

The MMU(sical) Personal and Professional Development (PPD) short course: An autoethnographical reflection on the course design and initial pilot

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With special thanks to my MA in Higher Education Supervisor Dr Chris Little

Photo Credit: Dale Vicker



Background

“The Student Needs Framework (SNF)” (Advance HE, 2024). The SNF has two broad categories: “**individual competence, competence and resilience**” and ‘**belonging and community**’.

According to the Blake et al. (2022) Wonke He / Pearson report, there are four key dimensions of belonging in HE:

Connection

Inclusion

Support

Autonomy



Background Cont.

These dimensions are similar to Ryan and Deci's Self-determination theory (SDT) (1985).

SDT posits 3 core needs of Competence, Relatedness and Autonomy.

“Competence is the belief that one has in their ability to influence important outcomes.

Relatedness is having the experience of having satisfying and supportive social relationships.

Autonomy concerns the experience of acting with a sense of choice, volition and self-determination” (Stone et al., 2009, p77).

Therefore, it seems likely that an intervention based on SDT (Stone et al., 2009) would improve belonging.



Background Cont.

In addition to the theoretical underpinning of SDT, research has shown that students who engage in **extra-curricular activities** are likely to have **improved well-being** as well as a greater sense of **student identity** and **belonging to their institution** (Winstone et al., 2020).



Method - The MMU(sical) Personal and Professional Development Short Course

The MMU(sical) PPD short course is a six week, 2 hours per week extra-curricular offering.

Each week involves the listening to, discussion of apposite songs from musical theatre, and self-reflections from the students, alongside additional activities in between sessions.

This MMU(sical) dimension is included each week to mirror the community ethos of people in the performing arts (Rouse, & Rouse, 2003) and because research shows it is beneficial to participate in community theatre (Jiang & Alizadeh, 2023) and glee clubs (Johnson & Fail, 2005).



Method - The MMU(sical) Personal and Professional Development Short Course

The PPD short course is underpinned by the core 6 principles of self-determination theory (SDT) interventions (Stone et al, 2009) which are as follows:

- Ask open questions and invite participation in problem solving
- Actively listen and acknowledge perspectives
- Offer choices within structure including the clarification of responsibilities
- Provide sincere, positive feedback that acknowledges initiative, and factual, non-judgmental feedback about problems.
- Minimise coercive controls such as rewards and comparisons with others
- Develop talent and share knowledge to enhance competence and autonomy



Week	Focus of first hour	Focus of second hour	Self-directed tasks using a Padlet (task based and weekly reflections) and teams chat space (social and informational).
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Week 1

Introduction to the Ethos of the MMU(sical) PPD short course.

Introduce students to the principles of SDT that underpin this short course.

This week students will also be reminded that this PPD short course will be evaluated as a research project for my MA. There will be an opportunity to re-read the PIS and ask questions. It will be reiterated that participation in the research is optional and that they can make the decision in the final week

Co-produce group name and group contract including the commitment to attend and to get involved based on MT principles that [“we’re all in this together.”](#)

And that Manchester Metropolitan University is [“a place where we belong”](#).

[“Getting to know you”](#)

Circle task (we all sit in a circle, minus one seat, and one person stands in the middle) the person in the middle says a truth about them, people who share the same truth move positions and the last person (one that does not get a seat) ends up in the middle and shares their truth. This exercise helps students to get to know each other and see things in common and areas of differences.

[“a few of my favourite things”](#)

Students all discuss their favourite things.

Importance of peer support and building communities.

Being vulnerable and supportive and building the sense of belonging.

[Library databases](#) – find Digital theatre plus. Have a look at this and also consider watching a musical.

On the Padlet post a link to a song from musical that resonates with you, it can be any musical and can resonate for any reason. On the Padlet write a reflection for week 1

Post something in the teams chat space, this is a social space and a space for announcements and questions in between the weekly sessions.



My Favourite Things

[My Favorite Things from The Sound of Music \(Official HD Video\)](#)

Singing

Swimming

Chocolate

Friends



Week	Focus of first hour	Focus of second hour	Self-directed tasks to do before next week, using a Padlet (task based and weekly reflections) and teams chat space (social and informational).
Week 2	Discussion of the songs that students have put on the Padlet and supportive discussion why they resonate with them. This week students will be building their confidence in terms of speaking out.	Perfectionism, Procrastination, Peers and Perseverance <u>"The wall in my head"</u> Discussion around the barriers to performing well at University for this specific group of students.	Register for "Future me" and familiarise yourselves with the <u>Future me programme</u> Post your thoughts about "Future me" to the Teams chat space. On the Padlet write a reflection for week 2



The Wall in my Head

[The Wall in My Head - YouTube](#)

Illness

Childcare



Week	Focus of first hour	Focus of second hour	Self-directed tasks to do before next week, using a Padlet (task based and weekly reflections) and teams chat space (social and informational).
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Week 3	<p>Breaking through those barriers</p> <p>Why are they at University and what do they want to get out of University? Discussion of their intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for being at University.</p> <p><u>"Chip on my shoulder"</u></p>	<p>Goal setting, setting personal learning objectives. Using the personal attributes of the "Future me" framework as a guide.</p> <p><u>"Dig a little deeper"</u></p> <p><u>"How far I'll go"</u></p>	<p>Do a literature <u>search through the Library</u> to find an article that relates to your personal learning objectives and post this on the Padlet.</p> <p>On the Padlet write a reflection for week 3</p>
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Week 4	<p>“Our Future selves” Group presentations preparation. Working together in small groups students will prepare for a presentation next week on their shared and individual visions of their future selves, they can do this in any format they want as long as they are co-constructing something together, e.g. song, play, poem, PowerPoint, artwork. They can use resources from the Brooks resource centre, but will also be encouraged to think about what resources that have that they can share.</p>	<p>Our Future selves Group presentations preparation continued</p>	<p>If the presentations are not ready students will complete this during the week so that they attend class ready to present their visions of their future selves team work activity. On the Padlet write a reflection for week 4</p>
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Week	Focus of first hour	Focus of second hour	Self-directed tasks to do before next week, using a Padlet (task based and weekly reflections) and teams chat space (social and informational).
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Week 5	Group presentations what ever medium they like	Reflections on the group presentations, self-reflections, peer reflections and feedback from me	<p>On the Padlet write a reflection for week 5</p> <p>Read the future me guidelines for reflective writing and what is required to submit a reflection through rise if they want to switch out for option units at level 6</p>
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Week	Focus of first hour	Focus of second hour	Self-directed tasks to do before next week, using a Padlet (task based and weekly reflections) and teams chat space (social and informational)
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Week 6

Consenting or not for the narratives to be analysed for the research project -

Writing the individual personal written reflections guided by the SDT prompts and the future me guidelines. Being able to think and write reflexively is a key component of personal development.

“it’s a wrap” wrap party

Sharing reflections across the group, and wrapping up, goodbye songs from songs from previous weeks.

Ending with Manchester Metropolitan University sing along is [“a place where we belong”](#)

Students who wish to participate in the research project will submit their reflection to Qualtrics.



Photo credit: Dale Vicker

Autoethnographical Reflections on the initial pilot

The initial pilot was delivered to level 4 Psychology students

- Unfortunately no one came on campus
- I also held an online version, the first week I had 4 students, then 3, 2, 1 so had to cancel it
- I asked for feedback from the 4 students and none gave me any



Autoethnographical reflections on the initial pilot - Speaking against the Dominant Narratives

MMU(sical) PPD short course to be innovative and vastly different mainstream content of their Psychology degree

The formative rather than summative nature of this course means that engagement is motivated by SDT in contrast to the obtaining of grades for the work that they are doing in class for their degrees. (Harlen et al, 2002).



Autoethnographical reflections on the initial pilot - Insider knowledge of the cultural experiences

It felt really meaningful to me to be able to share with a student from a different culture who had no previous experience of musical theatre my insider knowledge of and passion for musical theatre.

What struck me as well was the pure joy and exhilaration demonstrated by the student who also loved musical theatre, watching him share with his peers why certain songs resonated with him and seeing the way they responded and supported him as he talked about his mental health in relation to the songs was really powerful.

The discussion over the group name, which is important for belonging (Jetten et al., 2015) was a truly collaborative experience led by the student with insider knowledge, the group settled on “golden slippers” a nod to the glitz and glamour of Broadway and to the Wizard of Oz.



Autoethnographical reflections on the initial pilot - Autoethnographic Epiphanies

As Elle says in *Legally Blonde* “being true to yourself never goes out of style”. A few years ago I would not have been brave enough to have designed a passion piece which represents so much of myself.

The lack of attendance, even for the online session made me realise that University is really different then when I attended where extra-curricular offerings were viewed as important a component of the University experience as the academic offering. If Manchester Met is going to achieve this goal as set out in MMU Education priorities on the road to 2030 (Manchester Met, 2022), then they really do need to research what the barriers to achieving this is. A number of students told me they were interested but just did not have the time, or emotional capacity to undertake anything additional to what was required to passing the degree. Even the awarding of Rise points were not incentive enough.



Conclusions

Belonging and mattering and Personal and Professional Development are important but lots of students don't have the time and / or capacity to engage in the extra-curricular activities.

The course can be adapted to all sorts of cohorts, including academic staff, Youth groups, and team training events in industry.

There is the potential to develop this as a single session, or as an “away day” session.

I still believe in the EthOS of this and hope that other people will be able to run it successfully, both here and at other institutions



Thank you for attending my presentation.

If you are interested in running the MMU(sical) PPD short course, please do get in touch with me for more information.

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