INTERVENTION REPORT [1649 words] —

* What is the context of your teaching practice, your positionality in relation to your practice?

I am a 0.6 lecturer across the BA (Hons) Illustration and Visual Media course at LCC. I teach across all years of the course, from Level 4 to Level 6. I am also a 0.2 Lecturer on the Visual Communication MA course at the Royal College of Art, teaching at Level 7.

I am a cisgender, white woman, with Irish and English parents. I am agnostic, although I was brought up as a Catholic. I am heterosexual. I am disabled by two specific learning difficulties, dyspraxia, and dyslexia.

I am a first-generation University Student. I hold an MA from the Royal College of Art and received my Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy in 2021. In undertaking my MA, class consciousness[[1]](#footnote-1) has become an important part of my research and teaching practice — navigating a journey from a working-class upbringing to my position in Higher Education.

My positionality in class terms has driven my approach in writing this intervention report, which is centred around the *perceived purpose* of gaining a university degree. As I have worked through my blog posts on disability, faith, and race in this unit, and through conversations with my tutors and peers, I have become increasingly concerned with the idea of inclusivity in relation to teaching towards industry bias. I believe the purpose of gaining a university degree should reach towards the *practice of freedom[[2]](#footnote-2)* for the individual (especially intellectual freedom), rather than toward a pre-supposed position within society, or toward limited *imagined futures*.[[3]](#footnote-3),[[4]](#footnote-4) I would like to clarify at the outset of this report that, having experienced financial pressure and disadvantage in my own experience of education (and life outside of the institution), I am aware of the importance that the role of employment and financial security represents for students, graduates and academics — I do not wish to suggest that a university should not equip students with the skills necessary to work towards financial security, I only wish to enhearten, or to dream, that financial freedom may co-exist with intellectual freedom, and a depth of understanding in selfhood.

* What is the intervention you have designed in your teaching practice (what is the aim, when will it take place, what resources, training, support is required)? Why and how is it inclusive? Include references that cite critical pedagogy, social justice theories and data that supports your designs.

The aim of my intervention is it to help strengthen the classroom as a communal space, or as a *learning community*,[[5]](#footnote-5) where there is an ongoing recognition that everyone’s individual experience influences the classroom dynamic, and everyone’s individual contributions act as resources towards learning.[[6]](#footnote-6),[[7]](#footnote-7) I would like this communal space to encourage *excitement[[8]](#footnote-8)* in Higher Education. I would also like this understanding and presentation of *individual experience* to be centred around an intersectional framework.[[9]](#footnote-9)

This summer, following successful re-validation of our course at LCC, we will be re-writing all of the course content for our Level 4 students. I will be co-leading on the first fourteen weeks of planning and delivery, alongside my colleague, Ching-Li Chew. We have already begun this planning process, confirming the practical processes of making that we hope to guide the students through, and beginning to write the project brief. The project will culminate in a public showcase, in the form of a ‘catwalk’, where students will create wearable illustration (this could be anything from a garment to a placard) and model their individual outputs, at this collective event.

There is clear opportunity here for our learning community to be initiated in a manner that is collective, and celebratory. What we are yet to write into the brief is the conceptual initiation for these processes of making, i.e. what we’re asking the students to communicate through their experimental works of illustration — this is where the intervention will be instrumental.

Wearable, visual communication, or *fashion[[10]](#footnote-10)* that is approached through illustrative methodology, can be understood as a cultural signifier, as well as a cultural disruption; each concept intersects and collectively serves as a symbolic form of communication.[[11]](#footnote-11) This can be especially true for marginalised groups (as well as their allies) posing ‘radical questions’ and seeking social change.[[12]](#footnote-12) It is a mode of communication that can be wordless, and simultaneously loud, for those who feel it is safer not to speak — which is important in considering the classroom dynamic, where *politics of domination can be reproduced in the educational setting,[[13]](#footnote-13)* and where asserting subjectivity[[14]](#footnote-14) can feel uncomfortable, or even risky, especially for students with protected characteristics.[[15]](#footnote-15) Finding a way to make this project space into a democratic setting, *where everyone feels responsibility[[16]](#footnote-16)* (and empowerment) *to contribute*, will be a central goal in achieving *transformative pedagogy*.

It is my intention that these cultural and conceptual facets of the medium will be introduced to the students early on in the project, and that students will begin to recognise their positionality within an intersectional framework. Asking the students to use this project to communicate their individual contribution[s] to the classroom dynamic will require a concurrently gentle and complex introduction to understanding intersectionality. At Level 4, I believe it will be important to create some bridging resources to help make Crenshaw’s seminal essay on *Mapping the Margins[[17]](#footnote-17)* accessible and actionable for the class as a whole. In researching for this intervention, I have been inspired by *Womankind Worldwide*, a women’s rights organisation who help amplify action in women’s movements through creating resources and building projects/spaces for change.[[18]](#footnote-18) They have created a resource titled *Intersectionality 101: What is it and why is it important?* that I think will be useful for our students in its simplicity, but also in its suggested activations for understanding:

### *What can I do? […] Here are just a few ideas:*

* ***Check your privilege:****[…] Reflect on [your privilege] and consider how this impacts the discriminations you do and don’t experience.*
* ***Listen and learn:****[…] Intersectionality is about learning and understanding views from other[s] […]*
* ***Make space:****Ask yourself if you’re the right person to take up space or speak on certain issues. Centre stories and actions on those with the lived experiences. Don’t speak for them, don’t speak over them.*
* ***Watch your language:****So many of the words we use every day are ableist, exclusionary and downright offensive to marginalised communities[…][[19]](#footnote-19)*

These guidelines will be helpful in the students understanding modes of interrogation, representation, and platforming — it is essential that the students consider the complexity in approaching what is a potentially political medium, avoiding *tokenistic* involvement in speaking out or *embracing change,*[[20]](#footnote-20) in order to find a meaningful entry point towards communication, and/or, self-actualisation.[[21]](#footnote-21) It is important that this project is understood as the initiation of practicing who we are within our *learning community*,[[22]](#footnote-22) establishing the aforementioned idea that ongoing recognition of everyone’s individual experience will positively influence the classroom dynamic, and opportunities for learning.

*We learned early that our devotion to learning, to a life of the mind, was a counter-hegemonic act, a fundamental way to resist every strategy of white racist colonisation.[[23]](#footnote-23)*

In bell hooks’ seminal work, *Teaching to Transgress,* (which has been an instrumental resource in writing this report) there is a suggestion that the traditional role of the university is the pursuit of truth and the sharing of knowledge and information.[[24]](#footnote-24) She goes further in suggesting that the idea of the intellectual questing for a union of the mind, body and spirit has been replaced with the notion that *being smart* *mean[s] one [is] inherently emotionally unstable and that the best in oneself emerge[s] in one’s academic work*.[[25]](#footnote-25) hooks contends this development, through her commitment to education as the practice of freedom, and towards offering knowledge that empowers students to live more fully in the world beyond academe. It is my own observation that in the current Higher Education landscape, particularly within the arts, there is a systemic understanding that ‘the best in oneself’ emerges in one’s contribution to industry. It is my view that this focus holds inherent tendencies towards oppressive marginalisation and limited opportunity for self-actualisation.

* How have you reflected on feedback from peers, colleagues, students on your idea? Where possible, include how the intervention impacted inclusive teaching and learning (if you were able to deliver this)

I have been discussing all of these ideas with my students,[[26]](#footnote-26) peers and colleagues. Culture towards the importance of employment is correspondingly present amongst students, who are understandably anxious about their futures. It is also worth considering that the role of fees, finances, and the corporatisation of art schools, contributes considerably towards student’s expectations of what they hope to receive from university tuition. Les Back suggests that the marketisation of education has reduced the process of education to a financial transaction,[[27]](#footnote-27) which negates the idea of a dialogical learning model and harps back to the aptly titled ‘banking’ model of education, as outlined in Paolo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.[[28]](#footnote-28)*

This brings us to the consideration of expectations of subject matter, and what is/should be delivered in the field of Illustration — a point of feedback that both my peers and colleagues have raised in these discussions. Here, bell hooks echoes this consideration:

*Teaching in a traditional discipline from the perspective of critical pedagogy means that I often encounter students who make complaints like, “I thought this was supposed to be an English class, why are we talking so much about feminism?” (Or, they might add, race or class.)[[29]](#footnote-29)*

In reflecting on this, and through closely studying bell hooks, I believe there is a necessity to explain the *philosophy, strategy,* and *intent* of the inclusion of the transformative pedagogies utilised through this intervention, to the students themselves.[[30]](#footnote-30) It is encouraging that by nature of subject matter, wearable illustration is inextricably linked with themes of identity and culture, both visually and symbolically — and I hope for this fact to act as a bridge for students to understand the value of these considerations in their field.

It is also my hope that through the students focusing on embracing community through this intervention, they are better prepared, too, for the necessary collaboration and support networks involved in sustaining an enriching professional life — and aware of the need to reconstruct and to question processes of industry, towards inclusion.

*…to begin always anew, to make, to reconstruct, and to not spoil, to refuse to bureaucratise the mind, to understand and live life as a process — live to become…[[31]](#footnote-31)*

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1. *Awareness of one’s place in a system of social class, especially (in Marxist terms) as it relates to the class struggle.*

   Moore, Barrington (1978) cited in Levin, Michael, (1980), History of Political Thought Imprint Academic Ltd, Vol. 1, No. 3. p.499 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
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5. hooks, bell (1994) *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, Routledge, p. 8 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Sadiq, Asif (2023) *Diversity, Equity & Inclusion. Learning how to get it right*, *TEDx*. Youtube, 2 March. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HR4wz1b54hw> (Accessed: 26 July 2024) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. hooks, bell (1994) *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, Routledge, p. 7—8 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Crenshaw, Kimberlé (1990) *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color*. Stanford Law Review43 (6) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *“Fashion (or clothing; we can debate what we should call it) isn’t on the sidelines […] it’s a constant ally in times of trouble, a medium open to infinite nuances of meaning in the hands of ingenious people to show their beliefs.”*Mower, Sarah (2018), *Dressed to protest: Can fashion help bring about change?,* Vogue Magazine (UK), 20 January 2018, <https://www.vogue.co.uk/article/clothing-fashion-protest>. (Accessed: 31 July 2024)  [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
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13. hooks, bell (1994) *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, Routledge, p.39 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Ibid, p.40 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Rekis, Jaclyn (2023) *Religious Identity and Epistemic Injustice: An Intersectional Account.* Hypatia 38, p.786 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
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17. Crenshaw, Kimberlé (1990) *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color*. Stanford Law Review43 (6) [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
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20. *“All too often we found a will to include those considered ‘marginal’ without a willingness to accord their work with the same respect and consideration given other work. In Women’s Studies, for example, individuals will often focus on women of color at the very end of the semester or lump everything about race and difference together in one section. This kind of tokenism is not multi-cultural transformation, but it is familiar to us as the change individuals are most likely to make.”*hooks, bell (1994) *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, Routledge, p.38 [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. *“In our everyday lives we speak differently to diverse audiences. We communicate best by choosing that way of speaking that is informed by the particularity and uniqueness of whom we are speaking to and with.”*  
      
    hooks, bell (1994) *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, Routledge, p.11 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. hooks, bell (1994) *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, Routledge, p. 8 [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Ibid, p.2 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Ibid, p.29 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Ibid, p.16 [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. *I have focused my conversations on the process/expectations of graduation and employment with my postgraduate RCA students, in spite of the fact that this intervention will be made in my undergraduate teaching, primarily. This chosen focus group for feedback was intentional, in that my postgraduate students have experience in industry (or lack thereof) upon undergraduate graduation in correlation with their expectations/desires that has been useful to draw from.* [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Back, Les (2016) *Academic Diary, or, Why Higher Education Still Matters,* Goldsmiths Press, p.23 [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. *Presented in Paulo Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed, the “banking” concept of education represents the teacher-student relationship / hierarchy of knowledge or skills transmission that is prevalent in most Western education models.*  
      
    Freire, Paulo ([1968] 2017), *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans by Myra Bergman Ramos, Great Britain: Penguin Classics. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. hooks, bell (1994) *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, Routledge, p.42 [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. *I will do so in the introductory session of the project.* [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Freire, Paulo cited in hooks, bell (1994) *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, Routledge [↑](#footnote-ref-31)