



The radical pedagogies project: creating inclusive learning development materials

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Presentation abstract

This presentation explored how learning development can be reimagined as a more inclusive and critically engaged practice through creative and activist pedagogies. It introduced *Radical Pedagogies*, an initiative created by Helena Walsh and Sarah Macdonald from the University of the Arts London, that explored student-centred models of participation by weaving social justice, creativity, and activism directly into teaching materials. The project drew from a diverse range of personal and political research interests, which included poetry, film, performance art, feminist and queer theory, anti-racism, decolonising the curriculum, and anti-capitalist critique, seeking to mobilise radical traditions within an increasingly capitalised educational sector.

The initial output of this long-term project was a tactile box set of 28 activity cards designed to foster creativity, curiosity, and risk taking (hooks, 2010). Organised under four distinct themes of 'Avant-garde action', 'Critical thinking', 'Radical re-imaginings', and 'Thinking time', the cards were designed for flexible, transdisciplinary application. Central to the project's ethos was a deep commitment to co-creation; students were not merely participants but were recruited as paid collaborators in the design and feedback process, an invaluable experience which the authors posit had transformative potential for both educators and learners. This presentation offered a valuable model for learning developers, academic support staff, and lecturers seeking to embed creative, participatory, and critically aware pedagogies into their own practice.

Keywords: radical pedagogies; learning development; inclusive pedagogy; social justice; creativity; decolonisation; activism.

Community response

The community response for this presentation provided a detailed and enthusiastic account of the project's value from a participant's perspective. The contributor found the session to be both 'engaging and thought provoking' and highlighted the potential for the resources to be used in fostering difficult but necessary conversations around Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) in a safe and respectful manner.

A key takeaway was the adaptability of the cards; while created for a specific discipline, the contributor noted they 'could fit into a particular context as required' and expressed a clear intention to share them with their own institution's EDI working group and Learning Development Centre. The process of co-creation with students was also praised as a significant strength, with the contributor stating, 'I loved the co-creation with students – "if it's for us, include us"'. The reflection concluded that the project inspires educators to be bold when addressing critical topics in their teaching.

Four overarching themes were identified

To illustrate the concepts discussed, the presentation detailed the four key themes that structure the activity cards.

Avant-garde action

This theme is exemplified through the activist performances of Lorraine O'Grady, who challenged inequalities within the art world. The card details how she chanted poems of protest, such as 'Black art must take more risks'. Her 1981 performance (Knaup and Stammer, 2014) featured a costume that included a gown made of gloves and a sash reminiscent of beauty pageants. The reverse of each card provides discussion questions and activities for students. The activities for this theme are designed to benefit students by prompting them to identify and articulate contemporary inequalities in the art world and creative industries. Following this, they are encouraged to develop their own creative and

critical voice by creating a poem or statement that highlights these issues. The process culminates in creative self-reflection, where students design a performance persona, complete with a name, costume, and ideal audience.

Figure 1. Presenters' slide: avant-garde action.

Avant-garde Action

- About Lorraine O'Grady's activist performances
- She challenged inequalities in the art world
- Chanted poems of protest like 'Black art must take more risks!'
- In her 1981 performance, her costume included a gown made of gloves and a sash reminiscent of beauty pageants.

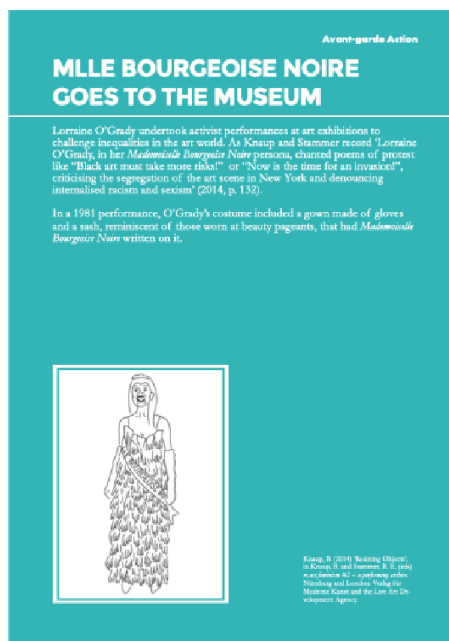


Figure 2. Presenters' slide: activities.

Activities

- The reverse side of each card has discussion questions and activities for students



Critical thinking

Critical thinking theme. The activities on this card are structured to enhance students' ability to perform close reading and textual analysis of a complex poem. This structured engagement aims to help them identify and understand concepts of oppression and intersectionality within a literary context. The tasks also benefit students by guiding them to conduct independent research into such critical theories and find further examples.

Figure 3. Presenters' slide: critical thinking.

Critical Thinking

- Audre Lorde's poem 'Who said it was simple?' was published in 1973
- It critiques those who call themselves feminists but continue to benefit from the oppression of other groups

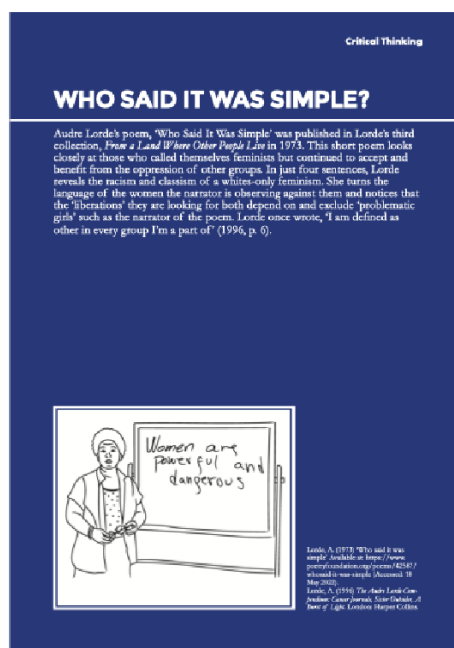


Figure 4. Presenters' slide: activities.

Activities



Radical re-imaginings

The radical re-imaginings activities on this card centre on enabling students to make connections between existing creative works, such as a book or character, and the concept of social justice. Furthermore, the tasks encourage students to translate their abstract analysis into a tangible, creative output for social advocacy, such as designing a placard that captures the spirit of that work or character.

Figure 5. Presenters’ slide: radical re-imaginings.

Radical Re-imaginings

- Exhibition at the V&A in 2021, *Curiouser and Curiouser*
- Looked at how Lewis Carroll’s work has been reimagined
- In the pictured work, Noorjan Allie holds a placard at an anti-corruption march in Cape Town, 2017 featuring a picture of Alice.

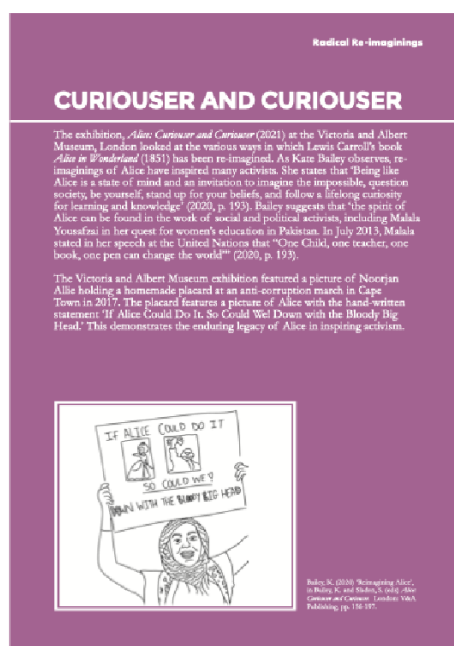


Figure 6. Presenters' slide: activities.

Activities



Thinking time

Finally, the thinking time activities guide students to develop a range of skills related to understanding and managing how they use time. For example, on this card they are prompted to practise close visual analysis of an artwork and articulate their observations, as well as interpret the artist's intent and the feelings the piece evokes. A key benefit is the task of connecting a historical concept like the revolutionary introduction of 'Decimal time' to contemporary critical theories such as decolonisation. This process also serves to broaden their cultural and historical awareness of different systems and practices that exist.

Figure 7. Presenters' slide: thinking time.

Thinking Time

- In post-revolutionary France, the French Republican Calendar was introduced
- Decimal time was used, with ten hours in a day, 100 minutes in an hour and a 100 seconds in a minute.
- Ruth Ewan's clock is a recreation of a decimal clock from this time.

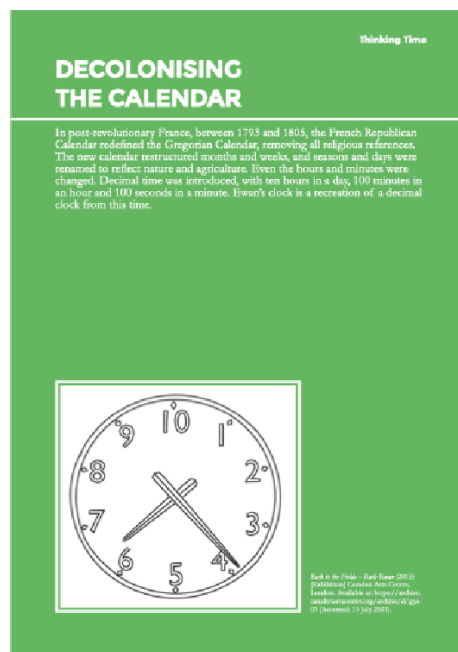
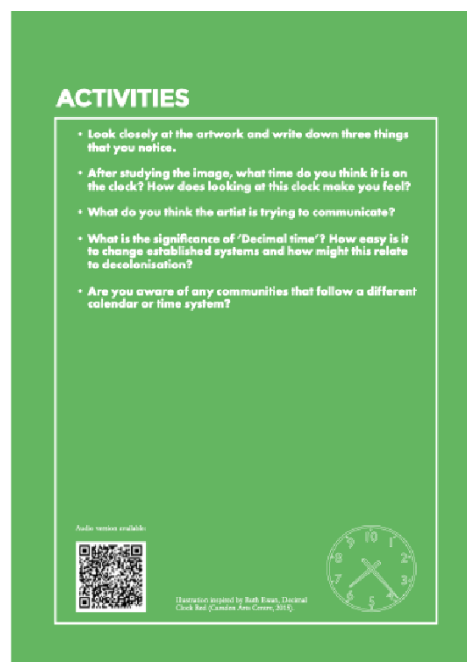


Figure 8. Presenters' slide: activities.

Activities



Application in learning environments

A key strength of the *Radical Pedagogies* project is the flexibility of the resources in practice. The box set of cards is designed to be used in a variety of ways, allowing educators to tailor the materials to their specific needs. Colleagues in Academic Support have successfully integrated the cards into their teaching in numerous ways. They have

been used as focused activities within critical thinking sessions and time management workshops, as well as for developing skills in object, artefact, and visual analysis.

The cards also serve as effective warm-up exercises or as catalysts for group discussion. Furthermore, they have been used to structure entire workshops for incoming students to foster engagement and participation from the outset. Their application extends to credit-bearing modules, particularly those focusing on issues of social justice, where they are used to develop and deepen students' critical thinking. This adaptability ensures the resources can be used for a single, short exercise or can form the foundation of an entire teaching session.

To improve accessibility, an audio recording of each card has been made. These recordings feature a diverse range of regional and international accents, again reflecting the focus on inclusivity and diversity inherent in the project.

Next steps and additional questions

Building on the presentation, the next steps for this project involve considering its significant flexibility and potential for wider application. Colleagues in Academic Support have already demonstrated the resource's versatility by using the cards in diverse learning environments, including sessions on critical thinking, time management workshops, visual analysis, and as activities within modules focused on social justice. The project's design allows lecturers to use the cards in multiple ways, from a single warm up exercise to a full workshop for incoming students or even building an entire class around the set's categories. This established adaptability leads to a key question for the wider learning development community, as posed during the session's discussion: how might other educators and practitioners create similar card-based resources that draw upon their own unique research interests and disciplinary contexts? Exploring this question provides a clear pathway for extending the project's creative and critical ethos into new areas of teaching and learning.

Authors' reflection

We were delighted with the sizeable attendance at our workshop and enjoyed presenting to fellow learning developers and receiving their feedback. It was heartening to hear the positive and enthusiastic responses to our project, and we were encouraged by the engagement and the rich discussions that ensued. It was especially inspiring to hear delegates' suggestions for how they would develop cards for their own disciplines. We are grateful for the insightful comments received in the community response, especially the contributor's appreciation of our co-creation with students.

Recommended reading

Back to the Fields – Ruth Ewan (2015) [Exhibition] Camden Arts Centre, London.

Available at: <https://camdenartcentre.org/whats-on/back-to-the-fields> (Accessed: 17 September 2025).

Bailey, K. (2020) 'Reimagining Alice' in K. Bailey and S. Sladen (eds) *Alice: Curiouser and Curiouser*. London: V&A Publishing, pp.156-197.

Lorde, A. (1973) 'Who said it was simple'. Available at:

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/42587/who-said-it-was-simple> (Accessed: 17 September 2025).

Acknowledgements

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The authors did not use generative AI technologies in the creation of this manuscript.

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hooks, b. (2010) *Teaching critical thinking: practical wisdom*. New York: Routledge.

Knaup, B. and Stammer, B. E. (eds) (2014) *re.act.feminism #2 – a performing archive*.
Nürnberg and London: Verlag für Moderne Kunst and the Live Art Development
Agency.

Author details

Sarah Macdonald is a Scottish poet, writer, editor and activist. She is a Senior Lecturer in Academic Support at University of the Arts London. Since 2006, she has been publishing short stories, and her poems have appeared in various publications. Her writing is concerned with gender, the working-class experience and resisting oppression. From 2003 until 2010, she taught at universities and art colleges in Tokyo. Her pedagogic interests include the international student experience, creative anxiety and trauma-informed pedagogy.

Helena Walsh is an Irish live artist, activist and academic. She is a Senior Academic Support Lecturer at University of the Arts London. Helena has performed widely in galleries, museums, theatres, and non-traditional art spaces, including public sites. Helena's research interests include live art and performance art practices, alongside the use of such to explore gender and cultural histories. Her work also considers the intersection of performance and activism. Her pedagogic interests include the development of practice as research methodologies and advancing creative and experimental approaches to learning development. Helena regularly presents and writes on the intersections of activism and performance practice.

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