainable problem solvers to address the pertinent issues in our contemporary societies.

The limits of slow (Higher) Education as a metaphor?

Metaphors are figurative expressions in our language that are applied to actions and/or social settings. They are powerful as they provide a symbolic representation and convey an interpretation in an elegant simplicity. However, the simplicity might also mask the more inherent complexities behind a metaphor. For instance, Pertini's (2003) slow food relates to a diet based on local and sustainably produced products in Mediterranean countries and allows for a varied, rich and tasty diet. Slow food based on locally sourced products in northern parts of Europe sounds a lot less attractive. In northern parts of Europe slow food has a different connotation, and becomes associated with affluent individuals, who have the time and money to demonstrate refined culinary tastes, enjoying exclusive products and less sustainable imports. As such, metaphors depend on interpretation, and are malleable and adaptable during the process of reinterpretation.

Slow food and the slow movement pose an alternative to the influence of neoliberalism, whose principles of marketisation, competition, privatisation, free trade and individualism have found their way into almost all aspects of our society, including education (Steger & Roy, 2010). Higher Education in the UK is not a homogeneous

Slow food and the slow movement pose an alternative to the influence of neoliberalism, whose principles of marketisation, competition, privatisation, free trade and individualism have found their way into almost all aspects of our society, including education

environment, and institutions differ considerably in terms of the historic context of their foundations; their orientation toward research, teaching, enterprise and knowledge transfer; their global and/or local outlook, and the student body they attract. This article has tried to highlight concerns about teaching and learning at institutions that focus on technical and professional training. These institutions might feel the strain of marketisation and competition more than others, and need to go to great lengths to enhance their place in the league tables. Yet the focus on employability and vocational skills might not provide the graduates with the understanding and outlook they need to address contemporary environmental and social issues.

Slow (Higher) Education, loosely building on the principles of the slow movement, provides an attractive metaphor, but might not carry sufficient substance to fundamentally critique the influence of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism, besides affecting institutions' financial and managerial situation, has redefined academic identity and collegiality, and the very purpose of Higher Education. Considering the substantial legacy that neoliberalism has left on Higher Education, it is tempting to become inward looking and nostalgic – referring to idyllic times, or become utopian about education's purpose and provision. Slow (Higher) Education as a metaphor might connect to this sentiment, highlighting what is wrong currently, but it might not provide a coherent and constructive way forward.

Nonetheless, Higher Education has become a high paced changing environment in which institutional leaders, academics and students are trying to keep up. If we can avoid a nostalgic or utopian gaze then slow Higher Education might offer us an interpretive space to consider what we mean by Higher Education and reflect on its purpose for individuals and society at large.

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Neoliberalism, educational philosophy, metaphors of education, metaphors for critique, sustainability

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BOOK OF BEASTIES: CHAMPIONING MENTAL HEALTH IN SCHOOLS

School leaders need to be better supported to make informed decisions about strategies to promote mental health and to help pupils who are experiencing difficulties. One tool for doing this is 'Book of Beasties: The mental wellness card game'. Book of Beasties (BoB) is a mental wellness card game targeted at primary school children. It is underpinned by the belief that every child should have the confidence to talk openly about their emotions and mental health. BoB aims to de-stigmatise mental health, promote wellbeing and raise emotional literacy

Supporting children's mental health and wellbeing in schools

The mental health of primary-aged children has received a great deal of media attention in recent months. Coverage included the revelation from 155 schools in England that 191 primary-aged pupils had self-harmed on school premises in the previous four years (Thomas & Titheradge, 2019). Other sources of evidence (NHS Digital, 2018) show that emotional problems e.g. anxiety and depression, in five to 15-year-olds have become more common for both boys and girls since 2004; whereas, other types of disorder, including behavioural difficulties have stayed broadly at the same level. Since the 2010 coalition, successive governments have pledged to tackle escalating mental health concerns and a Green Paper dedicated to children's and young people's mental health (Department of Health & Department for Education, 2017) set out measures to improve support by focussing particular attention on the pivotal role of schools.

Interventions which facilitate children's emotional expression; increase emotional literacy, and promote wellbeing are a crucial component of school-based strategies within which pupils can work to achieve their full potential – a priority set out in the Green Paper

Undoubtedly, mental health and wellbeing should be at the heart of children's school experience. However, education staff feel ill-equipped to manage increasing demands and competing priorities, and research suggests this is having detrimental effects on their own wellbeing (Education Support, 2018). In the words of one teacher, 'The government need to decide if they want us to be social workers, mental health workers or educators' (Thomas & Titheradge, 2019). The implementation of school-based mental health interventions depends on good quality evidence and yet much workin this area is not sufficiently evidence-based (Vostanis, Humphrey, Fitzgerald-Yau & Wolpert, 2013). A recent systematic review of mental health initiatives in schools (O'Reilly, Svirydzenka, Adams & Dogra, 2018) concluded that statistically, the effect of the majority of interventions was small to moderate and there remained a need for a stronger and broader evidence base.

Interventions which facilitate children's emotional expression; increase emotional literacy, and promote wellbeing are a crucial component of school-based strategies within which pupils can work to achieve their full potential – a priority set out in the Green Paper (DoH & DfE, 2017). During middle childhood, children experience an important period of change: their ability to recognise emotions in themselves and others increases; they have greater control over their emotions and are able to communicate more effectively about them, both expressively and with language. However, norms for the expression of emotion also change during this developmental stage and children are increasingly expected to modulate their emotions. The desire to support children to have greater control over their emotions is behind the evolution of 'Book of Beasties'.

The impetus for developing 'Book of Beasties' came from the creators' personal experiences of mental health issues during their own childhood and adolescence. Two clinical psychologists were consulted in the development of the specific features of each beastie – each of which aligns with symptoms associated with emotional disorders

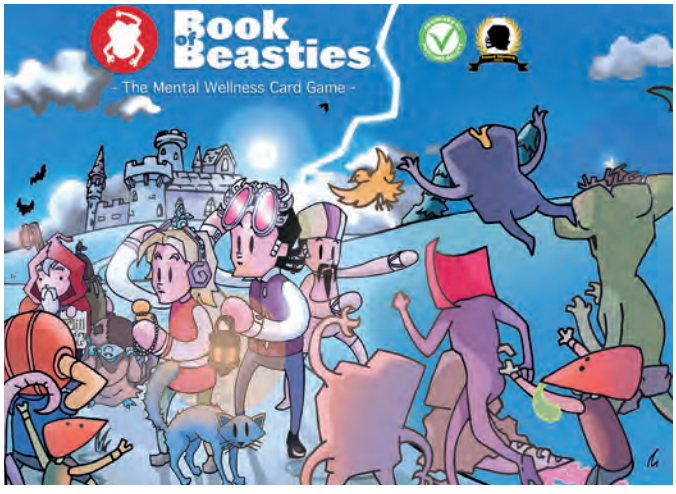
Developing Book of Beasties

'Book of Beasties' (BoB) is an intervention targeted at primary school children (aged 6-11 years), delivered in a small number of schools in the UK. At the time of writing, approximately 100 children had taken part in the programme since its launch in 2018. The BoB ethos is underpinned by the belief that every child should have the confidence to talk openly about their emotions and mental health. BoB aims to de-stigmatise mental health; promote wellbeing, and raise emotional literacy, 'to inspire the conversation, normalise the subject [of mental health] and make it less daunting when experiencing difficulties' (Book of Beasties, 2019, p.2).

The impetus for developing 'Book of Beasties' came from the creators' personal experiences of mental health issues during their own childhood and adolescence, and the lack of support available at the time. Two clinical psychologists were consulted in the development of the specific features of each beastie – each of which aligns with symptoms associated with emotional disorders. The evolution of BoB has been practice-driven rather than led by a particular theoretical model or theory of change. Arguably, simply participating in pleasurable and fun activities increases wellbeing by providing an escape from daily stressors (Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013). Nonetheless, a broad base of theoretical influences can be extrapolated including the therapeutic benefits of activity-based group encounters where children express emotional states through play and see that they share similar thoughts and feelings with their peers (a process known as universalisation). Links with positive psychology and competence enhancement models are also discernible. A meta-analysis of school-based interventions informed by positive psychology theories (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor & Schellinger, 2011) demonstrated that the availability of activities and opportunities for expressing feelings and thoughts, is an important component of successful programmes promoting mental health and wellbeing in children.

The game is delivered by trained school staff to groups of up to five children and can be implemented as a universal intervention or otherwise used with selected pupils referred by staff. Five, one-hour sessions are run consecutively with the same cohort on a weekly basis. BoB is accompanied by a manual which includes five comprehensive lesson plans. Core elements of the game are standard; however, there is in-built flexibility to pause and adapt play to suit the needs of each unique group. The game introduces 10 characters – the 'beasties' – each one embodies features (eg. self-consciousness or lack of energy) which may be associated with emotional difficulties (eg. anxiety or depression). The objective of the game is to help as many beasties as possible to overcome their worries by collecting special cards depicting 'items' that can be of assistance (for example, 'Bellows' help with calmer breathing); or a particular 'comfort', which can be a person, place or object (for example, 'French rabbit' is a cuddly toy, reminiscent of a favourite teddy a child would typically have).

At the start of the game, a story sets the scene and players are introduced to a team of characters who are also trying to help the beasties. Typically, two beasties per session are identified as the main ones in need of players' help. So, for example, Populo is presented as sometimes getting 'a foggy brain' so she 'loses her puff and can't bring herself to do anything' (Book of Beasties, 2019, p.40). Children are encouraged to discuss how they might be feeling before play commences and at natural intervals



during turn-taking. Time is allowed for discussing issues as they arise, such as: 'What kind of things may cause you to get a foggy brain?'; and to do the linked wellbeing activities that can help (such as the deep breathing exercises practised in a fun way by making paper boats and blowing through straws to race them. Yoga, origami, arts and crafts, and mindfulness exercises are built into the game – they are sensory focussed and involve active (as opposed to passive) learning. This approach is supported by research (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor & Schellinger, 2011) which suggests that to achieve positive outcomes, interventions need to include participatory elements that concentrate on personal and socio-emotional skills.

Understanding 'Book of Beasties'

The 'Book of Beasties' intervention runs for five consecutive weeks. Children complete a 6-item feedback questionnaire after their final BoB session, and school staff and parents/carers are invited to complete a 12-item questionnaire about the effectiveness of the programme. Qualitative data are also routinely collected from key stakeholders in the form of testimonials. However, no formal evaluation by an independent researcher was identified in either the published or 'grey' literature. In light of this and given that BoB does not align with an explicit theoretical model or theory of change (therefore lacking an evaluation framework), a single case study was set up to explore the intervention.

The right for children and young people to evaluate and inform practices and services targeted at them is increasing embedded in research designs and was a priority in this pilot study. The researchers' main interest was to investigate the social validity of the programme: the acceptability, fitness of purpose, and satisfaction with the

sessions perceived by the children, school staff and parents/carers. The aim was to gain an understanding of how beneficial (if at all) the sessions were in developing emotional literacy and promoting wellbeing for the children. A second aim of the pilot study was to test the suitability of selected, well-validated wellbeing and emotional literacy measures.

One West London school volunteered to participate in the research. Four pupils from Year 5 (aged 8-9 years) were allocated to the BoB group and four to the comparison group (two boys and two girls in each). Adult participants comprised two school staff who delivered the five BoB sessions and the parents/carers of the pupil participants (N=8). Quantitative measures were administered at baseline (before the first BoB session) and repeated after the final session. These comprised the Emotional Awareness Questionnaire (Rieffe, Oosterveld, Miers, Meerum Terwogt & Ly, 2008), Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (Gross & John, 2003), The Mood Questionnaire (Rieffe, Meerum Terwogt & Bosch, 2004), and the Parent-Rating Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (Guzenhauser, von Suchodoletz & McClelland, 2017).

A focus group with the four children who participated in BoB was facilitated by one of the researchers. Focus groups can offer a less intimidating and a more supportive research encounter than one-to-one interviews, especially for children, as a group scenario can help mitigate perceived power differentials. A drawing activity was also incorporated so that the children were not limited to verbal responses. The study's multi-method and multiple-informant approach included collecting observational data from the five BoB sessions and interview data from school staff and parents/carers, thus enhancing methodological trustworthiness.

The Department for Education's unabated focus on school as the ideal setting to promote mental health and wellbeing commands a strong research agenda moving forward

Initial findings

Pilot study findings suggest that the selection of quantitative measures for pupils were suitable for examining the intervention effects with this age group and are therefore recommended for use in a full-scale evaluation of BoB. Thematic analyses of pupil and adult qualitative data revealed consistent findings. Overall, key stakeholders – parents, school staff (delivery agents) and children receiving the intervention – perceived BoB to be beneficial in terms of increasing emotional literacy and enhancing subjective wellbeing. Furthermore, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods, and engaging multiple informants was deemed appropriate for the follow-up research on BoB.

'Real world' outcomes

The findings from this preliminary research will help inform the design of a full-scale evaluation of the 'Book of Beasties' programme; one that will enable effectiveness outcomes to be robustly measured and underlying processes to be explored, thus enabling explicit links between theory and outcomes to be developed. Schools have not hitherto, always relied on the strength of research evidence to make implementation decisions regarding mental health and wellbeing initiatives. In part, this may have been due to the lack of evaluation literature. Nonetheless, the Department for Education's unabated focus on school as the ideal setting to promote mental health and wellbeing commands a strong research agenda moving forward. This requires generating high-quality case studies to share with schools to promote best practice and evidence-informed commissioning. A cultural shift in schools is called for, whereby evidence-informed practice, derived from evidence-based research is embedded in whole school approaches to support and promote the mental health and wellbeing of all children and young people. The pilot research is a step in this direction and planned, further research on Book of Beasties will continue to blaze the trail towards this sea-change.

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HOW TO MAKE A 'COLOURFUL WORLD'

Addressing topics as varied as food supply; sustainable farming practices; climate change; green energy; transport solutions; river restoration, and air quality, Colourful World *is a children's computer game that seeks to convey complex and interconnected ideas in a way that is both comprehensible and enjoyable for young learners*

Running from 2018 to 2021, and backed by Erasmus+ funding of €264,423, *Colourful World* is a project about creating a computer game and associated learning and teaching materials for children aged 6-10. The project is an international partnership between the University of West London; Szkola Podstawowa, a primary school in Kraków, Poland; Advancis Business Services of Porto in Portugal; The Environmental Education Centre of Vamos, Crete; SATRO, an educational charity based in Surrey, and Boon Unipessoal, a dynamic design, communication and consultancy company, also based in Porto. The focus of this international project is to help children to understand key Sustainable Development and environmental topics and to develop their interest in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects. Sustainable Development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (see the 'Brundtland Report', World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987).

Readers for whom the term 'computer game' summons images of the hyperkinetic and vertiginous thrills associated with a *Grand Theft Auto* or *Call of Duty* might need to adjust their expectations at this point. Once completed, the *Colourful World* game will be a more age-appropriate and sedate experience, to be played by children both in the formal context of the classroom and in informal settings outside school. Belonging to the point-and-click genre in which players negotiate their way through several levels by collecting artefacts, completing tasks, and engaging with information and cues presented in text bubbles, the aim is 'playful pedagogy'.

Computer games and learning

Many claims have been made for and against the value of computer games in encouraging learning. In some accounts they encourage enjoyment and engagement, helping users to recall information as well as fostering cognitive and social skills. However, excessive use of certain games has also been identified as linked to social isolation and violence (Mitchell & Savill-Smith, 2004). Bjorklund and Pellegrini (2010) chart how evolutionary psychology has stressed the adaptive functions of play, while a beneficial role for play has, in developmental psychology, been a recurring preoccupation for major thinkers such as Piaget (1962) and Vygotsky (1978). This 'playful pedagogy' aims to place the *Colourful World* game at the heart of a series of inter-connected play/learning activities.

A key part of the interactive narrative approach that the team decided early on was a game structure that involved the player's on-screen character being visited at home by a series of talking animals who would each be experiencing different problems associated with climate change and environmental degradation. With the arrival of successive animals – rabbit, duck, dog – each of whom becomes an inconvenient house guest until their problems are

resolved, the player is obliged to visit a new setting, and then to investigate and fix the issues. In the course of the game, players engage in a series of positive environmental and Sustainable Development tasks that enable the animals to return to their, now remediated, homes and habitats. Their interventions include: planting field margins with wildflower and grass seeds to encourage the return of wild pollinators and natural predators for pests; getting a new solar plant up and running; restoring a forest to prevent soil erosion and improve air quality; 're-wilding' a river by restoring its natural flow, and petitioning a mayor for an improved urban transport infrastructure. In the course of the project it is intended that children will come to see environmental and Sustainable Development issues as matters that apply both locally (at home, at school) as well as nationally and globally. It is in the iterative process of deciding the overall trajectory of the game and hammering out the details of its content that the blend of skills brought by the different partners has proved so important.

Design and development

Combining actual meetings of all parties – so far, in London, Crete, and Porto – with Skype meetings and email exchanges, the game has progressed from a concept, through scripts with dialogues, to initial visuals and coding. Throughout, the substantial experience of working with younger children that several of the partners have enjoyed over many years has been critical in ensuring that themes and topics are conveyed in a fashion that is clear and to-the-point. It has certainly been a challenge for the University of West London's project coordinator, a Professor of Literature and Film more used to writing peer-reviewed articles on Jane Austen or Ian Fleming, to adapt to an idiom that is far less long-winded than his usual fare!

Making sure that the information presented in the game is factually watertight has also been an interesting process. Given the ubiquity of environmental discourses and associated stories across the media for many years now, most people would think they already know enough about these issues to put together a body of information for children about such a project. It transpires that this is only half true. In the course of agreeing the game content, partners engaged in wide-ranging research, fact-checking, and debates to ensure that what was put together was robust; for example, on the extent to which food supply depends upon pollination by bees. The team also had illuminating discussions on how far the game could stray into subject matter that might be contentious or awkward. Would it venture into the potentially deleterious environmental consequences of meat production, or the connection between individual families choosing to have many children and the global challenges of a rising human population?

High quality learning

From the outset the partners wanted the game experience to be supported by additional high quality learning materials that would enable teachers and others to deliver the game with confidence and use it as a springboard for activities and tasks both in the classroom and beyond. A 'Key Facts' supplement for teachers pulls together salient information from recent authoritative sources, so that those tasked with delivering *Colourful World* can augment or refresh their knowledge base. Similarly, an accompanying 'Glossary' of key terms helps teachers explain relevant words and concepts in straightforward language. However, there is an issue with intergovernmental and European sources that are rarely drafted with a view to ease of comprehension for the lay reader, and

From the outset the partners wanted the game experience to be supported by additional high quality learning materials that would enable teachers and others to deliver the game with confidence and use it as a springboard for activities and tasks both in the classroom and beyond

especially not for their adaptation to bite-sized knowledge nuggets for the under-10s. Nonetheless, these sources and many others like them have been mined for material that should give teachers – the key intermediaries in the game experience – a sense that what they are delivering is rooted in the best that the scientific and policy-making communities currently know. At present, the game and all its associated materials are being written in English but they will be translated into all the languages of the project partners.

The next couple of years will involve a range of key activities on the project. Presentations to selected schools and educational institutions across Europe will disseminate updates on the progress of *Colourful World*, and partners will use their established connections with such stakeholders for the pilot testing of the game and associated materials. This phase will enable the game to be modified as necessary in response to user feedback and also to prime the educators who are likely to be among the first groups to use the completed version. A website and a Facebook page bring together a growing set of resources relevant to teaching children about Sustainable Development and STEM topics. With the website serving as a repository of the materials produced in the course of the project and as a meeting point for people who wish to become involved and/or who already have an interest in the field. A variety of contests and challenges are also being developed – aiming to engage children and educators in the project and to raise awareness of Sustainable Development themes. At the time of writing, the project team are promoting a competition for primary schools across Europe in which groups of children are invited to submit posters showing young people's actions to protect the environment and support sustainability, and to promote eco-friendly behaviours and attitudes among children.

As recent media coverage of teenage campaigner Greta Thunberg has demonstrated, sustainability and environmental concerns have become increasingly important to young people who, to a far greater extent than previous generations, will have to deal with the consequences of a changed climate and damaged ecosystems. *Colourful World* hopes to play its part in developing the environmental literacy of children; to help them gain and deepen their knowledge of ecology and environmental protection; to motivate them to take an active part in environmental campaigns and actions, and to promote activities aimed at environmental protection.

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Colourful World website:
http://www.colourfulworld.eu/
Colourful World Facebook page
https://www.facebook.com/colourfulWLD/

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USING PEER FEEDBACK TO HELP DEVELOP CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

Many first year undergraduate students arrive at university without having been taught how to think critically. This poses a serious problem as without critical thinking skills, students can fall into bad intellectual habits impeding their development. An example of this is the over-reliance on the internet for information. The resulting 'Google-it' mentality can then leave sixth-formers insufficiently prepared for Higher Education; impacting their ability to thrive at university

Why do we care about critical thinking?

One of the key graduate attributes is that of being thoughtful and proactive – and at the University of West London, graduates are expected to develop the ability to interpret, analyse and evaluate information. In an environment rife with fake news and 'alternative facts' this is a vital attribute for any student. However, many undergraduates need academic support in the development of such information literacy skills in order to lay the foundations for their studies, future careers and lifelong learning. In order to undertake this effectively, active learning needs to be developed – where students become active participants in the process of information evaluation rather than passive listeners (Bronwell & Elson, 1991).

Critical thinking has been described as the defining concept of Western Higher Education with Moore (2011) going as far as to say it should be the goal of a Higher Education. Pohl (2011) asserts that one of the primary objectives of education should involve the teaching of tools for lifelong learning. Twenty first century graduates faced with the speed, breadth and depth of the fourth industrial revolution increasingly require creativity, critical thinking and peer collaboration in order to navigate complex, interconnected issues. These graduates are more likely to work across many disciplinary boundaries and thus critical thinking is a valued transferable skill from academia to the workplace. The reality is, however, that while academics assert that graduates possess critical thinking skills, employers disagree (Hart Research Associates, 2013).

Critical thinking in the classroom

Pohl (2011) describes a classroom thinking culture as a supportive environment where specific factors work together to bring about and reinforce productive thinking in a critical and creative sense. Moreover, Pohl asserts that thinking skills need to be explicitly taught and, while other factors connected to student learning are articulated in guidelines and policies, teaching thinking skills remains a common exception. Pohl, alongside the work of Professor John Hattie (1996) advocated devising a framework to aid teachers in the explicit teaching of thinking skills.

Scaffolding, as a teaching strategy, is known to help promote student learning. A study by van de Pol, Mercer and Volman (2018) on how teachers used scaffolding to support students' learning in small-group work found that scaffolding support in small-group work fostered students' learning; however, crucial to the success of the scaffolding process is the timely fading of this support. Literature discussing the use of scaffolding in Higher Education is rare as the emphasis is on developing the higher order skills of analysis, synthesis and evaluation; concepts that are considered more difficult to scaffold. However, a scaffolding approach was used with computing undergraduate students in Staffordshire University, to introduce a complex, unstructured problem requiring the exploration of a range of different issues. This was linked to assessment to encourage students to engage with the process. The findings revealed that whilst providing good support initially, linking scaffolding to assessments was problematic due to the fading of the support (Stanier, 2015).

As well as scaffolding, peer feedback has been found to assist in the development of critical thinking in students. Wanner and Palmer (2018) found that although formative peer feedback did not lead to improved marks in assignments, students stated that it improved the quality of their work – helping to clarify the strengths and weaknesses in their analysis. Moreover, students with specific learning needs appreciated peer feedback for the added help with editing the work.

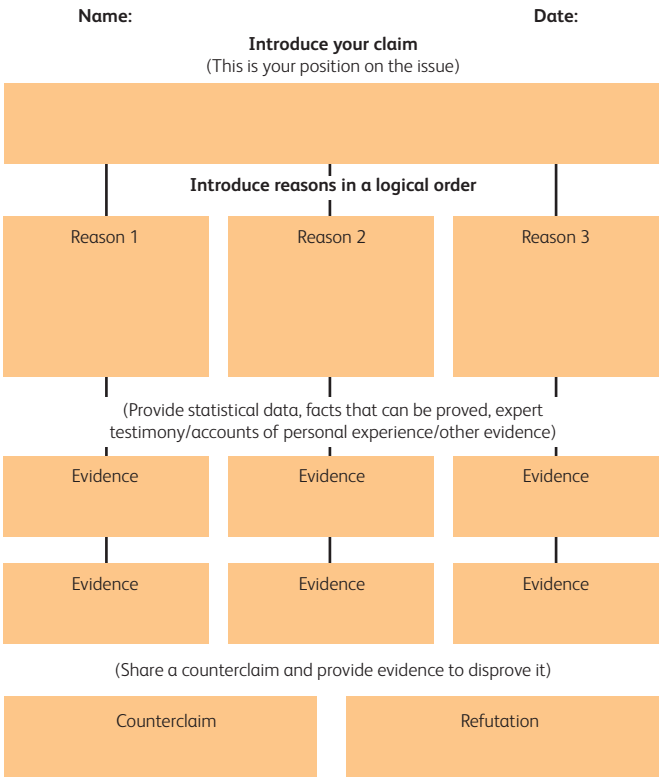

FIGURE 1 Building an argument

Criteria	Comments
Does the speaker attempt to engage listeners? How?	
What side is the speaker on?	
What are the reasons provided by the speaker to justify their position?	1) 2) 3)
Is the evidence they provide to justify each of their reasons clear?	1) 2) 3)
What is/are the speaker's counter claim(s)?	
How well is/are the counter claim(s) refuted? Are facts/ reasons/evidence used?	
Write any emotionally charged words that were used that the speaker many want to change.	
Are the speaker's ideas connected appropriately; is there coherence between the reasons and evidence? Is appropriate academic vocabulary used?	
Does the speaker clearly articulate their conclusion and is it clear which side the speaker is on?	

FIGURE 2 Peer-Evaluation Form for Critical Thinking

Research design

A classroom intervention activity was designed for first year undergraduate students at the University of West London (UWL) that aimed to encourage critical thinking and test the effectiveness of peer feedback as a tool for developing competence in critical thinking. A scaffolded approach was developed; using two specifically designed handouts. The first helped students critically structure their arguments and the second was used to work in pairs/small groups to evaluate the arguments of peers and provide meaningful feedback.

An active learning approach was used for this project with a group of first year business students who had a summative assessment that took the form of a group discussion (worth 20% in a core skills-building module). The assessment involved discussion, in small groups, of a highly topical and emotive subject (cyberbullying). Students were required to adopt a position in the discussion and support this with credible academic evidence – while also listening and responding to the opinions of other group members. The assessment was challenging, so, in order to support students, three lessons were planned to introduce students to critical thinking and argument positioning using specifically designed handouts (see Figures 1 & 2), and utilising peer feedback. The module was delivered by a team of tutors so lesson planning had to be clear in order to be effective in its support of the students. The process is summarised in Figure 3.

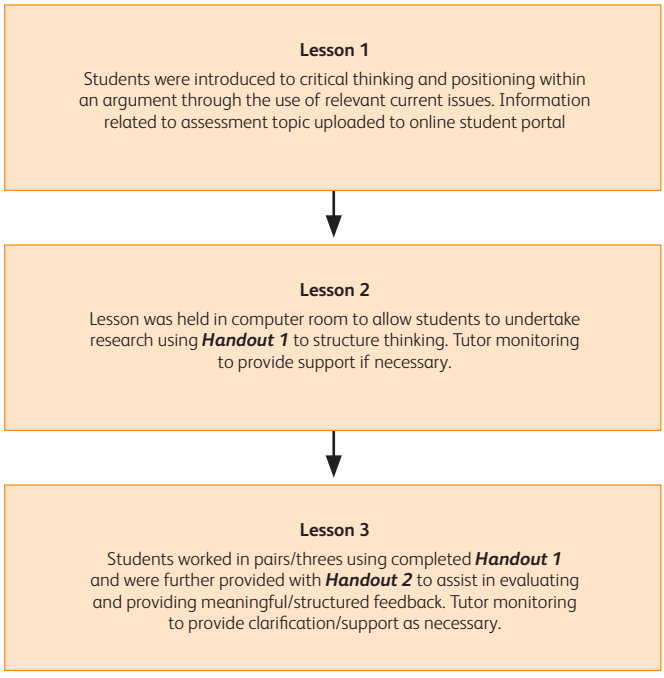

FIGURE 3 Supporting critical thinking

At a meeting to discuss the effectiveness of the intervention, it became evident that tutors who had previously felt hesitant about peer feedback activities now appreciated the value and were much more confident about setting up such activities in their teaching. Moreover, these tutors also had a clearer understanding of the importance of explicitly teaching thinking skills and facilitating this in a classroom setting

What did the students think?

Students provided anonymous feedback one week after completion of their assessed group discussion task. This allowed time for them to reflect on the usefulness of the intervention in the development of their critical thinking ability and the extent to which they were able to apply this in their assessment. It was clear from their comments that they had found the structure of both handouts helpful. Ninety-five percent of students commented that the peer feedback process using both handouts increased their competence in critical thinking and all students felt that they better understood the value of peer feedback in skills development. Furthermore, 90% of students felt that they had performed better in the assessment after the intervention and were anticipating higher marks.

Qualitative data from the student evaluations also showed positive results with comments such as:

"This template helped to structure my points more clearly and come to a more solid point and showed me you can't just say a point without legitimate evidence."

"Helped me structure my argument in a critical way"

"This type of exercise… is actually very handy and helpful for critical thinking"

"It encourages you to use evidence for your argument"

"It helped me organise my thinking and not go off topic which can happen when researching"

These findings are in contrast to Wanner and Palmer's study (2018) where students found peer feedback helpful but that it did not necessarily result in improved marks. The present study also finds itself in contrast with Stainer's research (2015) where linking scaffolding to assessment became problematic; the reason for this difference could be attributed to students having the scaffolding (two handouts) with them and consequently they did not feel abandoned when the tutor's verbal support was gradually faded and replaced with peer feedback.

A further unplanned impact of the intervention was on the confidence of the module team. At a meeting to discuss the effectiveness of the intervention, it became evident that tutors who had previously felt hesitant about peer feedback activities now appreciated the value and were much more confident about setting up such activities in their teaching. Moreover, these tutors also had a clearer understanding of the importance of explicitly teaching thinking skills and facilitating this in a classroom setting. This was a very welcome bonus to the intervention project.

Conclusion

The most important impact of this project was on the confidence of the students who felt that the intervention placed them in a much better position in terms of their ability to construct and evaluate a critical argument. It helped them realise the value and effectiveness of peer feedback and the explicit support provided by tutors. The overwhelming opinion was that critical thinking is a crucial skill that students value support to develop.

This intervention has the potential to be used as is, or adapted for any discipline taught at first year undergraduate level, to develop students' critical thinking abilities in a supportive environment with peers, where ideas can be tested collaboratively without outside pressures. This research could be further developed with second and final year students in mind, on ways to continue explicitly supporting students in the development of critical thinking.

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Keywords

Information evaluation, productive thinking, scaffolding

The most important impact of this project was on the confidence of the students who felt that the intervention placed them in a much better position in terms of their ability to construct and evaluate a critical argument

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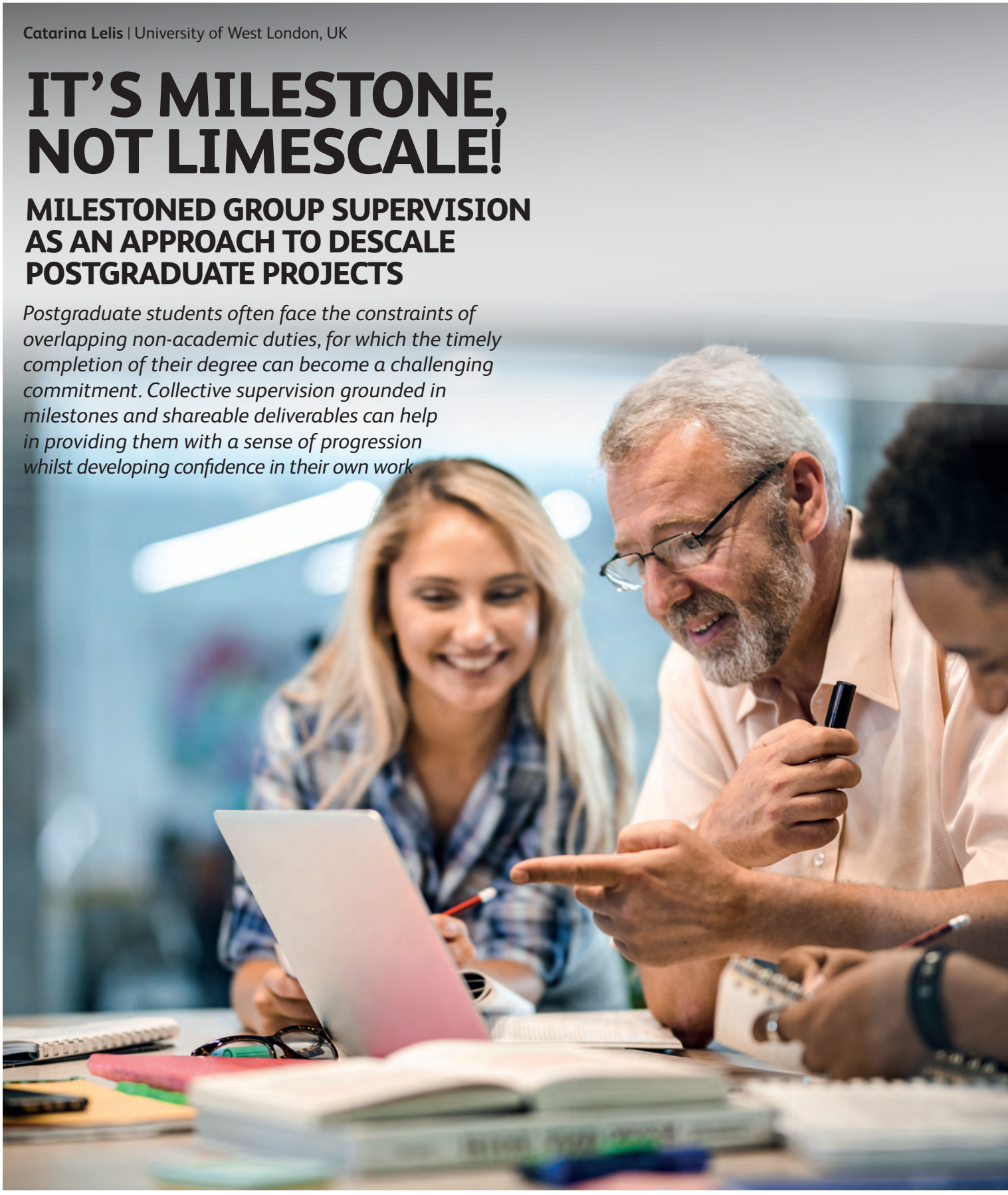
IT'S MILESTONE, NOT LIMESCALE!

MILESTONED GROUP SUPERVISION AS AN APPROACH TO DESCALE POSTGRADUATE PROJECTS

Postgraduate students often face the constraints of overlapping non-academic duties, for which the timely completion of their degree can become a challenging commitment. Collective supervision grounded in milestones and shareable deliverables can help in providing them with a sense of progression whilst developing confidence in their own work



Alternative models of postgraduate supervision

In the context of Higher Education the process of supervising academic work is often associated with the classic one-to-one approach (Pearson & Brew, 2002), in which a student is allocated to a supervisor and meetings between the two are scheduled according to various factors, such as the stage of the project, the specific needs of the student, and the availability of the supervisor. Authors such as Malfroy (2005) have defended alternative models of supervision that move away from the dyadic tradition and that, mostly, provide an efficient answer to the increasingly diverse and rising demand for supervision given the growing cohorts of students in postgraduate courses (Massyn, 2018). This becomes particularly preoccupying when, according to McCallin and Nayar (2012), the relationship between students and supervisors is acknowledged as one of the most important aspects of postgraduate course completion, but also when, according to Massyn (2018, p.115) 'students expect supervisors to be advisers, coaches, mentors, guides and quality controllers'. Massyn (2018) highlights these expectations as the ingredients for additional pressure on supervisors, both in terms of workload, and in terms of the competencies they need in order to properly supervise their students – suggesting that the new collective approaches to supervision tend to accentuate peer interaction as a support component.

Wichmann-Hansen, Thomsen and Nordentoft (2015) present group supervision as contributing to increased student participation in academic activities and to boosting learning – suggesting that it is more impactful than one-to-one supervision. In such groups, the authors mention that the supervisor can be co-present (but is not considered an essential element) and students engage in several activities such as discussing topics of common interest, presenting their research progress, and commenting on each other's materials. This would fall under what Boud (2001, p.3) describes as peer learning: 'a two-way reciprocal learning activity', or the 'networks of learning relationships, among students and significant others' (Boud & Lee, 2005, p.503), where the significant 'other' can be the supervisor. In fact, Stracke (2010) underlines that when peer group activities are conceived as a tactic of supervision, a more balanced relationship (in regard to power) between postgraduate supervisees and their supervisors is developed, which in its turn facilitates collegial exchange, feedback and moral support, in what students consider a friendly environment. Similarly, Samara (2007) offers *insight*, *reflection* and *self-confidence* as the main benefits of group supervision: the student gets a better understanding of the context of research by being exposed to similar topics facing similar or dissimilar problems, which then encourages reflection on ways to proceed and to find solutions, reinforcing the students' determination toward their own research decisions and projects.

Systems of monitoring the unconventional

Universities face a growing and rich diversity of students, if not for other reasons, because of the increased mobility provided by a globalised world. Hence, student diversity is defined not just by factors such as culture, country of origin, age range, but also, as Parker-Jenkins (2018) mentions, by academic background and personal and professional identities. In effect, many (if not most) postgraduate students are working adults, which means they accumulate their studies with other – very often, conflicting – responsibilities. These multiple roles put students, to some extent, at risk and can, undoubtedly, contribute to the discontinuation of their demanding studies, or to the choice of studying part-time, which constrains their academic interaction opportunities. Girves and Wemmerus (1988) stress that the more a student is committed to the university and to earning a degree, the higher their willingness to interact with faculty members and fellow students which then impacts favourably upon completion rates. Girves and Wemmerus add that, at postgraduate level, there is a direct relationship between students' perceived adviser quality/support and their academic performance.

Such support is usually associated with formal processes (e.g. monitoring and milestoning) and can also emerge from informal and multi-disciplinary meetings, where diverse students gather in a shared context to discuss their research projects. However, the latter can prove difficult, namely if completely detached from the former: firstly, if students cannot anticipate the added value of such informal meetings, the fact that their peers may be working on what they may see as tangent topics, may detract them from *wasting* their time in engaging with what, *a priori*, has no direct contribution to their very specific project; secondly, due to the little exposure to research during their undergraduate studies, students often underestimate the time and effort necessary at postgraduate level (Massyn, 2018). For these reasons, Lambert (2012) suggests that students should be given explicit deadlines for the various milestones of their postgraduate journeys.

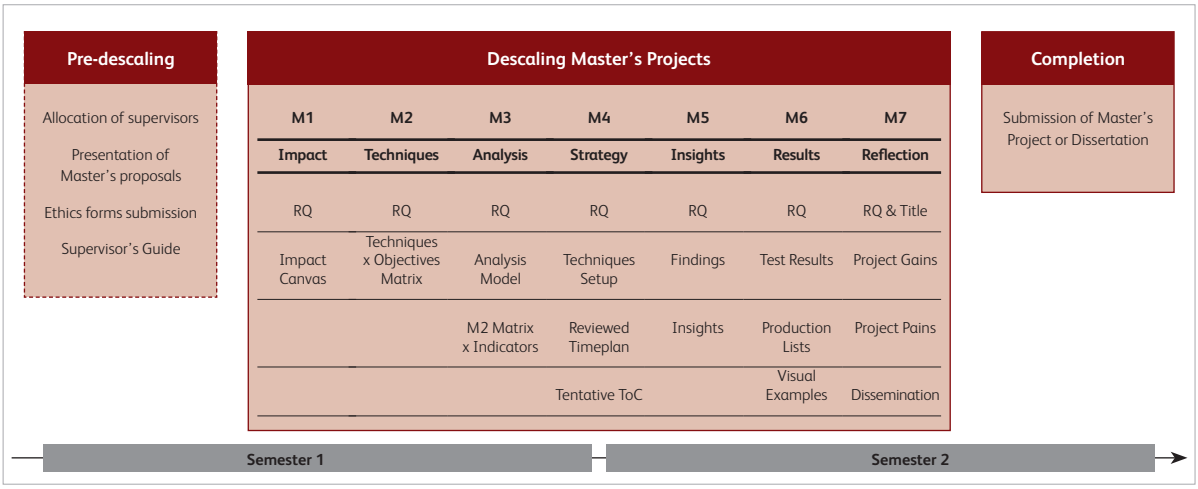


FIGURE 1 The framework for descaling master's projects

Descaling master's projects

In the context of the course I lead, a combination of formal and informal learning environments seems to be the most reliable approach in contributing to a timely delivery. Setting clear expectations and boundaries is expected to support the transition period of becoming a postgraduate student and, to some extent, an independent researcher for the first time. Toward the end of the course, students have two modules that run roughly at the same time: Master's Project/ Dissertation and Professional Creative Contexts, where students are expected to engage either with an internship opportunity or an industry mentorship. Such a context permits that, in regard to master's project or dissertation supervision, students can build both on situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and also on the idea of peer learning through collective supervision – where the supervisor is responsible for managing and structuring the activities for every meeting. The latter is informed by the fact that, this very same context, added to all the other conflicting responsibilities our students have to face, was contributing to the continuous appearance of what I call *research limescale* (queries perceived by students as basic doubts they should not have at that stage, fear of progressing or anxiety provoked by having to move to another stage of the project or, in some cases, simple procrastination). Such sediments were often preventing (or blocking) projects/dissertations (usually based on a mix of documentary review and empirical research) to be delivered within the expected time. Therefore, still within the realm of metaphors, a *descaling* process was deemed necessary.

Hence, after the selection and allocation of supervisors, after the presentation of students' proposals, and after the submission of students' ethics forms, our group supervision sessions are organised on the grounds of functioning as monitoring meetings, mostly to see that work is proceeding according to the cohort's timeline and that queries that can lead to potential delays are clarified in a timely manner. For that, it is suggested that supervisors and supervisees follow specific *pre-descaling* and *descaling* steps (Figure 1):

Master's Project / Dissertation

Milestone 3 – Completing your Analysis Model

Please prepare a PPT presentation with **3 slides only** containing:

1. Your RQ
2. Your completed analysis model
3. Your M2 matrix/table with your evaluation metrics/indicators

To be shared on the 13th April

FIGURE 2 The brief for Milestone 3

Setting clear expectations and boundaries is expected to support the transition period of becoming a postgraduate student and, to some extent, an independent researcher for the first time

1. At a pre-descaling stage, every supervisor receives a Supervisor's Guide, where the supervision formal and mandatory standards are defined (module's learning outcomes, marking criteria, etc.) and both meetings' timings and approaches are proposed (e.g., group sessions should be triggered and arranged by the supervisor, one-to-one supervision meetings should be requested by the students according to their needs and always in between group sessions). In the case of the latter, supervisors are free to adapt the approach according to their own supervisory style and other commitments.

2. Until the end of this two semester module there are seven group sessions, each one up to three hours long and corresponding to a specific milestone. These meetings occur roughly every three weeks. Therefore, the students have, at least, seven different milestones which they are expected to meet:

- Milestone 1 – Identifying the impact of the project
- Milestone 2 – Aligning objectives with techniques
- Milestone 3 – Completing the analysis model
- Milestone 4 – Reviewing the strategy
- Milestone 5 – Sharing findings and insights
- Milestone 6 – Testing results, preparing outputs
- Milestone 7 – Reflection and dissemination

3. Each milestone is accompanied by a very detailed brief on what exactly students are expected to deliver (Figure 2). Milestone 1 is published by supervisors immediately after the master's projects or dissertations proposals' presentations. The briefs of subsequent milestones are published on the day in which the previous milestone and corresponding group supervision meeting takes place.

4. The day before each meeting, students send their milestones presentations in either PPT or PDF format. They are expected to prepare highly diagrammatic contents.

5. In order to optimise feedback, interaction and allow time for discussion, each meeting can accommodate a maximum of six students presenting their achievements. However:

- Those presenting are only announced at the beginning of each group supervision session; hence, every student will still need to prepare the contents and accompany the milestones' schedule. After presenting, students receive immediate feedback from the supervisor and then from their peers, following Samara's (2006) insight that receiving feedback from a peer who is focused on a different topic can be highly positive as it allows for different views to emerge.
- Those not presenting are encouraged to stay for the whole session, as the feedback given to their colleagues will most likely be useful for them as well; moreover, their own perspectives are considered equally valuable during the expected discussion that is open to the group, as the pivotal idea is that exposure to the approaches of their peers helps students in refining the rationale supporting their own choices and research designs.
- Throughout the module all students are given the guarantee that they will present a minimum of two milestones.

In order to counteract all these rather structured guidelines, informality is encouraged throughout the sessions. The purpose of building this friendly environment mentioned by both Samara (2007) and Stracke (2010) is to reduce the fear of saying/asking 'something stupid', which is, in many cases, and in my domain of expertise, what actually allows students (or humans, for that matter), to develop their thoughts into really original or innovative work.

Keep removing the limescale

This framework has been allowing students to more easily keep track of their research and project's process/progress. Besides establishing the grounds for a social network and considering the fact that each communication is so personal and individual (because master's projects and dissertations are individual endeavours by nature), this framework also enhances the involvement of those taking part in these milestone sessions, whilst facilitating the sharing of knowledge and developing students' communication and interaction skills – highly pertinent for employability or career development and when, increasingly, professionals are expected to be members of teams. And, although most supervisees commit to these milestones, each project has its particular time constraints, most of which imposed by the empirical stage in which students are expected to interact with external parties. This means that, despite a structured and milestoned programme, some students are

I see this framework as very easily transferable and adaptable to other contexts beyond supervision, both in academia and in industry, especially regarding the regulation of team-based projects of any nature

unable to fully deliver at the timetabled deadlines. Nevertheless, attending these sessions and realising that some of their peers are further ahead leads to a deeper understanding of the need to either re-nudge the other parties or implement the anticipated contingency plan (which is part of their proposal).

As for those complying with time and benefiting from both the supervisor's feedback and their peers' thoughts and suggestions – in this case, dealing with an extended level of significant 'others', as suggested by Boud and Lee (2005) – I believe this process has contributed to the emotional empowerment defended by Samara (2007), as the students' self-image as researchers is strengthened: after their presentation and discussion, the group always erupts in a loud round of applause, notoriously celebrating small victories; thus, the students see themselves as being on the right track and closer to the moment in which they will be able to claim a small contribution to the discipline.

In addition to the above, I strongly agree with Malfroy's views in that group supervision is an excellent supplement to individual supervision, given the time and resource constraints supervisors increasingly experience (2005). I was recently invited to mentor a fellow colleague in supervision practice by allowing him to shadow one of my supervisory meetings. Unlike what he might expect, I did not invite him to attend an individual supervision session but one of our milestones' presentations. He kindly shared his thoughts:

> *"In the meeting, I have watched the efforts you make to ensure that the project of your supervisees is met, and, at the same time, you made your supervisees independent. I would like to use the format of 7 milestones to guide my supervisees in future. However, I am planning to redesign these milestones on my own and apply them with the next batch. You have extended your guidance and assistance to me, for my role as a supervisor."*

Besides the confirmation of a colleague from a different school and discipline, I have been gathering evidence that this framework is effective in our context, from a student point of view:

- Students manifested their wish to continue meeting as a group; in his final document, one of our recent graduates wrote: *"The milestones in our group of supervisees have taught me that even the largest task can be accomplished, if it will be done one step at a time. I am indeed enriched through the Milestones Series!!! This project alone is definitely a 'Milestone' in my life!"*
- Individual sessions (usually 60 minutes long) decreased substantially, as most of the queries were common and shared during the milestones meetings; also, experienced supervisors could anticipate some of the doubts and concerns, and these were clarified to the group at once instead of repeatedly in every one-to-one interaction. This was seen as very positive by the students because most of them would have to make arrangements with their employers in order to either come in person to campus for a 1-hour meeting, or manage conditions for a video-conference call while at work, which in either case was frequently seen as a burden, often resulting in individual supervision meetings being cancelled last minute.
- Timely completion rates increased; where before this framework had been implemented the majority of students would request the one month final project/dissertation extension, currently, less than half of our students submits an extension request and a great deal of those soliciting it find themselves able to complete their projects within the expected deadline – hence not making use of any extension at all.

Even students who had been allocated to other supervisors (who eventually decided to implement different supervisory practices) would occasionally attend our group sessions to take part in the discussion moments. Of course, as much as not all students are equally prepared to actively participate in a group of such dynamics, not all supervisors would see this approach as their preferred one. Nevertheless, I see this framework as very easily transferable and adaptable to other contexts beyond supervision, both in academia and in industry, especially regarding the regulation of team-based projects of any nature. When the length of such projects differs significantly from the one I present, the intervals between milestones can be flexed, stretched or squeezed according to the specificities of the project's timeframe. This could work for much more longitudinal cases (where sub-milestones would possibly have to be implemented) to one-day bootcamps (where, maybe, a couple of milestones would have to be discarded). When group size varies, considerations would have to be made in regard to who presents: in much larger groups, individuals may have to be gathered, for example, by topics under development or a spokesperson could be selected. Whereas, in smaller groups, every participating member could have their voice heard. As in most human relationship situations, immediate, uninformed and carbon-copy transfers are not recommended, for adjustments would have to be made in order to guarantee that limescale does not build-up to the point of causing irreversible damage.

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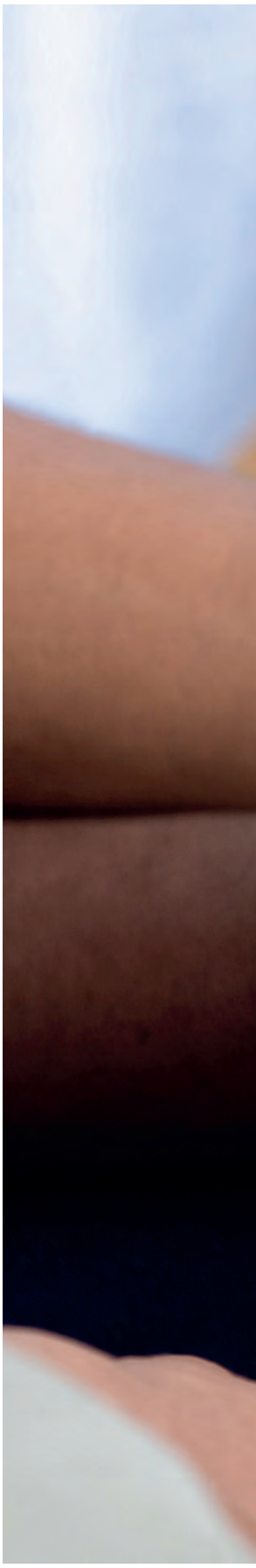
SEX AND ETHNIC DIFFERENCES IN GLOBAL PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS BEFORE COUPLE THERAPY



A couple's distress is associated with their inability to effectively communicate and successfully resolve problems. But are there any differences in levels of psychological distress between men and women of different ethnic backgrounds? This study offers a quantitative account of the effect of sex and ethnicity on the levels of psychological distress in heterosexual couples

A couple's poor communication and problem-solving skills – where both partners struggle to accept each other's differences – can lead to distress. Couple therapy has become a common undertaking nowadays as a way of resolving such distress. It is regarded as an effective approach, and a crucial locus of intervention in improving couples' mental health and well-being (Balfour & Lanman, 2012). Typically, couple therapy aims to assist and moderate a couple's communication styles through acceptance and emotional reciprocity.

Cross-national relationships under strain

Normally, the main source of strain in cross-national relationships (in addition to linguistic differences and the demand that one, or both partners use their non-native language), is the lack of common early-life socialisation into similar cultural symbols and associations, not the differences in values (which can just as easily occur in mono-ethnic relationships). Different experiences of discrimination and racism can also cause difficulties. However, the couple may not always perceive these discrepancies as a problem and may instead complain of general incompatibility or stress (Kenney & Kenney, 2014). Therefore, acknowledging these differences is an essential requirement for a better solution in a well-balanced couple's relationship.

It is also noteworthy, that intercultural couples experience additional difficulties, such as society's perception of such relationships, as well as non-acceptance on the part of their families (Kenney & Kenney, 2014). Nonetheless, couple therapy may not be openly welcomed by some (non-white) ethnic groups, therefore the therapist must recognise that in some instances not only the couple but the rest of the family may need to be offered therapeutic intervention (Bacigalupe & Cámara, 2012). Since a couple's ethnic characteristics play a crucial role, a culturally competent therapist should possess specific skills, such as having good knowledge and understanding of various cultural backgrounds. In assessing clients representing minority cultural origins, specific cultural norms of the couple are important and must be examined, for example, norms for marriage, partnership roles and responsibilities (Kenney & Kenney, 2014).

How different are men and women?

Different roles among men and women begin early in life and most of these differences result from socialisation – leading individuals to assume certain roles that subsequently translate into a couple relationship (Frank & Hou, 2015). However, the extent to which role differentiation among sexes is present in each couple is determined by the degree of social equality that culture will tolerate (Kellner, 2009). Almost all committed couple relationships start with an increased level of mutual satisfaction (Lavner & Bradbury, 2010) – though gender-associated variability in couple interaction suggests that women appear to be more relationship-orientated; feel more in need of resolving relational issues, and report lower levels of marital satisfaction (Jackson, Miller, Oka & Henry, 2014). Furthermore, women tend to display both positive and negative behaviours toward their partners, including being increasingly affirmative or expressing affect-like emotions such as sadness and anger. In contrast, males tend to show increased non-affective and instrumental behaviour such as, blame avoidance and conflict averse patterns (Gabriel, Beach & Bodenmann, 2010).

These findings about interactions between relationship distress and individual psychological distress lead to the question: "Who is likely to make improvement from couple therapy (men or women)?" Therefore, an understanding of the impact of gender on the relationship between couples is an essential requirement for couple counsellors in delivering an efficient service. The aim of our study was to explore differences between men and women, and white and non-white clients in their levels of global psychological distress at enrolment to therapy at a Couple Relationships clinic. This report presents the findings from clients at such a clinic who were mainly residents of London or its suburbs, who had sought help due to distress in their relationships.

The psychodynamic (insight orientated) approach is designed to assist couples explore their issues and the obstacles that interfere with change, as well as examining the reasons for their difficulties based on both conscious and unconscious contributing factors

	White		Non-white	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Percentage Single	4%	4%	0%	4%
Percentage Married	44%	43%	14%	46%
Percentage Cohabiting	27%	34%	61%	20%
Heterosexual	90%	91%	86%	71%
Percentage Employed	81%	55%	63%	50%
Mean Relationship duration (SD*)	4.72 (12.85)	3.04 (1.29)	11.08 (27.11)	7.49 (19.56)
Mean Problems duration (SD*)	12.81 (28.71)	4.07 (3.58)	15.17 (32.44)	12.20 (28.19)
Percentage Previous treatment	36%	44%	14%	27%
Percentage Disability	3%	3%	0%	13%
Percentage Children (u18 years)	35%	32%	64%	29%

*SD – Standard Deviation

TABLE 1 Demographic and clinical characteristics of participants by ethnicity and sex for the total sample

Research design and participants

This is a retrospective cross-sectional study using the divided CORE-OM subscales (Subjective Well-being, Life Functioning, Problems/Symptoms and Risk/Harm). With the support of the team at a London Couple Relationship clinic, participants' accounts were collected between 4 January 2015 and 1 June 2017. Their ages ranged between 18 and 63 years. There were 149 women and 147 men. Most clients (82%) identified themselves as white variants (White British/Irish/Other White background) whilst 18% identified as non-white (Asian/Mixed background/Black/Chinese and other ethnic backgrounds). Table 1 shows the demographic and clinical characteristics of participants by ethnicity and gender for the total sample.

Measures used to collect data

The Clinical Outcomes in Routine Evaluation – Outcome Measure (CORE-OM) is an individual mental state self-report scale, consisting of 34 questions about a participant's state of well-being over the previous week (Mellor-Clark, Barkham, Connell & Evans, 1999). The questionnaire covers four domains: (i) Subjective Well-being (4 items); (ii) Problems/Symptoms (12 items); (iii) Life Functioning (12 items), and (iv) Risk/Harm (6 items). The Subjective Well-being subscale is problem orientated where higher scores indicate more distress, (although this may seem counter-intuitive in relation to 'Well-being'). An example item for this domain would be *'I have felt overwhelmed by my problems'*. The Problem/Symptoms domain examines anxiety (4 items); depression (4 items); physical problems (2 items), and trauma (2 items). An example question for this dimension would be *'I have felt tense, anxious or nervous'*. The Life Functioning dimension contains questions about general functioning (4 items); close relationships (4 items), and social relationships (4 items), for example: *'I have felt able to cope when things go wrong'*. The Risk/Harm subscale includes four items measuring 'risk to self' and two covering 'risk to others', for example: *'I have thought of hurting myself'* and *'I have been physically violent to others'*.

Couples attend therapy due to a range of reasons and the CORE-OM captures all these areas of difficulty. Subjective Well-being can include a general increase/decrease in functioning; a better/worse sense of meaning in life, and improved/impaired relationships with others (which may mean an increase/decrease in the tolerance of things that are not optimal, rather than their removal (Dirmaier, Harfst, Koch & Schulz, 2006)). Eight items of the overall CORE-OM are positively framed, producing a mean score indicating 'Global psychological distress' – where psychological distress is measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 ("Not at all") to 4 ("Most or all of the time"). Total scores can range from 0 to 40, where higher numbers represent more distress. Overall mean scores can be classified in the following manner to signify the distinct levels of psychological distress: 0-5 "Healthy", 6-9 "Low level", 10-14 "Mild", 15-19 "Moderate", 20-24 "Moderately severe" and 25-40 "Severe".

A classic couple therapy approach

Our data was obtained from a relationship clinic that applies a psychodynamic orientated approach (for a detailed description of this therapy refer to Hewison, Casey & Mwamba, 2016). The psychodynamic (insight orientated) approach is designed to assist couples explore their issues and the obstacles that interfere with change, as well as examining the reasons for their difficulties based on both conscious and unconscious contributing factors (Balfour & Lanman, 2012). With reference to this approach, the partners in a couple share a common mechanism of psychological functioning (which may be unconscious), such that a psychodynamic orientated clinician can examine the couple's interaction and make a reliable observation of the quality of their functioning as one entity (Kächele, Schachter & Thomä, 2011). The number of couple therapy sessions varied from 0 to 44.

Findings

Overall, our results (see Figure 1 and Table 2) showed that women reported better Subjective Well-being compared to men. However, the levels of 'Life Functioning', 'Problems/Symptoms' or 'Risk/Harm' failed to indicate any differences between men and women or white and non-white groups.

Are there sex and ethnic differences in subjective well-being at enrolment?

This is the first study to divide the CORE-OM questionnaire to explore perceptions of one's wellbeing, problems, day-to-day functioning and risky thoughts. Findings suggest that white individuals seek professional help for their relationship problems more often than their non-white counterparts, as reflected by the ethnic profile of clients approaching counselling services in the UK (Jones, 2014). In addition, results demonstrate that women and men differ significantly in their levels of wellbeing (as it has been shown that women enrolling to couple therapy are more distressed than their partners). Most importantly, Figure 1 demonstrates that non-white women report higher levels of distress than their white counterparts, although underrepresented in the current study. Psychological distress in men shows a similar trend. These findings reinforce the view that different family values exist and we refer to their role in explaining the degree of the impact on the non-white group's views of life and the counselling process. However, according to what we found in our study, ethnicity provides very little indication about what may be the reasons for enrolling in couple therapy, as well as what makes therapy acceptable and beneficial.

On the question of whether women or men, and respectively white or non-white individual characteristics, are the trigger for distress in couples, it is perhaps worthy to suggest that the stress process between men and women is more relevant than the ethnicity factor (Jones, 2014). However, generally speaking, it is feasible to ask; do women experience institutionalised sex discrimination in the home? Could this be one explanation to the current study findings? Or could it be that culture type (individualistic vs. collectivistic); individual characteristics (masculine vs. feminine); financial strain, or empathy between partners mediate the effect of culture on partners' sex and sex on crossover stress.

A possible explanation for these results could be that although there is an assumed availability of social support (eg. family and relatives) in the non-white women group (Taylor, Chatters, Woodward & Brown, 2015), this could present an advantage as well as a disadvantage to them as it may deter them from approaching professional help (Williamson, 2014). This may well account for the limited number of non-white clients enrolling on couple therapy.

Subscales	Sex/Ethnicity	Mean	SD	N
Subjective Wellbeing	White Female	7.28	3.65	107
	Non-white Female	7.63	3.92	24
	Total	**7.34**	**3.69**	**131**
	White Male	6.31	3.48	113
	Non-white Male	6.18	3.83	28
	Total	**6.28**	**3.54**	**14**
Life Functioning	White Female	14.28	7.42	100
	Non-white Female	17.13	9.30	24
	Total	**14.83**	**7.86**	**124**
	White Male	14.93	7.47	110
	Non-white Male	15.69	6.87	26
	Total	**15.07**	**7.34**	**144**
Problems	White Female	19.44	10.03	101
	Non-white Female	20.71	10.31	24
	Total	**19.68**	**10.05**	**125**
	White Male	18.38	9.55	108
	Non-white Male	18.00	10.90	28
	Total	**18.30**	9.**81**	**136**
Risk	White Female	.79	1.61	106
	Non-white Female	1.50	2.67	24
	Total	**.92**	**1.86**	**130**
	White Male	1.10	1.99	113
	Non-white Male	.82	1.22	28
	Total	**1.04**	**1.86**	**141**

TABLE 2 Mean and Standard Deviation for the four individual subscales across sex and ethnicity

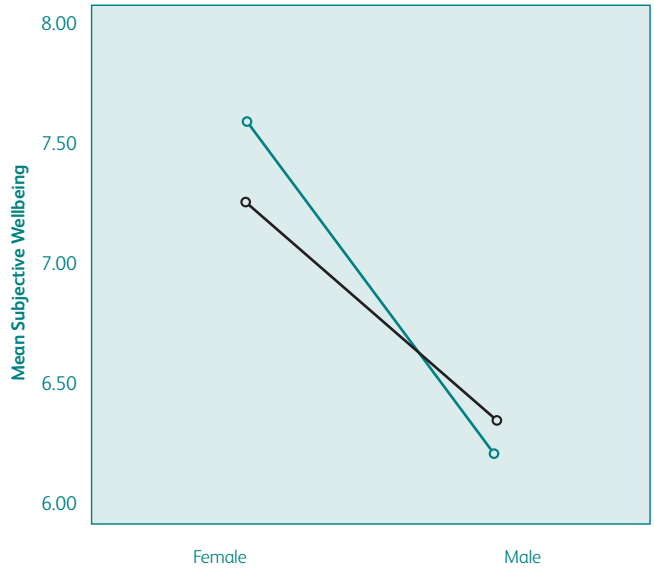


FIGURE 1 The effect of sex on Subjective Wellbeing

Communication and acceptance

Communication sits at the basis of every relationship and couples often employ different communication patterns (such as the demand-withdraw pattern, where one partner demands and criticises, while the other becomes withdrawn and avoids confrontation (Caughlin & Scott, 2010)). Interestingly, women are shown to be in the demanding position more often while men are happy to adopt a more withdrawn role (Holley, Sturm & Levenson, 2010).

Psychotherapy could also provide an opportunity for couples to explore a partner's acceptance of differences. In couple therapy sessions it is important for the couple to recognise differences in their partner's views, through gaining a better understanding of how culture and gender can have an impact on one's personal value system. In this way, couples can negotiate changes by finding a middle ground without having to compromise crucial needs. Also, couple dissatisfaction has been shown to have a negative effect on physical and mental health, resulting in distressing behaviours and disrupted relationship dynamics (Robles, 2014). Therefore, if couples are supported in recognising and accepting their partner's thoughts, feelings, behaviours and values, couple therapy will prove to be an invaluable tool in modifying partners' perceptions of each other and in achieving greater acceptance of difference.

Conclusion

The naturalistic sample in this study offered an exclusive opportunity in terms of assessing the cases of existing clients, enhancing the study's external validity. The splitting of the four CORE-OM subscales, provided a unique advantage in the thorough exploration of the differences in clients' scores across gender and ethnicity. The main findings suggest that sex had an influence on subjective wellbeing at enrolment to couple therapy with women tending to be more distressed than men – particularly so for non-white women. However, the non-white fraction of clients from the total sample was very limited, therefore generalising the results across this group would not be appropriate. Nevertheless, what makes the Subjective Well-being subscale particularly relevant is that it captures the impact of a distressed relationship. Future research should therefore investigate the experience of participants using qualitative measures to capture more fully individual differences in experiencing couple distress.

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Keywords

Couples, psychological distress, ethnicity, gender.

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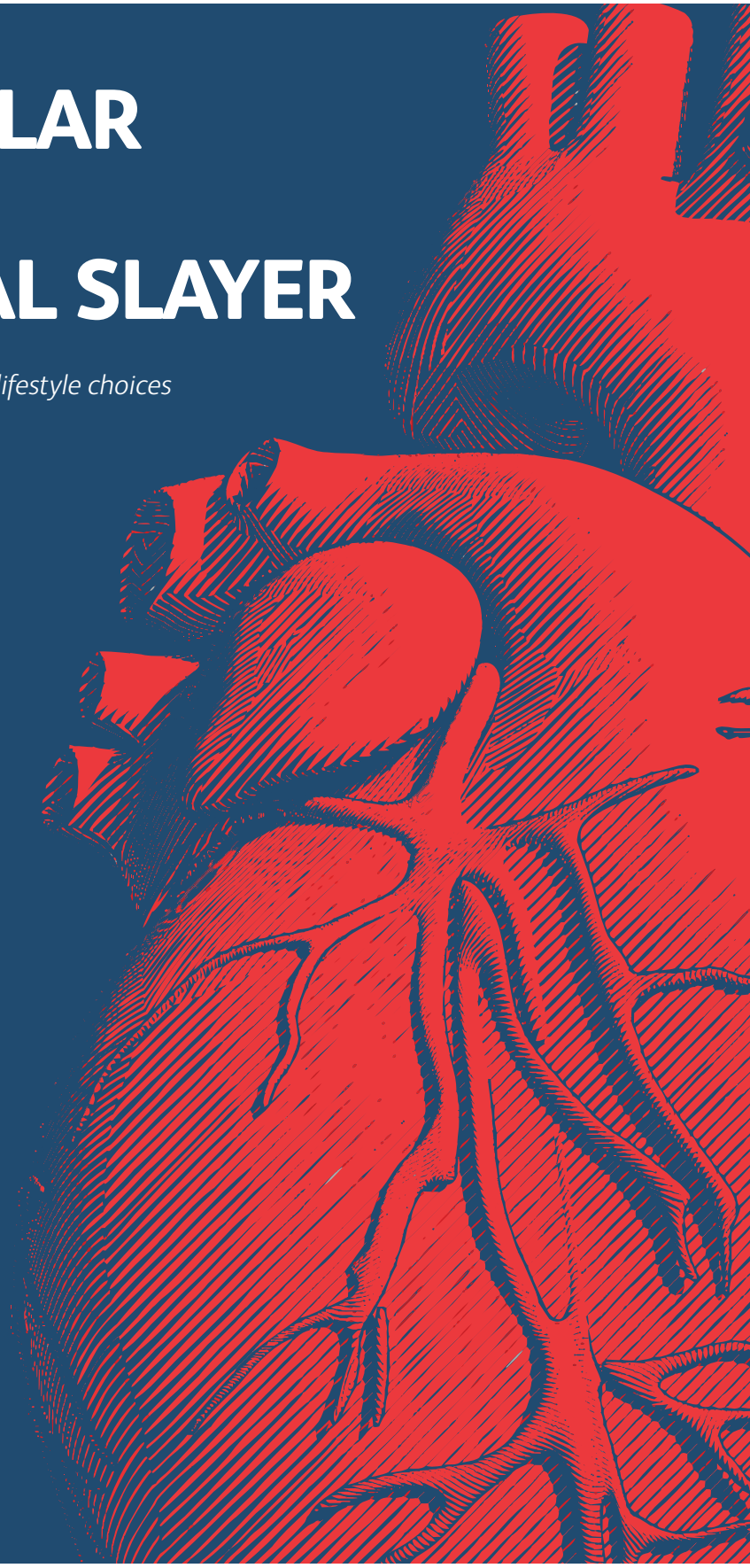
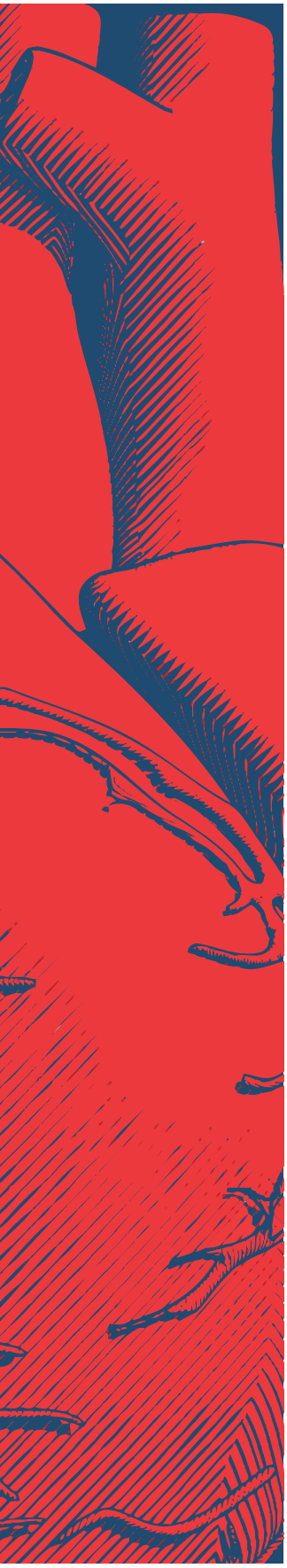
CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE: THE UNIVERSAL SLAYER

This voracious killer is strengthened by particular lifestyle choices – can you escape its morbid embrace?





Cardiovascular disease is by far the leading cause of human mortality. Certain lifestyle choices lead to increased prevalence, however other forces are at play – over which we have no conscious control. The cardiovascular system comprises the heart and all of the blood vessels that are the conduit of flowing blood. It is a transport system providing oxygen and nutrients to respiring tissues, as well as removing waste products.

All human arteries comprise three main layers. The inner layer is made of cells called endothelial cells and the continuous lining created by these cells is called the endothelium. The endothelium is in direct contact with the flowing blood and is exquisitely sensitive to blood flow patterns. The main body of the artery wall is composed of protein fibres and smooth muscle cells. This part of the artery allows the vessel to expand or contract to regulate blood pressure. The endothelium and smooth muscle cells contain nervous tissue and are therefore responsive to messages from the nervous system. The outermost layer is composed of fibrous material, which allows it to be anchored within its environment.

It is known that dysfunction of the endothelium plays a role in the initiation of cardiovascular disease. Cardiovascular disease (CVD) occurs through the process of atherosclerosis which leads to the development of fatty deposits, called plaques, within the arterial wall (Figure 1 p40). Plaque formation can result in reduced blood flow such that organ function can become compromised. The most common organs affected are the heart, leading to cardiac arrest, and the brain, increasing the likelihood of stroke.

Cardiovascular disease is a metabolic syndrome whereby individual risk factors can increase the likelihood of developing the disease. It is well known that certain lifestyle choices, for example a high calorie diet with little physical exercise, leading to obesity, contribute to CVD. However, other aspects are also involved, such as hypertension, diabetes and blood flow profiles. The multi-factorial nature of the disease is responsible for its staggering prevalence. According to the World Health Organisation, 17.9 million people died from CVD in 2016, which represented 31% of all global deaths. In the UK, 7.4m people are living with CVD, and an average of 470 of these will die every day.

Oxidative stress

Oxidative stress is the key risk factor that can link the disparate elements associated with CVD. Oxidative processes occur naturally within the body through metabolism, and produce chemical species that are highly reactive. These reactive oxygen species (ROS), which include hydrogen peroxide and superoxide radicals, play essential roles within the body, including immune defence. However, excessive ROS can damage the tissues of the body through oxidative reactions, and normal levels are maintained through anti-oxidative measures. If these anti-oxidative mechanisms are insufficient to neutralise the effect of these processes, then a state of oxidative stress prevails. Oxidative stress exerts its negative effects on the body through a number of disease states. In addition to CVD, oxidative stress has also been implicated in other conditions including Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease and cancer (Liguori et al, 2018).

Cardiovascular disease is a metabolic syndrome whereby individual risk factors can increase the likelihood of developing the disease. It is well known that certain lifestyle choices, for example a high calorie diet with little physical exercise, leading to obesity, contribute to CVD

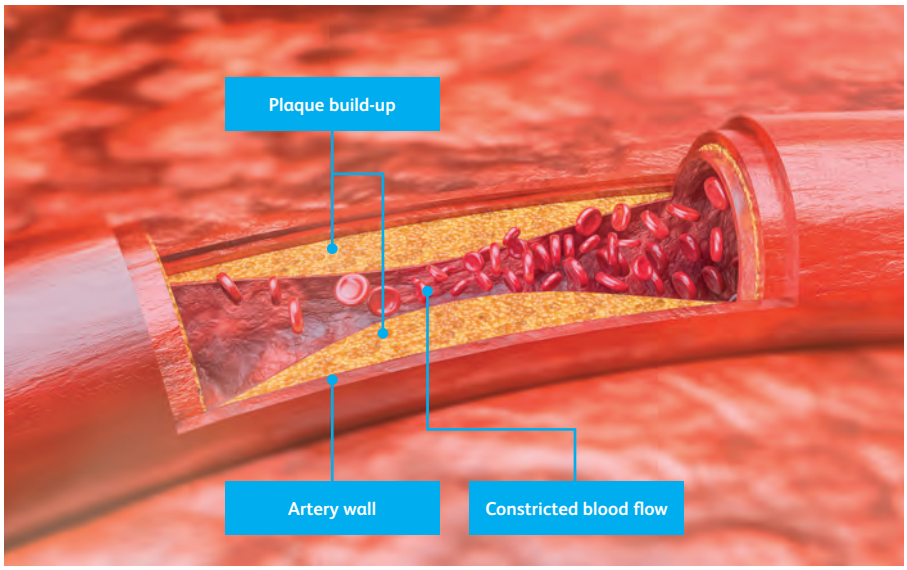


FIGURE 1 Arterial occlusion due to atherosclerotic plaque formation

Atherosclerosis

Cholesterol is an important component of all normal body cells. It is produced by the liver and is also derived from dietary sources. Cholesterol is not water-soluble and therefore needs to combine with protein to allow transportation within the blood stream. This cholesterol-protein complex is called a lipoprotein, and a number of lipoprotein variants exist. The type comprising a high protein to cholesterol ratio is called high-density lipoprotein (HDL), whereas those with a low protein to cholesterol ratio are referred to as low-density lipoproteins (LDLs). It is these latter lipoproteins that play a fundamental role in the process of atherosclerosis. This is partly because the liver can only remove LDLs very slowly. As a consequence, LDLs travel within the blood for an extended period of time in relation to HDLs, and as LDLs are small they have both a greater opportunity and an increased ability to penetrate the arterial wall. LDLs gaining access to the arterial wall are readily oxidised by ROS to produce oxidised LDLs (oxLDLs). The creation of this oxidative product greatly accelerates the rate of atherosclerosis through a rapid development of atherosclerotic plaque.

Obesity

According to the World Health Organisation, an individual is said to be obese if their body mass index (BMI) is calculated to be 30 or above. BMI is derived from the weight in kilograms divided by the square of the height in metres. Obesity leads to disturbed lipid metabolism such that LDLs are broken down even less effectively, leading to increased circulating levels. To further compound the problem, obesity is able to raise oxidative stress within body cells (Lefranc et al, 2018) and the combination of LDLs and ROS ultimately increases levels of oxLDLs.

Biological sex can play a role as women are afforded some protection due to the fact that oestrogens are able to reduce ROS within body cells (Mahmoodzadeh & Dworatzek, 2019). In addition, men tend to have higher blood LDL levels than women, and are therefore further disadvantaged with respect to CVD. In general, males and females have different hip to waist ratios. Moreover, the sites of body fat deposition vary according to sex whereby women tend to deposit body fat in areas such as the hips and thighs, whereas body fat distribution in men is more likely to be concentrated in the abdominal region (Kautzky-Willer, Harreiter & Pacini, 2016).

Diabetes mellitus

Diabetes mellitus is a metabolic disorder whereby levels of a type of sugar (glucose) within the blood are not adequately controlled. Insulin is the hormone released from the pancreas that instructs cells of the body, for example the liver and skeletal muscle cells, to uptake glucose from the blood. Insulin is the only hormone produced by the body that is able to lower blood glucose concentrations. A number of hormones, for example adrenalin and growth hormone, are able to increase blood glucose levels, and it is the interplay between these hormones and insulin that normally maintains tight control of blood glucose levels.

There are two main types of diabetes mellitus (hereafter referred to as 'diabetes'), type 1 and type 2. Type 1 diabetes occurs as a result of impairment or destruction of the cells of the pancreas that are responsible for producing insulin and therefore insulin is either present in extremely low levels or is absent. The major feature of type 2 diabetes is insulin resistance. In this case, insulin is released from the pancreas, however the body cells do not receive a clear instruction to remove glucose from the blood. As a consequence, both types of diabetes result in abnormally elevated levels of blood glucose. Glucose is quite reactive and is able to chemically attach itself to proteins and this has implications for regulating blood pressure.

The normal human heart contracts on average 60-90 times per minute, and generates a unidirectional, pulsatile blood flow profile. As arteries carry blood away from the heart, the blood is rapidly transported through these vessels

Diabetes (primarily type 2) is able to affect lipid metabolism. In this case, the ratio of LDLs to HDLs within the blood is skewed in favour of LDLs. The fact that LDLs remain in the blood stream for longer periods of time relative to HDLs, coupled with the knowledge that higher levels of LDLs are present as a consequence of diabetes type 2, highlights the clear link between diabetes and atherosclerosis. A primary cause of type 1 and type 2 diabetes has been attributed to oxidative stress through damage to the pancreatic cells that produce insulin (Ullah, Khan & Khan, 2016).

Hypertension and tobacco smoke

Normal blood pressure is generally regarded as a systolic (heart contracted) blood pressure of 120 mmHg and diastolic (heart relaxed) blood pressure of 80 mmHg. High blood pressure, or hypertension, is clinically defined as a systolic blood pressure greater than 140 mmHg and/or diastolic blood pressure greater than 90 mmHg. Nitric oxide (NO) is a gas released by normal endothelium that is able to relax arterial smooth muscle cells. This relaxation leads to expansion of the blood vessel, which effectively reduces blood pressure. Obesity is able to stimulate nervous tissue present within the arterial wall, leading to continuous smooth muscle contraction which brings about a sustained increase in blood pressure. Prolonged hypertension can damage the arterial wall leading to endothelial dysfunction, with the effect of promoting atherosclerosis.

Tobacco smoke is made up of a wide variety of chemicals such as benzene and pyrenes, heavy metals such as nickel and lead, and toxic gases including carbon monoxide and ammonia. This chemical cocktail can exert profoundly negative effects on the lungs, liver and kidneys. The chemicals in tobacco smoke, in addition to nicotine, can also adversely affect the vascular system and lead to the production of ROS (Wu et al, 2018). Reactive oxygen species then chemically react with NO so that the levels of active NO are decreased even further (Liguori et al, 2018). This significant reduction in NO levels due to the effects of hypertension and ROS generated through exposure to nicotine and tobacco smoke, impairs the ability of blood vessels to expand, leading to chronic hypertension.

Blood flow profiles

The normal human heart contracts on average 60-90 times per minute, and generates a unidirectional, pulsatile blood flow profile. As arteries carry blood away from the heart, the blood is rapidly transported through these vessels. The blood is moved most quickly through the centre of the blood vessel, whereas the blood passing over the endothelium is slowed due to the frictional force (shear stress) generated by the blood flow across the endothelial surface. The endothelial cells respond to shear stress by elongating and lining up in the direction of flow, and this cellular arrangement tends to resist penetration of circulating LDLs. As a consequence, this flow profile which produces a high fluid shear stress, has the potential to retard atherosclerosis.

The initiation of atherosclerosis is highly focal in nature whereby branch points within the arterial system are the first to be affected. Vascular branch points divert the blood through each branch thereby slowing down the flow and decreasing the fluid shear stress. At certain points, the positive forward flow can be slowed to such a degree that there is backward flow also, and this results in the endothelium experiencing an oscillatory flow profile at these points. Endothelial cells exposed to oscillatory flow are not elongated or aligned, but assume a random cobblestone arrangement (Chappell et al, 1998). Oscillatory flow profiles have been found to activate an intracellular enzyme called NADH oxidase (De Keulenaer et al, 1998). Enzymes are proteins that are involved in metabolic processes, and NADH oxidase takes part in biochemical reactions that produce superoxide radicals. As a consequence, oscillatory shear stress has the potential to increase cellular oxidative stress by the production of ROS. As previously described, increased levels of superoxide radicals are likely to lead to greater abundance of oxLDLs resulting in increased levels of atherosclerotic plaque.

Oxidative stress is the key factor in the initiation and development of atherosclerosis, and it is likely that individuals who are less effective in negating the deleterious effects of oxidative stress are more likely to suffer from CVD

Treatments and emerging therapies

Conventional treatments for CVD include balloon angioplasty and coronary artery bypass surgery. Balloon angioplasty involves the insertion of a catheter into an artery, carrying a balloon and a stainless steel mesh (stent) at the tip. On reaching the narrowed blood vessel, the balloon is inflated so that the plaque is pushed to the sides of the blood vessel wall. The stent is then deployed maintaining the opened blood vessel. Coronary artery bypass surgery is performed when the affected artery is blocked, and involves using blood vessels from other parts of the body, for example the legs, to bypass the affected artery in order to increase blood supply to the heart. Medical interventions now tend to focus on preventative measures. These include the use of drugs to control hypertension, and one such set of medications are the ACE-inhibitors. These control the activity of an enzyme which has the ability to raise blood pressure. As a consequence, inhibition of this enzyme will naturally reduce hypertension. Drugs (statins) have also been deployed to reduce cholesterol (and therefore LDL) production by the liver, as well as promote the removal of circulating LDLs.

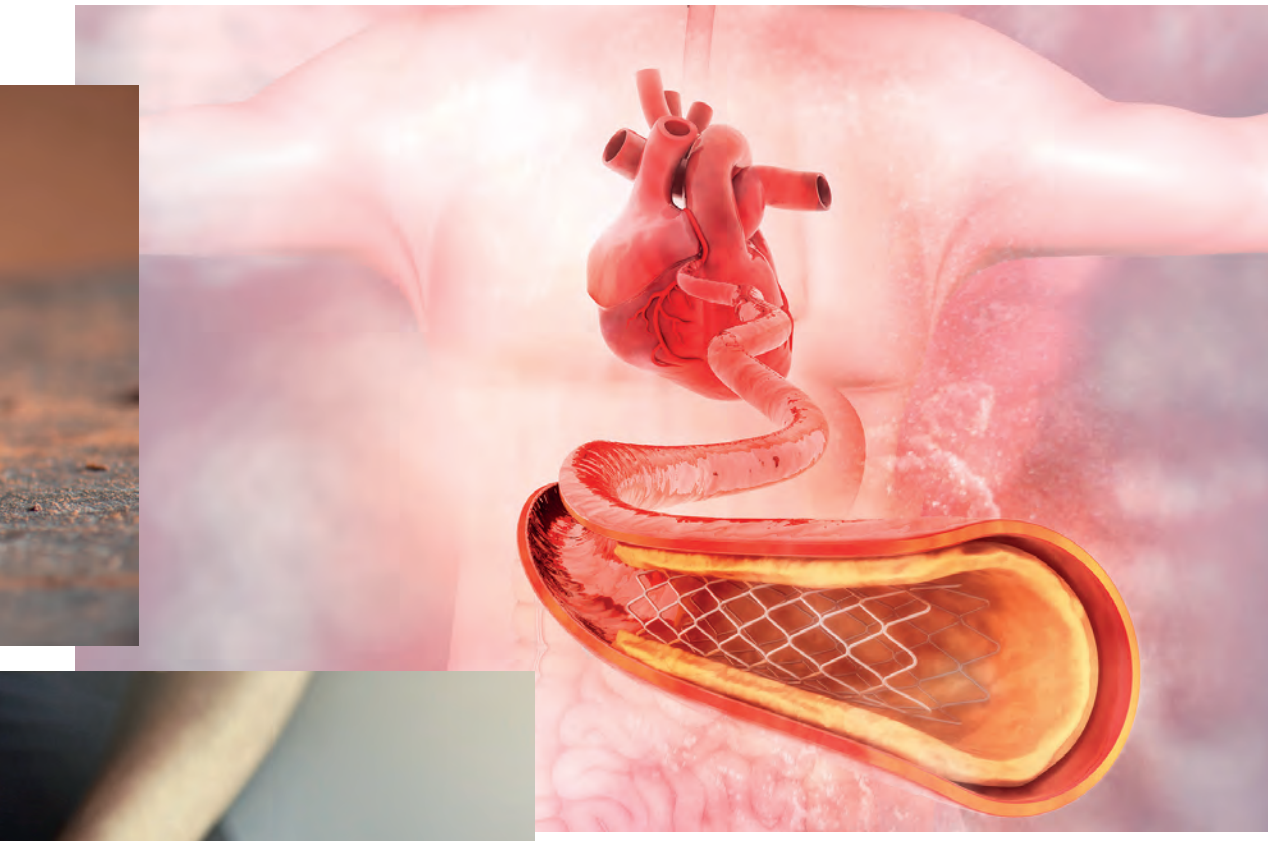
Emerging therapies are becoming more sophisticated by targeting specific mediators of atherosclerosis. For example, it has been found (Tang & Hazen, 2017) that a particular enzyme (PCSK9), in combination with other therapies, is able to reduce the ability of the liver to take up LDLs from the circulation. It follows therefore that targeted inhibition of this enzyme, may have a therapeutic effect with regard to CVD, by allowing the liver to more easily remove LDLs from the circulation. Dysfunctional cells and debris within the plaque would normally be removed by scavenger cells (macrophages) – with the potential to reduce plaque size. However, these plaque cells through biological messages, are able to prevent macrophages from degrading the plaque (Tang & Hazen, 2017). Blockade of this biological instruction could promote removal of plaque constituents by macrophages and thereby reduce plaque size, and possibly reverse the atherosclerotic process.

Exercise and diet

Regular moderate physical exercise, in conjunction with a calorie-controlled diet, will help to reduce excess body weight and has been suggested to promote anti-oxidative processes within cells so that ROS are decreased (Ligouri et al, 2018). This dual action would provide a range of additional benefits as reduced body fat would help to lower circulating LDLs, and as reactive oxygen species are decreased, there would be an overall decreased production of oxLDLs. Moreover, a reduction in abdominal fat (in males) would help to control or decrease the likelihood of developing type 2 diabetes. In addition, generally decreased body fat would lower blood pressure, thereby reducing damage to the endothelium, and promoting the release of NO.

Homocysteine is a product of metabolism that can increase oxidative stress, with the potential to promote atherosclerosis. Homocysteine is quickly and easily removed by a process which uses vitamin B12. However, the body is not able to produce this vitamin and dietary sources are restricted to products of animal origin. This could have implications for those following vegan diets. It has been shown (Obersby et al, 2015) that vegans, compared to omnivores, are statistically more likely to display raised blood homocysteine levels.

Dietary vigilance can also play an important role in preventing or slowing the development and progression of CVD. The effects of type 2 diabetes can be reduced by following an appropriate diet leading to gradual release of glucose (low glycaemic index). Certain foodstuffs are beneficial in that they are processed by the body to produce anti-oxidants that are able to neutralise ROS. These include blueberries, artichokes, tomatoes and dark chocolate. Vitamin C (found in citrus fruits, for example oranges) and vitamin E (sourced from foods such as avocados and tuna) are natural anti-oxidants. Herbs and spices such as ginger and turmeric, through their anti-oxidant nature, have also been shown to interfere with a number of atherosclerotic processes (Nimgulkar et al, 2015).



Conclusion

A number of diverse factors play important roles in the development of CVD through atherosclerotic plaque formation. These include high blood cholesterol levels, smoking, diabetes mellitus, hypertension, blood flow profiles and biological sex. It is often the case that these elements combine to exacerbate the problem and/or promote the likelihood of disease. Oxidative stress is the key factor in the initiation and development of atherosclerosis, and it is likely that individuals who are less effective in negating the deleterious effects of oxidative stress are more likely to suffer from CVD. Considering its multi-factorial nature it is probable that CVD will remain the most likely cause of human mortality in the near future. However, therapies which aim to reduce oxidative stress, in combination with sensible lifestyle choices, including diet, have the potential to be more effective in preventing the development of CVD.

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Creativity in new music for strings: Under which circumstances does creative change occur in different types of performer-composer collaborations?

Agata's research on creativity in new music for strings is a fantastic example of the way that research, theory and passion can combine to create new knowledge. In analysing the nature of creative interaction between performers and composers collaborating on new works, Agata was able to develop two new typologies. Her study related to the ways in which performers contribute to the development of new works through the devising and rehearsal process. Agata decided to conduct her research using both 'emic' and the 'etic' approaches. This meant that her approach focussed on internal elements of the group under study and their functioning (emic) but that she was able to draw from this and develop theories that are more universal (etic).

Despite not using an established definition of creativity, she built on a strong foundation of theories that are currently used in creativity research. Agata was fascinated with and inspired by Amanda Bayley's research into the string quartet and her project 'From composition to performance'. She also thought that Csikszentmihalyi's Systems Creativity Model worked well with her research. Bourdieu's Theory of Conflict and his forms of capital also play a crucial role in these very intricate social relationships that are created between composers and performers, especially in establishing the authorship of a piece of music. Other research that had a definitive impact on the shape of Agata's thesis were in connection to cognitive psychology, creative problem solving (Runco, Kozbelt and Beghetto) and other language-based studies (Herbert Clarke, Linda Kaastra and Thomas Porcello).

Agata's first typology categorised seven different forms of creative change that happen during rehearsals: mistakes being spotted; simplification being offered; choice being offered; intention being clarified; experiment being proposed; moments when creative change happens spontaneously, and editorial changes. The second typology related to five varying circumstances of composer-performer collaborations: the Traditional Collaboration; Workshop Collaboration; Hybrid Collaboration; New Instrument Collaboration, and Experimental Collaboration. Both of these typologies arose from an analysis of the data that Agata gathered from the interviews and the observations of the projects that she conducted. The case studies in her work related primarily to string players, however these results could be applied to other areas of performance practice.

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In analysing the nature of creative interaction between performers and composers collaborating on new works, Agata was able to develop two new typologies

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