Building wellbeing and connectedness in the Open University Associate Lecturers teaching at a distance through online creative expressions

Conference or Workshop Item

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Building wellbeing and connectedness in the Open University Associate Lecturers teaching at a distance through online creative expressions.

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Theoretical rationale

• Creative arts are a medium of self-expression and have a potential to build “connectedness” in people.
• Creative arts can enhance participation, inclusion, and wellbeing of all participating and connect people well too (Keyes, 2002).
• Studies on creative expression through arts has been focused mainly as an intervention in many studies (Hacking et al. 2006).
• A review by Leckey (2011) concluded that in about 11 studies the connection between mental health, mental well-being and creative arts was evident.
Theoretical rationale

Wellbeing as a concept- Historically, both Eastern philosophy, and Western philosophy have debated the notion of wellbeing and have made several attempts to link happiness with wellbeing.

Despite debates on the definition of the term wellbeing (Camfield et al, 2009; Simons and Baldwin, 2021; Fattore et al 2016), most studies agree that there are five dimensions of wellbeing- positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement (Seligman, 2011).

The Department of Health (DoH, 2011) highlights the definition of wellbeing as “a positive state of mind and body, feeling safe and able to cope, with a sense of connection with people, communities and the wider environment” (Department of Health, 2011, p. 90).
Key aims

1. Build a sense of connectedness and self-expression in the Access AL community.

2. Enhance wellbeing and reduce isolation of Access ALs through creative expression of arts.

3. Create a safe space for Access ALs to build their self-care and wellbeing.

4. Encourage inclusion of all Access ALs giving them a diversity of expression through creative choices rather than just academic writing and teaching.

Participants- The participants in the project were a mix ALs and other staff who are in Access and Open and cross curricular Innovation (AOCCI).

Although all ALs were invited and informed the participation and engagement on this Hues portal was voluntary and optional for all.

About 7 Als and 4 other staff from AOCCI participated on pilot project Hues and the four galleries.
The project followed the following timeline,

**August 2021**- A pilot of the IT requirements and the AL input of what may work well started in first week of August with a core team of AL Volunteers (2-3).

**September 2021**- Presented the proposal plan before ACSST.

**September 2021**- IT issues discussed in line with Jam board/ Open Studio / SWAY portal and what is required in line with OU systems.

**October 2021- November 2021**- Adverts and launch in Newsletter and forums invited ALs for entries.

**November 2021-December 2021**- Gallery 1 – Orange Hue opened for online for view, comments, and display.

**January 2022-March 2022**- Gallery 2- White Hue opened for online for view, comments, and display.

**April 2022-June 2022**- Gallery 3- Green Hue opened for online for view, comments, and display.

**July 2022- August 2022**- Gallery 4- Yellow Hue opened for online for view, comments, and display.

**July 2022- August 2022**- Review of the benefits of Hues from ALs /exhibitors/ contributors through an Online short survey.

**August 2022 -December 2022**- Dissemination and recommendations for improved online spaces for wellbeing.
Ethical issues

• The project went through ethical approvals through the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) and Staff Survey Project Plan Application (SSPP) approvals as a short survey would be part of the review of the benefits of this space from ALs.

• The project was listed in the Information Asset Register (IAR) of the Open University.

• The key part of the project was to identify and set up an online portal that would be inclusive, easy to use and accessible to all ALs.

• In September, IT issues were discussed in line with Jam board/ Open Studio / SWAY portal and what is required in line with OU systems.

• Request for VLE workspace was sent to the LDS (Learner and Discovery Services) for their consent to set up OpenStudio on the Open University website.

• Following this, advertisements were released in the Access newsletter and forums inviting ALs for entries.

• The consent from AL volunteers was sought and the rules of engagement were laid out online on and Open Studio portal set on the Open University website. Right to withdraw, confidentiality, purpose of study, anonymized survey returns were detailed clearly.
Results

The results obtained were analyzed by the interaction comments on the four galleries (November 2021 to August 2022) and the short survey done in August 2022. The results were analysed through quantitative and qualitative analysis of the four galleries and their uploads along with the survey questionnaire.

Table 1 shows the number of uploads, key themes, total comments and total emojis used on all four galleries. On the four Hues galleries the total number of uploads were 85. Many participants took the opportunity to share multiple ideas and creations.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gallery Name</th>
<th>Themes of uploads</th>
<th>Total uploads</th>
<th>Total comments</th>
<th>Total Emojis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orange Hue</td>
<td>2 Hobbies 2 Places 3 Gardens 7</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Hue</td>
<td>4 Hobbies 8 Places 2 Gardens 18</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>70</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Hue</td>
<td>16 Hobbies 18 Places 3 Gardens 37</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow Hue</td>
<td>17 Hobbies 5 Places 1 Gardens 23</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

39 38 9 85 227 249
Results

• 9 Surveys were returned by the participants, and these were incorporated in the evaluation and findings. With a combination of the thematic evaluation of the comments on the four galleries and the surveys returned by Staff, following key themes emerged.

• These themes could be classified under four key headings –
  1. Connectedness,
  2. Away from work feeling,
  3. Happiness, enjoyment, and positive feelings,
  4. Opening to new places, ideas, and shares.
Theme 1-Connectedness

“Having Hues was a real bonus for me as I could post up my progress as I work now in almost isolation.”

The visuals, the creative interaction with colleagues and sense of community.”

“It was really nice to connect with other colleagues on something non work related. I think it is a really good way of seeing how talented and varied colleagues’ interests are.”

Seeing interesting photos and pictures. It is a bit of light relief from the everyday academic aspect and nice to see creative things that people have been doing”.

“It creates a sense of connectedness. I hadn’t thought about it in terms of well-being before, but yes, connectedness does enhance this.”
Theme 2- Away from work feeling

Yes, although we ‘speak’ in the various tutor fora it was good to share something outside of the everyday OU work.”

“It is a bit of light relief from the everyday academic aspect and nice to see creative things that people have been doing.”

“I liked the opportunity to share some things in a way I might not normally as it felt appropriate within the setting.

“It was nice to have a task to take me away from marking for a bit to give myself a mental break.”

“This provided a reinforcement that there are other things in life other than work.”
Theme 3-Happiness, enjoyment, and positive feelings

“wow I never cease to be impressed by craftspeople’s work. This kind of thing is beautiful!”

“Love how the monument is cuboid, with each side facing out in different cardinal directions.”

“Beautiful and how architecture can be made a feature in its own right.”

WOW D…!!! I can imagine the joy and you riding that bike!

It makes me feel like I'm at a party. I really like it and I would never have guessed where it was taken.”
Theme 4- Opening to new places, ideas, and shares-

“In my family, I am not such a good photographer! 😊

“I was looking at the dying back leaves and wondering if I just let them totally die down or not? (haven't ever done snowdrops before)

What talent in your neck of the woods, R”

I am particularly intrigued by the hare towards the top - that looks very realistic, but I can't work out if it is metal or somehow embroidered?

“...a magical few moment. Gave a real lift to the day”. 
Recommendations

1. Organizations specially distance teaching and learning HEI (Higher Education Institutes) organizations should explore the inclusive ways online to create safe creative spaces for teachers and lecturers.

2. A range of medium of expression should be allowed on these online spaces to help all engage in the expression through creative arts like photography, hobbies, sculpture, creative pieces of writing and so on.

3. The ground rules for the online spaces should be set up before the launch of the online spaces.

4. Engagement of Associate lecturers in the creating, designing, and commending others should be encouraged by moderators on these online spaces.

5. The moderators should act as a facilitator in these online spaces to help in building, restoring and encouraging wellbeing in the teaching community.
Conclusion

• This project highlights the importance of online safe spaces for creating an inclusive platform for Associate lecturers. The stress of teaching and supporting the students at a distance can be easily overcome by designing online spaces like Hues to engage Associate lecturers in activities that are nonacademic and may allow building a sense of community and connectedness.

Moving forward

• Hues 1.0- Started from September 2022.  
  https://learn3.open.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=302096
Queries from today’s session.

Please write your feedback for today’s session here or through email

renu.bhandari@open.ac.uk
References


- 9780877736585
**References**


