PgCert Academic Practice in Art, Design and Communication

Action Research Project Ethical Enquiry Form

Participant name: Amy Urry
Cohort: 4
Tutor name: Rachel Marsden

1. What is your research question?

To what extent does our Moodle design template support inclusive practice in relation to neurodiverse and disabled students?

The aim of this enquiry is to generate new knowledge about the experience of neurodiverse and disabled students when using Moodle pages designed according to a template which aims to be accessible and inclusive. This knowledge will allow us to tailor the template to better meet students' needs and make more informed recommendations to course teams as well as the digital learning community across UAL.

Objectives:

- Survey students on the BA Product and Industrial Design course at CSM who are neurodiverse, using an online questionnaire.
- Facilitate one (or more) focus groups to have an in-depth discussion about Moodle usage, barriers and positive features.

2. Who will be providing you with information to help you answer your question, and how will you approach and/or select them?

I will be basing my project in the BA Product and Industrial Design (BA PID) course. I have discussed my proposal with the Course Leader and with the co-Stage leader for Stage 2 and they are both supportive of the project in principle.

In terms of gaining consent from the rest of the course team, I will send an email to each of the Stage leaders explaining the project and asking if they would be happy for me to approach their students and ask for participants. I will outline what I will propose to the students, how they can opt in, how I will look after their data, and that they can withdraw at any time. If they confirm via email that they are happy for this to go ahead, I will arrange a specific time and date to meet their students in person to present the project and explain how to take part.

To recruit participants, I will:

Give a short presentation, introducing myself, my role, the project's aim and an outline of what participation would involve. I will support this with a short PowerPoint presentation and a hard copy of an Information Sheet and the Consent form.

Students will be asked to consent to participate in the study by completing an online form, hosted on my MS Forms UAL account, or a hard copy. GDPR and privacy information will be included on the Information sheet.

The form will be accessible via a QR code which will be on the PowerPoint and the Information sheet. Students will also be able to email me and my details will be on the PowerPoint and the information sheet. No-one will be asked to volunteer, or disclose any personal information in front of their peers.

I will follow up the presentation with an Announcement on Moodle, where students will be able to click a link to access the Consent form and the Information sheet.

Contingency planning:

If these methods aren't effective, I will talk to the Stage Leaders who may be able to approach students on my behalf. They could share my details with the student(s) without disclosing anything about them to me. If I still don't have sufficient numbers, I will go ahead with the students who have expressed an interest, and perhaps approach students on the Foundation course as well. I could also approach staff on the BA PID course.

If I have more than 6 potential participants, I will run the focus group twice.

3. **What will you be asking participants to do?**

Participants will be asked to complete a short online questionnaire and attend a focus group of up to 8 students. Responses will be analysed thematically and participants will have the opportunity (but no obligation) to comment on the final report.

- Completion of online questionnaire prior to focus group: (estimated time 5mins)

This will give the opportunity to provide confidential feedback and you will also be asked what your neurodiversity or disability is. This information will be confidential.

- Focus group: (60mins, in-person at Kings Cross, scheduled to fit in with your studies)

Group discussion – a discussion amongst the participants about what works and what doesn't, based on a series of prompts. You won't be asked to disclose your neurodivergence or disability to other participants. The discussion will be audio recorded and transcribed, and facilitated by me and my colleague, Sarah Leontovitsch, as an observer.

Structure:

1. Welcome and briefing

2. Task: I intend to use a task which links to Standpoint theory, described by Strunk and Locke, in this way - 'An institutional ethnographic exploration begins by asking participants to describe their daily activities, where they go, what they do, why they do it, and how they know where, why, how, and when to do those things in order to identify the institutional processes, practices, procedures, and discourses that coordinate their descriptions of their daily lives; a second research question then asks participants to describe the challenges they face accomplishing their daily work.' Strunk and Locke p. 23.

   Participants will be asked to think through how they use Moodle, what they look for, what barriers they face and what assists them. They will have the opportunity to think individually and then in small groups, before sharing with the wider group.

3. This will be followed by a group discussion with some prompts about what students find helpful and whether they feel their neurodiversity impacts on their ability to access information.

4. Finally, the participants will be asked to 'draw' their experience of using Moodle and to briefly explain what they have drawn.

5. What happens next? Debriefing and thanks

As an alternative, if students request it, I will also offer a 30-minute semi-structured interview with the same/similar prompts in order to be flexible and inclusive if this is better suited to the student.

For further information and detail about the design and rationale, please see: Research methods: design

Reference:

Strunk, Kamden K., and Leslie Ann Locke, eds. *Research Methods for Social Justice and Equity in Education*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-05900-2.

4. **How will you get informed consent from these participants?**

- There will be an Information sheet which covers who I am, the rationale for the project, what will happen, how data will be collected and stored, and the right to withdraw, as well as my contact details.
- Potential participants will be asked to complete a Participant consent form either online or a hard copy.

There will be hard copies of both of these documents available when I speak to students and also a QR code to access each privately. I will also share these links via announcements on Moodle. Students will be able to opt-in via the consent form confidentially, no-one will be asked to volunteer in front of their peers.

5. **What potential risks to the interests of participants do you foresee and what steps will you take to minimise those risks?** A participant's interests include their physical and psychological wellbeing; their commercial interests; and their rights of privacy and reputation.

I think there is a risk that the students will feel 'othered' by my request to focus on them and I think this may be compounded by the fact that neurodiverse students are currently quite often the focus of research and there is a risk that the load is too great.

- Ensure the rationale is clear, that is to deepen our understanding of the student experience and make digital spaces more inclusive in the first instance. All students will be asked for their responses to the Moodle redesign, we just want to make sure that we are listening to all students, including this group. Future projects will focus on other groups of students.
- The expectations are limited in terms of workload. One short questionnaire and a 60mins focus group. The opportunity to review the findings will be entirely optional.
- There will be absolutely no repercussions from anything they say, there will be no additional requests.
- The focus group will be scheduled so that it doesn't clash with any assessment deadlines.

In addition to the above, there is a risk in the methodology. By using a focus group I am making it more difficult to control confidentiality (students may report what they have heard outside the group), it is also harder for participants to feel they can withdraw consent (it's hard to extract participation from a group discussion and socially awkward to leave the room). A sense of marginalisation could also be compounded by the conversation being dominated by individual students at the expense of others.

- Give a (friendly) briefing at the start and end of the focus group (and intervene where applicable) to remind everyone (participants, facilitator and observer) of the need make space for everyone to contribute, to listen attentively and respect confidentiality.
- Explain that participants don't have to respond to every prompt/question. Ensure harm is avoided, even at the expense of the research goals.
- Remind participants that the content of the focus group and questionnaire is confidential and there is no need to disclose any details of their disability/ neurodivergence to other participants.

- Let everyone know that they can leave the room at any time and let me know later if they would like to withdraw their consent.
- For potential participants who don't want to engage with the focus group, there is the option to contribute to the study in a 1:1 interview.

The group setting also poses the risk of harm by asking neurodiverse participants to be in a setting which can be stressful (the need for prolonged eye contact, face to face communications, speaking in front of a group).

- Ensure the space is welcoming, calm and friendly and provide items in the room to hold, manipulate, draw, play with, in case this helps some participants feel more relaxed.
- Use a reassuring and friendly tone at all times, written and verbal, and remind participants that they can stand up, walk around, and leave at any time if they wish.
- The use of the online questionnaire will hopefully allow students to make any contributions they were unable to make during the session.

6. **What potential risks to yourself as the practitioner do you foresee and what steps will you take to minimise those risks?**

Anticipated risks to myself relate mostly to the success or otherwise of the study. I work with the course team and to some extent the students and my professional integrity and reputation may suffer if the project doesn't go according to plan. Similarly if we find that the students feel the redesign is deeply flawed in relation to inclusivity, this will be an important finding, but also undermining of my position. In order to minimise these risks I will need to plan with care, have humility and embrace feedback and reflection that will ultimately improve my work.

In terms of safeguarding for myself and participants, any 1:1 meetings will be held in an open (if not public) place, for example KX 4th floor or the street.

7. **Does your project involve children or vulnerable adults e.g. a person with a learning disability?**

Neurodivergence is a complex term and those who are neurodivergent are best placed to determine the language and their own preferences in terms of how they identify. Bearing that in mind, neurodivergence is, however, often used to describe neurological difference such as dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia and ADHD, or Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) and according to Acas 'Being neurodivergent will often amount to a disability under the Equality Act 2010, even if the person does not consider themselves to be disabled'.

Similarly, there is discrepancy about the use of the term 'vulnerable' to describe someone who is neurodivergent. It may be appropriate in some cases but not for other individuals.

In this case, since the potential participants in this project may or may not identify as disabled or vulnerable it is important to make provision in case they do. In addition, they are part of what is commonly referred to as a 'marginalised' group and this requires careful ethical consideration.

In addition to the strategies identified in Qu. 6, I will make sure support services are clearly signposted. There is the Disability service and Counselling, Health and Chaplaincy. Martin Jones is the Disability advisor assigned to the course, and Paul De'ath is the Course Leader.

8. **How will you store the information you gather from participants?**

Online forms: The Participant consent form and Participant questionnaire will be stored in my MS Forms UAL account which is password protected.

Focus group (and interview where applicable) audio recording: Audio recording will be done via my phone (which is password protected) or Panopto, which is part of UAL digital storage and therefore also password protected. If I am obliged to use a different device for technical reasons, I will ensure that the recording is transferred to my UAL OneDrive account immediately after the focus group and permanently deleted from the initial device. File names will be Group1, 2, 3 and date. Participants will be A, B, C, D, etc..

The identifiers for these participants will be stored in a separate file on my UAL OneDrive account. Interviews will be transcribed electronically and only A, B, C, etc used to identify participants.

All data will be permanently deleted in July 2024 after the PG cert is complete. The original responses will not be needed once the results are collated and analysed.

I confirm my responsibility to deliver the project in accordance with the Code of Practice on Research Ethics of the University of the Arts London (the University). In signing this form I am also confirming that:

a) **The form is accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief.**
b) **I understand and accept that the ethical propriety of this project may be monitored by the relevant College Research body and/or the University's Research Ethics Sub-Committee.**

Signed: **Amy Urry** Date: **9 November 2023**

I support this project and have reviewed it with the participant:

Signed: ____Rachel Marsden___________ Date: ___9 November 2023_