

“Breaking Barriers: can we make a difference?”

An exploration into the role of mentoring for fostering a sense of belonging in graphics students.

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Linked to the NTU commitment to Success for All, the notion of ‘Universal Design for Learning’ (UDL) is a framework that defines the importance for university staff to recognise the particular needs and interests of their students, alongside their individual identities, their cultural backgrounds and personal experiences and take these into account when developing teaching methods, curriculum and assessment (Hockings, 2010). This notion came from the idea of ‘Universal Design’, born from 1970s architecture, but which has now been investigated in other fields, such as neurodiversity and learning sciences (Levey, 2021). When looking at the creative industry and the graphic design field, this principle is also important and recognised by professional bodies such as the CPSK guidance from the Chartered Society of Designers. Therefore, this notion has been integrated into the FdA Graphics and Digital Design curriculum, which aims to prepare students for employability and industry standards.

CONTEXT

It is recognised that students with full access to learning and teaching are more likely to engage with learning, and to reach their full potential (Hockings, 2010). However, to reach their full potential, students need to feel that they are part of a community that recognises their individuality, namely that they have a ‘sense of belonging’ (Strayhorn, 2018). **Sense of belonging** generally refers to “an individual’s sense of identification or positioning in relation to a group or to the college community, which may yield an affective response” (Tovar & Simon, 2010, cited in Strayhorn, 2018).

Looking at the students’ voice and last year’s survey (NSS) on the FdA Graphics and Digital Design course, it was noticed that the course received low scores on:



It has been shown and supported by academic research, that students who don’t develop a strong sense of belonging can perform less well than students who have. **Put differently, students need to feel a sense of belonging to excel in their studies (Strayhorn, 2018).** And because it is recognised that “college student educators, faculty, practitioners, and administrators play a critical role in creating environments where all students can thrive and belong” (Strayhorn, 2018, p.11), **this poster will focus on mentoring students and how the staff on the FdA graphics course at Confetti can play a role in developing a strong staff/student community.** The focus on mentoring, despite the fact that mentoring techniques are varied, will reinforce the opportunity to provide students with a safe

space where they can experiment, develop effective strategies, be challenged, but also where they can make mistakes and learn from these (Singh, 2021). All these aspects are key for the creative processes taught on the course and will support the development of professional skills and employability. But it will also help the students to feel that they are valued and encouraged by tutors and their peers, which is crucial for fostering a sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2018).

“It is critical for college student educators to encourage positive interactions among students through conditions that really matter in college, ranging from advising networks to cocurricular involvement, from learning communities to peer mentoring to name a few” (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005, cited in Strayhorn, 2018, pp.21-22).

METHOD

This research has been developed within both cohorts of the FdA graphics (90 students) and is integrated into the course-level SFA strategy for 2022-2023. For the purpose of this poster, the investigation will be focused only on two of the factors of this strategy, namely identity and a sense of belonging, but it is still connected to the overall aims of the “Success for All” scheme.

Psycho-social factor

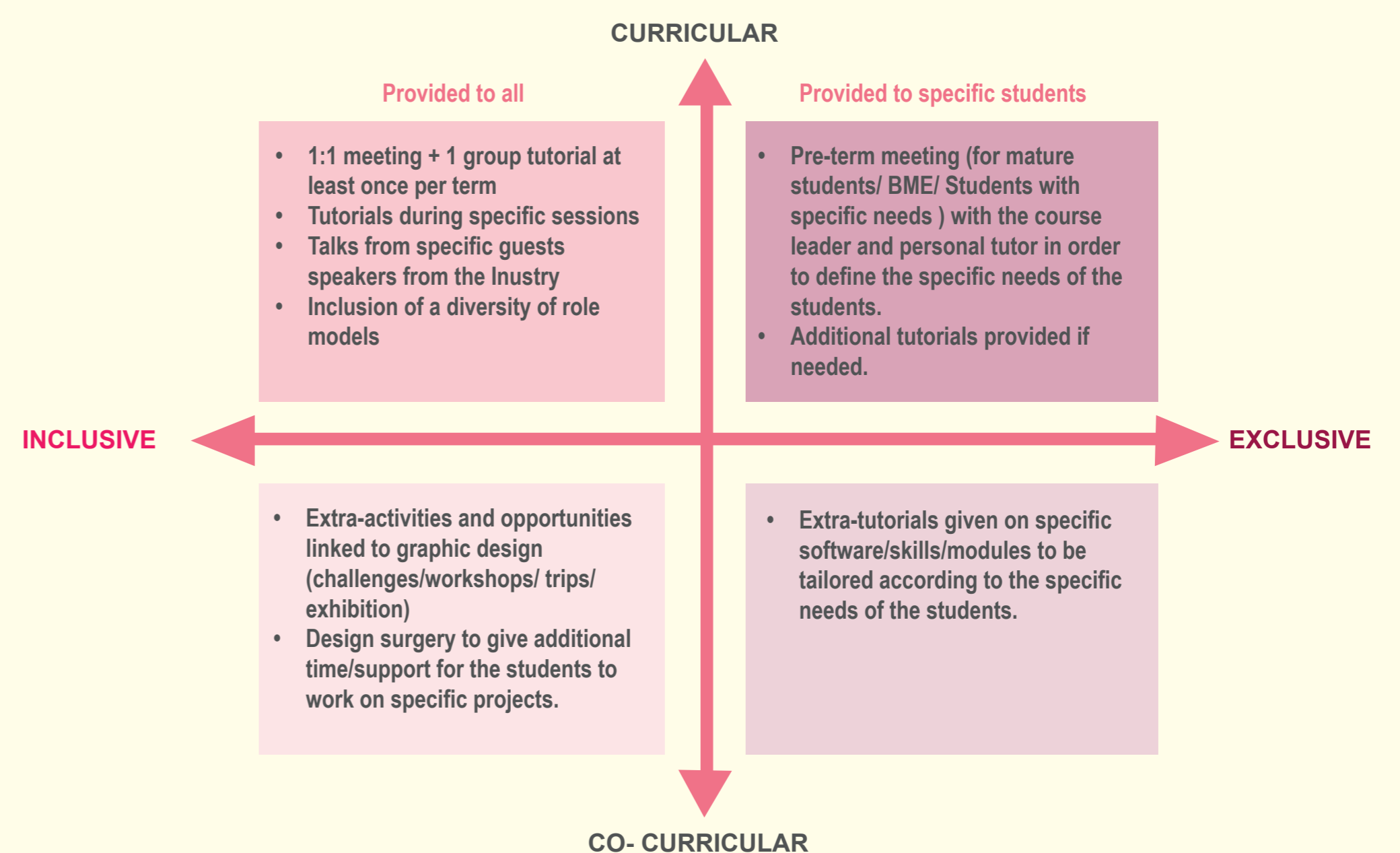
To develop the Identity factor, the team has concentrated their efforts on diversifying the use of role models from industry, showing diversity and a range of different backgrounds to ensure that students feel represented in the curriculum, in the pedagogy, but also in the assessments. This will be supported by talks and workshops delivered throughout the academic year and during specific sessions or events (e.g. Industry Week 2023). Some challenges and specific activities are also planned to create more links between staff and students (e.g., live drawing session during a trip to the York sculpture park).

Research questions:

- How to develop an inclusive mentoring system to facilitate the first-year students’ integration and strengthen the sense of belonging in students on the course?
- How to better take into account the variety of identities within the course and make the students feel they are part of a wider graphic design community?

Sense of belonging

For the sense of belonging, the tutorial system delivered by the team has been revised in order to develop a more inclusive mentoring scheme. The original tutorial scheme will be kept for the 2nd year students, with one individual meeting per term, alongside tutorials within specific modules and sessions. But a new mentoring scheme will be introduced within the 1st-year cohort with the introduction of additional small-group tutorials alongside the three individual meetings. Adding small-group tutorials will support the idea that students can discuss ideas and concepts at a specific time, where they can also share concerns and questions outside the whole class group and in a less formal environment. The tutor will provide advice, guidance, and potentially a link to further specialist support, if needed.



EVALUATION & CONCLUSION

This research aims to develop my teaching practice by developing mentoring skills, but it also aims to have a positive impact on the course by creating a greater sense of community among the different cohorts and the staff. **The results of this new mentoring scheme will be monitored by surveys that will be conducted with the Y1 and Y2 students (Mysay and the NSS 2023), but attendance and exam results will be also looked at, as this is a relevant metric when looking at students’ integration and achievement.** The additional tutorials only organised for 1st-year students for this academic year will allow us, at the end of Term 3, to reflect on this new mentoring programme, evaluate its results by comparing 1st- and 2nd-year feedback, but it will also give us a chance to adjust the mentoring scheme for

the next cohorts of students, if needed (e.g., the size of the groups, frequency of the tutorials,...).

Over the academic year 2021-2022, attendance was low with 62% for the first years and 75% for the second years. Attendance has already improved with a 77% for the first year and 80% for the second year (October 2022). **Alongside quantitative data, qualitative feedback will be collected during the 1:1 tutorials in the 1st and 2nd year to gain insights from the students’ experience on the course.** For ethical reasons and to protect the privacy of the students, these insights will be collected and recorded with their consent only and they will be anonymised if used outside the development of the course.

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