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A reflective case analysis of an interactive and collaborative teaching practice under unexpected circumstances, the use of MURAL digital tool

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/CASE ANALYSIS

A reflective case analysis of an interactive and collaborative teaching practice under unexpected circumstances, the use of MURAL digital tool

Introduction

This case analysis comes from my personal experience as a lecturer in the MA in Tourism and Cultural Policy at Goldsmiths, University of London (United Kingdom). Over the last few years, we have faced unexpected circumstances that influence and involve the students' experience and learning. The last two years have been characterised mainly by being full of unexpected circumstances. Not just the Covid-19 pandemic shaking our way to relate but also other unexpected events such as Brexit, the Ukrainian war, inflation, industrial actions, etc. have influenced our personal and professional life.

This case analysis looks at the impact on education in two specific circumstances: how covid-19 and industrial actions affect the delivery of the sessions – also applicable to many professional experiences where training and collaborative teamwork is undertaken. Since many in-person sessions and meetings were disrupted the problems of interaction, engagement and experiential learning affected the students and/or participants. Those circumstances as many others, place us in a variety of scenarios where it was imperative to include digital instruments that facilitate the improvement of the student´s experience as well as our own practice.

The focus of this piece of work relies on the use of the MURAL tool to prove interactive and collaborative digital workshops and activities. This tool, better known in the professional sector to run workshops and brainstorming meetings, allowed me to investigate educational experiences hence, totally applicable to professional spheres in the cultural and creative industries. The present case analysis will present two practices undertaken to fulfil some of the areas and tasks of the ABC methodology for designing learning[1] and providing a co-creative experience for the learners (Laurillard, 2022). Both workshops allow me to reflect critically not only on my teaching practise but also to improve my understanding of digital skills as a facilitator and engage with a range of sources to decolonise my pedagogical approach. Firstly, the MURAL digital tool will be briefly explained in terms of teaching and learning

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Why MURAL?

The MURAL[2] digital tool is a collaborative digital platform that enhances the experience of teamwork and as it states on its official website "connects teams with a digital whiteboard and collaboration features designed to inspire innovation" (MURAL, website). It is mostly addressed to multidisciplinary teams which belong to the same company or a consortium of parties who work collectively on a project. The platform also allows the use for teaching and learning purposes, providing a special price bundle. Its features highlight the importance of this specific tool in the development of teaching actions and how it allows the achievement of learning outcomes as well as being a good practice for the student's future and potential employability.
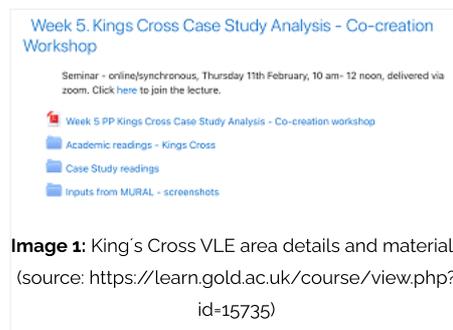
The theoretical framework that relates this digital platform with the teaching and learning foundations is based on the regard for experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), and fosters engagement by providing online interactive activities, an innovative practice of reflective learning (Brookfield, 1998). On the other hand, this practice was the intent of using all the digital knowledge acquired to deliver a high standards quality of blended or entirely online lessons during the covid-19 times; it was implemented by the ABC methodology – design for learning (Laurillard, 2022). All are based on the two levels of the learning process: theory and practice which captures three key ideas: a) the essentially iterative nature of learning, b) the communication flow, and c) the goal-oriented actions with feedback that are necessary to complete the learning process (Laurillard, 2022). All six learning types were included in the lesson planning and the MURAL platform helped to reach some of them due to the methodology used being completely focused on the six different actions required.

On another note, it is important to mention that the figure of the teacher becomes a facilitator within the dynamic. Their task is not just to be a mere observer who provides the content and materials. They merge within the idea of becoming a technical and educational facilitator creating a digital environment of freedom (hooks, 1994) and inclusivity. It might be interesting to reflect on this "new" environment and what are the criteria to transform physical etiquette into the virtual one.

Focusing now on the MURAL workshop practices, both represent a moment of discussion and teamwork about a case study to connect with the materials and theories undertaken in the previous sessions. Below, there is a brief description of each under the same categories: date and context, participants, the methodology utilised and outcomes.

King´s Cross workshop – lockdown scenario

The first workshop entitled "King's Cross case study analysis – Co-Creation workshop" was a synchronous session delivered in the spring term of the academic year 2020/21 (see image 1). It was noticeable that this session came after months of lockdown and the students were used to receiving and interacting with Teams and Zoom digital software. Even though all of them did not know the MURAL platform, this was a new experience for them.

Image 1: King´s Cross VLE area details and materials (source: https://learn.gold.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=15735)

Regarding the participants, this module had eight students who were divided into four groups, small teams of two members to boost participation. All the needed materials were uploaded to the VLE Moodle specific area: academic and case study readings (two sources per folder). A presentation contextualising the topic was given by the teacher before starting the activity. Moreover, the students had 15-20 minutes to familiarise themselves with the use of the platform and its features and settings.

The students were asked to investigate and retrieve the information needed to complete the square assigned to each group within 45 minutes in a freestyle – the topic was the King´s Cross regeneration process but no more details or guidance was provided. After the collection of the information required, the groups posted sticky notes on the whiteboard and rehearsed for their presentations – 15/20 minutes presentation with Q&A. It was a final discussion with all the participants individually, after each group presentation. As it is shown in the image below all groups finished the tasks successfully.
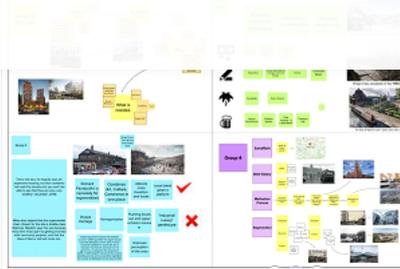
Image 2: King´s Cross workshop outcomes
(source:
https://learn.gold.ac.uk/course/view.php?
id=15735)

After the session, and out of recording, all the participants (teacher included) had an informal voluntary conversation where everyone was welcome to give their opinions and feedback about the MURAL tool and the materials and topics developed and worked with.

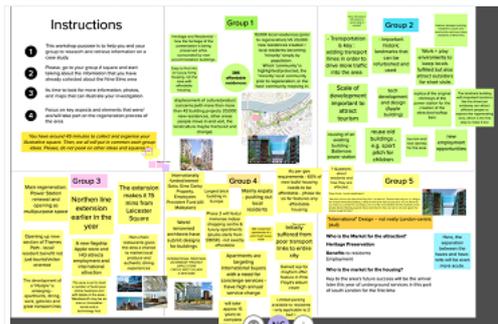**Nine Elms workshop – Industrial actions scenario**

This second workshop was addressed to the Nine Elms area and was also held as a synchronous session. In this case, this session was the second online due to industrial actions (academic year 2021/22) and the students were used to Teams and Zoom software too. Again, just a few of them knew the MURAL application so it was new software for most of them.

On this occasion, there were twenty-eight participants who were divided into five groups; it was considered small groups of 5/6 members. Previous materials were uploaded to the VLE area some days prior; this workshop was supported mainly by official websites with relevant information about the topic: the regeneration project of Nine Elms. The manager of the tourism and experience department of the Battersea Power Station was the person in charge to open the session with a talk/conversation explaining part of the project and its relationship with the district. Again, the students had 15-20 minutes to familiarise themselves with the use of the platform and its features before starting the workshop.
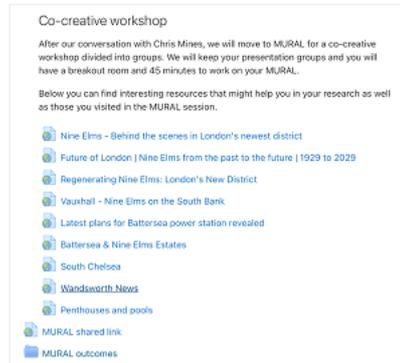
Image 3: Nine Elms workshop materials
(source:
https://learn.gold.ac.uk/course/view.php?
id=19903)

The same methodology was conducted by the students – investigate, retrieve, fulfil the square assigned, put the sticky notes, and get ready for the presentation – but this time, detailed instructions were provided. The timing was the same, 45 minutes to collect and analyse the information and 15/20 minutes presentation with Q&A. As shown in the image below (image 4), just one group was not able to finalise time the tasks successfully however, all the students participated in the final discussion.

Image 4: Nine Elms workshop outcomes (source:
https://learn.gold.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=19903)

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Workshop insights and thoughts

Based on Kolb´s reflective learning[3], the learning and teaching process was critically tested and validated from the first event to the second, moving through each of the phases. The student´s feedback and the teacher´s own experience and observations were critical points to be able to critically analyse this case study through the lens of experiential learning, digitalisation of the educational practises and the application of the ABC methodology. As follow, some of the main inputs noted down from the sessions.

Insights from the teacher-facilitator

- Demographics or/and age might interfere in the development of the teamwork – digital gap existing as well as connection accessibility.
- The previous conversation with a guest speaker aid and feed the workshop.
- Cocreation and collaborative learning were achieved through a digital tool.
- Experiential learning experiences achieved regarding the students and the teacher – indirectly many of the participants went through each of Kolb's cycle phases without realising. Nevertheless, within the final feedback, they exposed that reflective journey.
- As teacher and facilitator, the second event worked better than the previous one. I mastered myself reaching a proficiency level of undertaking a wide range of workshops and activities synchronously.

Insights from the students-participants

- In both workshops were more than a group which experienced technical difficulties.
- The MURAL platform was not very pleasant for some of the participants, generating feelings of frustration and being overwhelmed.

- Aside from the previous points, almost all the students expressed that they had an enjoyable time and considered the workshop a successful session.
- The students mentioned that they would have appreciated having more time to work on the whiteboard.

Conclusion

This case analysis portrays a good practice to illustrate challenges undertaken in terms of communication and connectivity throughout those unexpected circumstances worldwide and how to implement digital tools to sort out those unexpected situations. The reflection made on both workshops connects with so many layers and levels for both approaches – professional and educational – that opens a variety of questions for further discussion. I encourage you to reflect on the importance of experiential learning not only towards education but also in professional environments, the technological gap (digital natives) and how to even those unbalances, inclusion and cohesion of multicultural groups, engagement and how to promote it, stimulation of co-creative and collaborative team working as well as the creation of a safe and free environment where all participants are treated with respect and equality.

[1] Further information available at: https://abc-ld.org/6-learning-types/

[2] For further information about the MURAL tool, visit its website: https://www.mural.co

[3] Further information available at: https://www.simplypsychology.org/learning-kolb.html

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Nuria Cortes holds a BSc in Business Management and Administration from the University of Navarre, Spain. After her degree studies, she achieved an International Commerce Graduate Course for the Chamber of Commerce of Navarre, Spain. She also obtained her MA. in Leisure Management Projects (culture, sport, tourism, and recreation) at the Institute of Leisure Studies of the University of Deusto-Bilbao where, in 2016, read her Ph.D. in Leisure and Human Development. Her Ph.D. research project studied the different methodologies for measuring and assessing both quantitative and qualitative impacts of major leisure events (culture, sport, and tourism). An extensive bibliographical revision of impact measurement methodologies was carried out and the study was based on a variety of case studies at international levels. Her doctoral journey also included a doctorate stay at the ICCE of Goldsmith, London. From a professional perspective, she has a vast experience working as a Lecturer at Goldsmith, University of London as well as at the University of Deusto-Bilbao. She taught at undergraduate and postgraduate level in the fields of business, leisure, tourism, and cultural policy. Furthermore, she has been in charge of the organisation and coordination of several field trip projects. Moreover, she have working in research and consultancy projects about leisure, cultural and creative industries and cultural policy at the World Leisure Organisation, and 3Walks Consultancy. In addition to her academic experience, Nuria has an extended experience of organising events, including a range of cultural events. She was Head of events at Dock-Bilbao, a hub belonging to a council building BFF: the first urban ecosystem of innovation and entrepreneurship located in Bilbao. There, she has managed an integral production of corporate events, workshops, talks, meetings, exhibitions, and networks being one of the promoters of an initiative for networking to entrepreneurs called Speed Meeting. Her research interests include the measurement of qualitative and quantitative impacts/outcomes of the major events, tourism, urban regenerations, and city transformation from a glocal perspective of development projects.

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ABC methodology, digital workshop, e-learning, MURAL, reflective learning

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