

In the Field with Writing and Thinking (Literally)

How does the pedagogy of the Institute of Writing and Thinking (IWT) contribute to the ethos and delivery of Black Mountains College (BMC), Wales?

How can IWT reinforce/engage with students and tutors with a more embodied and creative approach, initially focusing upon the delivery of further education programs offered at BMC?

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Abstract What I hoped to demonstrate was that the IWT Writing and Thinking pedagogy has a place at the table with the hands-on, Level 2 vocational courses as a part of core skills delivery, in a way that engages with the lesson content in a meaning-making and generative way. Could writing and thinking be a constructive and valued part of the core-skills delivery, as a part of outdoors-based vocational Level 2 courses, at an innovative, start-up institution with climate change at its very heart?

This study reflects on a year-long project that set out to ascertain the efficacy of applying writing and thinking in a setting where 'learning by doing' was at the very centre of two courses, Regenerative Horticulture alongside Coppicing and Greenwood Trades. Core skills sessions—a mandatory part of student entitlement on both courses—provided the opportunity for my experimentation to take place at the start of each week on a Monday morning.

A range of writing and thinking strategies were engaged with over three terms. Private free writing, dialectical notebooks, loop, focused free and reflective writing all provided opportunities to engage with core skill content in a way that helped to facilitate meta-cognitive spaces, more than the students perhaps realised.

At different points in the study, writing and thinking strategies showed they were able to connect, like, the values and ethos at the heart of BMC and the experienced and lived world of the students. It helped to explore possibilities, to pose questions and encourage empathy across climate-focused topics that by their very nature, were challenging and pressing.

What I found was that writing and thinking is able to dovetail into the manifold approaches to teaching and learning that are evolving at BMC, in a way that helps to further nurture curiosity, build collaboration and engage deeper thinking. Writing and thinking could be successfully used as a part of a tool kit, one that serves to bridge, connecting ideas and reflections between a wide range of topics and foci. This would help in establishing and

developing a meaningful, complementary practice to that already evolving at the college.

Given beneficial conditions and pitch appropriate delivery, writing and thinking can work beautifully at this level.

1. Introduction For the main part in this study, I reflect and evaluate upon working with a range of writing and thinking strategies, engaging with adult students across two vocational, non-writing based courses, Regenerative Horticulture and Coppicing and Greenwood Trades. (These courses are accredited by City and Guilds and validated by NPTC Group of Colleges.) (NPTC 2019)

The year I spent on this study wasn't without bumps in the road, and at times was difficult, but it was a valuable and insightful learning experience and one which has verified the application of the efficacy of aspects of the writing and thinking pedagogy working with a Level 2 vocational group. What is key is understanding that the pitch, the motive for applying specific strategies (why, when and how) and even the indoor learning environment itself, has to be just right or at least close (we all accept that outdoor environments flex and sway through the year). Going in too quickly and too deeply as I did at the outset, caused at least one student to stand back from aspects of some sessions at the start of term one, and yet, for others, it simultaneously offered welcome challenges, leading to deeper thinking and generative discussion alongside moments of generative surprise that accompanied the act of writing itself.

This study also explores how dialectical notebooks were used to start and hold a written conversation, a valuable strategy when exploring emotive and challenging subject areas. Incorporating strands of writing and thinking into the core skills session importantly served in part to help build a sense of collaboration, community and empathy which was evidenced positively—albeit to varying degrees (this also included loop and focused free writing). In this setting, it was opportunities for collaborative writing exercises that then enabled small and whole group

discussion that were considered as those holding the greatest value overall by the core skills students.

Balancing writing and thinking within the existing core skills curriculum (which importantly, is constantly evolving and was only in the second year of its implementation during the time this study took place) while using it in such a way that it served to enhance and create moments of deeper learning, connection and synthesis, between learning purposes and intended outcomes required a great deal of preparation and thought—and even then, that was not a guarantee of it working as had been intended. But it was time well spent and provided a valuable learning opportunity for those involved. Specificity was an issue throughout the year crafting the right questions and prompts elicit responses that encouraged further thinking and curiosity. Even so, listening to student voice, there were occasions when prompts felt a little bolted-on or contrived. There were also occasions when students would have welcomed more time to explore their own creativity. It was noted in surveys that creative opportunities for writing weren't long enough to fully explore a prompt and response to 'warm-up'.

Managing student and course expectations, the environmental learning conditions and the actual physical time available to accommodate these factors, influenced the depth and quality of final outcomes with regard to the generative capacity of using writing and thinking tools. It was a case of depth over breadth that was needed at times when applying a writing and thinking strategy, working with the content which was at times too wide to offer a students a foothold in the core skills sessions. There was also a need to link session content more directly to the vocational courses themselves, thus encouraging a transfer of skills and ideas between the two aspects of the practical, outdoor based courses.

The addition of myself to the core skills sessions at the end of September was a surprise to the group, and consequently, so was writing and thinking. Taking this into consideration, the benefits to utilising writing and thinking tools outweighed the drawbacks—and there were plenty of both.

While correlations and inferences can be made throughout the main reflective section in this study, in considering how the IWT pedagogy can be used on a broader level, my initial and main focus is with the Level 2 core skills group, as this is where my time has been spent over the year exploring this project. There are many areas in this study that I would very much like to have explored in more detail and there are further observations, reflections and evaluations that have not been included here that have already, in part, been shared with BMC.

Essentially, I conclude that the IWT pedagogy could usefully and meaningfully be implemented across all levels of

BMC provision (both with students and across faculty) as a way to engage with and deliver content on a multi-disciplinary basis, along with application around planning and curricula development (and across degree modules) as a part of the BMC embodied and experiential ethos at an incredibly exciting and innovative stage in its growth and development. It could also serve as a natural stepping stone, for a student transitioning between levels, up to the BMC degree. Writing and thinking could be applied in layers, deepening and enriching student response as they undertake their studies, drawing from a deeper well each term / year, both within the context of their specific learning environments and beyond.

What follows is a reflection of that journey—of what worked well, and what provided valuable learning opportunities. There were moments of clarity and deeper thinking and a sense of real joy, as well as those that didn't quite get off the ground. I have only been able to select a slim range of detailed examples of the journey to share with you here. I hope that the benefits of our writing and thinking rich realisations will be ones that bubble up to the surface for some time to come, for all of us who were involved.

I would like to acknowledge gratitude to Director Ben Rawlence in offering this line of enquiry with this project. I am especially grateful to the support, grace and generosity afforded me by Tiwtor Jo, and also to the core skills students for running with this exploration into writing and thinking—I couldn't have done so without their cooperation, engagement or attention.

2. Context Set up in 2017, Black Mountains College (BMC) is based in Talgarth, in the Black Mountains of Powys, Wales with a second campus in Treherbert, Rhondda Cynon Taff (RCT) operational from September 2023 offering the two same vocational courses as mentioned. September 2023 also marks the start of the third year offering Level 2 vocational courses at the Troed yr Harn campus and for the first time, also at Treherbert, RCT, and will be piloting a third course in NVQ Nature Recovery on campus at Troed yr Harn (TyH). September 2023 also marks the pilot rollout of its degree BA (Hons) Sustainable Futures: Arts, Ecology and Systems Change ("Higher Education", n.d.). A range of non-accredited short courses (day long and residential, in-person and online) run at different points throughout the year and have done so since 2020.

BMC was set up in direct response to the climate and ecological emergency we are currently facing. "BMC focuses on the challenge of our times: how to build a fair and just society within safe planetary boundaries." (About BMC, n.d.) It is very much at an evolving and emerging point in its development. It is also an incredibly exciting time for the college, one which allows for innovation, for bold and creative thinking, for experimentation with how learning is acquired, experienced and then transferred into life

beyond the college; not losing sight of the urgent motivation underpinning the college's initial inception. From an article in The Guardian Newspaper that will be visited further on in this study:

The NVQs also include “core skills” such as climate science and empathy, with neuroscience informing innovative educational techniques that emphasise outdoor and multisensory learning, utilising creative practices such as painting and dance to enhance learning. (Barkham 2023)

BMC is creating a unique educational approach that seeks to equip students with the skills to engage constructively with the socio-environmental shifts and changes that climate change is already presenting to our current world experience. BMC considers that climate and ecological literacy is as important as maths and English, particularly over the next three decades. The vocational studies of the college are applied within the context of a world that is rapidly changing, where change is unavoidable and increasing in pace.

With so many unknown factors circling around what we think we understand about climate change and how they will ultimately be presented to us in our lived world, the college aspires to encourage students to try and critically engage with what we do know while considering how our world may or may not change. Noticing, sensing, being aware of our whole body learning, and then deciding what actions we can each take in response to this. During the core skill sessions, BMC wanted to encourage students to both seek and consider a range of data / information and to critically enquire and pay attention to what could and couldn't be verified, all linking to aspects of climate change, to then try and 'fill in the gaps'. Themes and topics were planned with a programme of study in place to structure content, while leaving the delivery of the content to the expertise of the core skills tutor Jo Price (Tiwtor Jo). The students all wanted to 'do something'—this is partly why they signed up to find out more about how to grow food trialling regenerative farming techniques and learn about coppicing and greenwood trades, all while developing eco-friendly adaptive skills responding to climate change. Each student wanted to make a positive difference. Enrolling on one of these two Level 2 courses seemed to demonstrate each student taking an element of control over what at times possibly felt like overwhelming odds on a global level, reflecting a shared motivation to contribute to forms of active hope, positive acts, across their communities, businesses or homes.

The BMC learning and teaching ethos seeks to engage learners on a multi-sensory basis, recognising that as humans, we learn with our whole bodies and that learning should be engaged with in a way that is both active and inquiring. Again from their website:

We know from neuroscience that humans learn with all their senses and store memories in their whole body.

Our learning model, applied across all our courses, integrates the head, hands and heart, multi-sensory protocols, outdoor learning and multiple hierarchies of knowledge or ways of knowing.

Our vocational courses include an invitation to students to think critically about wider global issues and systems, and our higher education programme uses experiential and problem-based learning, practical skills and arts-based training in cognition and perception alongside more traditional activities of reading and writing. Moreover, we aim to encourage crossover between the vocational and degree strands, so students can study alongside each other and potentially transfer from one to the other. (About BMC, n.d.)

The learning mission of BMC is also informed by the Well-being of Future Generations Act (WBFGE) 2015¹. This is a policy developed by Wales for Wales:

Wales faces a number of challenges now and in the future, such as climate change, poverty, health inequalities and jobs and growth. To tackle these we need to work together. To give current and future generations a good quality of life we need to think about the long term impact of the decisions we make. This law will make sure that our public sector does this. (“Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015” 2021)

BMC describes itself as a mission-oriented institution and is not limited to a specific level, with an open admissions policy and with support offered to those who would like to study for a GCSE in Maths / English:

...we look for potential to contribute to change, not prior achievement. This requires collaboration and everyone's input. We apply the science of learning at all levels: learning is practical and theoretical—with our programmes addressing real-world challenges practically and holistically, combining insights from a wide range of disciplines and professional practices. (BMC FAQ, n.d.)

The BMC core skills curriculum extends from that established by Neath Port Talbot College Group (NPTC 2019) with the usual focus on Literacy, Numeracy, Digital Competency while also engaging in discussions around several pastoral themes. This would also be usually targeting 16—19 year old students and by building out

¹ Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015: the essentials [gov.wales]

from it, BMC utilises the opportunity to engage with the wider issues around climate change. The pilot of it in Year 1 resulted in amendments being made for Year 2. It has since been re-shaped further for Year 3. It is an ongoing learning process. These courses were fully funded by the Welsh Government. And were delivered over three days weekly 9am—3pm taking place at Troed yr Harn Farm (TyH), Talgarth on or in the woodlands in the vicinity of the 120 acre campus.

Core skills sessions were held physically, outdoors in ‘nature’s classroom’ as well as indoors or under cover. They seek to address a range of topics while also connecting to the hands-on and practical and skills based courses. The vocational courses are non-writing based and completion of the course is evidenced through individually completed project work with engagement evidenced throughout the year by the subject specialist core tutor. There is no formally written component to gain accreditation.

Working alongside Tiwtor Jo on Monday mornings, enabled me to experiment with a range of writing and thinking strategies and seek to ascertain if the implementation of strands of the pedagogy into this core skills entitlement was a constructive, meaningful intervention in helping to further explore and consolidate the content being shared while aligning with and reinforcing the teaching approach and ethos of the college.

In May 2022, following a meeting with Director Ben Rawlence it was agreed that in the light of the recent degree accreditation with Cardiff Metropolitan University, that this capstone study provided an opportunity to explore possibilities presented by the CLASP program with IWT and the Writing and Thinking pedagogy. This study is a result of that conversation.

3. Methodology In setting out the teaching and learning ethos of BMC from the outset, it is no coincidence that there is a correlation between BMC and the Black Mountain College, North Carolina, US 1933—1957.² The two colleges are aligned in many ideological ways. I will be drawing upon the works and influences of educator and philosopher John Dewey 1859—1952 (who was also a board member with the original Black Mountain College) with an eye on the ‘learning by doing’ pedagogy. The writings of bell hooks and Carol R. Rodgers, whose insights further helped me to frame and consolidate my own. My own approach to this study has been one engaged in reflection and evaluation throughout. I turn to Rodgers on Dewey, as she captures his thoughts on reflection so clearly:

Dewey had four criteria for reflection: that it is a meaning-making process that moves a learner from one experience into the next with deeper understandings of its relationships with and connections to other experiences and ideas; that it is a ‘systematic, rigorous, disciplined way of thinking, with its roots in scientific inquiry’; that it is a social process and must be done in the company of others; and that it requires particular attitudes, like open-mindedness, wholeheartedness, directness, responsibility, and curiosity. (Rodgers 2020, 81)

Surveys consisted of between 10–12 open and closed questions taking between 15–20 minutes to complete. The third and final survey included tailored questions developing upon responses provided in Survey One and Two. Cumulatively, they provide a wealth of information which informs the study throughout. Data was also collected from a four person focus group conversation that also fed into findings.

3.1. Participants and data collection Participants were selected on the basis of their participation on one of the two full-time courses that were running 2021–2022. This totalled a group of 19 students, 18 of whom were invited to engage in this study, and where all 18 gave informed consent to do so. Pseudonyms were chosen by each student. They joined the BMC community from a wide-range of socio-economic and educational backgrounds, with intergenerational age spans of over 25 years, from early 20s to 50.³

There was accommodation for some of the students onsite with others travelling to college from locations largely, but entirely, within an hour’s drive of the campus. A small number of students relocated from across the UK, mainly England and Wales, to attend the course.

This cohort brings a rich and diverse range of work experience and prior educational attainment spanning from GCSE level up to those with a PhD being represented across the group. Several had prior working experience based overseas across a range of settings, including work with land based charities and organisations and in more academically inclined fields, including education and science. What was clear from the outset, was that each and every student shared a passion to learn hands-on skills that could be applied in their own businesses, across their communities and in their own homes. They each wanted to ‘do something’ to make a positive contribution, taking an element of control and direction in the face of challenging times—that of climate change. More than one student had made a mile-stone level decision to attend their chosen course, and investments of many forms had been made. There was much trust to be respectful of.

² More information here plus further signposting: An Essay By Ben Rawlence—“Public Education in an Era of Planetary Emergency” [blackmountaincollege.uk]

³ Attendance averaged 82% with absences authorised bar one on Mondays.

Research undertaken is largely qualitative based on my own journals, observations and reflections throughout the year with input from conversations gathered with the core skills tutor. Quantitative data is used to inform overall findings and suggested going-forwards steps in the form of three surveys administered at three points throughout the academic year, October / March / June. Survey Three included questions tailored to each participant, inviting further reflection based on responses from previous surveys. A short focus group conversation (held by the core skills tutor) that was recorded in June 2023 also feeds into the study.

3.2. Introduction Out of a possible 27 weeks (excluding the first three weeks in the first term before I joined the group) 21 weeks allowed for the weaving in of writing and thinking pedagogy—even if, on some occasions, it was limited to a private free write at the start of the day. Out of these 21 weeks, strands of the writing and thinking pedagogy formed a part of the actual delivery on 16 occasions. On the 5 occasions when the planned exercises weren't able to run, it was largely due to time limitations or changes in the time-table on the day.

Despite the challenges that accompany a new term and cohort, let alone a new course and especially one that was still evolving and taking shape, the core skills group were very aware they were part of something new, different—radical—even. They knew what BMC were setting out to do on a wider scale beyond their own course, and that their own experiences and reflections would form part of an innovative stage of a college fresh off the blocks and in development, while simultaneously transferring their newly acquired skills back into their businesses, communities and homes. Still, my role wasn't easy. There were days that were incredibly rewarding and it was heartening to see how an activity with some writing woven into it, could lift the atmosphere to one of warmth, trust and possibility. On other days, such as the one where I intro-

duced the first dialectical notebook, as I hadn't contextualised the activity clearly enough and I failed to avert quite a sharp exchange between two students, where writing had been mis-read and consequently mis-understood. The students weren't the only ones learning in a learning by doing context—I certainly was too, including doing so through mistakes which in turn allowed a space where I could remain open to evaluation and possibility.

Overall, although not entirely, the reticence that bubbled-up as a response from a minority with the unexpected writing and thinking strands feeding into a Monday morning core skill session, lessened over the Autumn and Spring term, as they were woven into the fabric of the day—and the leaning toward a regular embodied and multi-sensory approach to learning became more familiar. It was important to remain, as Dewey would say, 'alive' and 'alert' to how the group were feeling too, knowing when to change gear, adapt plans, as needed.

Over time and with familiarity, engaging with writing and thinking as a way to access session content, expectations shifted, reluctance eased, and almost on an osmotic level, the benefits of the short writing practices were observable and evidenced across the learning spaces and surveys as the terms evolved, particularly the Autumn and Spring term. By the Summer term, the arc of the term had shifted again and the opportunities to further deepen and truly consolidate the value and potential of a private and reflective free writing weren't quite fully utilised. This routine was altered, in part due to sheer practicality and the shortening of the morning session by a half hour to release more time for student final projects to be realised and to accommodate a number of speakers who had been invited to a range of core sessions.

Each week considered a new theme. In chronological order:

3.3. Year Overview: Core Skills : 2022 / 2023

3.3.1. Autumn Term 2022 Arc of the term: How do we learn?

Wk	Theme / Keywords	IWT strategies delivered
1	Induction / Welcome Why are we here? Learning styles: Visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, reflective, relational	NA
2	Where to begin? Building trust	NA
3	Bank Holiday	NA
4	How to continue learning <i>My first time meeting the class</i> Delivered by dance practitioner and BMC Academic Advisory Panel member Kirstie Simson Outdoors—field, stretch tent and sheep barn	NA

5	<p>Time—How it links to learning <i>Time, temporality, climate, adaptation</i> Types of time we experience. In the classroom and outdoors</p>	Private free write / focused free write Loop writing Collaborative writing & agreed shared responses
6	<p>Who has a voice? <i>Voice, heard / unheard, equity, diversity, inclusion, climate change, climate refugees, adaptation.</i> Listening and speaking skills. Vocal exercises. Classroom and outdoors in a field next to Generation Circle</p>	Private free write Focused free write (3 prompts) Voluntary sharing Popcorn
7	<p>How to use words <i>Words, placenames, field names, useful, land, climate, living connections.</i> Survey One Walk through Pwlch y Wrach, in a field and classroom.</p>	Private free write Focused free write (1 prompt) Reflective free write (RFW) end of session
8	<p>Why does sensory learning matter? <i>Sensory learning, whole body learning, cortisol, perception, cognition, usefulness.</i> Zoom. Neuroscientist Dr. Hanna Poikenon from ETH Zurich presents her work. Consider: What does it mean to be useful? Classroom</p>	Private free write Focused free write Collaborative writing (Loop Writing) Sharing of group responses (not individual) RFW (not shared)
9	<p>How do we know what we know? <i>Knowing, sensory learning, intuition, instinct, whole body learning, seasons, forest gardening, layering, resilience.</i> A visit to Nant Y Bedd Garden, Grwyne Fawr valley in the Black Mountains</p>	Writing and thinking planned, but not delivered. Time.
10	<p>Remembering <i>Ancient trees, ecological surveys, memory, tree time, tree susurraton.</i> Ancient tree walk Outdoors walking the farm grounds</p>	Private free write
11	<p>Preparing for the future <i>Agroecology, food sovereignty, future.</i> Guest speaker BMC Advisory Panel Member Ian Rappell Classroom</p>	Loop writing (Throwdown) Focused free write Reflective free write
12	<p>Postpone the end of the world <i>Creative thinking, future, ancestral, life.</i> Responding to Wild Arrow films Classroom</p>	Private free write Process writing to and against
13	<p>What do we value? <i>Mud, cob, earth building, values.</i> Guest speaker, cob builder Classroom, farm yard making cob (socks off!)</p>	No writing and thinking today.
14	<p>New Beginnings <i>Seeds, saving, biodiversity, non-violence, eco-feminism, life.</i> Zoom. Dr Vandana Shiva. Classroom</p>	No writing and thinking planned today.

Table 1. Autumn 2022: How do we learn?

3.3.2. Spring Term 2023 Arc of the term: How do we know what we know?

Wk	Theme / Key words / Session	IWT strategies delivered
1	Ways of knowing—Water. How to adapt to change. <i>Water; senses; multisensory; knowing.</i> PPT and presentation by core tutor and Director Ben Rawlence Classroom	Private free write Focused free write
2	Ways of Seeing <i>Observation; knowing; watershed; way-finding.</i> Watershed walk in TyH location.	Private free write
3	Ways of Touching <i>Touch; sensory; felt-time; mapping; layering; imagination.</i> Guest speak from Roddick Foundation's Cluster Mapping Project Outdoors	Focused free write prompts
4	Ways of Hearing <i>Hearing, sounds, Imbolc, reeds, rhythm, words, sacred, well.</i> Eco-poetry Outdoors	Private free write
5	Ways of Tasting <i>Flavour, taste, water protectors, activism, dialectical, ecological health</i> Water protectors locally and globally. Classroom	Private free write Dialectical Notebook Text / visual prompts
6	Ways of Coping <i>Coping; emotions; truthful; response-able; medicinal; together.</i> Exploring ways of coping with our feelings and frustrations in response to climate change Classroom	Private free write Dialectical notebook
7	Learning from beavers <i>Beavers, characteristics, healthy, environments.</i> Visit to beaver nature reserve Outdoors on site and indoors at venue	Private free write Reflective free write Re-visit Dialectical Notebooks Survey Two
8	Health and Safety <i>Risk assessment, health, safety, land, workers, alliance</i> Guest speakers from Land Workers Alliance Cymru	No writing and thinking planned Lesson cancelled (weather)
9	Being of Service—Setting up a business <i>Service, business, being your own boss</i> Presentation on do's and don'ts of setting up a business Classroom	Private free write Focused free write
10	Being of Service—Careers Fayre <i>Careers, networking, forestry, Horticulture</i> Careers Fair with local business providers from the connected sectors Livestock shed	No writing and thinking planned

Table 2. Spring 2023: How do we know what we know?

3.3.2. Summer Term 2023 Arc of the term: Building community

Wk	Theme / Keywords	IWT strategies delivered
1	Entrepreneurial Skills <i>Resilience; strengthens; threatens; innovation, futures.</i> Guest speaker from BMC trustee Classroom	Loop writing process Writing prompts
2	Visioning Skills <i>Motivation, small steps, practical know-how</i> Former students now local business people to talk about experiences. Classroom	Private free write Collaborative questions
3		-
4	Half term and Bank Holiday	
5	Super Proofing Skills—Regenerative Horticulture <i>Regenerative, resilience, experimentations, diversity, resources, collaboration.</i> Guest speakers from Land Workers Alliance and a BMC adviser from College for Real Farming to discuss future of horticulture Outdoors at coppicing sites	Reflective writing Writing prompts
6	Resilience. Future Proofing Skills—Coppicing & Green Woodworking Trades <i>Regenerative, resilience, experimentations, diversity, resources, collaboration.</i> Guest speakers from Wood Knowledge Wales, Aber Forestry, and Bronwin & Abbey Forestry join to discuss where the Welsh forestry industry is going. Outdoors on horticulture plots	Writing and thinking planned, not delivered due to timings.
7	Mediation Skills <i>Community Assemblies, deliberative democracy, active listening</i> Guest speaker—Local councillor talking about her work with Citizens Assemblies, deliberative democracy and active listening. Outdoors stretch tent	Writing and thinking planned, not delivered, timings. Survey Three
8	Storytelling Skills / Creative Cultures / Systems Change Guest speaker Writer in Residence for Bannau Brycheiniog National Park and storytelling Outdoors on site at Pwlch y Wrach	No writing and thinking planned or delivered.
9	Schumacher College visit Camping trip	No writing and thinking planned or delivered.
10	Graduation Day Onsite at TyH	No writing and thinking planned or delivered.

Table 3. Summer 2023: Building community

Each vocational course had two further days of weekly study, in their specific areas including topics such as:

- Producing a planting plan
- Carrying out a site survey

Regenerative Horticulture

- Soil conditions
- Preparing ground for planting
- Planting out plants in rows by hand
- Propagating by grafting / stem cuttings / indoors from seed
- Identifying damage caused by plant pests
- Applying fertiliser
- Tree and shrub identification

Coppicing and Greenwood Trades

- Sharpening and maintaining edged hand tools
- Cut, process and extract coppice
- Tree identification and properties
- Felling and processing trees up to 380mm
- Controlling pollution incidents
- Maintaining coppice health and productivity
- Planting trees
- Monitoring health and safety

- Chainsaw maintenance and training provided

4. Reflection

4.1. Autumn Theme: How Do We Learn? September–December 2022

All education is experimental, whether or not we call it that or not. We simply can't help that and we are experimenting with very precious and valuable material in the lives of these young people. We may think or try to convince ourselves that there is not experimental element in the situation, but practically everything we do, every course we lay out, every class we meet, is in its effect an experiment for good or for bad... Rollins College, 'Curriculum Conference Proceedings.' Typescript, 19 Jan., 1931, 8, conferences and meetings files, Rollins College Archives (Reynolds 2016, 7)

On an early autumnal Monday morning, walking up to the campus from the town car park, navigating lanes that were first laid down during the mediaeval era, crossing over fields and down through The Dingle (ancient woodland, and a favoured spot for a private free write) with its ancient oaks, glossy hollies, lean hazels and elevated view of the River Ennig, can offer a grounding and welcome start to a day. Once The Dingle was behind, a gate passed and then another half way up a field, the farm buildings of Troed yr Harn—now the main BMC campus—edged into view as you took yet another pull to the top of a further field with a row of trees for company on your left—perhaps once an old hedge boundary itself.

You couldn't help but connect to the landscape around you. Many who are used to hearing the Welsh language, speak of its guttural quality. And yet, since we were shown an old map with the naming of the fields, a further resonance was created. Names such as Gaer Onin (Fort Onin), Waun beilan (beilan moorland) and Cae Eynol (Friendly Field) deepened a connection during the walk up and with the campus itself. I loved how the wheel of the seasons turned through the year, and how being physically challenged to engage with the walk to get to campus, served as an opportunity to notice shifts and changes within our immediate surroundings, something that we all (usually although not always, depending sometimes on the weather) welcomed. The sound of water perpetually on the move would accompany the quiet chatter and laughter of the students along with occasional grumbles. I could always tell by the quality of the ground underfoot, the ease of the earth as I pressed my weight upon it, figuring out the type of mud—if my return walk would be via the lanes—a slightly longer route but one that offered a few more minutes to reflect upon the morning's session. Quite often I would pause on the way back, taking in the view across to Mynydd Llangors where I live, enjoying the view from an altered perspective which always seemed



Figure 1. Walking up the Dingle

to shift and alter quickly depending on time of day, the light, weather.

This shared experience on a Monday was intended to help create the learning community and link us to our physical world, experiencing nature in a beautiful and rural landscape. The walk, the conversations, the noticing—all called upon active engagement and participation, setting the tone for the day while also reflecting the green policy at BMC, encouraging cars to be left in the town car park. Pavel Cenkl refers to Dewey in this provoking quote:

We can no longer afford to keep the experience of learning at the periphery of education. It must take place at the very centre, in a model where 'learning by doing' is not relegated to the margins as an ancillary activity (Kumar and Howarth 2022, 255)

Where possible, sessions were held at least in part, outdoors—in the farmyard, under the stretch tent or in the former livestock shed. Time was otherwise spent in the classroom (a converted barn) with a wood burner, some chairs, fold out tables and an access point to a laptop with a projector.



Figure 2. On the walk down

Once on campus—if we were dry and warm—a fairly prompt start could be made, usually by 10am. For those who couldn't walk up (for physical or practical reasons with kit) they would meet everyone on-site. If they arrived via our meeting point in the car park, they would soon have a boot full of our backpacks for a lighter walk up.

This was the environment into which I'd been invited earlier in the year, to explore the role of writing and thinking within the core skills element of otherwise entirely skills-based courses. I hoped that this experience would be generative, feeding positively into the overall experiences of the students, not only during their time on their courses, but beyond across the wider aspects of their lives. I hoped in the words of Nicole Wallack to “reinforce and extend the content goals of our classes” (Vilardi and Chang 2009, 26) I wanted to encourage and nurture a little of the magic of writing and thinking within this new learning community, something that could be augmented in a meaningful way, across the arc of the core skills curriculum that involved the word written, spoken, shared, reflected and evaluated. As a way to encourage discussion arising from written thoughts, listening that was active and attentive while being observant and enquiring, where our time together was undertaken with authenticity and care.

My hopes were partly borne out—albeit inconsistently. There were some beautiful and poignant moments as well as those that were difficult requiring a different handling to what perhaps was offered at the time. I soon realised, as much as I love all things, writing and thinking,

doesn't mean everyone else will feel the same way. At times the pitch was too high, especially given the time allocated to explore weighty and vital topics which really required greater specificity and more time to unpack than a session allowed.

I was grateful for students being so open in their responses during informal conversation and through the first surveys, completed during my second session with the group. The range of work and life experience that accompanied the group was striking—interesting and wide-ranging. It was wonderful to see that despite this, the group were largely—with one exception—open to this unexpected possibility of writing and their willingness and generosity was welcomed and appreciated. I felt humbled and heartened:

I realise writing has become a very narrow tool for me... I have very little reflection on learning from what I write. Remember how much I love to write, and creative writing was my best subject to age 16. I got lost doing science, so I'd like a chance to reconnect. (Laura, Survey One)

I use writing as a reminder, a tool to help me remember and expand on previous thoughts and ideas. It helps me to get things done, but I see the beauty in it... Once you put your thoughts and ideas down on paper, you can think about them deeper without worrying about forgetting anything. (Simone, Survey One)



Figure 3. Classroom



Figure 4. Classroom view

Yes, I absolutely like the pleasure [of writing] and as a means of processing ideas or concepts I find interesting. I try to capture and reflect the collective consciousness in my writing, often in a fantasy context...Writing down your thoughts and feelings [is] a way of processing things. I find it helps clear my mind of reoccurring thought patterns. (Tamlin, Survey One)

Usually a means to end however I see and think about its importance in use when going through [the] day and issues and sorting out [my] mind. I have a basic relationship with writing after school. I definitely tried to do it as little as possible. (Edna Knickerbocker, Survey One)

Not for pleasure. Just a means to communicate and a way to remember things. (Forrester, Survey One)

However, it soon became clear that there were a small number of members of the group that had a difficult or complex relationship with the physical or emotional act of writing, and previously held associations with writing itself. The first survey illustrated this clearly—from students with a non-academic background in education (but with GCSE level qualifications), up to those with PhDs and with teaching backgrounds. On writing for pleasure:

Have a difficult and fraught relationship with writing. Had to do a lot in previous jobs and found it hard, lonely and demotivating ... a grim journey. (Ruth, Survey One)

[Writing is a] means to an end, I'm more of a visual thinker, non-verbal and also have dyspraxia, I do prefer writing for speaking though. (Stanley, Survey One)

I was aware of how writing could challenge people but I hadn't considered how someone could find it an isolating experience. Speaking of the loneliness of academia, I was put in mind of a chapter I had been reading and hoped throughout the year, that Ruth's perspective might shift, even just a little, towards something more affirming. Lesnick:

I recall a lively argument I once had with an Institute colleague about whether academic rigour ultimately requires lonely struggle. He said it did, and I said it didn't. Really, I was hoping that it might not always have to, that it might lead, at least from time to time, into a hopeful world of imaginative converse where the edges between individual and social experience might soften. (Vilardi and Chang 2009, 81)

From the outset it was clear there were some who bought-in to this extra-core-skill experience with writing and thinking and it appealed to a number of the group. Not one person had heard of Bard or the Institute of Writing and Thinking prior to my arrival and yet, although willing to give it a go. Despite reservations of some, of the seventeen respondents who completed that first survey 7/17 stated a positive response to the question "Is writing something you do for pleasure or is it something you regard as a means to an end?" where it was something undertaken as a pleasure. A further 7/17 indicated they wrote only for practicality. Two stated that they took no pleasure in writing at all, both citing very different rea-

sons. There was one non-response. However, by the second survey, March 2023, the two negative responses had shifted to answering the same question more positively, attitudes were more open to possibility. Promisingly, 5/17 indicated a positive change regarding their relationship to writing with a further seven stating nothing had shifted in their attitude—positively or negatively. It was heartening to see positives from students who had been unbriefed on this pedagogy prior to my joining them.

4.1.1. First steps with private free writing Introducing the private free write for the first time when we looked at the theme of Time, some took to it like ducks to water—heads down, pens, moving, you could see the “here and now” physical world dissolve, and the Paul Connolly expression “illusion of infinite time” (Vilardi and Chang 2009,12) certainly seemed to echo my observations and experience in that moment. However, it took a while for it to be understood as a form of writing that was private, non-judged, non-assessed. For some, there was a palpable sense of something being explored that felt authentic, new and full of promise. For others, despite paraphrased repetitions that private writing was exactly that, it still seemed to be a hurdle too high to leap over. It was hard for these students to break the connection between written words being committed to paper, not being words that were consequently read, judged, assessed. Carefully, I would reiterate: It’s not for sharing, it’s just clearing of our neural pathways ready for work and over the term, this started to form a routine and one that settled and created a space at the start of each session for the learning to commence.

Sometimes the private free write would take place on the walk up otherwise when we were on campus. However, for a couple of students, it was met with continued resistance however many ways-in I tried to suggest. *Just keep the pen moving... Doodle, sketch, perhaps outline an idea for a garden you’ve been thinking about...* The key lay in repetition, establishing a routine, a ritual. Over the first term, it became an expected opening activity, when the space for a private free write was ringfenced at the start of the day. This wasn’t always possible—and there were times in the year when some students (due to attendance on chainsaw training or absence) weren’t able to attend Mondays and this obviously impacted on the creation of a new habit.

Goldberg writes of aiming to:

burn through to first thoughts, to the place where energy is unobstructed by social politeness, or the internal censor, to the place where you are writing what your mind sees and feels, not what it thinks it should see or feel.. [to] Explore the rugged edge of thought. (1986, 8-9)

Marshall speaks of private free writing as:

...it leads to better writers by making students better thinkers, and perhaps even more aware and sensitive people... [it has] potential to stimulate self knowledge, sharpen focus, enhance creativity and promote fluency for individual writers while at the same time foster a unique sense of community in the classroom. (Vilardi and Chang 2009, 14)

I truly hoped that the private free write would provide a space for each student in the group, where whatever they’d experienced prior to meeting to walk up to college that morning, or whatever the weekend had left people with, or even how they had closed their car doors in the car park or to where they lived, that these three or four minutes of quiet private writing time provided a chance to recalibrate, set the scene, allowing a little space to experience and immerse themselves in the morning’s activities. Returning to Marshall:

Private free writing was a bridge between their [students] often difficult lives at home and the new identities and competencies they struggled to forge in the college writing classroom (Vilardi and Chang 2009, 12)

The private free writes help me get everything else out of my mind [and] really focus on the next task or activity. (Simon, Survey Two)

While I was fully cognizant of the fact that we weren’t in a ‘college writing classroom’, we were in a space regarded by some, as a reprieve from stresses and life ‘outside’ of their courses. We were all adults, with all of the diverse accompaniments that often step side-by-side with us as we make progress where and how we can, through our lives. Jim, after the first time we ran the initial private free write, simply beamed at me. We had been sitting next to each other during our writing. He’d clearly enjoyed the experience, one that had surprised him in terms of what transferred between mind, pen and page. This was further supported in a comment made on Survey Two where he said a private free write was something:

... I found interesting. I felt like I accessed a slightly different area of thinking. Kind of sharpened my mental pencil.

I beamed back. He got it. For others, it wasn’t the same. Marshall captured an observation that resonated:

I’ve watched people doodle, make lists, fiddle with pens, stare blankly at the page, defiantly at me... It can be difficult... Threatening... To find that private space in public. (Vilardi and Chang 2009, 19)

Finding ‘that private space in public’ was difficult for some, who felt they couldn’t be open with themselves for fear of work being overlooked. There were also students

who were wrestling with private issues—and the writing and thinking was a challenge, regardless of invitations to write at a level that felt comfortable, it was a huge ask for one student in particular.

The exercises that have led to comprehensive group discussions—I have found these much more useful- I don't feel writing by myself to be useful as I feel disconnected and lost. From the collective experience of learning—this feels more important to me. I appreciate the time for reflection is useful, but also that discussions can happen as well... they [the writing activities generally] ask too much of me at this time. (Nora, Survey Two)

On a physical, practical level, there was a lack of space in the classroom for some to feel any writing was private, regardless of whether we were sitting on chairs with journals in hand or on tables if we had put them out. This didn't help to ease the reticence that persisted with a minority in the group and there was an element of self-consciousness too, with a fear of having writing perhaps overlooked. It didn't always feel private, physically.

...if in the right frame of mind it (private free writing) has been useful, knowing it is private is very important. Sometimes still hard to let go of fear of judgement. (Ken, Survey Two)

With a group of 12 in the classroom (which happened some weeks), the pressure was lessened and this often seemed to be the perfect number for that particular space to be held in a relaxed and generative way when it came to anything written. What was also key—and sometimes not heard during instructions, leading to a lack of understanding—was the given audience of a writing activity, whether it was to be private, or voluntarily shared (a line, a word even) or whether it was public writing (as with collaborative responses to text extracts). It was simply a different and unfamiliar way of working with words, words as a process to extrapolate personal thought or as a way to perhaps deepen it. There were some thoughtful reflections shared via surveys from students on the private free write:

Private free writes is helpful for engaging the brain, especially first thing in the morning and can produce unexpected results. (Norman, Survey Two)

I found the Private Free Writing activity to be a useful way to write something. I sometimes struggle with writers block or feel like the work I produce has to be polished from the offset, but the free writing has helped me with that. (Tamlin, Survey Two)

I enjoy the 5 min PFW for my own personal journey / more as a journal to look back on and remember things we have done. Ramblings of my mind which

often don't relate to the learning plan etc. (Amadeus, Survey Two)

It's nice making writing a more automatic process. I've enjoyed the unfocused personal pre-writes, as a means of recording / considering unfiltered thoughts (Lord Greenwood, Survey One)

4.1.2. Thinking, writing, and talking about time The objective of this session was to “enable learners to understand how learning fits into a life and a variety of ways to manage time. To explore understandings of time relating to the land, climate change and adaptation”⁴ Care was given to which writing and thinking strategies could help to engage the group in the lesson objectives. Tiwtor Jo had planned a thinking prompt on the walk up from the car park:

What is time? How does this walk fit into our lives, the different shapes of our lives, and conflicting priorities? What happens to time as we walk? Consider different moments in the walk—quiet, talking, catching breath...

Tiwtor Jo had shared her PPT presentation outlining timings for the term, drawing out the theme ‘How do we learn’ and then discussing individual practical projects to be completed throughout the courses. During this, I noticed just how many in the group expected a teacher led experience on the course. It was insightful. “I like being led” from one. “All we have is questions.” from another. “I've got to lead my own thinking? This is making me... I hate it, but...” Autonomous learning wasn't expected in any tall measure, there was a reluctance—or perhaps, a lack of confidence with this. Another student was visibly frustrated with what she called “a paralysis of choice.” The conversation developed to consider the importance of trust, of trusting the process that they had been presented with, trusting the college too. Others welcomed a more de-constructed and open learning space, moving away from former, more traditional experiences. A new course, a new approach with a new college. And not mentioned, but perhaps implied, a new approach to writing too. “The pictures are building, I just can't see the end... yet”.

After break, I introduced an exercise I have used for many years and what I call for ease, a ‘throwdown’ but in actuality it is a form of early process loop writing, before we moved outdoors to explore our shared understandings of and connotations around and types of time. First responses were ‘thrown down’ onto a length of drawing paper and returned to, layering up like onion peel, as thoughts, curiosity and responses developed. The session felt smooth, well paced, well-pitched, where the writing and thinking strategies were working effectively, with ease and enjoyment, teasing out further layers along the

⁴ See lesson plan in appendices.

way, capturing a sense of the group itself. It looked and sounded like the class was getting to know each other. Body language was relaxed. Eye contact was being made. People were laughing and sharing anecdotes. Within a few minutes we had a visual representation of collective first thoughts and impressions. It was fascinating—an insight into a hive-mind at play. In my journal from that day:

My first time sharing this pedagogy. Let's see! People are focused. Writing. With me so far. I love time for space. For thought. The possibilities. I wonder if people will feel or sense any benefit from what we are doing, here, now, today?

We needed a way to explore different aspects of time: geological, linked to climate change, ancestral. During our planning conversations for this session, I suggested to Tiwtor Jo that we pasted extracts onto big paper moving starting in groups of three or four before moving towards a whole group sharing of ideas and reflections. Roles were suggested which would be self allocated: scribes (for those keen to write), responders (to provide spoken comment to be scribed), a magpie (someone to 'quality control' and lift nuggets from other groups that they saw or heard), and a reporter (someone to share back to the whole group a their collaborative written response as well as reading out the short text extract). This approach ensured roles were chosen according to interest, ability and comfort—so all were included. This dialogic approach was one that was hoped would encourage meaning—making for learning while encouraging communication and social interaction—while providing an opportunity to focus critically.

Once we had a snapshot of the group's first responses to the Time loop exercise, we explored a range of text extracts in groups outside on A3 paper. Tiwtor Jo had selected several extracts from three texts to include:

Dewey's Art as Experience: We do not learn from experience ... we learn from reflecting on experience / Failure is instructive... The person who really thinks learns quite as much from failures as from successes / The self is not something ready-made, but something in continuous formation through choice of action The person who really thinks learns quite as much from failures as from successes. (1932)

Ailton Krenak's *Ideas to Postpone the End of the World*: This river is an entity or character, which suggests he does not die. He doesn't go through the same experience of (time) as we humans ... So our temporality (time) is different / We are calling people to think about another ontology (understanding of time), another observation about existing, because life is not useful and being alive is wonderful. (2020)

Robin Wall Kimmerer, *including from Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*: If time could run backward, like a film in reverse, we would see this mess reassemble itself into lush green hills and moss-covered ledges of limestone. The streams would run back up the hills to the springs and the salt would stay glittering in underground rooms. (2020)

It worked. The feelings around the space was one of developing camaraderie and trust. It looked, sounded and felt—as I sat in the outside sunshine with everybody, all huddled on the floor around sheets of paper and pens, deep in discussion and sharing ideas, that a safe and nurturing space had been created where a diluted form of loop writing, a small range of writing strategies (private, collaborative and shared) had formed part of the delivery. The strategies had been carefully matched to compliment and help unpack the themes. The sharebacks were generous and all were appreciated and listened to with care and attention.

A good start, or so I thought.

There was a problem that emerged the next day when Tiwtor Jo and I spoke to reflect and evaluate. One student had found what he considered to be an unexpected classroom experience difficult to manage emotionally, the previous day. Fortunately, he shared his concerns at the BMC office and was quickly offered support⁵, but this shocked me. I had no indication of any student in distress, perhaps only a mild discomfort from the said student, with how people were grouped working outside, but this had been quickly and simply resolved. At that stage, I hadn't been informed of any student requiring particular care to help support and navigate potential triggers that could lead to anxiety in an otherwise outwardly looking session.⁶

This gave me further food for thought. It hadn't felt as if a typical traditional classroom experience had been deliv-

5 It was heartening to see over the year that the same student completed the course, and provided some thoughtful, constructive and positive reflections reflecting on his experiences with writing and thinking activities. In survey three responses: 'I have enjoyed the (private free writes and focused free writes) somewhat and it's something I might get into'. On journals: "Yeah, definitely as I've never been encouraged in education to have that private space for myself, everything (previous to the course) is always examined... (On writing shifts over the year) "Somewhat... It is more spontaneous, less hesitant or forced." On writing and thinking: "For me it is still early stages, it's not a set of tools I'm familiar or comfortable with, however I do think it has value... (it needs) a subject to engage with and I don't always understand where the sessions were coming from content wise."

6 A clear strength of the college is how it listened to and valued student voice. Students were supported throughout the duration of the course and indeed after it had finished—a testament to the wrap-around care offered by the pastoral team. Tiwtor Jo gave me the updates I needed to stay aware of individual student needs.

ered, and still one student found it too intensive, reminding him of a perhaps, of a former educational setting. I had perhaps needed to emphasise the low stakes nature of the activity, as one being a chance to explore and share our relationships to the theme of time.

The complexity and fluidity of of the thinking that occurs during collaborative learning—both in small groups and when people reconvene as a whole group—make it essential that learners have the chance to clarify, synthesize, and evaluate the textual understanding they have gained through the process... people engaged in collaborative learning need to articulate conclusions and persisting questions, lest the process of writing and responding never leads to visible, viable thoughts. Without metacognition, collaborative learning may remain too provisional, not available for shared consideration and revision. (Vilardi and Chang 2009, 81)

The core skills group had a wide range of physical, intellectual and emotional needs and interests to be met. Tiwtor Jo worked hard to meet these and worked hard to remain aware of any alterations in pace or direction that needed to be made within a session. Rodgers responding to Dewey's writing in 1933:

Dewey talks about being alive and alert, and having one's mind free to observe... The student is alive to the subject matter, and the teacher is alive to—present to—the student's encounter with the subject matter. The learners 'aliveness' comes from what Dewey refers to as his 'active and alert commerce with the world'. It is not the mere act of taking it in, he says, but interacting with it, meeting resistance in the form of puzzlement, difficulty, conflict with previous understandings, but persisting in the productive struggle of making meaning. (Rodgers 2020, 6)

The extracts chosen to create collaborative and shared responses weren't straightforward, each had their own attraction and potentially, challenge. Observing how the core skills group engaged and responded to this, the loop writing and collaborative writing tasks enabled access to the texts, being both generative appropriate. It was an accessible way to approach text while encouraging the sharing of ideas and thoughts that resulted.

At Level 2, the collapsing of boundaries between tutor and student wasn't easy for some to navigate. There seemed to be a need for greater perceived security from some students. It was a balancing act, between 'teaching from the front' as some felt more comfortable with, and with the more experiential and enquiring approach as had been planned for the core skills sessions in line with the model of learning being developed at BMC. Managing one's own learning independently wasn't something that

had been expected at this level in a core skills setting. Some simply wanted to "be told what to learn and do". A teaching approach that was in part, embodied, coupled with the writing and thinking element, was unexpected. From hooks:

What's really scary is that the negative critique of progressive pedagogy affects us—makes teachers afraid to change—to try new strategies... they should have expected that students who have had a more conventional education would be threatened by and even resisting teaching practices which insist that students participate in education and not be passive consumers. (1994,143)

I returned to Dewey:

If an experience arouses curiosity, strengthens initiative, and sets up desires and purposes that are sufficiently intense to carry a person over dead places in the future, continuity works in a very different way. Every experience is a moving force. Its value can be judged only on the ground of what it moves toward and into... failure to take the moving force of an experience into account so as to judge and direct it on the ground of what it is moving into means disloyalty to the principle of experience itself. (1997, 38)

Staying alert and responsive to shifts in class was vital, as was building up confidence with what was experienced as new approaches in engaging with session content. I always tried to think how the writing and thinking strands could serve to heighten and encourage responses to content, even when there was an ongoing transition from one expected set of learning habits to another. Looking back, I missed a beat when I failed to even consider an act as seemingly simple, as writing a postcard or short letter to oneself with a short and accessible prompt—to then be re-visited at the end of the year, was missed. An activity that I took part in recently, and one which I found deeply resonant and meaningful, and one that helped me to track my journey, measuring the distance in hopes and skills developed in a moment. How could I have missed something as profound and as accessible as that? "Another note to self."

4.1.3. Equity of voice I wondered if the fairly recent lockdowns—and the whole Covid experience collectively—impacted on how people were able or wanted to communicate, how they wanted to be held, in a learning space. As I got to know the group, I noticed how three students in particular, all having stated some antipathy towards writing (all with a degree minimum background and / or educator backgrounds), were frequently more vocally confident than others in the group. Across my observations, I was aware that I was listening to the

7 A comment made in class

same voices, while not hearing others so much, if at all. From hooks:

Once the space for dialogue is open in the classroom, that moment must be orchestrated so that you don't get bogged down with people who just like to hear themselves talk, or with people who are unable to relate experience to the academic subject matter... the bottom-line assumption has to be that everyone in the classroom is able to act responsibly. That has to be the starting point—that we are able to act responsibly together to create a learning environment. (1994, 151-152)

I tried to see beyond these sometimes strident and often impassioned voices, and consider what it was that was driving them. Occasionally, as happens with vocally dominant speakers, it had an unbalancing effect on the group dynamic especially when dialogue grew heated—we were dealing with emotive and powerful topics. There was a sense of vulnerability exposed, of anxiety and anger too, and fear for the shape of the future and the world the next generations would be inheriting. Answers or at least solutions couldn't be provided when important questions were posed in exploring some set themes, and this may have led to some of the frustration being aired. It was only natural that we were all making connections between Monday mornings and our own lives. In exploring engaged pedagogy, hooks writes of a classroom being:

...the one space where teachers were willing to acknowledge a connection between ideas learned in university settings and those learned in life practices (hooks 1994,15)

Being present at BMC, as a student, a tutor or in any other capacity could be seen as an active decision, one of active hope, being of the conviction that change can be enabled and then acted upon. From hooks again:

Progressive, holistic education, 'engaged pedagogy' is more demanding than conventional critical or feminist pedagogy. For, unlike these two teaching practices, it emphasizes well-being. That means that teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students. (hooks 1994, 15)

Yet at times I could hear in more than one voice a sense of disempowerment when discussion turned to how and why these changes were all happening, the perceived lack of responsibility being demonstrated by those who actually had the power to do something about it in a way that created quick and positive change—the hugely powerful corporations in connection with different political groups vs a single voice. What was actually needed was a resetting of systems. The wheel almost had to be

re-invented. If the world could respond as it did to the recent pandemic, then surely similar levels of response could be enacted with the massive challenges of adapting to climate change in a way that held all life at its centre.

The following two extracts resonated with me so deeply, that I would like to share them with you here. I hadn't come across the work of Alexander or of family therapist Mason before with his concepts around 'safe uncertainty'. This was something that echoed some of my observations when I thought about group discussion—and the possible triggers for heartfelt conversations. Alexander:

I remember the moment clearly. It was a Friday afternoon, and I was in discussion with my mentor. We had spent the week talking, reflecting, telling each other stories of our lives and dreams. Having signed up on how to fix the climate, I was frustrated. 'I came here to learn the rules,' I said. 'That's what I do. I learn the rules, I play by them—and generally, I win. I came here for you to teach me to do that with climate change. Not just to talk.' I remember exactly what she said in response. 'What if I told you there are no rules?' I stared at her. Then from absolutely nowhere, I broke down in tears. (Kumar and Howarth 2022, 278)

I came across the work of Mason via Alexander, too late to consider it in this setting. However, it provided me with a pertinent reflective insight, as one to possibly consider for the future as it certainly seemed to present a way to frame feelings of overwhelm and frustration. Alexander on considering Mason (author's italics):

We are living now in a time of radical uncertainty, and we have to start by facing that... This might not seem a particularly fertile starting point for re-imagining education because, if no one knows, how can anyone teach?... Mason argues that those coming for therapy tend to occupy one of two 'positions': unsafe certainty, characterised by anxiety and a loss of coordinates by which to navigate their lives; or unsafe certainty: characterised by self-disgust and rejection. All know what they think they want, and this Mason terms safe certainty: solutions, answers, fixes. The problem is not so much that this is wrong, but that it is a chimera: safe certainty simply does not exist; there are no such things really, as solutions, or if there are, they should be understood as, 'only dilemmas that are less of a dilemma than the dilemma one had'... Education I believe must seek to cultivate safe uncertainty in everyone. We need to see the challenges we see as radically unresolved in order to know that the only way forward is to see every single one of us as a participant in facing them... see information as equipment... see teachers and students as side-by-side collaborators in a shared inquiry into the future,

not transactional counterparts. (Kumar and Howarth 2022, 278-280)

This was interesting. It felt as if fears and anxieties could be both acknowledged and respected, in a way that may also provide a structure in which to hold the concerns we collectively have inside our minds and hearts, whether they are shared outwardly or not. The idea considered via Alexander, connected with me in a way that made me think about the learning space in a more heart-centred way:

A position of safe uncertainty is a framework for thinking about one's work, orientating one away from certainty to fit, a framework for helping people to fall out of love with the ideas that solutions solve things. (Kumar and Howarth 2022, 279)

I was sure that if I persisted with some aspects of writing, that it would help to nurture a space where all voices could be heard. It would take the heat out of the moment, allowing for more consideration, greater equity of voice, while also encouraging greater ownership and consideration to ideas shared.

In May 2023 towards the end of our time together, one of our local community councillors, Cllr Sian Cox, was invited to lead a session on mediation. This was such a powerful lesson. We were invited to explore what it was to actively listen and experience how a deliberative discussion (as used in Citizens Assemblies) would feel and sound. This valued experience would certainly have reaped dividends placed at the start of the Autumn term.

For deliberation to be effective it is important that an appropriate amount of time is provided for people to familiarise themselves with the various aspects of a question. While people ought to be exposed to arguments representing contrary positions, they should also be given the time and resources to discuss and reflect on the issues... The outcome of a deliberative process should be one in which people feel more able to make an informed decision on a given issue.⁸

Again, the issues of time rippled to the surface in reflecting on how equity of voice could be ensured and here, Cllr Sian Cox had shared valuable insights with us not only into how she navigated challenging conversations with clear ground rules, care and respect but in a way where we could apply similar principles to our own experiences too. Perhaps creating such a framework to hold our conversations could help to ensure equity of voice, while also acknowledging differences in opinion. Lesnick:

⁸ Taken from the landing page of Citizens' Assembly [citizensassembly.co.uk]

Learning is not possible without generative conflict—conflict that emerges from respect for and across differences. Groups need clear guidance and explicit norm setting about the value of this kind of conflict and the time it takes to negotiate it, in order for the practice to succeed. (Vilardi and Chang 2009, 82)

4.1.4. New ways, yet needing tighter prompts Tiwtor Jo's teaching approach for me, was the antithesis of what hooks referred to as teaching "without reinforcing existing systems of domination." (1994,18) We spent time talking through what it was to facilitate rather than 'teach' with the latter term laden with connotations of hierarchy, control, rules and judgements—and yet at times, teaching from the front is what seemed to be preferred by those who found the assurances of what such traditional classroom approaches offered—something safer and less challenging perhaps. Again it was a question of balance. I would sometimes invite people to write, to take part in an activity, but in a way that was open to interpretation. This openness was difficult for some and enjoyed by others:

The more open minded 'no wrong answer' / 'answer however you feel' kind of interpretations [are more challenging] . But it is rewarding, even if somewhat contrary to the way I've learned to answer questions/ record/ summarise events/ activities. Not looking for the 'right' answer. Maybe even looking to ask more questions. It's different to my schooling [and I guess mind that]...This is all fun! But I wonder how well I can unlearn nearly 40 years of writing practise, in order to write more freely (EG from the heart, not solely from the head) after only such a short college course? (Lord Greenwood, Survey Two)

I think they [prompts and writing activities] need more frameworks quite often 'what you think it means / what you see' etc is quite unhelpful. Some guiding is needed. (Robyn, Survey Two)

Would have preferred more reading / visual material than writing at the stage / levels we were approaching topics. (Priscilla, Survey Three)

I am sometimes conscious that we are encouraged to share our FFW thoughts which makes me nervous and I doctor my thoughts prior to writing due to this. Sometimes I am able to engage well with PFW and FFW, and when this happens I find them to be useful. (Ken, Survey Two)

Monday mornings incorporated elements of multi-sensory and embodied practice, and yet there was a continued need for hard, specific information to (perhaps) accompany this—or at times, be in the place of it. Survey responses reflected where it was felt writing and collaborative exercises could have been more relevant and

transferable as thinking tools to other aspects of study and future application:

I have definitely used writing differently in this course than in previous academic studies [I went to university and wrote a lot...] the [writing and thinking] approach feels like a slightly different relationship with writing than my past experiences. Sometimes it hasn't really flowed or fit in with meeting the group's needs in my opinion, maybe not being totally integrated as a method/ tool. (Jim, Survey Three)

I think that often the prompts for more focused writing were often quite obscure, so felt dislocated from the activities we were asked to do- more could be done to set the scene- or 'warm up' to writing. (Nora, Survey Three)

I think as someone who doesn't find free writing relaxing or fun I would have benefited from being given some different strategies or more 'recipes' to write in different ways—maps or stories or something. The guided reflective writing was better for this. I think overall, for me, there were issues about not having been given enough material/ context to reflect on, or the pacing of the day being such that we only scratched the surface. (Ruth, Survey Three)

Clearly tighter connections were needed.

The principle of interaction makes it clear that failure of adaptation of materials to needs and capacities of any individuals may cause an experience to be non-educational quite as much as a failure of an individual to adapt himself to the material. (Dewey 1997, 35)

In trying to create prompts that fitted into sessions were sometimes simply too open for the comfort of some. Wallack explores how focused free writing prompts can be approached:

What kinds of prompts are the most appropriate for an initial encounter with the text? What reading instructions or guidelines will prepare participants for the focused freewriting we will be doing?... What kinds of prompts or questions will foster readers' further inquiries into the text or the issues raised by it? (Vilardi and Chang 2009, 35)

4.1.5. Needing to find a balance There had to be a balance. Sessions incorporated embodied practice where possible, but again, the lack of hard content that was engaged with in session, for some students, contributed to a sense that content at times was difficult to grasp. To compound this, when Moodle wasn't being used effectively to check in with readings or sign postings to further information which would have helped to frame themes

week to week, it didn't ease the situation. I mention this as it relates directly to how writing and thinking was being implemented as a tool to help unpack content and encourage meta-cognition.

Rodgers writes:

Staying open, disciplining the urge to diagnose, requires a stance of humble 'not knowing'. For a teacher or anyone in a position of authority, to embrace not knowing seems counterintuitive... It is, I believe, our job to know our subject, and to always be making new and more complex connections. The objective of that knowing is not to show everyone how much we know but to open doors and windows through which others can step so that they might make their own connections. This takes enormous preparation... What a teacher cannot know ahead of time is what will happen in that space between learner and content, between a person and the world. That is what a teacher is present to, the space where her attention, curiosity, and inquiry live. (Rodgers 2020, 34-35)

However—and worthy of repeating again—each student knew they were a part of a college that was new, growing from the ground up. They felt a part of something vital and needed in the educational system. They had anticipated some challenge, but perhaps not in the way they experienced how some Monday morning content would be explored. This was a level two course, not a degree level, and while some welcomed a different approach others found it hard to resonate with straight away—and one or two weren't turned around by the end of the final term. This again led me back to reflecting on my own efforts with writing and thinking, and how I had used it to tease out and consolidate lesson content—and I could see how and why some sessions had to change gear, and just ease up a little, taking the foot off the gas. There was a need for parameters, a reminder of the group code of conduct. A further outlining of lesson objectives perhaps—the hows and whys of what we were doing, how it was relevant to the learning, to studies across the week.

Some weeks, I found it challenging too—this wasn't a course I had written and I was learning en route. Themes and to a large extent, content, was predetermined. Throughout the year, Tiwtor Jo was re-interpreting delivery to try and meet the needs of the learners in specific and considered ways on a week to week basis. She demonstrated a reflective practice with such care and attention it was a pleasure to witness. However, while this was interesting and exciting as a process to be a part of, it was also a situation where I felt there were times when sands could shift in the space and someone in the group would feel challenged or compromised even. But again, learning is a challenge, surely? Yes—but it also has to be accessible. Again, to Rodgers:

It is important to remember that experiments often do not work the first time! They need to go through adjustments and refinements and should not be abandoned out of hand. Intelligent action becomes the next experience... to reflect upon, and the cycle, for both teacher and students, continues—forever. (Rodgers 2020, 99)

Balance was needed with the time that was either considered too little for private free writing or where a writing and thinking activity took up possible space where an outdoor focus could have been enjoyed. Again, this set me thinking about how to create tighter prompts and writing activities that would be poised with the necessary balance. Just enough, not too much. It needed to be just right.

4.1.6. Reflective free writing and the importance of well crafted prompts However, it was evident that a reflective free write, well placed, could help students to consolidate what had been explored in a session. It was a chance to pull strands together. I hoped that using reflective free writes at the end of our morning sessions would serve as ways-in for individual consideration, perhaps noticing what further questions lingered at the end of a morning's content. Some students found the content of some sessions hard to engage with especially with a wide ranging theme, which naturally impacted on the efficacy of a writing reflection. A narrower, more specific focus could have helped with this.

By mid-term, I could see that the simpler the writing prompt, the more engaged and generative the response. Tiwtor Jo's prompt *"What is it to be useful? To have usefulness?"* was an example of this. The pitch, within the context of the session, was spot on.

Other prompts were too intangible to grasp a hold of. *"What is it, not to be heard?"* was one I gave, during a session looking at voice. It wasn't accessible—or pleasant enough—for the group. It was also early on in the term, and on reflection I felt that such a question could really only be answered once a learning community had been securely established. Another note to self.

I needed to acknowledge this difficulty with prompts. I needed to ensure access, they needed to be provided at an appropriate level, but contextualised meaningfully, linking into lesson content to ensure inclusivity—and enable a sense of play, of exploration.

However, there were some shifts taking place, some students were engaging with writing reflectively and positively. Lord Greenwood reflected in Survey Two, on writing and of any shifts since Survey One:

[I'm] enjoying writing more, and more freely. Still need to write more, and more often. [and for fun.]...

or my time could be spent between lessons adding to this. There's a lot of great discussion at the time, and it can be hard to capture/ reflect that in five or 10 minute writing windows. That said, the time limits do help focus thoughts, what's worth recording etc... [I'm] Still confident in my command of words. Less confident writing freely and creatively without "pre editing" thoughts and concepts... This is all fun! But I wonder how well I can unlearn nearly 40 years of writing practice, in order to write more freely open brackets EG from the heart, not solely from the head] after only such a short college course ?

It was encouraging to see this response. It highlighted a resistance in part, explained by the shape of traditional education as experienced by so many. Marshall:

Private free writing can be fun; not knowing what will happen next is fun; it can be a kind of play... And that like voting, private freewriting, an individual act performed in public, can be the first step in participating in a classroom community that ultimately endeavors to be dialogic, democratic, collaborative and academically rigorous. (Vilardi and Chang 2009, 19-20)

I could see how writing and thinking strands could be easily woven into the fabric of the course. It had potential, a meaningful role to play. I felt it could have flourished with some further, gentle nurturing and encouragement—and more thought given to creating prompts. Establishing the learning environment in a way that allowed for speculation, for thought, and inquiry—without any sense of judgements or hoop jumping creeping in—was so important. Conditions had to be curated and nourished in creating small yet impactful shifts, practices, habits:

The basic characteristic of habit is that every experience enacted and undergone modifies the one who acts and undergoes, while this modification affects, whether we wish it or not, the quality of subsequent experiences. (1997, 35)

By mid-December the majority of the students were settling into themselves, settling into the routine of writing, as writers themselves. One student (Robyn) continued to draw or sketch rather than write, as this was clearly her preferred medium of communication when it came to pen and paper throughout the year. However, the ease with which the journals came out (even for drawing reflections and responses), the quiet calming space a private free write or a simple, crafted thinking prompt could create was a pleasure to see:

Private free writes is helpful for engaging the brain especially first thing in the morning and can produce unexpected results. (Norman, Survey Two)

Private freewriting to journal my college days and general thoughts each Monday. Though this doesn't benefit my learning journey I feel it will be nice to look back on when the course is over to reflect on activities and my mindset each week. (Amadeus, Survey Three)

The private free writes help me get everything else out of my mind and really focus on the next task or activity. (Simon, Survey Two)

I found the Private Free Writing activity to be a useful way to write something. I sometimes struggle with writer's block or feel like the work I produce has to be polished from the offset but the free writing has helped me with that. (Tamlin, Survey Two)

I personally appreciated the time that was designated for the private writing and in a sense it was useful to think about some proposed questions though writing first rather than being asked outright. (Norman, Survey Three)

I have enjoyed the no pressure approach [private free writing and focused free writing] allowing thoughts to gather and once start to write I find the words begin to write themselves...Reflection opens up memories and theories and once reading over your writing can adapt and build on ideas more easily... Putting thoughts into words makes us more selective and makes us think of the cement way to word our thoughts and develop and further thought. (Edna Knickerbocker, Survey One)

Again, it still posed a challenge for those who were reluctant, and also, for those who wanted a Monday to be more physical, engaged with their actual tools or just as a chance to catch up with each other:

Personal free writes first thing are difficult as I often just want to speak to people on a Monday morning. (JC, Survey Two)

Sometimes the private free write can be a challenging thing to step into first thing on a Monday morning! It can be difficult to switch into thinking/ reflecting mode, I do find doing it outside useful as it can inspire and gives something to write about. (Ken, Survey Two)

I also encouraged people to engage with doodling, sketching—whatever they were comfortable with, just to get the pen moving.

I have drawn in response to a lot of the writing tasks and found this quite engaging. (Robyn, Survey Two)

There was value in taking just a short three minutes or so to settle—people would sometimes come in late, or need to grab a hot drink from the kitchen area or eat

a breakfast. Creating a little space where we could all prepare for the morning session served more than one purpose including being able to start at the same time, and for some, while not all possibly a chance to engage in our own thoughts or a chance to put them to one side to allow a deeper focus for the time we had together. Marshall:

The mind is the world—not the whole world of course, but a microcosm, separate yet familiar, contained within and sustained by the macroscom. Private free writing encourages reflection on these worlds. (Vilardi and Chang 2009, 17)

4.2. Spring Term Two Theme: How Do We Know What We Know? January–March 2023

The Spring term had a new arc, one exploring learning through the senses. Some found it over-conceptual and hard to pin down, or unfamiliar perhaps, not resembling how traditional learning had been acquired. Signposting resources and reading materials (including short films, links to websites as well as to journal articles and books) were put up in advance, usually over the weekend prior to a Monday session, on Moodle. However, not everyone accessed them in good time for a session and reliable tech access was also an issue for one or two students. When students were asking for more materials to engage with, they were being provided yet they weren't accessed equally across the group or perhaps with enough time for them to be given attention.

The weather wasn't always on our side, and our Monday morning sessions could start later than planned as a result of having to dry off and warm up. However, by the end of January, Tiwtor Jo noticed a quiet focus within the group. In one of our conversations, we had spoken about the challenges of holding a space with care and a lightness of touch. It takes time, it requires attention, especially with so many personalities and a range of interests and motives across a group. Tiwtor Jo was right. The tempo had changed. A routine was settling in. The morning private free write didn't pose the challenges it had. The shift experienced at the end of December continued into the new term and it felt generative.

A presentation given in January at the start of the Spring term, was one where students were invited to listen while freewriting or watercolouring, and this served to help process what was being shared with them. The facts were hard hitting and I could see how keeping moving was a way to process and assimilate information being shared. Keeping hands moving, in an almost non-cognitive way allowed for an element of relaxation while being presented with challenging and unsettling data. The frustration here was again, at the end of the presentation, that there wasn't enough time to unpack what we had all heard, to explore further. The course, by its very nature, was at-

tracting people who already cared for the world around them. This would also partly explain the outbursts that happened in class when it perhaps felt like it was the only safe space where such fears and anxieties could be met with compassion and a sense of solidarity.

4.2.1. A creative moment, dialectical notebooks and beavers at Elgrog In February we were led by Tiwtor Jo who introduced us to eco-poetry writing, with its environmental focus. We were encouraged to explore the world of the Reeds, exploring the non-human world as opposed to our own. This was a novel experience for many in the group and an enjoyable one. We were all gathered on the edges of Lower Talgarth Common, a new location. There was a sense of mutual appreciation of having a little time to simply connect with our landscape, while focusing on a very specific inhabitant of the common, taking in everything around us and having a little space for some creativity. We were encouraged to write in conversation, with our environment, and then with each other, in a playful, low stakes way.

I liked some of the poetry that people shared. I am usually quite interested to hear what others have written. It perhaps gives you more of an insight into who (of themselves) they present to the world. (JC, Survey Two)

The week after this, the first of two dialectical notebook exercises ran, with focusing on the role of water protectors locally and globally, during a multi-sensory session exploring taste. We started off with tea tasting, and then shared a range of prompts—written and visual—taking in the Friends of the Upper Wye (local to the BMC), Tryweryn memory protectors, the water protectors of Standing Rock, the Wet’suwet’en peoples defence of the Wedzin Kwah River and the Chipko tree hugging movement. I had hoped that using the dialectical notebook to explore the selected texts would encourage interactions between the students, as a way to expand perceptions and stimulate reflective conversation. It was challenging, and took a real shift and it called for people to write from points of view different to their own (believing and doubting). It generated mixed responses, but they were weighted towards the positive. Bledsoe:

The dialectical notebook is a tool to help students in the slow work of developing habits of mind that support a more authentic encounter with texts. (Vilardi and Chang 2009, 107)

I noted in my journal that:

I should have taken more time to set the exercise up—perhaps rushed introductions to texts without contextualising them. Now the whole group is engaged—people are talking more freely in share-backs—looks and sounds like leading to engaged



Figure 5. Seated conversations

and natural conversations around planting, water supplies, our food chain.

However, it also created the forum for two students to verbally spar with each, when they were sharing responses. There had been a mis-reading and therefore, mis-understanding ensued.

I didn't enjoy the dialectical notebook entries... on one occasion [it] produced an unintentionally confrontational situation due to a misunderstood response. (Tamlin, Survey Two)

... this activity led to a sort of conflicting way of communicating. I did not enjoy it. Felt like being set up to argue... I felt that it led to conversations that were challenging in a slightly unpleasant way. (Jim, Survey Two)

The atmosphere had tilted. Somehow, what I thought the dialectical notebook would avert, happened, perhaps through a lack of close reading. No-one enjoyed the display of frustrated and adamant emotions that were shown. It took a couple of sessions for it to settle—but it did. At this point, the group ground rules could have been re-visited from when they were set up at the start of the autumn term and I should have organised the activity into smaller groups (we started in pairs and moved to whole group sayback, but smaller groups may have held this with more care). Overall, I noticed there seemed to be a preference for small group discussion across the group and perhaps this may have also helped avert the heated conversation. Lesnick:

Learning is not possible without generative conflict—conflict that emerges from respect for and across



Figure 6. Group work by the window

differences. Groups need clear guidance and explicit norm setting about the value of this kind of conflict and the time it takes to negotiate it, in order for the practice to succeed. (Vilardi and Chang 2009, 81)

The second dialectical notebook activity evidenced just how quickly understanding the process and the value of its application, could be. Pushing with this after the ‘fails’ of the first, illustrated that something could be improved quickly while developing familiarity—and further reflective opportunity. Confidence was built up with re-visiting the strategy:

We can sense an increase in intensity, seriousness, and activity in the room. Many of our students are thinking thoughts they had not thought before (Vilardi and Chang 2009, 25)

This time around, the group had been interviewed earlier in the term, for an article that was written for a national newspaper, focusing on BMC and its development.⁹ This was used as a prompt and students were invited to share comments and phrases that they found positive and affirming, celebrating the brave steps that had brought them to the college and their chosen course. During this activity, there was the low hum of a group focused in writing, thinking and conversing—the text related directly to the students themselves. It had relevance. The written dialogues sparked further conversations—it was

⁹ See “We create changemakers: the new UK college dedicated to climate crisis” [The Guardian]

so rewarding to witness. Students were each finding their own, comfortable level of written response and using that to develop spoken conversation. It felt and sounded focused, caring and generative. The dialectical notebooks provided a way into the conversation. It was interesting and more insightful the second time around—it was easier for people to engage with. The written comments reflected thought, attention and were also able to pose different perspectives without generating the mis-understanding and disagreements that had surfaced with the first dialectical notebooks.¹⁰ There were also some alterations in perspective—a testament to this particular writing and thinking tool. I could see how when it was well planned and clearly delivered, it allowed for shifts and cognitive connections that may not have been enabled so easily in a whole group or verbal only discussion. For me, this was an example of a collaborative learning community. What I found particularly interesting with the follow-up part to this exercise, was how reflective comments were framed by some students in reaction to that day’s experience at Eligro (beaver sanctuary, more details below). Connections were being mapped across topic areas and experiences.

The dialectical notebooks didn’t work for all, but I persevered as I felt strongly that vocal equity was something to encourage and I hoped the exercise would appeal at some point, to all across the group—but with this type of activity, time is such a precious resources, and yet just an extra ten minutes may have created an even deeper response (we had allowed 60 minutes for the second attempt but it was curtailed and actually ran to 35 minutes on the day. On the day it was a busy morning as there were colleagues from the college observing and a previous activity took a little longer than planned to complete.

The dialectic was potentially interesting but I felt there was too little time and space around it to engage with material and work through questions and responses raised in the group. (Ruth, Survey Two)

In early March, we spent a day at Eligro Nature Reserve¹¹, a beaver sanctuary. Eligro is in my home community, just a few miles from the BMC campus in Talgarth. I have watched the reserve grow from its first planting, around 10 years ago to where it is today and felt it would provide a perfect opportunity to inspire and engage the core skill group. I was delighted we could arrange a visit. Colin Preece, who created the reserve, is a gifted and passionate speaker, and his enthusiasm and knowledge was readily conveyed to the group. This day-long session completed the multi-sensory exploration of taste. After a morning walking tour of the reserve and presentation, Tiwtor Jo

¹⁰ Examples to follow below

¹¹ Eligro Nature Reserve—Llangorse—Brecon Beacons National Park

ran a 'heart, hands, head' exercise, writing prompts were woven into the day. The change of scene at Eligro with its inviting and comfortable workshop space and endless supplies of hot drinks, helped to ensure a well-held and engaging learning experience. From my journal:

After lunch—all settled down so quickly to writing reflectively—instant, no questions. Reminded it wasn't a private free write—that it may be shared in part either in conversation—in groups or not. Three absent today. But the atmosphere is quite different—even Stanley has gone back to writing. A fabulous morning = super attitude and levels of focus, curiosity. Covered many aspects from bio-diversity, to nitrates, water, farming, wetlands. I'm hopeful some of the information will make its way into conversations at some point. Will they make connections between beaver behaviours and their own? Resourcefulness, managing the environment... nature's engineers... It really feels like something has clicked into place... people are simply picking up a pen and responding to the prompts. A lot of reflection taking place. Focus. No-one is distracting others, pulling people off task. It's calm and considered. It feels and looks thoughtful.

This reminded me of how, presented with a great deal of data and information after a tour of the nature reserve itself, students needed time to assimilate and reflect upon what had been shared with them and this was accommodated with a short consolidating free write to complete the morning. It felt like a perfectly balanced day, with a range of varied activities and approaches to encountering information, accounting for all learning styles, while offering space for further thought and curiosity.

...the method of intelligence manifested in the experimental method demands keeping track of ideas, activities, and observed consequences. Keeping track is a matter of reflective review and summarizing, in which there is both discrimination and record of the significant features of a developing experience. To reflect is to look back over what has been done so as to extract the net meanings which are the capital stock for all intelligent, dealing with further experiences. It is the heart of intellectual organisation and of the disciplined mind. (Dewey 1997, 87)

Examples of the second dialectical notebook exercise, with reflective comments beneath are below.

Comment	Response	Reply
<p>[include 'core skills' such as climate science and empathy]</p> <p>Teaching 'empathy' is critical to building back a community based system, where we can communicate with and support each other, learn to live with respect and patience toward one-another. If the well-being of our neighbour was on our priority list perhaps community change would be more visible in the wider world. Less me, more us.</p>	<p>I totally agree, empathy is something which is really neglected as a value in society or education. The world would be such a better place if that 'brain muscle' was better developed. Montessori education is particularly good in the early years (0-12). I guess there will always be differences of opinion on issues & generational divides from 'learned cultures' but empathy would at least help bridge the divide & open channels of real communication</p>	<p>Perhaps we can get to a place where empathy + respect are a human wide 'learned culture' and we celebrate difference and accept contrasting details. We are supposedly a smart bunch (human race) I have hope!</p>

Notebook A. Response writer: At least practising empathy is something that we as individuals can start doing right now. Today. In the very next moment & interaction with the next being that we meet. It is a means to changing the world that will become systemic, will change society and it is something that we as individuals actually have power over, to practice and engage with. Especially when everything feels so overwhelming and hopeless.

Comment	Response	Reply
<p>It's a problem of consciousness and values and supply chains and a way of looking at the world.</p> <p>Businesses need to be involved -</p> <p>the also want to disrupt the UK education system.</p> <p>this is crucial but needs to happen at secondary school level.</p> <p>There is a growing desire for climate-literate students from young people - students</p> <p>This makes me feel hopeful as they will encourage change</p>	<p>I feel so positive about education with secondary schools & younger learners. I think that the efforts to educate in a better way are going on & energy well spent.</p> <p>Humanity is so inherently adaptable and able to learn, and we don't even know yet how much things could change from where we are now.</p>	<p>I hope this is the case as the current curriculum does not encompass values which encourage young people to care about their environment. Corruption + effect on the planet.</p> <p>This is true but the speed of change is not fast enough to support ^{educate} the devastation that has already taken place.</p> <p>I don't hear or see many young people talk about the environment or caring about nature.</p>

Notebook B. Commentator response: After today's talk by Colin (Eligro) perhaps there is reason to be more hopeful given how fast beavers can change & adapt their landscape. Resilience of living systems—if right conditions exist and can generate quickly.

Comment	Response	Reply
<p>It's a problem of consciousness and values and supply chains, and a way of looking at the world?</p> <p>I agree with this sentiment and it's interesting because it's not often expressed verbally in this way. I like the recognition that our approach to climate change is impacted by our values and our experience with the natural world.</p>	<p>I agree that this sentence clarifies an often quite abstract sense of the problems with climate change + the debate/rhetoric around it often being led by scientists, and it's useful to recognize how we are all implicated and how political it ultimately is, and the relationships with social values, business interests + policy intentions.</p>	<p>Yes, definitely political and hugely impacted by business interest, and the values those companies/people hold. I guess I wonder how we can affect change in such vast complex political systems in a globalised capitalist world - its daunting and frustrating when values and ways of seeing the world are so hugely different and often it seems that how we change ways of seeing the world so that the value of nature is recognised without monetising and 'processing/using' natural resources</p>

Notebook C. Comment writer: I still agree with what we discussed, the large scale problems feel insurmountable. I guess what Director) Ben was trying to suggest is that by addressing our consciousness and values we can begin to cultivate change.

Comment	Response	Reply
<p>"Quit hrs Job" I liked this, if gave me hope, the sense of reckless, foolhardy abandon of stability, to let your soul fly, feels positive.</p> <p>"changemakers" this made me recoil, it feels marginal to put your faith in a select few.</p>	<p>Risk and reward! Real positive change requires bravery, and sacrifice. It's a scary thing to do, but isn't the future we face scary enough without our commitment to make it even a little better?</p> <p>A buzzword, like 'disruptors', but we need a brave few to start a revolution (that leads to a popular movement, that leads to global change) ... we just need a better word, perhaps</p>	<p>adage - - the game is only worth the candle. ie. its only worth going on with commitment - agreed.</p> <p>- an image of a pebble dropped in a pond appears maybe I'm just getting hung up on ideology etc.</p>

Notebook D. Response commentator: Maybe it isn't all or nothing—beavers single mindedly adapt their landscape to their needs, unwittingly making change for good. They benefit themselves, their environment, other species and the wider area—without making ground plans to change the world. Maybe small changes to your immediate environment, within arm's reach, is disruption enough? Think smaller. Think beaver.

Comment	Response	Reply
<p>THIS IS NOT JUST A SCIENTIFIC PROBLEM. Reasoning to consider what capacity we all have to effect change whatever our skill set. Vital to understand the many and varied aspects of the climate crisis + how to engage/respond/challenge.</p>	<p>yes, the many varied aspects of climate change are important to understand and often it feels inaccessible to consider/learn/understand when there is lots of scientific terminology and concepts. Not everyone is interested and I think its easy to switch off from it because you can think 'I'm not a scientist' or its not my problem. In highlighting that it is not just a scientific problem it reminds the reader that there are many facets to this conversation and opens up ways to engage with it.</p>	<p>I suppose then we must consider how wider engagement can be successfully maintained + how science and other disciplines must interact to move the debate and responses to it forward. Hopefully institutions such as BNC will drive more traditional institutions to develop their approaches rather than remaining in opposition to this more 'radical' approach.</p>

Notebook E. No reflective response

Comment	Response	Reply
<p>'changemakers who become catalysts'</p> <p>The word 'catalyst' feels like a double edged word, brings a bit of hope that we may be able to create radical change in a world that desperately needs it. But it also brings brings with it anxiety at how quickly everything feels like it can go wrong wrong and feel like it's fallen out of our control.</p>	<p>Absolutely, it's also scientific terminology which makes it all sell like some kind of experiment, which as the second set of students to pass through the college, I suppose we are. That does put a lot of pressure on us as students though! I relate to that anxiety.</p>	<p>making change to any degree I feel will also always be an experiment, and I think that will often bring with it plenty of anxiety. I suppose that may suggest that we one need to look at how we view change and try to make steps towards how we cope with that anxiety, and how we can channel and the transform it into excitement and ideas.</p> <p>In a way I think we need to get excited about the future again and the potential we can have to make it better than our present.</p>

Notebook F. Comment writer: I think the only thing I would add to what I said is, it's important we don't try to move past / change our anxiety too quickly. It's important to feel the emotion and experience in its entirety. I think staying true to our human experience of fears and overthought is key to create transformation for change and solution within appropriate coping and grounding methods.

Comment	Response	Reply
<p>This is experience and knowledge and passion.</p> <p>Couldn't have chosen 3 words that represent my time here more accurately. We're learning through doing and that genuinely excites my interest in the subject. I enjoy our lessons, whether they're in the woodwork by barn or out in the forest.</p>	<p>I think these 3 things are the foundation blocks for the future of education. The current education system is extremely flawed. I feel that in many situations it often doesn't give you the experience you need, and in many cases kills your passion for subjects or the act of learning itself.</p>	<p>I completely agree. The school system turns us into great little workers, for someone else, but fails to prepare us for life's realities. Studying subjects such as music and art quench the creativity that should blossom through these forms of expression. It's an old system which is out dated for the modern problems we face.</p>

Notebook G. Comment writer: I think BMC are doing a good job at challenging these educational norms, especially with the introduction of their new course Nature Recovery and the degree programme. I still enjoy what we do and take satisfaction from my work. I am hoping the college will provide us with the help we need to leave the course with purpose and the information we need to go on to build from our time here and have the positive impact they're training us for.

Comment	Response	Reply
<p>"Be outside."</p> <p>Being outside is so incredibly important to my wellbeing and health. I have been missing it before the last year. I believe that appreciation for the importance of spending time outdoors is essential to the part of creating our toxic culture and widely.</p> <p>"Lack of opportunity"</p> <p>The world and our realities can seem very limited by the way in which our economy and services services currently operate, and risks risks involved in embracing opportunities can be high.</p>	<p>Yes! I agree that we all spend far too much time in human-made 'unnatural' environments doing 'unnatural' things - we have lost our connection to the world around us that we are actually part of, not distinct from.</p> <p>Yes. It's really easy to feel trapped by the system - this is what Prigat price got so upset about last week. It is easy to let the system overwhelm us either out of bypass or lack of hope. But we must hold on to hope, and be bold where we can.</p>	<p>There is an interesting tension between the comforts we seek indoors/ sheltered/ protected, and the simple need to be 'wild' and explore, be cold, be exposed and be at risk. It is this risk that the systems have convinced us can only be managed until being indoors and comfortable - with a huge price to pay.</p> <p>I wonder where the ability to be hopeful comes from - Sometimes we can drop into hopelessness, it is there that we might feel less brave, at risk and unable to take first steps.</p>

Notebook H. Comment writer: Feeling the need to bring compassion for the difficulties of either position, being outside—freedom, but also isolation, the constant tensions we live with in being ourselves and coming together in community, holding space with care—to be met with holding, but also to be free to breathe, move, follow your own path.

I found returning to the dialectical notebooks created a meaningful moment.

I found the collaborative writing exercise[s] were good for generating discussion and unpacking issues—more sociable. (Nora, Survey Three)

Dialectical notebook was effective and will use again. (Priscilla, Survey Three)

Dialectical notebooks have the potential to stimulate really interesting discussions and have been reasonably thought provoking. I guess we have often ended up agreeing so perhaps different quotes could be chosen if looking to stimulate debate? But generally found the process to be useful. (Ken, Survey Two)

I think it [dialectical notebook] guided my thoughts to a deeper conclusion, than my initial surface thoughts... I think with my recent experience of writing being a lot more laid-back, and not focussed on essay writing, I think my feelings toward it are a lot lighter and positive... I feel this [writing and thinking as a means to problem solve] can allow you to reach solutions / conclusions / arguments much quicker and effectively—either in groups or independently. (Simone, Survey Two)

I've enjoyed the dialectical notebook. I like discussing ideas but it's helpful to fully complete an

inquiry on your own, share it then respond to the response... dialectical notebooks and discussions have brought me into deeper connection with others. (Stanley, Survey Two)

Creating opportunities to revisit previous thinking, re-framing experiences in new settings, all helped for further connections, deeper thinking, shifts to take place—some consolidation even. This was evidenced in the reflective comments on the reverse of the A4 second dialectical notebooks, and also across the second and third set of surveys. The views weren't all shared in equal measure, and some still found using dialectical notebooks challenging. The success of encouraging the validity of this type of activity hinges on creating the right prompt, for the right purpose, to make that bridge between what we are learning, and why. Our own experience being something that we can then transfer outwardly, beyond ourselves outside of the learning space.

4.2.2 Further shifts and surveys The second surveys showed overall, a deepening of written response, in comparison to the first survey ran in October. Responses were largely engaged and open, care and attention was given to the questions posed. There was some astute and constructive writing across the group.

One student who had shared previously that writing was 'grim' at times, found the dialectical notebook exercise difficult and unenjoyable although she could see a poten-

tial in it. In responding to a reflective question on writing and thinking strategies, she stated she hadn't really found any that were positive for her:

I haven't found the BMC writing very fruitful. It's often felt too open/ and focused and so slow to get started in 5 minutes, or like we haven't been given enough context/ material to respond to or reflect on. So let's be blunt but it hasn't really worked for me. The five minutes free writes at the start of a day I find it hard to get much out of it.

Clearly, time and a lack of narrow focus or specificity with writing prompts and material used, were key issues again. This student felt lesson / activity frames were at times too ambiguous, and continued to feel uneasy with the writing aspects. It was agreed she could step back from engaging in writing activities until she could do so in a way that felt secure and generative for her. A need for a little 'time-out' from the writing activities was respected. It was evident that thinking about the process of writing evoked complex responses, and not ones that were always comfortable. There continued to be a wide range of considered responses across the group and it raises further scope for reflection; that of trying to ensure that topics / activities delivered are able to engage all learners, of all learning preferences, of all ages, at all times:

I suppose I find it difficult being articulate on the spot and prefer more time to think about issues and so I still think that it [short free writes] produces redundant or incomplete responses and personally leaves me feeling annoyed at myself for not being able to do so. Still other people may find thinking on the spot helpful so I suppose one task can't fit all types of people. (Norman, Survey Three)

Dosh was another student who found the writing elements of the core sessions challenging at times. But again, I was confident that the rewards of writing and thinking as tools, was something that could ripple beyond the course of students' lives in a way that was generative, and even something that could continue to bring benefits beyond the college course itself. On private and reflective free writing:

I appreciated both tools [private free writing, dialectical notebooks] as it forced me to write. Also keeping a journal was encouraged, which I started to do at the beginning of the course and actually developed my confidence in my ability to write more fluently. I enjoy the group work post-its as writing short ideas down seems less daunting. Once we have read everyone's ideas out, a common thread seems to prevail... The dialectical tool provoked an emotional response in me that I hadn't anticipated... To some extent I am pleased that I have had opportunities to write as it has forced me to try and be more coherent and con-

cise. I do find journaling useful because sometimes it helps me to reflect on my learning and forces me to be more positive. Earlier I said I don't know if I'll use it outside college because I'm quite negative. In college we have been outside a lot, in nature with like-minded people and this has helped me feel more positive and hopeful, which ultimately makes me write in more Monday ways. I would like to use the dialectical tool in my teaching... I would argue it is a way of reflecting observations or ideas learned from hearing external speakers, or exploring sustainability issues. (Dosh, Survey Two)

The recognition that a writing and thinking strategy could be transferred to life beyond study was positive to see. Dosh wasn't alone—there were additional students who, on the third survey, stated that they may transfer their exposure to writing and thinking strategies beyond their vocational studies. Marshall:

When freewriting is going well, it allows us to believe that we have arrived, if not at a completely different level of consciousness, then at a place where we are more fully aware, awake, and conscious, and we are engaged by the willy-nilly permutations of our own thinking. (Vilardi and Chang 2009, 16)

Reviewing the first and second surveys was valuable. Some found the positioning of the core school session on Monday frustrating; they wanted to engage physically—with their hands, with tools, out in the open, not start the week with conversations, writing and thinking. But they persevered, and by Christmas, and then again by Easter, I could see incrementally positive shifts taking place. I had wanted to evidence that there was a value to implementing a written ritual, one that didn't take up a lot of time, to "top and tail" a session and over the term overall, despite challenges outlined so far, this was demonstrated:

...free writes help me to put less thought into what to say and how to say it, more energy into recording thoughts and feelings (that unearth thoughts and concepts) in real time, through a more transparent lens. (Lord Greenwood, Survey Two)

I have used private free writes... [it has] started me journaling to help work through emotions and my own reactions to sharing... I consider myself a confident writer now, as long as I'm passionate or curious about the subject which I'm writing. (Simon, Survey Two)

My writing habits haven't changed, but I think with my recent experience of writing being a lot more laid-back, and not focussed on essay writing, I think my feelings toward it are a lot lighter and positive... Writing I feel is a way to free up space in your mind for deeper / further thought, either on the same topic

or something different. So I feel this can allow you to reach solutions / conclusions / arguments much quicker and effectively—either in groups or independently. (Simone, Survey Two)

I personally appreciated the time that was designated for the private writing and in a sense it was useful to think about some proposed questions though writing first rather than being asked outright. (Norman, Survey Three)

...engaging in an authentic relationship with students where teachers know and respond with intelligence and compassion to students and their learning. We define this engagement as 'presence'—a state of alert awareness, receptivity and connectedness to the mental, emotional and physical workings of both the individual and the group in the context of their learning environments and the ability to respond with a considered and compassionate best next step. (Rodgers and Raider-Roth 2006, 265)

At the end of the Spring term both Tiwtor Jo and I could see, feel and hear how the private free writing at the start of a session, the loop writing, the reflective free writes to bring a session to a close had served as a way to settle space: preparing for, exploring or consolidating work. Despite patchy attendance from a minority, and the odd session where we weren't able to run even the 'topping and tailing' writing rituals, the Monday morning routine with a private and reflective free write overall, had served as a way to help structure a session. Using focused free writes had acted as ways-in to introduce and start to explore themes which in turn, helped to focus thought as they helped to frame thinking, formulate ideas prior sharing in discussion. It took away the knee-jerking emotional responses that could at times be quite quick to surface in the group. Wollack cites theatre scholar and performer Matthew Goulsh:

We approach it [anything worthy of human study] from any direction. We approach it using our eyes, our ears, our noses, our intellects, our imaginations. We approach it with silence. We approach it with childhood. We use pain or embarrassment. We use history. We take a safe route or a dangerous one. We discover our approach and we follow it. (Vilardi and Chang 2009, 35)

Yet issues with narrowing a focus and connecting writing and thinking effectively and meaningfully to content persisted. There was an opportunity here to connect to the vocational work in the week and (again) a desire to explore ideas in discussion:

I think that the sessions and use of tools would be enhanced by the topics being discussed being embedded in other learning opportunities, and the subject matter not being so abstract. I also think writing can be too individual, and that facilitating discussions in a group might be better in some instances. (Nora, Survey Two)

4.2.3 What is it to be of Service? One morning in particular, in March, really stood out as a learning moment for me. The theme was 'To Be of Service'. There was a sense of genuine presence created where the space felt held and one that allowed for real connection between all present. Rodgers and Raider-Roth on teaching as:

Tiwtor Jo had a thought-provoking presentation sharing her own experiences and journey around the theme of 'service'. She spoke of decency and care. There were 9 students present today and so the space we were working in was perfect for our group. Tiwtor Jo set up a writing prompt "What is it to be of service?—What do you value about the work you've done?" A sentence opener was offered as a way in, for those who wanted it. "A time when I was of service...". One student circled back to a discussion in January when the director of the college had spoken about finding what you're good at is what needs to be done. It was good to see connections, correlations being drawn between sessions. During this 45 minutes, I observed while Tiwtor Jo led the session, using prompts that she had crafted, to structure the content. I noticed how everyone was curved over their notebooks. There was no sense of self-consciousness or reluctance with this activity. The atmosphere was held lightly, with no-one using the quiet space to pipe up with comments or to start a conversation of their own. It was considered, with an atmosphere that felt rich with trust and care.

Tiwtor Jo reflected on this particular morning in conversation: *"There was a trust between myself and those who had been present that day."*

It's not surprising that a group may need a while to learn how to sit and do the kind of writing that both requires and fosters silent connectedness with other people... students will quickly discern the difference between meaningful work and busy work. Busywork takes up class time, and the student remains unaffected by it; meaningful work—including focused free writing—can change the student and the class, sometimes profoundly. (Vilardi and Chang 2009, 45)

What was clear at the end of this term was that the writing and thinking strategies could be used to inform an embodied approach to learning at the college, on a Level 2 vocational course. However, the conditions had to be right. The huge themes covered week to week had the potential to generate strong feelings. Being responsive to and able to change—"alive and alert"—within a lesson was important, being open and responsive to mood and direction. It was also necessary to remember that life happens—and some students had urgent and difficult situations to manage outside their college life, some

of which happened in an instant. From another angle, college was also something that represented some ‘time-out’ from the rest of the week, I recall one student using the word ‘respite’. There were still moments on a Monday morning when topic ‘overwhelm’ was an issue. There was still a need to be led, provided with information (it was easier to be ‘told’), rather than have to try and grapple with ideas and concepts that were hard to locate and define. To slow down, narrow the focus. Hard and fast facts, answers, solutions—this was the preferred option on the menu some days. And still, the pitch needed constant attention paid to it, ensuring all were engaged and interested in what had been prepared.

Mondays felt like a catalyst at times—a space to air and share grievances about the topics we were exploring. It was clear that writing and thinking well placed and carefully connected, was able to help temper and set up the space for more generative discussions, whether through a well placed dialectical notebook or a collaborative loop writing exercise. From a recorded focus group interview:

Speaker 3: There were times when I must admit I did enjoy the private free write, where we were sitting in a place and I remember sitting down near the river. And I did feel like an unexpected like, Oh, I can do this. You know, I actually have got ideas and they're valid or whatever. And it forced me to push myself

Integrating writing and thinking into core skills content was something I felt was a natural fit, on many levels. But clearly, there were times when the balance and fluidity between the two elements needed more attention.

4.3. Term Three: Summer: Building Community April–June 23

By the middle of the third and final summer term, core skills sessions had shifted to one focused around next steps. The opportunities to experiment with writing and thinking activities tailed off, and by the end of May, was no longer a part of any routine as students were allocated more time (at their request) to complete their practical projects.

During a session delivered by a guest speaker on Entrepreneurism, one student noted how useful they found the loop writing, as it was incorporated into the presentation in a way that students could track collective understanding as it evolved over the morning’s listening and questioning.

The three surveys carried out over the year evidenced that writing and thinking had shown more benefit than I had initially thought, with a group who had signed up to take a very practical course and with quite a few students who despite initial reticence with the pen, actually found

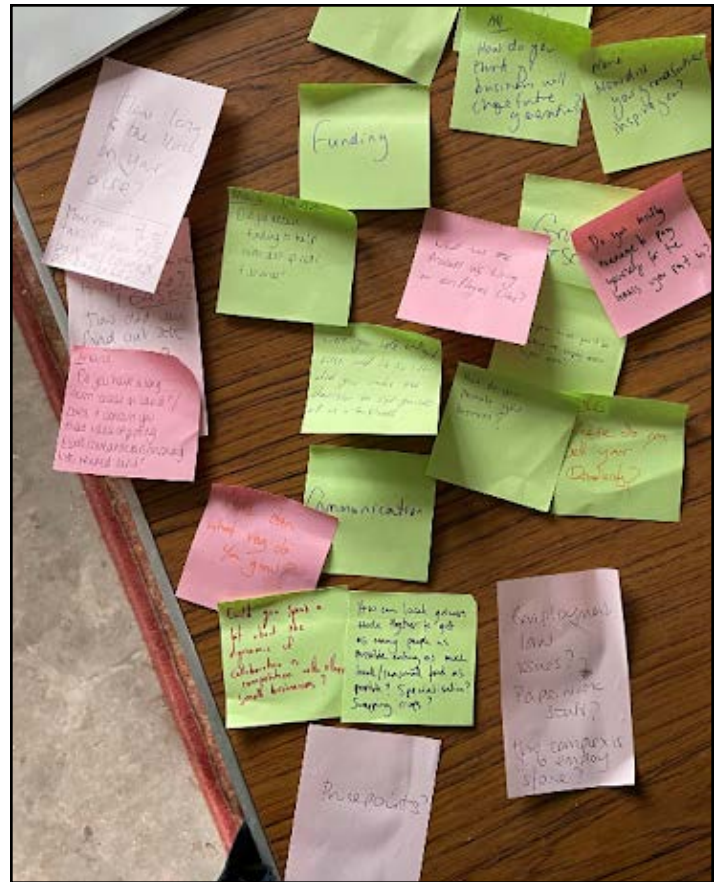


Figure 7. Sticky note questions

some pleasure or value in doing so. It wasn’t perfect. But it played a small, yet significant and constructive part in the delivery of core skills sessions.

The three surveys tracked a shift not only towards writing (which wasn’t the main intention) but towards being able to engage with concepts, challenging facts and new ideas in a way that nurtured and encouraged individual thought as well as that developed collaboratively. This was shown through the depth of responses shared, regardless of the angle they were writing from.

Writing and thinking was demonstrating that it could bridge or intersect between the values of BMC and the experienced and lived world of the students. Writing and thinking was relevant, it had value and helped to create a space where a richness, a depth of response was starting to surface for some.

I have started to write how I’m feeling or what’s on my mind sometimes to help clear my mind a bit and examine these feelings a bit deeper.” On loop writing “having to interrogate the original thought really helped to weed out any weaker logic and either strength response or change it completely...mostly it helped me admit fault or change my mind on subjects easier. (Simon, Survey Three)

The implementation of writing and thinking strategies hadn't been perfect, but there were benefits to working with it and potential for it to continue to do so. It needed tighter integration and to be used in a 'light touch' way.

I think small group conversations have been the most dynamic and memorable communications sometimes enabled by writing exercises. I have definitely used writing differently in this course than in previous academic studies [I went to university and wrote a lot...] the WT approach feels like a slightly different relationship with writing than my past experiences. Sometimes it hasn't really flowed or fit in... maybe not being totally integrated as a method/ tool. (Jim, Survey Three)

Writing forces you to slow down and consider your thoughts for longer which I think can help give time and room for them to develop, and in turn they can change or be dependent...I feel that focussed free writes in particular can reinforce ideas, thoughts, or what we've recently learned. (Simone, Survey Three)

4.3.1. Hearing all voices and a community of learners

toward the end of April, three guest speakers shared experiences about their own businesses. Before we opened the session with the speakers, we started with a private free write. It was a part of the routine by now. Journal:

I've reminded about private writing being private—not to be shared. Takes a few moments for two or three to finish exchanging personal comments. Settle after a reminder. It's soon quiet. People are writing, without fuss. A lovely atmosphere. Easy. The fire is burning. It's damp and wet outside. The room is interrupted twice but people are still writing. It feels natural. It's the longest the group has written for, before someone puts a pen down.

In preparing for a session involving three guest speakers, Tiwtor Jo and I looked at how we could try to eliminate windows for such opportunities where equity of voice may have been clipped. The intention was to find out as much as we could from the breadth of experience presented with our speakers, without being lured off task on conversational tangents. We had a plan and it worked as we had hoped. Tiwtor Jo invited students to write any questions at all, on to post-its. Questions were then grouped into categories. We had hoped this would pre-empt the vocally strident / confident from jumping in too quickly, thus allowing equity across the group.

The written questions were then shared in turn, theme by theme, by Tiwtor Jo, directly to our guests. This allowed for everyone's question / questions to be heard. This was such a simple strategy but an effective one. This then led to conversations that felt natural as they weren't hopping



Figure 8. Tiwtor Jo and shared responses

around, from one query or thought to another. For the first time, I noticed Edna Knickerbocker felt empowered to speak when usually she would remain quiet. Some continued to make written notes throughout the session. All were actively listening—there wasn't anyone championing at the bit to speak or be heard, and it allowed for a relaxed discussion. People were leaning in on elbows towards the guest speakers, or with arms folded on the tables. Journal:

The post-its helped to structure the discussion. It feels more natural and respectful, with less space for going off-piste.

Tiwtor Jo then shared the questions to the speakers who in turn answered them. Piggybacking served as a way to further conversation in the time we had left. We finished with a reflective free write—one not to be shared, but as a way to wrap up and capture any stray thoughts and further ideas.

One of the guest speakers later shared with me that had she been in the group as a student, she would never have put her hand up to ask a question, she would have been too self-conscious. She found the post-it's a beneficial way to have been asked the questions too and really took something positive from the experience herself.



Figure 9. Chat outside

4.3.2. Moving towards a close One of the last core skill sessions was one with a focus around educational regeneration. Tiwtor Jo opened with an initial and individual prompt of “If you were open to all the power available to you in the web of life, what would you do in the service of regenerative futures?” This took a couple of further explanations before the pens were moving, but they did. Tiwtor Jo encouraged some voluntary whole group sharing before responses were then re-written onto post-its onto big paper. Categories were easily established into either 1) Building links and networks, 2) Communication, listening or speaking and 3) Welcoming community.

What resulted from these written prompts were thoughtful and inspiring conversations taking place, around creating an alumni group, around the use of public space and what it is to be a community. There was an authenticity to the session that reflected the close friendships and understandings that had developed over the year. From my journal in May (at this stage people were working in one of the three established groups):

People are standing in a circle, eye contact, building upon each other’s ideas and comments... there is really focussed discussion. All listening with care. Throwing questions out into the mix...

It was a real pleasure to be able to observe, listen to and consider what was actually happening across the group. The activities had been carefully layered up to culminate in a discussion around actionable steps that could be taken, ensuring a learning experience that also consolidated ideas while laying the ground for potential future actions.



Figure 10. Where shall I put it?

It felt a natural place for writing and thinking to draw to a quiet close on a Monday morning with this group, in the sunshine under the stretch canopy.

I hoped some of the strands of what we had done over the three terms would stay, in a nourishing way, with people going forwards—even if in a way that wasn’t immediately apparent.

If how we experience the world and our own lives, lies within our sensory, physical and critical selves (including our imaginations and intuitions, our explorations and responses) then I would like to suggest that an act of writing and thinking, however small, can serve to elicit hope, realisation and generate informed action. From Dewey:

In a word, we live from birth to death in a world of persons and things in large measure is what it is because of what has been done and transmitted from previous human activities. When this fact is ignored, experience is treated as if it were something which goes on exclusively inside an individual’s body and mind. It ought not to be necessary to say that experience does not happen in a vacuum. There are sources outside an individual which give rise to experience. It is constantly fed from these springs. (1997, 39-40)

5. Final thoughts and recommendations Creating conditions for learning that is engaging, meaningful, transferable and inspiring is complex.

In the context of Black Mountains College, with its understanding that learning is whole-body and that there are many ways to access and assimilate how we acquire it, I hope this study serves to inform the pedagogy evolving at the college. BMC is pioneering in many ways, forging its own unique pathway with an urgent message at the helm. The connection between an embodied teaching and learning approach, one balancing individual student needs, expectations and course content is a tightrope walk and a delicate one that will continue to evolve and sway, as we and the world around us does. Writing and thinking can absolutely play a part in that journey.

The moderate investment in terms of time taken up by a writing and thinking input can be richly rewarded.

It was interesting to note how the writing and thinking practice actually informed and helped to facilitate meta-cognitive spaces more than the students perhaps realised. The positive takeaways from working with this pedagogy, this set of tools, was one that had a greater value than was consciously experienced and this was demonstrated when all three sets of surveys were studied.

IWT Writing and Thinking pedagogy is able to dovetail into the manifold approaches to teaching and learning that are evolving at (BMC) in a way that helps to further nurture curiosity, build collaboration and engage deeper thinking. Writing and thinking pedagogy with its range of strategies, can be used as a part of a tool kit, one that serves to bridge, connecting ideas and reflections across a wide range of topics and foci. It is a tool that encourages focus, curiosity, active listening, synthesis, reflection and evaluation.

The sheer range and variety of opportunities presented throughout the year for the students during the core skill sessions was remarkable. Similar levels of range and provisions going forward could provide challenge, and it may be worth considering approaching fewer topic strands to allow time for understanding and learning to develop. This unpacking, the linking of connections between core skills studies and the practical components of the vocational courses could be bridged via a focused free writing prompt.

I realise, at the time of writing this, that changes and adaptations may already have been put in place for Year 3 Level 2 students. Where there is repetition below of such changes, suggestions are coincidental.

- At Level 2 the use of IWT strategies needs to be in a 'light touch', 'topping and tailing' way with the occasional carefully chosen writing and thinking tool to explore

/ consolidate session content as decided by the tutor / educator / faculty. Loop writing, dialectical notebooks, focused free writing and believing and doubting are strategies that were experimented with for this study. There are a wealth of further IWT writing and thinking resources that could be explored.

- Routine is key—even with a 3-5 minute private free write at the start, to 'top' a core skills session and a 3-5 minute reflective write to consolidate, 'tail', at the close of a session. This would help in establishing and developing a meaningful, complementary practice to that already evolving at the college. A small use of time with a considerable reward for the learners—both individually and as a community.

- At higher levels, a depth of response could be encouraged as an expectation, when the pitch would be more appropriate. Writing and thinking would be invaluable here.

- Expectations needed to be managed. Students needed to be aware of what 'Core Skills' actually entailed—more than the Literacy, Numeracy, Digital Competency and discussions around pastoral global issues and themes. BMC, in building out from the original core skills curricula, had taken on huge topics without being able to allocate the time to positively engage with them in a generative way—as a consequence discussions and activities (including writing and thinking) felt rushed, while trying to stick to the arc of each term. Bite-size and more immediately (local even) life relevant material could have provided the spring boards for greater generative group discussion (written and spoken), further metacognition, while enabling skill transfer to other areas of study. There was also an expectation that more activities would involve the outdoors, and physical engagement.

- It was interesting to note how people framed their connection to writing as one of relationship—and how they use writing. All agreed words are important, words matter with many different ideas as to how and why they do. Thinking and writing activities should help to draw out our understanding of new ideas and develop literacy confidence as a way to explore and express responses to areas of focus. An agroecology session, led by BMC Academic Advisory Panel member Ian Rappell sparked interested and enquiring responses around topics that warranted further time and thought. There was a need to further explore more: Agroecology as (re) wilding, as farming with all nature, as radical optimism for the Anthropocene. The same principle applied to other guest speakers, including Dr Vandana Shiva (seeds, biodiversity and eco-feminism) who spoke of how writing can be viewed as a subversive act and how thinking can change through experience and observation—just these two takeaway lines were two of

many shared over two hours. Similarly, with Dr Hanna Poikenon (neuroscience, whole body learning, memory, embodied collaboration and usefulness) there was a lot of information to assimilate over one Zoom session. The key themes needed time to unpack, not necessarily on a deeper level, but on one that allowed further consolidation and cognitive confidence to grow over further Monday sessions perhaps—allowing for a more gradual consolidation, while remembering the level of this course while also holding the BMC learning intentions and ethos. How could student responses and questions and reflections be transferred to their practical learning across the week, in a way that encouraged evaluation? You could take one theme and explore it while applying it across practical elements of the courses at hand, spanning one or more weeks.

- Time is key. Certain types of conversation need time to hold it, unpack it and deepen. These learning opportunities should not be rushed. The space needs to be held and moderated, with the setting out of boundaries. There are many working models that can be used to inform that suits such learning moments (as well as debating skills). This needs to be introduced at the start of the Autumn term and then circled back to. The session with Councillor Sian Cox was incredibly valuable—but placed too late in the term (May) to be of any benefit on future Monday sessions for the said group. Looking at models of group discussion that were shared by Cllr Sian Cox—they could take place following or leading on from a dialectical notebook exercise, or a collaborative loop writing exercise. Keep the writing activities as tools, tools to help deliver the content while also making connections to the main part of the practical courses.

- Linking to the point above—being comfortable in a whole group discussion is a key part of the learning process. Earlier input focussing around mediation and active listening is essential to help frame the discussions that are valued while ensuring all voices are heard—and that voices can be heard through the written form as well as those volubly stated orally. This would also benefit those students who are less confident speaking out in groups—writing and thinking is a way of working with equity on many levels, including that of voice.

- Understanding what engaged participation looks and feels like, could be a way to further consolidate understanding the ways in which we can learn—and also listen, communicate and share our meaning-making processes. This may help to reinforce and act as an aide memoire issues around positive behaviours.

- Balancing writing and thinking within the existing core skills curriculum while using it in a way so it creates opportunities for deeper engagement and

synthesis between learning purposes and intended outcomes, required preparation and thought . It was time well spent, as it always is with a new course and reflection and evaluation serve to inform next steps where a re-focusing and altered perspective is needed. It is an evolving process while recognising the need for some strands to be more consistent, providing a frame which allows for further experimentation within the embodied learning space.

- The key is understanding that the pitch, the motive for applying specific strategies (why, when and how) and the indoor learning environment itself, has to be just right or at least close. There will often be those for whom writing and thinking strategies offer welcome challenges, leading to deeper thinking and generative discussion alongside moments of generative surprise that accompanied the act of writing itself. While striving for this it is vital to ensure inclusivity—perhaps considering the use of different ways of demonstrating and logging thinking—Video blogs, electronic writing tools, voice memos, diagrams, sketching would offer comfortable options here, ensuring inclusivity and accessibility. Technical advancements in recent years could be used to great benefit here.

- Most at the start were interested to see how writing and thinking could inform their study—but it didn't work for everyone. When it didn't work as intended, it was largely down to the specificity of prompts failing to integrate with content fully. As a result, not enough connections between the purpose and relevance of tasks didn't transfer, especially connecting to studies across the courses more broadly.

- The subject matter and the writing and thinking prompts dictated and affected levels of engagement. There was also a need to link session content more directly to the vocational courses themselves (Regenerative Horticulture and Coppicing and Greenwood Trades). Connecting between different areas of study while ensuring the links between relevance and application are in place, are vital to consolidate the purpose and value within the activities. Specificity was something that was returned to throughout the year in discussion with the core tutor as was trying to pose the right questions and prompts that helped to elicit responses that encouraged further thinking and curiosity.

- Managing student and course expectations, the environmental learning conditions and the actual physical time available to accommodate these factors, influenced the depth and quality of final outcomes with regard to the efficacy of using writing and thinking tools. It was a case of depth over breadth that was needed at times when applying a writing and thinking strategy, in

working with the content which was at times too wide to offer a students a foothold in the core skills sessions.

- Students weren't briefed about my working role with them at the start of term. Coupled with other aspects of core skills sessions and its varied styles of delivery, this lack of communication didn't help to manage student expectations as they could have been.

- Some students were keen to further explore their creative side—this was an aspect that was mentioned throughout the surveys and perhaps something that could be considered going forwards.

- Students taking an active role in leading workshops / sessions were encouraged, but not delivered until the end of the year. Perhaps this could be factored into expectations, nurturing the 'learning by doing' opportunities presented in this setting. Students leading their own learning, at different points in the calendar, sharing their experiences as they develop. Students represent a rich resource, and this cohort had a wealth of experience connected to their areas of study between them that I would truly have been interested to find out more about.

6. Conclusion As a tool for deeper thinking and exploring facts, ideas, possibilities—across any area of study—writing and thinking pedagogy can help to encourage and structure such activity. It would also act as a tool to nurture and inspire writing creatively. It is currently applied across settings that embrace the liberal arts and sciences and by its very nature would certainly sit comfortably within the BMC ethos and approach to learning that is evolving and being implemented.

The IWT pedagogy could play an insightful, meaningful and exciting role in the life of BMC as it continues to grow from strength to strength, at Level 2—and above.

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"An experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment."

— Dewey 1997, 43

"In a certain sense every experience should do something to prepare a person for later experiences of a deeper and more expansive quality. That is the very meaning of growth, continuity, reconstruction of experience."

— Dewey 1997, 47

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Appendix A.1. Autumn Term 2022, Week 5 Lesson Plan: Time



GRŴP COLEGAU
NPTC
GROUP OF COLLEGES

Lesson Plan
Course: Core Skills
Unit/subject: Time

Session number: 3
Date: 03/10/2022
Start time: 09.00
End time: 12.00
Room number: Troed Yr Harn






Objectives of this session:

Enable learners to understand and appreciate how learning fits in a life and a variety of ways to manage time. Explore understandings of time relating to the land, climate change, and adaptation.

Key words: Time, temporality, climate, adaptation.

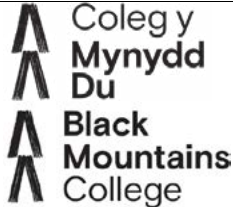

Time	Activities	Cross cutting themes	Resources	Assessment that learning has taken place
09:15 – 10:00	Share plan for the day. Walk up to Troed Yr Harn. Thinking prompt – What is time? How does this walk fit into our lives, the different shapes of our lives, and conflicting priorities? What happens to time as we walk? Consider different moments in the walk – quiet, talking, catching breath ... Pause for warm up movement exercise – how to tell the time by the sun. Hot drink and bring out into the classroom.			
10:00 – 10:45	Introductions and an experience of time during the walk Writing prompt – A free write (no need to share) – questions about the course timing to date. (LC) PowerPoint presentation – Term timeline in relation to different understandings of time. (JP) Second writing prompt – Have your questions been answered? Share answers, more questions. (LC / JP)		Journals; Laptop & projector Record responses on to big paper. Pens.	
10:45 – 11:00	Breaktime			
11:00 – 12:15	Walk-centred BDA exercise (before-during-after) – warm up, set tone (10 mins) In groups of 3, to create 3 freeze-frames: How did you feel before the walk to Troed Yr Harn on your first day; during the walk; after / since your first walk? (LC) Share with the whole group / split group into two to see pieces simultaneously. Removing pressure to 'perform'. In groups of 4, What types of time are there? A variety of perspectives on time (termtime, lifetime, college time, core skills time, project time, mountain time, crop time, deep time, calculative time, family time, alone time, tree time ...). Consider different ways of understanding / measuring time and how we use it. 5 mins first thoughts and feedback. (JP) Give each group a quote relating to time from core BMC texts. (JP) Create a collaborative written response to each quote and share. (JP / LC) Quotes to choose from: John Dewey, Art as Experience (1934) John Dewey (1859-1952) was an American philosopher and educator interested in how the practical application of creativity. "We do not learn from experience ... we learn from reflecting on experience." John Dewey, Art as Experience (1934) John Dewey (1859-1952) was an American philosopher and educator interested in how the practical application of creativity. "Failure is instructive. The person who really thinks learns quite as much from failures as from successes." John Dewey, Art as Experience (1934) John Dewey (1859-1952) was an American philosopher and educator interested in how the practical application of creativity.		Exercise outdoors / sheep barn? A little space needed for this. Big paper / pens for shared responses in smaller groups. Printed quotes	one of the ways we make the sessions relevant is keep returning to two overarching themes – one, the climate crisis and two, their future work . As such, the exercise with considering the different kinds of time at 11am could be sharpened with 'and how are these re-framed put under pressure by the climate/nature breakdown?' In particular ecological and geological time that have been hugely disrupted (whilst our subjective sense of time may not have changed that much yet – i.e. some people are able to speak about the future with confidence whilst others are finding we cannot plan for more than a year – this was always an issue but it is more so now when climate action and impacts are all about how fast we act and how long we think we have to act etc.)

<p>“The self is not something ready-made, but something in continuous formation through choice of action.”</p> <p>Ailton Krenak, <i>Ideas to Postpone the End of the World</i>, 2019 Born in the heavily mined Doce River valley in Minas Gerais, Ailton Krenak is one of the main voices in defence of Indigenous peoples’ rights in Brazil: “This river is an entity or character, which suggests he does not die. He doesn’t go through the same experience of (time) as we humans ... the fish that lived there, they died, but the river didn’t. The river went into a coma ... this river plunged into itself. The real river is now underground ... The underground layers will filter the heavy metals so that the body of the river comes out alive somewhere else. So our temporality (time) is different. We’re alive, he’s alive somewhere else. Now he’s in a coma. This feeds our hope of living with Rio Doce.”</p> <p>Ailton Krenak, <i>Ideas to Postpone the End of the World</i>, 2019 Born in the heavily mined Doce River valley in Minas Gerais, Ailton Krenak is one of the main voices in defence of Indigenous peoples’ rights in Brazil: “Capitalism throws all this crap at us, which makes it look like if we lose capitalism we’re going to starve. We are calling people to think about another ontology (understanding of time), another observation about existing, because life is not useful and being alive is wonderful.”</p> <p>Ailton Krenak, <i>Ideas to Postpone the End of the World</i>, 2019 Born in the heavily mined Doce River valley in Minas Gerais, Ailton Krenak is one of the main voices in defence of Indigenous peoples’ rights in Brazil: “If we can throw a rope and a person going to hell grabs hold, it’s worth it. There is a possibility that you will simply experience this life, whether we are in our 30s, 50s, or 80s ... But, my observation of life is always taking place between cycles. I hope that this perspective on life is shared by my grandchildren ... that is why the future is ancestral ... that’s the worldview: it’s the ability to go back to an event that created the world and that is alive in you. We want a constant creation of everything and of ourselves.”</p>			
<p>Robin Wall-Kimmerer, <i>Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants</i> (2014) Robin Wall Kimmerer is a mother, scientist, decorated professor, and enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, Upstate New York. “If time could run backward, like a film in reverse, we would see this mess reassemble itself into lush green hills and moss-covered ledges of limestone. The streams would run back up the hills to the springs and the salt would stay glittering in underground rooms.”</p> <p>Robin Wall-Kimmerer, Facebook page (2016) Robin Wall Kimmerer is a mother, scientist, decorated professor, and enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, Upstate New York. “When I got home from a few weeks of teaching in the field, my cupboard was bare, so I went to my garden to see if there was any spinach for dinner. It was way too small and poozly looking to harvest but of course the weeds were thriving! So I ate them, instead. Lamb's quarters or <i>Chenopodium album</i> makes the most delicious cooked greens, tender, silky and more flavourful than spinach. I like them with pasta, especially. Latin names can sometimes tell a good story - this one means goose-foot and its true leaves are shaped like a webbed foot I even like to eat the little ones raw as I pull them up from among the rows. They are super nutritious and way more so than the spinach I was looking for.”</p> <p>Robin Wall-Kimmerer, Facebook page (2016) Robin Wall Kimmerer is a mother, scientist, decorated professor, and enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, Upstate New York. “I love gardening but I have to admit that it seems like we've got it a bit backwards...pulling up the "weeds" like lamb's quarter which volunteer in our gardens and grow magnificently without benefit of planting or tending or fertilizer-displacing the wild so we can cultivate the domestic. A lot of "weeds" are just free vegetables without the work, free-range companions to the crops. Maybe next year I'll skip sowing spinach and let the lambs quarter run wild. I think I'll skip the grocery store this week – after all – there's sorrel and purslane and milkweed and day lilies and grape leaves and ... more. Eat wild!”</p>			

12:15 – 13:00	Lunchtime			
13:00 – 14:15	<p>Engaging a sense of time at various project sites</p> <p>How do I see time; how someone else in the group sees time; how other living things involved in the project see time e.g., a herbivore, a wooden post, a piece of grass.</p> <p>Create a project timeline – with a start date and end date. Consider time cycles before the project start date, during the project, and afterwards. In what ways might the living things identified earlier be a part of the project's longer term timeline?</p> <p>Prepare a presentation to share with the whole group at 14.15.</p>		Flip-chart paper	<p>pose the Q on considering time in their project plans with v. specific relevance to climate and career. E.g. How will the medium/longer term impact/changing sense of ecological and geological time affect the project and how you think about it and how you plan it? (For example, the strategic plan for BMC only goes up to 10 years and after that we have no idea!). And then let them report back (if at all) on the specifics of how shifting timeframes impact their projects. But then perhaps not ask them to do more sharing/breathing/writing – but to allow then to get on with their projects</p>
14:15 to 15.15	<p>Meditative breathing exercise, and sharing project timelines</p> <p>Engage and ask questions</p> <p>What is the story of your understanding of time up to this point? How is this changing? Would you like it to be different? How can you make that happen? How can we create new timelines?</p> <p>Independent study</p>		Journals	
	In journals, responses to the day. Log how your sense of time changes with each walk.			
15.15	Walk to Talgarth			

Evaluation of the session		
Did learning take place?	Yes	No
Did you engage and challenge all learners in the session?	Yes	No
Were your learning activities/strategies appropriate and effective?	Yes	No
Was the pace appropriate?	Yes	No
Were your resources appropriate and effective?	Yes	No
If you answer 'no' to any of the above, what actions are you going to take and in what time frame?		






Appendix A.2. Spring Term 2023, Week 7 Lesson Plan: Learning from beavers



	<p>Session Plan</p> <p>Course: Core Skills Unit/subject: Ways of knowing. Learning from beavers at Eligro Nature Reserve</p>	<p>Spring term session: Date: 06/03/2023 Start time: 09.00 End time: 15.30 Room number: Troed Yr Harn</p>	
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Objectives of this session:

- Learn about beavers in their natural habitat at Eligro Nature Reserve, Llangors.
- Attend to characteristics or traits of beavers associated with core strength, exploring how beavers are intricately at home building dams, smelling scents into the air, and transforming their environment for good.
- Inspired by these great problem solvers, we reflect on ways to move toward the creation of healthy environments.

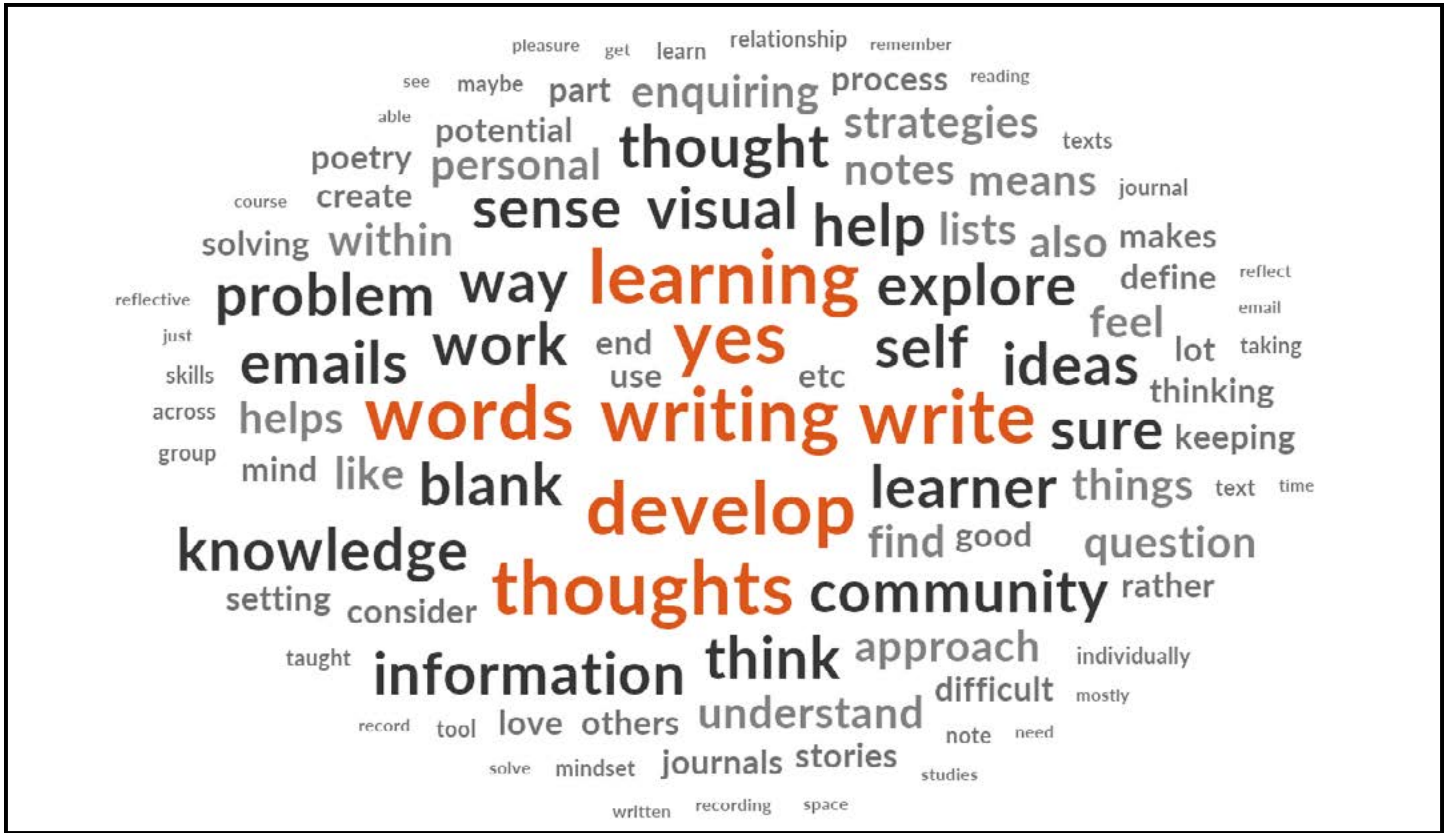
Key words: beavers, characteristics, healthy, environments.

Time	Activities	Cross cutting themes 	Resources	Assessment that learning has taken place
09:00 – 09:30	Meet at Gilfach, Llangors. Refreshments.			
09:30	Introductory presentation by Colin Preece about Eligro Nature Reserve and the beavers.		Journals, pens	
10:00	Guided walk around Eligro Nature Reserve. See how active beavers have been, dams, lodges. Make notes on the characteristics or behaviours of beavers. Notice what your senses pick up, what energises and excites us, makes us feel happy. Notice how beavers are intricately at home in Eligro, smelling scents in the air, transforming their habitat.		Journals, pens	
12:30	Lunch			
13:00	Aim of session is to explore characteristics of beavers and how we can learn from these. Honest focus on what we have learned this morning. 5 minute reflective write on the morning session. Think about observations made. Guided write/ FFW responding to one of the following three questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What inspired you about the way beavers live in their habitat? • Are there characteristics /behaviours / traits that we can identify and use ourselves? • Are there characteristics you already exhibit or would like to exhibit? 		3 questions written up large for people to see	
13:15	Heart, hand and head Ask one participant to lay / stand in front of a big piece of paper on the floor / attached to the wall. Choose someone of the right size so that the upper body and head fit the paper, and ask him/her to hold their hands along their body so that they are on the paper as well. Draw the outline of the person. Explain that learning takes place on heart, hand, and head level: personal, practical, and intellectual / theoretical. If needed, give an example of learning at each level. The outline of the person is the collective body of the group, which is now empty but the group is going to fill the body with learnings from walking in Eligro Nature Reserve this morning. Explain, there is a collective learning in the group, people learn together and from each other.		Large piece of paper Marker pens Paper heart, hand, head shapes of different colours	

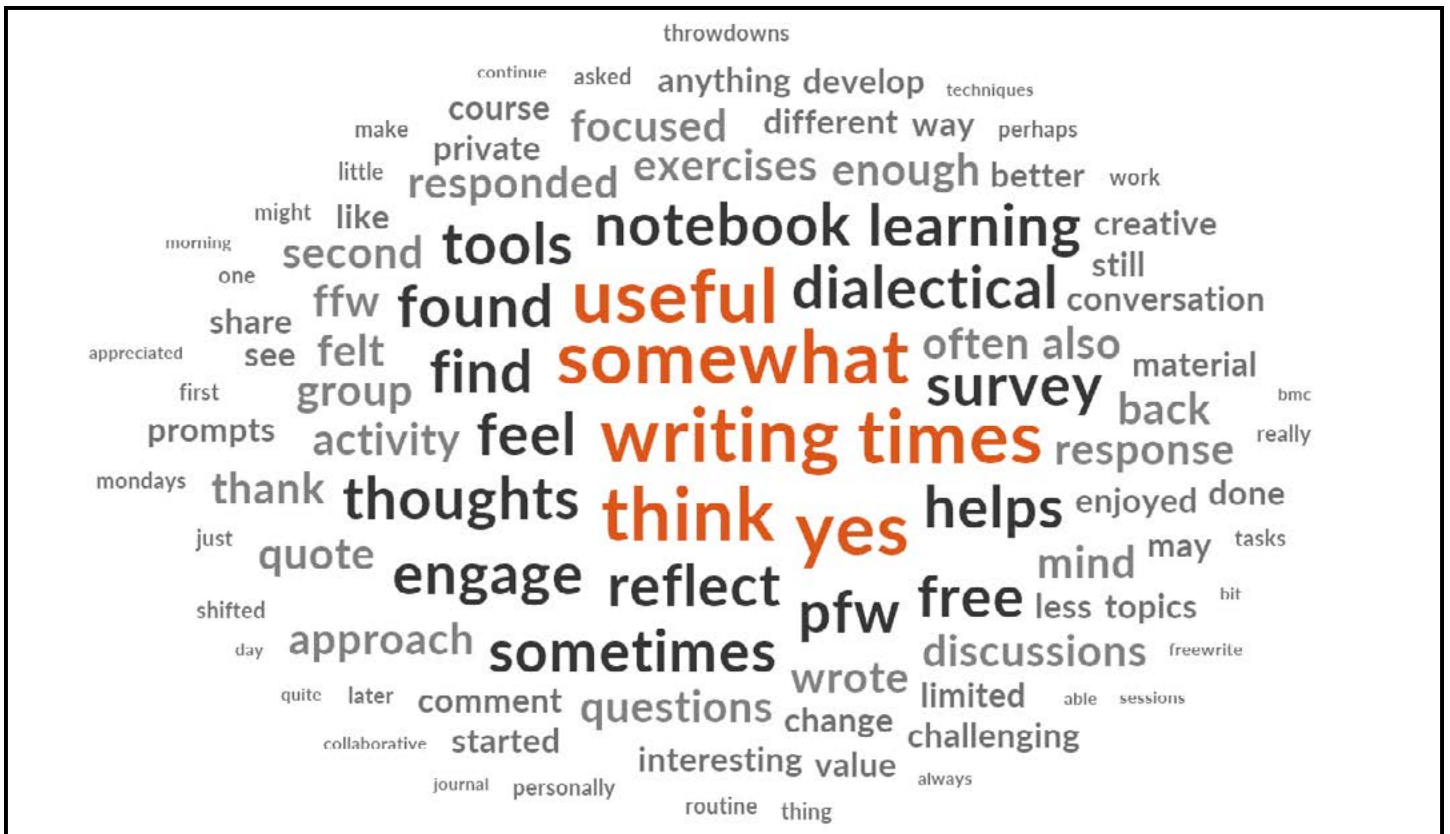
	<p>Working in pairs, each have different paper colours & shapes for heart, hand, head. Discuss their learning on all three levels, and write that down. Ask three pairs to group together and exchange the heart, hand, and heads.</p> <p>As a whole group, invite each person to come forward and attach their learning to the body on the wall / floor, explaining one of their learnings briefly, 1 minute per person.</p>			
14:00	<p>Code of Conduct</p> <p>Ask for peoples advice to make better. Could you help us to improve our ground rules now that we know each other a little more.</p> <p>Read the Code of Conduct. Ask each person to choose the most important sentence, and to select one core word to summarise this. The word can be a concept, emotion, action already written or chosen by you. Ask each person to say their word. Words are added to a flipchart. In groups of four or five, choose five to seven words to write a new sentence in the Code of Conduct. This could be a poem or song. When all the groups are ready, a member of each group shares their sentence.</p> <p>Explain we'll return to this later in the term.</p> <p>Display in classroom.</p> <p>Thank people for their sharing.</p>		<p>BMC Code of Conduct</p> <p>Flipchart paper, pen</p>	
14:30	Break			
14:45 to 15:30	<p>Recap what we have learned to date. Hand out a list of Spring term multisensory learning experiences.</p> <p>Dialectical notebooks</p> <p>Hand out Dialectical notebooks from previous session. Re read what you wrote. Continue conversation in original pairs for five minutes. Carefully respond to the 'Response next session' column and hand papers in.</p>		<p>Spring term multisensory learning experiences handout</p> <p>Students dialectical notebooks</p>	
	<p>Bard Second Survey</p> <p>Lynn to ask group to complete a second Bard survey. People leave as and when they complete.</p>		Bard second survey	

Evaluation of the session		
Did learning take place?	Yes	No
Did you engage and challenge all learners in the session?	Yes	No
Were your learning activities/strategies appropriate and effective?	Yes	No
Was the pace appropriate?	Yes	No
Were your resources appropriate and effective?	Yes	No
If you answer 'no' to any of the above, what actions are you going to take and in what time frame?		

Appendix B.1. Wordcloud from Survey 1



Appendix B.2. Wordcloud from Survey 2



Appendix B.3. Wordcloud from Survey 3

