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Innovative, interactive and individualised (*i³*) teaching and learning practice in higher and lifelong education

Agnieszka Uflewska, Catherine Lido & Soumi Dey
School of Education, University of Glasgow

Email: a.uflewska@vistula.edu.pl

Abstract This article addresses contemporary approaches to learning and teaching in higher and lifelong education in the era of internationalisation and digitalisation. Drawing from our experience within the context of *Psychology of Adult Learning* (also known as PAL, our postgraduate course offered at the University of Glasgow), we developed an innovative, interactive and individualised (i^3) practice applicable for adult and lifelong learning. This i^3 approach emerged organically within the PAL teaching environment and echoes the work of researchers calling for a more balanced, personal, ethical and creative education (Robinson & Aronica, 2016; 2010; Craft, 2011). In the article we offer some insights into our PAL philosophy and structure, embedded in formal domains of lectures, seminars, workshops, and assessment, as well as less formal learning support and opportunities, particularly needed in the recent and rapid shift to online practice. Our framework is demonstrated within a semi-flipped classroom approach, and more generally advocates structuring adult learning experiences flexibly and responsively, always underpinned by ethical, inclusive, and sustainable principles for higher and lifelong education for the era of post-pandemic new normal.

Key words: internationalization of higher education; digitalisation; i^3 practice; lifelong learning; creativity; ketso; collaboration; intersectional inclusion

PAL Background

In light of the ongoing post-pandemic 'new normal' of rapid digitalisation and internationalisation, educational institutions are faced with critically reappraising their teaching practices and learning environments. In particular, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have been responsively modifying the types of knowledges and support offered to an increasingly diverse and internationalised student audience. Through these changes of digitalisation, globalisation and massification of higher and lifelong education, we see the era of 'conservative mono-cultural reproduction' giving way to a 'plurality of voices, ontologies and epistemologies' (Phipps, 2019). This offers adult learning facilitators a plethora of challenges, including moving beyond merely reproducing past heritages, toward incorporating diversity of knowledges present in our internationalised cohorts into andragogical practices (Dimmock, 2019).

Thus, our Psychology of Adult Learning (PAL) journey commences with adopting a definition of psychology reflecting these contemporary changes. We first apply a definition provided by the British Psychological Society (2019), conceptualising psychology as the scientific study of peoples, 'attitudes, behaviours and emotions', and more specifically how we as humans 'think, act and react' with and to others in the world around us. Understood as such, psychology's reach as a discipline goes far beyond lay conceptions of counselling psychology, and both historical psychological theory. Current empirical work critically informs the evidence base for educational practice today, from learning and memory to metacognition and self-actualising one's full potential.

In this context, we then argue that psychological research, particularly in the domains of social, developmental, cognitive, health and counselling psychology are increasingly relevant to adult learning and teaching practice (Tennant, 2006; Anathasou, 2008). Other emerging trends informing our work include adult learning strategies for inclusion, decolonisation of knowledges, and learner-centred and learner-directed approaches (Wu, 2020; Schweisfurth, 2013; Gale & Mills, 2013; Britton et al, 2019). Although we acknowledge global variance of how these trends have been considered in adult and lifelong learning settings, our framework and practice specifically emerged from the origins of andragogical learner-centred approaches, and are explored further below.

Moreover, additional global trends can be seen in increasing creativity in adult learning practice across Smart and Learning Cities initiatives for educational, economic, social and technological impact (Osborne et al., 2021; UNESCO, 2019; Campbell, 2012; Craft, 2011). Such research on creativity in adult learning encourages questioning assumptions, interdisciplinary cross-fertilisation of ideas, and creative learning and teaching methods. Creativity stimulates innovation (Jeffery & Craft, 2004), and is defined educationally not through a lens of 'natural talent', but as a set of skills and predispositions educators and learners might develop as an on-going, life-long process of exploration and problem-solving (Dweck et al., 2014).

Although a full exploration of the concepts above are beyond the scope of this paper, these current adult learning trends of inclusion, decolonisation, learner-centredness/ directedness and creativity were of fundamental significance in developing PAL approaches. PAL has been iteratively developed over 8 years in the School of Education, to run across multiple Master programmes (in Education and Psychology) to develop current and future adult learning practitioners. Many of our PAL alumni were engaged more widely with community development, youth work, psychological practice, teaching English as an additional language, and wider social change. At its core, PAL aims to integrate theory and evidence-based research from two main disciplines, Psychology and Adult Education, focusing each week on a

domain of psychology research (e.g. social, health, cognitive, counselling), asking *how* historical and recent empirical work in the area can help us to develop our adult learning practice together.

Thus, PAL offers a unique opportunity to blend disciplines by applying creative learning, teaching and research methodologies. PAL has organically emerged as Psychology *OF* Adult Learning, rather than continuing to address Psychology's subjects as separate from Adult Learning Theory (Psychology AND Adult Learning), with research at the heart of evidence-based learning and teaching practice, integrated with creative and innovative learning approaches. Yet, creativity alone is not sufficient for developing a meaningful learning and teaching practice: critical reflection and high self-reflexivity are highlighted as necessary to uncover a potential reproduction of the often unconscious biases, factual inaccuracies and generalisations (McCormack & Titchen, 2006; Ash & Clayton, 2009). In this context critical reflection features a number of principles, including thoughtful practice, empathy, ethics, academic and personal integrity, self-awareness, as well as openness to challenge oneself and one's assumptions (Jarvis, 2009; Csikszentmihalyi, 2002).

Other aspect intimately associated within PAL includes meaningful learning. We use Rinkevich's (2011) definition of it emphasising an assurance of safe educational spaces for learning and teaching based on respect, trust and mutual support. Situated in such environments (both online and face-to-face), we explore psychological implications of learning predispositions among adults, behaviours and orientations in action, both inside and outside of formal classroom and virtual learning environment (VLE) settings. As a result, PAL is accordingly underpinned by principles of ethics, responsibility, inclusion, sustainability and openness to change. We proffer below the i^3 framework core to its design and implementation.

i^3 Framework Underpinnings

As stated, the i^3 is the key structural foundation to our PAL design, learning facilitation and support, as the course advocates offering learners a diversity of opportunities to grow and express themselves within the course's content. This includes consideration of neurodiversity, complexity of prior learning experiences and an embedded multi-cultural focus in design. The recent response to the post-pandemic next normal demonstrates further the urgency to facilitate a meaningful higher and lifelong education, both virtually and in the real world, which recognises ongoing social change and adapts to challenges of internationalisation, massification and progression of *smart* VLEs. Therefore, having reviewed the current trends in Psychology and Adult Learning leading to the development of PAL as a course, we will now unpack the underpinnings of the i^3 framework before moving to its demonstration in

practical course delivery, assessment and learning support below. All theories and the empirical research discussed above are explicitly taught as part of the course, making this a metacognitive journey of learning.

Innovative

Theoretically the innovation of *PAL* stems not only from the evidence-based approach above, but from the interdisciplinary blending of historical and current psychological thinking with classical sociological and educationalist perspectives, namely Knowles' Andragogy (1980), with Mezirow's Transformational Learning (1990), layered within the context of oft cited Critical Pedagogies (Freire, 2005; 1996; see also: Au, 2007). In other words, we approach our learners with the assumption that they are holders of valuable existing 'funds of knowledge' (González et al., 2005). The course offers opportunities of knowledge exchange to allow for confronting the frames of references of other learners, ideally addressing the natural power imbalances we each have brought to the learning space, and disrupting our existing knowledges.

As regards implementation and practice, the innovation is described below, and stems largely from the introduction of creative approaches to teaching and learning, incl. semi-flipped classrooms (face-to-face and online), co-creating learning contracts and novel and responsive opportunities for support outside class (such as the Ketso hands-on information-sharing toolkit that supports collaborative learning and enables inclusive cooperation, as well as online diaries). Each will be described further below.

Interactive

The course's theory incorporates interaction via the study and application of Johnson and Johnson's Cooperative Interdependence Theory (1989; 2013), which evidences the role of cooperation, competition and independence in educational outcomes, proposing structure and process for positive interdependent interactions in learning. More broadly the course is developed from classic social psychological approaches of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), explicitly investing in the development of positive in-group identification and course affiliation for successful learning outcomes. Finally, in terms of successful interactions, we also draw more broadly upon Bandura's revised Social Cognitive Learning Theory (1986), with its emphasis on self-efficacy of learners, but also consideration that educational outcomes are a function of the individual within the learning (group and course) environments.

As regards practice, such interaction is described below in the semi-flipped-classroom practice, where we advocate Vygotsky's (1978) notion of scaffolding our learners to become adult learning facilitators themselves, and

assigned groups based on 'About Me' forms, to maximise culturally diverse interactions. In addition, such interaction is necessitated by the dialogues described below. Such interdependent learning approaches are in line with the broadly understood African traditions placing learning and education as a communal and shared endeavour (Fasokun et al. 2005).

Individualised

The theoretical underpinning of the individualised aspect of our framework is rooted in an orientation towards intersectional inclusion in adult learning, meaning marginalized identities are not only acknowledged but diverse student needs explicitly discussed and advocated for within the classroom pedagogy and curriculum (in line with Linder 2019; Case 2016). Additionally, we highlighted the emergence and particularities of our i^3 framework, being our organic response to increasingly multilingual and multicultural learning and teaching spaces. As stated above, inclusive intersectional pedagogies/ andragogies are consistent with the longer-standing traditions of self-directed advocacies and Self-Determination Theory (specifically Deci & Ryan, 1980), upon which our foundational approach was built (see also: Cafarella & Cafarella, 1986). Finally, theoretically we must acknowledge both traditional and modern humanistic psychological traditions from Rogers (1951) to more recent models of flourishing (Titchen & McCormack, 2010; Titchen et al., 2011) and Motivational Interviewing (Rollnick & Miller, 1995; Miller & Rollnick, 2012), which helped us extend beyond learner-centred approaches, offering tools, strategies and opportunities empowering students to explore and action the personal and professional development changes they are seeking.

In practice this can be seen in the Traffic Light system described below, and the diverse offering of optional support (online and face to face) outside the classroom using Ketso and online journaling. Learning support is understood here as an integral part of the educational process, necessary to enable a meaningful learning experience, and is not defined through the lenses of *dis* or *in* ability. We created the learning support space to accommodate the diversity of motivations, experiences and learners' orientations, as well as to meet the complex needs present in our increasingly neurodiverse classrooms.

In sum, the i^3 foundations supported the broader actualisation of our learners' potential, many of whom are experienced educational practitioners, by disrupting hierarchical power structures, enabling individuals to grow via space for active academic emancipation. We radically departed from traditional expert knowledge paradigms historically rife in academia. In i^3, creativity and transformational flourishing or self-actualising is the *end* and the *means* in education. As a result, PAL's design embeds the i^3 framework

to enable creative thinking, empowerment, nurturing of vulnerable learning identities to maximise the individual and collective potential for learner and learning practitioner growth.

Innovation in learning facilitation

The design implementation, as well as the curriculum and delivery of PAL incorporates variety of particularities, including, among many the semi-flipped classroom. These workshops are scheduled in the middle of the term, a week after delivering a thematic lecture, to ensure the learners' access to the topic's theoretical background. A flipped classroom is one in which the majority of the lecture-type pedagogical learning occurs, therefore class time is devoted to more learner-directed engagement with course content. We adopted a semi-flipped classroom solution, delivering some lecture-style content in the classroom or through pre-recorded mini-lectures, but retaining an interactive and dialogical style. The learners were solely responsible for bringing course theories to life through active learning workshop planning and delivery. Learners were supported in a structured manner, commencing with a generation of 'Learning Groups' (of up to 6 participants) reflecting intersectional principles for acknowledging diverse identities and experiences. This allowed for the emergence of creativity among the participants, helping to establish cooperative intergroup learning strategies.

Other innovations, given the cultural and academic diversity of the class, includes the introduction of a *traffic light system* in the lectures' scenarios. Starting with a green light, each learner can anonymously 'turn' on the light on their desk, which faces the educator, to amber or red, signalising difficulties in following the pace, or understanding the terminology. Also, at the beginning of each year we jointly co-create with our learners a *Learning Contract* (via online applications), making transparent this meta-cognitive level and commitment to transformational learning tenets. The introduction of a contract serves also as a part of a wider objective of empowering learners and promoting more self-directed learning actions. Indeed, learning contracts have a rather seldom practice in higher education, but our PAL experience supports their beneficial role in enabling to co-create learning outcomes and to manage expectations, both of crucial importance in the increasingly internationalised classroom of complex academic ontologies and epistemologies. The lively consultations on the type of contract last for the first couple of weeks, culminating with a celebratory signing by learners and educators.

Innovation in assessment

One of the summative assessments in this course was a *Critical Dialogue*. Stemming from critical approaches (Freire, 2005; 1996; Freire & Macedeo, 1995) the brief dialogues (2-3k words total) were carried out on a topical adult learning issue selected by the learners. These were often carried out online, via email, chat forums or other app of choice, or via face-to-face or zoom chats, and transcribed. The purpose was to explore various issues pertaining to pressing social topics facing adult learning today, and how psychological research in that area can inform arguments on such topics. Topics ranged from inclusive approaches for marginalised groups to the effectiveness of less formal online education, funding and policy promotion, adult learning for democratic social change, learning and representation of the LGBT+, minority ethnic and social class voices. The exchange places dialogue and dialectic learning and metareflection at the heart of transformational learning experiences (Freire & Macedo, 1995), and often cross-cultural knowledge exchange and application of research to experiences results in a critical and transformational learning outcome for both partners.

Innovation in learning support

In addition to the formal learning strategies above, we utilised a variety of methods, including Ketso, a Digital Journal, and a range of informal learning opportunities offered to our participants, via moodle and VLE access.

Ketso is a hands-on information-sharing toolkit that supports collaborative learning and enables creative engagement for inclusive cooperation. Tactile and interactive, it was invented by Tippett (2010; 2005) and means 'action' in the Sesotho language of Lesotho, where the concept originated. Ketso techniques facilitate successful data gathering in polarised and often socio-culturally diverse environments by creating spaces for innovative transmission and representation of knowledge and ideas. Subsequently, it has been utilised in PAL to facilitate individualised and group supporting sessions, enabling participants to benefit from other than verbal and traditional methods of knowledge transition and sharing. Significant for densely multilingual environments, Ketso has been empowering individual and group flourishing by allowing the much-needed space for expressing and structuring theoretical understanding, as well as for building confidence in research discovery and communicating abilities.

Also, the jointly co-created Digital Journal has been another method incorporated to foster learning support through combining other than verbal means of knowledge and ideas exchange. Utilising digital habits of our participants (Hansson & Sjoberg, 2019) and virtual space offered by the University of Glasgow, we collaboratively shared images and reflections of our PAL learning journeys, generating a cooperative space for exchange and

reflection on ideas, practice, experience, leading to more complete understanding of the theories studied. The approach, derived from the work of Paivio (1971), who defined information as a two-sided coin consisting of visual and verbal aspects, allowed for stimulating imagination, a factor necessary for activating innovative and creative thinking for the era of accelerating social and environmental change.

Finally, we introduced numerous additional activities designed to enhance learning and engagement, including our ever popular 'Cross-cultural bring a dish to share' event that has been providing extra space to display and share eclectic aspects of our vibrant cultural identities. We did so, as following Fasokun et al. (2005) we recognise that learning is a process combining a mixture of individual and collective activities, with interdependence and collectivism being actually the value system of majority of the world's population (see also: Bredemeier 1998; Greenfield 1994). Hence, we are determined for our participants to become integrated in all type of learning initiatives across the University's campus and beyond, including staff-related *petcha kutcha* evenings, art exhibitions linked with class learning, engagement with local charities, and research engagement through active participation in postgraduate seminars.

Conclusion

In this article we shared the background and framework for our i^3 design to implementing Psychology of Adult Learning for practitioners of higher and lifelong education. We demonstrated how this organically co-created i^3 approach might be reflected in the structure and organisation of lectures, workshops, assessment methods and learning support. Indeed, the feedback for the course emphasised that the approach benefited participants not only with an in-depth understanding of theories studied, but more significantly, provided them a space to rediscover themselves as educators. This includes applying the semi-flipped classroom, allowing for introduction of creativity into education of adults, and provoking learning as a positive and empowering experience. The organisation of lectures and workshops allowed for cross-cultural knowledge sharing and co-construction, utilising imagination and incorporating previous life experiences. The innovative assessment methods, such as the critical dialogue, allowed for an implementation of skills learned throughout the course, enabling critical, competent and confident argumentation. Finally, less formal spaces for knowledge exchange and support, such as Ketso, digital journals and cross-cultural events (face to face and online) highlighted the importance of diverse learning support opportunities for gaining confidence, and provided reflective spaces, discussion, and knowledge exchange. By now, many of our alumni are active lifelong educators themselves, interweaving the PAL principles and underpinning i^3 framework into their own contextualised practice globally,

ensuring more balanced, personal, ethical, responsible, and sustainable educational experiences. Our advocated approach is increasing necessary for globally conscious citizens to creatively, confidently and competently address complex challenges brought by the digitalisation and internationalisation of the post-pandemic next normal. For us, answering the lifelong learning call to address global challenges and empower adult learners remains our ultimate motivation.

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