

SPARK



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Higher Education at Oldham College

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Editorial

This 6th issue of Spark includes research and scholarly activities undertaken at University Campus Oldham (UCO) and Oldham College (OC) over the last academic year. This publication includes reflections, summaries and papers which were presented at our annual UCO Research Symposium alongside other research and creative outputs from a range of subject specialist areas. You will find elements of Oldham College's strategic plan (2019-24) - which highlights the importance of Specialism and Reputation; High Performance; Digitalisation and Technology; and Community - running through this publication.

In June 2022, we celebrated our return to a face-to-face event for our annual UCO Research and Scholarly Activity Symposium. We hosted speakers from staff and students from UCO and OC around the theme of creativity. Our keynote speaker was Dr Chris Bailey from Sheffield Hallam University. Chris presented some of his award-winning research which draws on ideas around literacies, multimodality, and neurodiversity.

This year's publication includes a further report on the development of Paula Litherland's research into a psychometric tool for measuring lifestyle factors for the fitness industry to improve mental health (presented in Spark 2022). In this edition, Paula considers the use of the Mental Health Questionnaire in the workplace to improve wellbeing. Vikki Scholes provides a reflection on the Pandemic Project, a pedagogic tool that she created enabling students to reflect on their lived experiences of the pandemic using creative outputs. Danielle Vipond reports of the use of Padlet as a collaborative tool enabling peer to peer support and building a strong learning community whilst students were working online. Dr Jennie Bailey presents some reflections on zine making and place writing in Rochdale. Jennie's article provides some useful instructions on how to create your own zine!

Within the pages of Spark you will also find photographic images of creative outputs from final year Graphic Design students of 2022.

We hope you enjoy learning more about the wide range of research activities undertaken at University Campus Oldham and Oldham College, please join us at our next annual UCO Research Symposium. If you would like to present your own research for publication or you would like to be involved in a research project, please get in touch.

Tray Wilson

Chair of the UCO Research and Scholarly Activity Group.

Could the implementation of the Mental Health Questionnaire (MHQ) in the workplace improve wellbeing and reduce sick days?

This report is a further development from the paper presented at the UCO Research Symposium on 30th June, 2022.

Paula Litherland – Programme Tutor in Sports (Oldham College)



The Mental Health Questionnaire: The workplace wellbeing solution

The Mental Health Questionnaire (MHQ) is an innovative, validated, psychometric tool developed by the author in conjunction with Edgehill University for an MSc dissertation project. The MHQ was designed to measure the trajectory of mental health using lifestyle factors as markers. The bespoke MHQ strategy is a potential 'game changer' for workplace wellbeing as it intends to improve physical, mental, and metabolic health by offering early preventative behavioural change interventions. The MHQ provides scores for 11 lifestyle outcomes to tackle the wider determinants of health and ultimately reduce chronic disease.

The MHQ will be completed by an individual, followed by a discussion around the outcomes during a lifestyle discovery consultation with a wellbeing coach so that they can produce a nuanced holistic personal plan to improve health. The lifestyle discovery consultation will include setting individual specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) health targets. The MHQ psychometric measure will provide vital information on subjective health indicators that may be influencing an individual's overall quality of life and wellbeing. Specifically, the data produced from the 11 lifestyle scores will be used to inform which type of lifestyle intervention would be most effective for the client's behavioural change journey. The individual will complete the MHQ again after four to six weeks of following the holistic health plan so that the coach can identify any improvements in the scores, and signs of improved mental health. However, 'high' scores produced from the MHQ could indicate that the individual may need to be referred to a clinical professional or to be signposted to appropriate support to assess the trajectory of mental health as this would be beyond the scope of a wellbeing coach.

The MHQ launched commercially in October 2022 through the newly formed company: MH1 Global (www.mh1global.com) and data partner Refer-All (www.Refer-All.net). The sophisticated Refer-All platform calculates the scores of the MHQ questions, allowing dedicated wellbeing coaches or mental health champions to evaluate the trajectory of mental health using the data from the 11 lifestyle outcomes. The wellbeing coach offers a nuanced holistic approach to the consultation and discusses lifestyle strategies to improve wellbeing and quality of life. Conversations using behavioural change techniques during individual consultations aim to develop preventative early interventions for physical, mental, and metabolic health improvements.

The Design of the Mental Health Questionnaire:

The initial design and framework for the MHQ derived from the subscales of the biopsychosocial model developed by Engel (1977), which includes biological, social, psychological, and behavioural health determinants (Lehman et al., 2017). The biopsychosocial model was used to design appropriate original questions that reflected indicators of physical and mental health outcomes. The MHQ cannot be used within a diagnostic capacity and does not, currently, present itself as a clinical psychometric tool. The MHQ can, however, be used to discuss the trajectory of mental health with individuals once they have completed the 72-item questionnaire. Questions devised for the MHQ reflect the determinants of health, were original in design, inspired by existing questionnaires, and selected for internal validity and statistical reliability analysis. The results of the analysis produced the following 11 outcomes:

1. Stress & Anxiety
2. Physical Activity
3. Sleep
4. Employment
5. Nutrition
6. Self-Image
7. Social Interaction
8. Emotional
9. Finances
10. Confidence
11. Work/Life Balance

The 11 lifestyle outcomes: how do they inform early personalised preventative health strategies?

Mental health disorders represent an estimated 28% of the total burden of disease in the United Kingdom and are significant predictors of physical health conditions and future mortality (Bell et al., 2019). Furthermore, research recognises mental health is not just the absence of mental ill-health and further defines it as a state of psychological wellbeing, influencing health-related quality of life (Das & Horton, 2012; Dimirchi, 2018; Hu et al., 2015). Whilst research literature identifies the prevalence of mental health concerns, evidence suggests that diagnosed individuals allocated to clinical professionals accessing services to treat mental health symptoms are potentially beyond early intervention (Anand et al., 2019). Moreover, recent studies assert that the concerns surrounding mental health intensified due to the adversities individuals faced during the COVID-19 pandemic which increased sedentary behaviour and promoted social isolation. This has exacerbated the prevalence of mental health disorders (Cullen et al., 2020; Marashi et al., 2021; Shevlin et al., 2020).

According to Marashi et al. (2021), the global pandemic brought on moderate symptoms of anxiety and depression and increased psychological stress by 22%. These findings echo those of studies relating to previous pandemics. For example, Chan (2021) explored the effects of the 2009 influenza pandemic on mental health and wellbeing and suggested that lockdown measures accentuated mental wellbeing changes in the population. Social isolation was a contributing factor to the changes in mental health due to the increased amount of time people were forced to spend at home which left prolonged psychological stress on individuals. Increased anxiety was prevalent amongst individuals who were forced to work and study from home during COVID-19 and attributed their health concerns to uncertain times. However, conflicting evidence suggests that the prevalence and patterns of mental health symptoms were present before the pandemic (Fancourt et al., 2021).

The development and implementation of the MHQ draws upon this existing research and studies that suggest the trajectory of mental health may improve by modifying lifestyle and addressing the wider preventable determinants of health (Fancourt et al., 2021; Maheswaran et al., 2012). For example, increasing physical activity, adapting nutrition, and reducing sedentary behaviour contribute to improving homeostasis (Boschi, 2020; Batman, 2021) and reducing non-communicable diseases. Non-communicable diseases include hypertension, type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis, coronary heart disease (CHD), atherosclerosis, non-alcoholic fatty liver disease, and strokes. These non-communicable diseases are suggested indicators of stress, anxiety, depression, and mental health and are exacerbated by unhealthy lifestyle choices (Davey et al., 2011). Seminal studies suggest the costs of lifestyle interventions remain underestimated, and for this reason, strategies continue to be underutilised despite evidence of effectiveness (Ekkekakis et al., 2018; Schuch et al., 2016; Walsh, 2011). Through measuring subjective indicators of health, the MHQ intends to encourage increased utilisation of early lifestyle interventions as a bespoke approach by trained staff who will discuss personalised behaviour modification recommendations.

The 11 lifestyle outcomes of the MHQ and their role in the trajectory of mental health.

The literature review completed for the MHQ study explored the determinants of health and how they interact and influence the individual trajectory of mental health to promote or prevent individual behaviours systematically or antagonistically. Sederer (2016) suggests that individual behaviours and habits contribute to 40% of ill health and that simple changes to lifestyle – such as healthy nutritional choices and increasing physical activity – can have a positive effect on inflammatory markers that indicate risk of non-communicable diseases and mental health (Sotos-Prieto et al., 2016). Despite evidence that 30% of health can be attributed to genes, research suggests that behaviours and environments are the factors that need improving. Each of the 11 MHQ lifestyle outcomes identified has a role to play in the trajectory of mental health. One of the most common factors for the wellbeing coach to discuss is physical activity, this should include suggestions for moving more and not just structured exercise.



Physical Activity to improve mental health.

Physical activity is a modifiable risk factor that can affect the trajectory of mental health and may be improved using appropriate strategies prescribed by a wellbeing coach. Implementing the MHQ into a health consultation will provide a more nuanced holistic approach. The information provided will explore beyond the physical indicators of health by measuring the subjective indicators of mental health, which are necessary for the integration of salutogenic (origin of health) approaches (Brick, 2020; Firth et al., 2019; Sotos-Prieto et al., 2021). According to the WHO (2020), physical inactivity is the fourth leading risk factor for global mortality, accounting for 6% of deaths globally, 22% of heart disease, 22% of colon cancer, and 12% of diabetes and hypertension. Furthermore, research reports that inactivity is associated with low cardiorespiratory fitness, which causes more deaths than obesity, smoking, and diabetes combined (Guthold et al., 2018; WHO, 2020). Therefore, advice and guidance from a wellbeing

coach about physical activity would be more productive than discussing obesity – which usually draws more attention in public health policies (Joy et al., 2012). The evidence implies that strategies aimed to increase physical activity levels require attention and that the focus on promoting physical activity to improve mental health should shift towards more innovative strategies to encourage a more active nation (Helliwell & Huang, 2013; Jetten et al., 2017; Joy et al., 2012; Schnohr, 2018; Walsh, 2011). Stubbs et al. (2018) propose physical activity as a free medicine with longer-lasting effects than pharmacological treatment. The meta-review researched the effects of physical activity with individuals diagnosed with depression and illustrated a positive relationship between physical activity and mental health.

In the United Kingdom (UK), the New Office for Health Promotion (Department of Health and Social Care, 2021) proposes strategic plans to tackle obesity, increase physical activity, and reduce mental health by implementing early intervention strategies. The plan is to use the wider determinants of health as subjective markers to monitor progress (Firth et al., 2019) due to the high number of health concerns that are associated with modifiable lifestyle factors. The Government's proposal in the UK is to execute plans that include the employment of health care services, physicians, and psychologists to manage early intervention. Therefore, the use of the MHQ in workplaces, aligns with public health strategic plans and policies, as the MHQ may identify early signs of mental ill-health which supports wellbeing coaches to implement, execute, and monitor non-clinical interventions (Joy et al., 2012). Assessing physical activity (moving more, not structured exercise) could be one of the strategies discussed in the lifestyle discovery consultation to ensure that individuals are meeting the minimum amount of movement to improve general health.

The most recent and updated physical activity guidelines produced by the WHO (2020) included a recommended volume or 'dose' of physical activity. These recommendations include details regarding the frequency, intensity, duration, and types of activities (FITT) that individuals of various populations should engage in to receive health benefits. The FITT principles provide the foundation guidelines for physical activity and exercise prescription to promote physical and mental health (Batman, 2021). Policymakers, decision-makers in sports, non-governmental organisations, health care providers, and private sectors may draw upon the WHO (2020) mandate as it presents evidence-based guidelines that, when contextualised for practical application, can be used for increasing physical activity levels and reducing sedentary behaviour. Sedentary behaviour is detrimental to health and contributes to obesity (Batman, 2021; WHO, 2020). Moreover, reports estimate that 28% of adults in England are obese, while an additional 36.2% are overweight but not obese (NHS, 2020). The WHO (2020) propose strategic plans to reduce the global prevalence of inactivity by 15% by 2030. Guthold et al. (2018) suggest that progress in meeting this target is already too slow and imply that inactivity levels will not reach a global reduction of 10% by 2025. However, there are reports indicating that 75% of individuals voluntarily participate in physical activity (Demirci et al., 2018) to manage mental health (Cooney, 2018; Marashi et al., 2021).

More recent evidence suggests that many individuals are failing to adhere to the recommended guidelines of physical activity despite supporting evidence correlating positive health outcomes

across their lifespan (WHO, 2010, 2020). While 70% of adults report that they are aware of the benefits physical activity has on mental health and would like to increase their levels of engagement (BPS, 2018), awareness and knowledge of physical activity benefits are arguably not enough to influence change in individual attitudes or behaviours (Crocker et al., 2012). Inactivity is the most modifiable risk factor that can improve health and longevity over time. However, due to physical inactivity and sedentary lifestyles, changing behaviours and attitudes require innovative behaviour modification techniques to improve the access and duration of physical activity interventions (Batman, 2021; Demirci et al., 2018).

Physical Activity Guidelines

WHO (2020) guidelines recommend that adults undertake 150–300 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity, or at least 75–150 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity, per week. Moderate-intensity exercise reduces stress as physical activity increases serotonin, which calms the nervous system and interrupts the anxiety feedback loop to the brain, thus reducing tension in the muscles. GABA (a hormone) is also released during physical activity, providing anti-anxiety effects by interrupting the brain's obsessive feedback loop (Batman, 2021). Evidence suggests that increasing physical activity levels reduces stress by lowering the stress-related hormones (cortisol and adrenaline) and increasing endorphin production, which improves mental health outcomes. For example, noradrenaline is secreted during physical activity when the heart rate increases, and this hormone is associated with improved cognitive functioning (Boschi, 2020).

Research suggests that an effective 'dose' of exercise prescription includes moderate intensity activities. The frequency recommended is 3–5 days per week, with a duration of 20–60 minutes at the intensity of 40%–50% of V02max (maximal oxygen capacity; ACSM, 2021). The guidelines also recommend that an equivalent combination of moderate and vigorous intensity exercise can contribute to substantial health benefits. Individuals may achieve additional health benefits from physical activity by participating in muscle-strengthening activities which use all major muscle groups. These activities include bodyweight exercises or the application of external resistance, using bands or weights at home or in a commercial environment (ACSM, 2021; WHO, 2020).

Conclusion

Increasing the effectiveness of interventions designed to change a person's behaviour is a complex endeavour. The effectiveness, longevity and replicability of behaviour-change interventions has been called into question (Glasziou, Chalmers, Green, & Michie, 2014; Prestwich, Sniehotta, Whittington, Dombrowski, Rogers, & Michie, 2013). In response, researchers have argued for the need to adopt personalised support systems (Kaptein et al., 2015; Wortman & Wood, 2011). The present MHQ wellbeing solution will be completed by an individual during a lifestyle discovery consultation with a wellbeing coach, where the data will inform the type of intervention to be implemented and then used to re-test to assess

improvements to the scores. The re-test will take place after a four to six-week holistic health plan and will assess any improvements to physical, mental, or metabolic health. High scores on MHQ outcomes may indicate the individual could require advice from a clinical professional or be signposted to appropriate support to assess the state of mental health.

The initial question for this article “Could the implementation of the Mental Health Questionnaire (MHQ) in the workplace improve wellbeing and reduce sick days?” cannot be answered until there is live data collected by the MHQ from lifestyle interventions assigned to individuals. Oldham College will implement this innovative system to use as a referral strategy to identify early signs of stress in their staff. The implementation of the MHQ will require staff training for ten newly appointed wellbeing coaches to support the use of the measure and how to assess the data from the 11 outcomes. This new opportunity is supported by the college management and will include remission from teaching timetables. The intention is to use the data from the MHQ anonymously to identify any key areas that are affecting staff sick days and create strategies to improve staff wellbeing.

It is recommended by the staff at MH1 Global, that all wellbeing coaches using the MHQ system do the L2 mental health awareness and first aid qualification as a minimum. Optional training will be offered to include how to apply behavioural modification strategies and how to apply strategies from psychological models such as the self-determination model and the transtheoretical model (Batman, 2021). A user guide has been developed to assist the effective use of the MHQ, explaining the subscales of the items being measured, and highlighting the importance of the outcomes and how they may affect the trajectory of mental health. The user guide will be part of the staff training as it has instructions on how the measure could be used during a consultation to assess the subjective indicators of mental health alongside physical measurements. Modular training will be designed to increase knowledge and skills on improving lifestyle behaviours such as reducing physical inactivity, using exercise prescription guidelines (WHO, 2020), and improving nutrition by analysing a food diary more effectively. It also provides education on how to improve sleep and strategies to reduce stress. The strategy for the MHQ will be to assess data every 3 months with the college to allow discussions on areas that may need improving. There should also be discussions around which interventions are supporting improvements in the responses provided by the staff participating in the study.

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Stories from a Pandemic: a reflection on the Pandemic Project

This project was presented by Vikki Scholes and some of the participating students at the UCO Research Symposium, 30th June 2022.

Vikki Scholes – Course Leader for Education and Early Years.

Lockdown

In March 2020 the UK was plunged into a national lockdown and education was moved online. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, lockdown, and educational disruptions lasted 18 months before normality as we knew it began to return in the UK. During this time, although contact and education with students continued, little was known about the personal experiences of HE students during the lockdown.

Locked in our houses, all four walls
 Open the windows even when autumn falls
 Calls over the internet, Zooms every day
 Kill the virus so children can play
 Downing street updates from Chris Witty
 Open the wine, Oh what a pity
 When this is all over we will remember
 Never take for granted a family member

Jess Oldham, Carise Bowker, Rachael Bourne and Lianna Andrews

Education and Early Years (Y2)

The Pandemic Project was carried out at UCO with BA (Hons) Education and Early Years students following their return to face-to-face teaching. The project was used as a pedagogic tool to allow time and space for students to reflect on the pandemic creatively. Over a period of three sessions, students were given opportunities to discuss and share their experiences during lockdown and how these had affected them. The project aimed to provide a safe space for students to share their own stories from the pandemic and enabled academic tutors to gain a deeper insight into their lived experiences during this time. The stories and reflections from these sessions formed the basis of the material used for The Pandemic Project. From reflections and stories, students created art using newspapers collected during the pandemic and poetry using the Japanese art of Haiku (17 syllable poems) as well as acrostic poetry.

Technological advances and remote learning supported higher education institutions to continue delivering education during lockdown but for many educators, interaction online was reduced compared with a class setting (many students chose not to be camera visible online). This

resulted in a limited view of the reality of students' lives meaning many educators had little or no window into the reality of their experiences during this time.

A survey by Savage et al. (2021) took place 9 months into the pandemic with the results revealing a 'sustained negative impact on student mental health.' In 2022, as the world was returning to 'normal' there was an increased focus on education, a government commitment to a 'catch up' agenda, particularly for children in the early years and primary, with some consideration to older children and children's emotional wellbeing post pandemic. Questions which later inspired the project included 'was the same consideration given to the lived experience and wellbeing of adults in HE during this time?' 'Were they able to easily return, unaffected by the pandemic to continue with their education?' 'Could and should educators and institutions be doing more to assess student wellbeing as they returned to face-to-face education following a global pandemic?' The challenge for the tutors was to consider how to support students' post pandemic return in a way that allowed the time and space for meaningful reflection; but also provided students with an opportunity to create a lasting physical representation of what the pandemic meant to them.

Providing time and space for students to reflect on the pandemic with peers was the starting point. Discussions were stimulated through sharing images commonly associated with the pandemic. These provided a vehicle for students to reflect upon and share different and personal stories of the challenges they faced and the impacts on them and their families. The sharing of stories was a powerful part of the project, in which students gained an insight into the lockdown lives of their peers, allowing time for them to process their own and others' different experiences of isolation, death, separation and of mental health challenges. Personal reflections prompted students to acknowledge peers with 'I had no idea you went through that' and 'I didn't know that happened to you'. Through a reflective process, students were able to process how much they had lived through and how much had happened in a 12-month period in everyone's lives. One student commented 'a lot happened when you really think about it' whereas others acknowledged they had 'blocked out or forgot a lot of it' only recalling and remembering aspects of the pandemic through the discussions. Students reflected on the events of the pandemic from the initial frightening fear of an unknown virus in the UK, to the serious threat of Covid-19 on health, lockdown, law breakers and the more humorous aspects of a country obsessed with toilet roll! Stories of camaraderie, of the UK's unwavering support for NHS frontline staff, weekly street clapping and rainbow windows prevailed, along with the impact that Joe Wicks had on the nation's morning exercise routines, later reflected in the Haiku poem 'Eye Candy'.

Eye Candy

Everything closed

But Joe Wickes kept us going

Easy on the eye

Ruhi Zakiah. Education and Early Years (Y1)

The sharing of pandemic stories enabled students to gain an empathy and deeper understanding of the different experiences of their peers that otherwise, they would not have known. They were able to share the effects of lockdown on their own mental health through stories of separation from family, ill health, financial hardship, anxiety, depression, and social isolation. One student's feelings of despair during the pandemic were powerfully reflected in the Haiku poem 'I Will'.

I Will

Covid ruined life

But I will stay strong

I will get through.

Ruhi Zakiah. Education and Early Years (Y1)

The stories shared by UCO students reflected the Young Minds (2020) survey which assessed the impact of COVID-19 on young people, highlighting that 67% of young people thought the pandemic would lead to long-term difficulties with their mental health and wellbeing. Issues such as loneliness and isolation, breakdown in routine, and concerns about college/university work and loss of learning were raised. The end of the national lockdown signified a return to educational normality as if the pandemic had never occurred.

A series of reflective activities enabled students to identify key themes that were meaningful to their own lived experience in lockdown, and this formed the basis of their creative project. The powerful themes that had emerged from their reflections of scandals, anger, isolation, and fear are clearly represented in their art and poetry. Some students reflected on their feelings of helplessness; others expressed anger towards those who had not followed government mandated rules whilst they had been kept away from loved ones. Some students chose to reflect on more positive or humorous moments from the pandemic, this can be seen in the Haiku 'Must Dash'.

Must Dash

Toilet roll shortage

Put a mask on your face

Shopping is a race.

Emily Hainsworth. Education and Early Years (Y1)

Online Learning was the focus of some students' experiences. The dislike of remote learning was reflected on in the Haiku, 'Virtual Reality'.

Virtual Reality

**Remote learning is
Difficult and very hard
Can we go to school?**

Shuma Khanom. Education and Early Years (Y1)

Students with children reflected on the challenges faced by many who were home schooling, in the Haiku titled 'Home School'.

Home School

**Sat at the laptop
Teaching my children their work
God, I need a drink.**

By Carise Bowker. Education and Early Years (Y2)

Poetry as a medium to express feelings resulted in powerful reflective poems. One student reflected on her experiences at home during lockdown. As a clinically vulnerable single parent in this acrostic poem, 'Masks'. It reflects her feelings and awareness of her new life indoors and of the importance of keeping safe.

Masks

**Mandatory to be worn
A new lifestyle we have formed
Social distance is a way of life
Keeping safe is saving lives
So everybody can survive**

Melissa Green. Education and Early Years (Y1)

As new variants of the Covid-19 virus began to emerge, one student expressed their fear in the Haiku 'The World as we Know it'.

The World as We Know It

A global crisis

Mass fear of the new virus

Is it my turn next?

Jodie Pierre. Education and Early Years (Y1)

What was clear at the end of the pandemic project was that students had gained a shared understanding of what they had all lived through, together but also separately; connected by a shared experience but unconnected and apart from each other. Through reflection, students were able to see that they could reflect on life through the lens of the lockdown but that their experiences were not all the same. As British writer Damian Barr said of the Covid-19 pandemic, "We are not all in the same boat. We are all in the same storm." (Barr, 2020). This was the overwhelming outcome of the stories from a pandemic project, which had lasting and therapeutic benefits to the students who took part.



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Padlet as a Collaborative Tool

This paper follows the presentation given at the UCO Teaching and Learning Conference on 29th June, 2022.

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Below is the link to the main activity

<https://padlet.com/daniellevipond/y3z7s2staajw9zn9>

The online tool Padlet is a platform that allows individuals to post comments onto an online post-it wall. It allows for collaboration using links, photos, text and videos, this allows students to interact outside of the classroom.

The pedagogical reason for using Padlet as a collaborative tool is to support and encourage peer learning between level 3 Access to HE Business students. Padlet allows them to acquire more knowledge and skills from others through an interactive platform. (Al-Rahmi, Othman, Yousof & Musa, 2015).

Collaboration is an expansion of active learning, which according to Bernard (2015), can improve students' performance and facilitate well-being and motivation. As summarised by Mehta et al. (2021), active collaborative learning is a branch through the pedagogical approach of connectivism. This has been seen as a growth area since Covid which has impacted the necessary style of learning towards an online platform or flipped learning (Corbett & Spinello, 2020). Online tools such as Padlet allow the tutors to monitor, interact and keep the students on track. Deni & Zainal (2018) identified that a positive aspect of Padlet is that students do not have to register, which allows them to ask a question privately, which can foster free speech and less personal pressure. Based on updated research by Ali (2021) it has been identified that using Padlet promotes a "very student led" space and allows the students to "directly interact with their peers," which increases student engagement (Ali 2021, p3).

Context

The activity was used with 19+ students for the Access to HE Business course to increase peer learning within their research project; this is a mini dissertation that requires students to complete primary and secondary research. The project is independent and was supported by one-to-one tutorials. The activity was developed to allow students to share ideas and take ownership of their own learning.

Within the group, there were thirteen students, with an age range between nineteen and thirty-eight. Eight out of the group were second-language English speakers, but each had a high level of English qualifications. There was one student with mild dyslexia within the classroom, and colour was considered in the activity. The students were only on site for two full days a week, this limited the interaction that the students would normally get together as a group, reducing the

peer support that works really well with older students, therefore impacting the sessions' focus. Students needed to be self-motivated throughout the week to complete additional topics reading between the sessions.

The Padlet was set up as a standard wall for the students to post and comment on; they can also upload work and share media and ideas. Padlet is completed in a private environment, monitored by the tutor (Gill-Simmen, 2021). Padlet can also be used as a flipped learning activity. Based on the previous years of using this tool with the Access course, the more involved and engaged in learning the students are, the higher the grades across the course. The Access group is often seen as a second chance at Education; adults particularly embrace flipped learning as an extension of their learning experience and bring more to the sessions through their further learning (McNally, 2017).

Activity

The activity was introduced through the interactive whiteboard at the beginning of the research project unit:

Using the board, I navigated how to use the Padlet tool.

Each student was requested to post and comment on the Padlet board before the following session: this would show the utilisation and usability of the tool.

The class was given ownership of the group's Padlet board to complete their work.

Once a week, we consolidated the information within the face-to-face sessions.

The main aim of the activity is to create an atmosphere of inclusivity and work towards the desired outcome - moving towards a more collaborative learning environment and achieving active learning. (Mahta et al., 2021)

Learning Theories

When creating the activity, I used Salmon's (2013) "Five stage model for teaching and learning online". At stage one, the students need to buy into the reason for using the tool. This must successfully motivate the students to use the tool and encourage self-regulated learning (Van Allen et al., 2020) This involves showing the students the tools within the face-to-face session to show useability. The students must use the Padlet before the session to establish their online identities and interact with others within stage two. This moved the students into the third stage, where they exchanged information and supported goals. With the backup of the face-to-face sessions to support the goals of the activities and encourage online discussions on Padlet, this encourages stage four, which relates to collaboration and team/peer learning. This completes the final stage of collaborative learning (Frison & Tino, 2019). Each stage is monitored by the E-moderator (Salmon, 2011)

Conclusion

The activity was an effective tool for enabling collaboration and peer support building relationships between students on the access course. With the wide range of learners and backgrounds it also helps develop the group's cohesiveness. This improved the motivation and self-regulated learning of the students due to the impact of the two-day timetable. This allowed the students to continue interacting with each other throughout the week and facilitated peer learning and support. Padlet also allows the students to take more ownership of their learning and keep up to date with current news and trends within the marketing environment. The online tool could be further used as a formative assessment tool (Black & Wiliam, 2009), where peer assessment and feedback from tutors could be interlinked. Padlet also allows downloads of the board, which would allow the activities to be used in a face-to-face lesson, encouraging the flipped classroom concept (Reidsema, Kavanagh, Hadgraft & Smith, 2017). Due to the Access to HE course being recognised as a step towards university, the activity aimed to facilitate skills needed for higher education. The students needed to become more independent in completing assignments and using peer support to ask questions. This is one of the main objectives of the course, and Padlet is a tool that can be used to achieve this.

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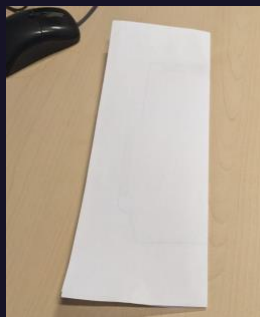
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Engaged Creativity: reflections on zine making and place writing in Rochdale.

Dr Jennie Bailey – HE LRC Assistant



Take a regular piece of A4, or any size of rectangular paper you want to use.



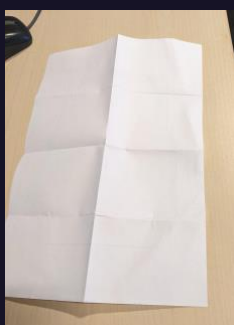
Fold the sheet in half lengthways.



Fold this in half again.



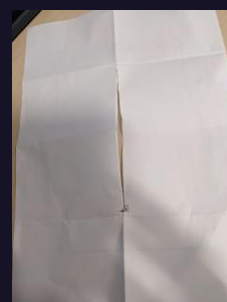
And then in half again



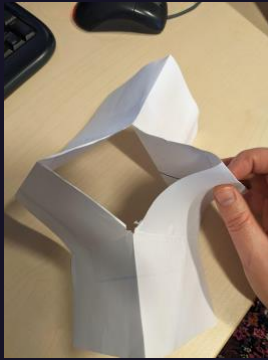
Unfold the paper and you should have 8 “panels” from folding the piece of paper. These will become the pages of your



Insert the scissors between the middle “panels” (lengthwise). You may need to snip into the middle fold slightly to get the scissor point in. Alternatively, use a craft knife.



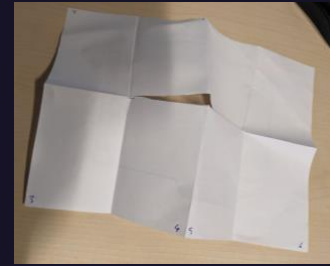
Cut down the fold length, do not cut all the way through



Pinch the sides of the paper and form a cross. This is the trickiest bit but if you give the folds a nice crisp crease this will make this easier.



Smooth down the fold at the top, and crisply refold the pages. Consider which are your cover pages and number your pages. You can at this point begin writing straight into it, but if not



...if you fold the paper back out on itself, you will see the numbers on one side are "upside-down". Refolding the zine orientates them the right way around. Use the pages to write and decorate your zine. If you would like to want to photocopy or scan it, unfold

Figure 1: How to make a zine, images writer's own.

The above method that I have described - developed from workshops that I have run for different audiences from university staff and students to families and children on issues from friendship to space travel - is one of the easiest, and possibly the cheapest, ways to make a zine. Zines, pronounced "zeens", are short magazines that tend to be: hand crafted; low technology; are democratic as they have low to no barriers to entry in creating one; and tend to be photocopyable. Zines are a way of distributing ideas and stories that may not otherwise be heard by traditional publishing.

This article draws from scholarly discourse on zine making as a form of knowledge production and peer-to-peer learning, and as a form of practice-as-research drawing upon my own scholar-activist/artist practice when creatively responding to Rochdale. While there are constraints of space, and controversies around, trying to represent the histories and "herstories" (Hanna, c.2003) of zines, this article is structured thusly: a brief overview of the histories and current practices of zine making in academia; an introduction to place writing; and reflections on making, and geocaching, three zines around Rochdale; and finally, pulling together some conclusions and questions for the future of using zines to critically, and creatively, engage with places that are sometimes considered to be on the margins and as a tool for sharing ideas in the classroom.

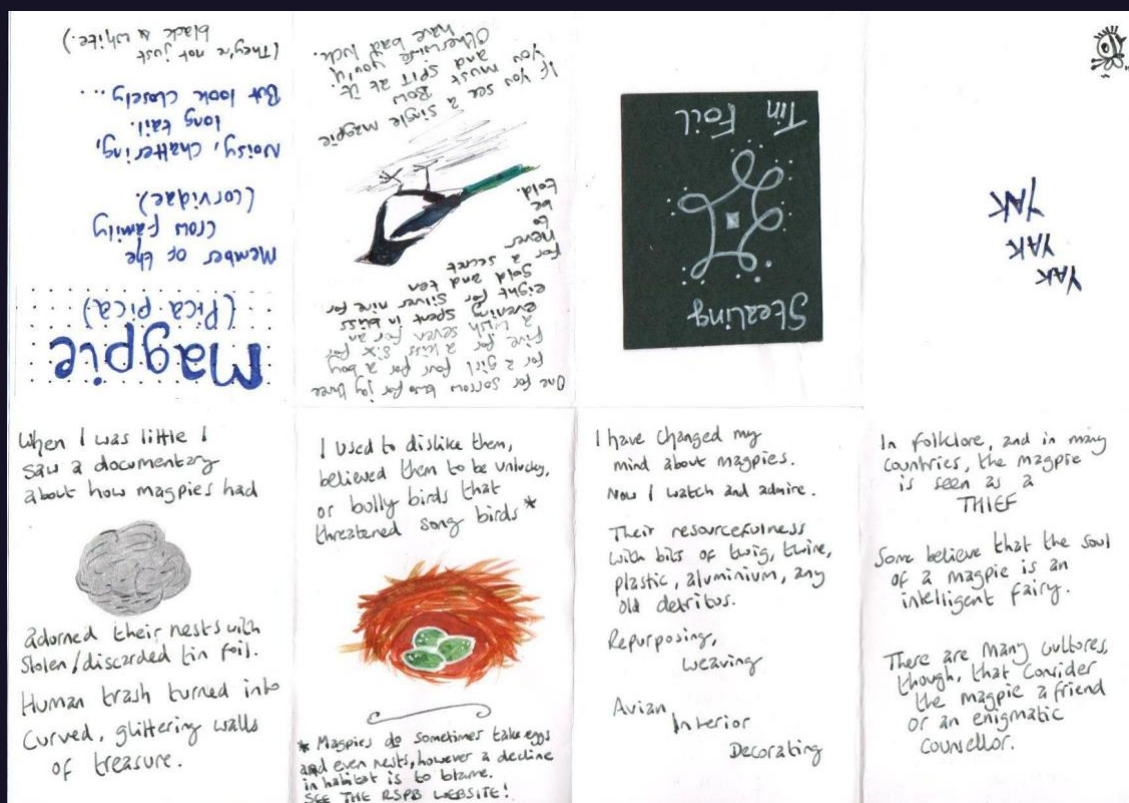


Figure 2: Magpie zine, made for the Zines in Dark Times project. Image and zine writer's own.

Zines: the art of writing and sharing

The art of writing, and sharing, pamphlets and sheets and other media while bypassing some of the gatekeeping of traditional publishing realms, is not a new phenomenon. From elegiac and political broadsides (see, for example, Acheson, 2020) to the poetry of William Blake, to activist newsletters such as SchNEWS, writers, artists, and activists have been circumnavigating, and subverting, traditional modes to distribute their work. The rise of the zine can be argued as being part of this rich tapestry of self- or small press- publishing. For space constraints, I am concentrating on zine production in the UK and the US (where 1990s zine culture was arguably more prevalent).

Zines are lively things; a form of active 'literacy practice', as academic Rebekah Buchanan posits, 'to tell our stories and the stories of the people, places, and movements of which we are a part' (2018, pxxiv - xxviii). They are useful storytelling tools that encourage new ways of knowledge production and provoke acts of 'creating and sharing' (Bagelman & Bagelman, 2016). Some of the histories of zines revolve around the latter notion, where zines were created then shared as a form of feminist "punk practice" in the early 1990s, a kickback against predominantly white male dominated "homogenised" rock scenes (see, for example, Comstock, 2001; Schilt, 2003; Creasap, 2014; Radway, 2016; and Buchanan, 2018). There are, however, more to zines than political

publications (such as Riot Grrrl), zines have been used as “fanzines” and are a way of sharing fan thoughts and original fiction (see, for example, Straw, 2023).

Due to the transient nature of zines, there is a risk of the knowledge and ideas shared by zines being lost when their authors or readers stop sharing them. However, networks of zine repositories exist such as Salford Zine Library in England, and Barnard Zine Library based at Columbia University in the US. Much work is being done to collect, care for, and promote these libraries and archives (Britton, 2018). During the first Covid-19 lockdown in the UK, writer and academic Joanna Walsh instigated the Zines in Dark Times art project, encouraging people to share handmade zines (the Magpie zine detailed in figure 2 was one of my contributions to this). Walsh’s Zines in Dark Times was one of many “zines in quarantine” projects that mushroomed during the lockdowns (Cheung, 2020).

In the age of social media networking, blogging, podcasts and vlogging, zine-making is still relevant – for example, a search at the beginning of March 2023 found that there are over 5,000 handmade UK-based zines available to buy from e-marketplace Etsy. Zines have the potential to be a form of ‘active participation’ (Dewalt et al, 1998), and utilise a pedagogical, and playful, practice in the academy. They are a form of practice-led ‘research [that] can develop unique processes for creative work and [further] research’ (Smith & Dean, 2009, p 2). This form of active participation, and practice-led research, can be seen in the creation of zines focussed on place writing.

What is place writing?

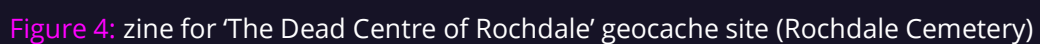
Place writing, as a scholarly concern, is an emerging inter/multidisciplinary area that has, as writer and academic David Cooper posits, over the last two decades ‘crept into the cultural consciousness, and the literary critical lexicon in Britain’ (2020, p.644). It covers artistic, and writerly, creative-critical responses to places from megacities to small dwellings or even rooms. Through my own creative-critical thesis on Rochdale, I found that by surveying, and analysing, literary texts of and on Rochdale (fictional, non-fiction, poetry, maps, and other media), like the art of creating or writing, takes time. I was immersed in Rochdale for nearly six years as a writer, academic, and artist practitioner. Immersing oneself in the borough was a complex experience, especially as places are multi-layered and complex. One of the ways I chose to creatively respond to Rochdale was through place writing, creating three zines, and then geocaching them for others to find.

The process of making a zine necessitates slow and considered practices. Making the three Rochdale zines, detailed below, involved: choosing materials - producing and printing images; choosing the theme for each zine based on geolocations then writing, editing, and rewriting the chosen text; making the zine (using the method described in figure 1) and illustrating and glueing material. Once the zines were complete, and dry, I then placed them in polypockets and used a free geocaching app from geocaching.com to hide them in three geocache sites: Hollingworth Lake, Rochdale Cemetery, and Boarshaw in Middleton. In the polypocket I included a pencil and

a folded blank zine in the hope that the finder would then take the zine, be inspired, and create a new text adding to the layered notion of place writing.

Geocaching functions like a quest, or a treasure hunt using GIS technology to find hidden locations. The larger caches contain 'trackables' items that can be traded, swapping one item with another so that the cache is never empty (Anon., 2023). This notion of trade and swapping is arguably similar in zine cultures. The geocaching network is global and sustained by volunteers - and treasure hunters - with an ethos on sharing. There are, however, limits on what can be left in the geocache due to the size of them; many caches are tiny and just provide a log to sign that you have found it.

While there are many positive aspects to geocaching, including the pedagogic potential of utilising GPS for teaching (see, for example, Lisenbee et al, 2015), there are many aspects where it is hard to repeat as an experiment. Leaving a zine and seeing whether it was reported as traded in the geocache log and finding out what happened to that zine after it was found. Further, it is also hard to measure the success of the caches unless one was to monitor the sites over time. Between July 2017 - November 2018, when I ran this creative experiment, the 'Dead Centre of Rochdale' (Rochdale cemetery) had 14 log entries; 'The Old Grammar School' (Boarshaw, Middleton) had 21 log entries; and 'MC Lake Cache' (Hollingworth Lake, Milnrow) had 87 entries. The lake cache was removed on the 6th September 2018 as it had been vandalised. As of 2023, all three geocache sites are no longer active and have been archived which, like zines, adds to the transient nature of voluntary creative collaboration. Another criticism of this practice is that it may be too situationist, and therefore does not add to understanding the complexities of Rochdale and how the place has been imagined and reimagined, and may not engender a sense of place. Moreover, those who have not heard of geocaching or are part of the network may be unaware of the sharing potential, and are deemed to be "muggles", a lexical "borrowing" from the Harry Potter series where the word denotes the non-magic population. In terms of accessibility, potential treasure hunters require access to expensive hardware, even if the app is free.



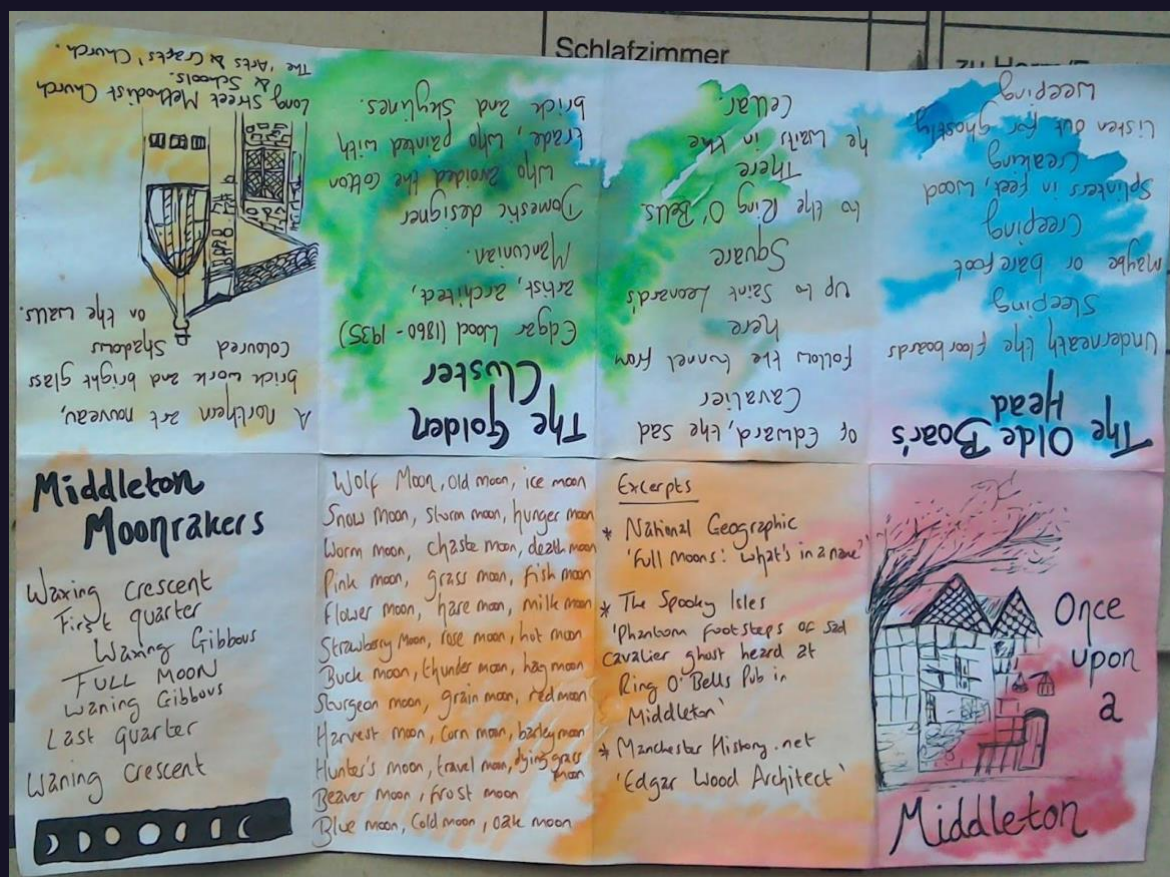


Figure 5: zine for 'The Old Grammar School' geocache site (Boarshaw, Middleton)

Zines in the classroom: practice and pedagogy

While this experiment demonstrated that although there were people who accessed the zines, a longer term or collaborative project could merit a richer response from geocache treasure hunters. The practice of responding to the three geocache sites in my writing contributed to my knowledge of these places through research and physical engagement: finding the sites to geocache the zines. This practice-led research method allowed me to think-through places and explore an area from another angle. It allowed me to explore the topic of Rochdale creatively while I was wondering how places are made in the imagination. Trial and error, and even failure and discovery, are valuable scholarly lessons!

As for zines in the classroom, from the literature there is evidence and shared practice on how they are used such as: teaching tools (Etengoff, 2016; Johnson, 2016); creating new narratives (Belleville, 2014); exploring belonging (Kempson, 2015); art activism, or "artist", practice (Damon et al, 2022); interrogating art methodologies (French & Curd, 2021); and promoting and discussing environmental justice (Velasco et al, 2020). There are also methods for mixing the analogue practice of cutting and pasting with scanning for e-zine distribution - using platforms such as Issuu - accessing different digital networks to promote voices that are not usually heard and are of scholarly interest (see, for example, Cresser et al). This demonstrates that zines, as a

form of 'engaged creativity' are flexible devices that can be used to communicate critical thinking and lead to the practice of creative and critical writing.

The idea of 'engaged creativity' has its genesis in craftivism - where making has a political or social cause, using creative energy to provoke a reaction and for positive change (Levine, 2014). This creative energy could be used for sharing knowledge in a democratic, and fun, way allowing students to question and experiment with different schools of thought, articulate their own critical reflective learning creatively, and share this with other students. As for my own scholarly and artistic articulations of place, my experiments with writing Rochdale continues in the forms of zines and other creative interventions.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to past participants of zine workshops from the Manchester Metropolitan University (Crewe and Manchester campuses), Reddish Vale Country Park, Hebden Bridge Library, Smallbridge Library, and Manchester Central Library who always surprise, delight, and inspire me with conversations and creative responses to stimuli from place writing to fairy tales to hardcore space science!

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Call for Papers – UCO Research Symposium & Teaching and Learning Symposium, July 2023

The UCO Research Symposium and the Teaching and Learning Symposium are two days of exciting contributions from guest speakers, staff and students. The symposia are taking place on 5th and 6th July 2023 and as in previous years, we are looking for contributions from staff and level 6 or 7 students in order to share and showcase teaching, learning, research, and scholarly activity.

Your contribution could involve presenting or exploring ideas around teaching and learning, a professional activity or output, a research paper, or a teaching / research project in which you were recently involved. We are looking for:

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20-minute papers

Interactive workshop / seminar sessions

Posters

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Participation in the symposia will enable you to share your practice and research in a supportive environment alongside invited guests. This is a great opportunity to hone your presentation skills for higher levels of study, other conferences, or in preparation for the professional arena. You will also be invited to feature your work in the next edition of Spark (UCO's research and scholarly activity journal).

Please send your idea/proposal by 31st May to tray.wilson@oldham.ac.uk

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