



EMBEDDING RELATIONAL PEDAGOGY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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The conversation so far...

- Relationships between students and teachers are important in creating classroom atmospheres of trust and cooperation. Opening ourselves up to students requires us to be aware of our own emotions, to observe and interpret students' emotions, and to cope with students' feelings as they are expressed. All of these are demanding and important, if rarely acknowledged, aspects of teaching (Quinlan, 2016).
- Student-teacher relationships are a significant factor contributing to undergraduate student learning, motivation, identity development, well-being, graduation rates, and post-graduation career and civic outcomes (Cook-Sather et al., 2021).

Relationships & Belonging

Human beings are fundamentally and pervasively motivated by a need to **belong**, (Baumeister and Leary, 1995).

We believe creating meaningful relationships with students is central to enhancing the quality of teaching and to ensure all our students feel they belong, and that they feel safe.

“UNDERSTANDING RELATIONSHIPS,
CONNECTIONS AND MATTERING, AS
FUNDAMENTAL TO LEARNING AND TEACHING,
OFFERS THE POTENTIAL TO CHANGE THE WAY
WE EXPERIENCE OUR WORK AS EDUCATORS.”

GRAVETT (2023)



Relational Pedagogy

Relational pedagogy puts **relationships at the heart of teaching** and emphasises that a **meaningful connection** needs to be established between teacher and student if effective learning is to take place (Bovill, 2020; Di Miceli, 2023).

The benefits of strong relational pedagogy include, **more engaged** forms of learning and teaching; **greater inclusivity, increased relevance of learning** to students and **positive outcomes** for all students (Bovill, 2020).



“Pausing to be human in Higher Education” (Lemon, 2023)

The Heart of Teaching: Reflective Practice in Teaching and Learning

We have developed an innovative professional development training course to help HE professionals build knowledge and understanding of **relational pedagogy**, the role and importance of teacher-student relationships and the positive association with **outcomes**.

The online course explains **how to build positive relationships with learners** and **provides practical strategies** to enhance student engagement, a sense of belonging, and academic outcomes. The training prompts moments of **reflection** on how HE professionals might integrate their learning into current teaching practices.



Scan the QR code or [click here](#) to learn more and join the course.

The Heart of Teaching



Course Overview

Our **FREE** 5-week, 20-hour online training program is hosted on a global platform, bringing together experts from both healthcare and education sectors.

By embracing **relational** and **inclusive student-centered pedagogy**, educators can significantly enhance student engagement and connection.



ONLINE LEARNING

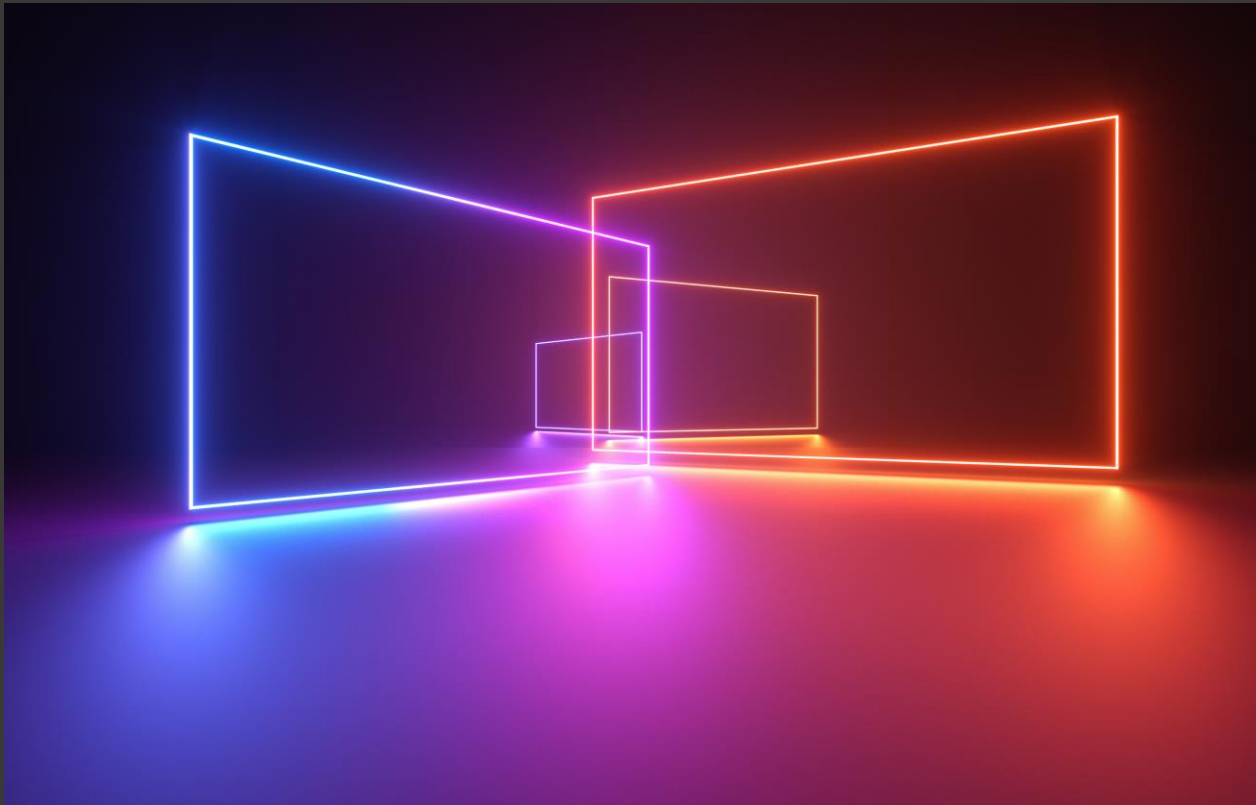


5 WEEK COURSE



DIGITAL CERTIFICATE

The Heart of Teaching: Reflective Practice in Teaching and Learning



Our training uniquely integrates insights from **both educators and students**, providing course users with a comprehensive understanding of the educational relationship from **multiple perspectives**.

Why Participate?

To enhance your professional skills, while actively participating in a community focused on **advancing educational practices** through reflective methods.

Course Preview Video



Aims

Our aim was to solicit the views of HE Professionals on:

- i) The course content and delivery, and
- ii) What impact the course material has on teaching practices following immediate completion of the course, and six months later.

Our research question:

What impacts are associated with an online course designed to train HE professionals about the significance of relationships in the learning process and teaching practice?

Mixed-methods

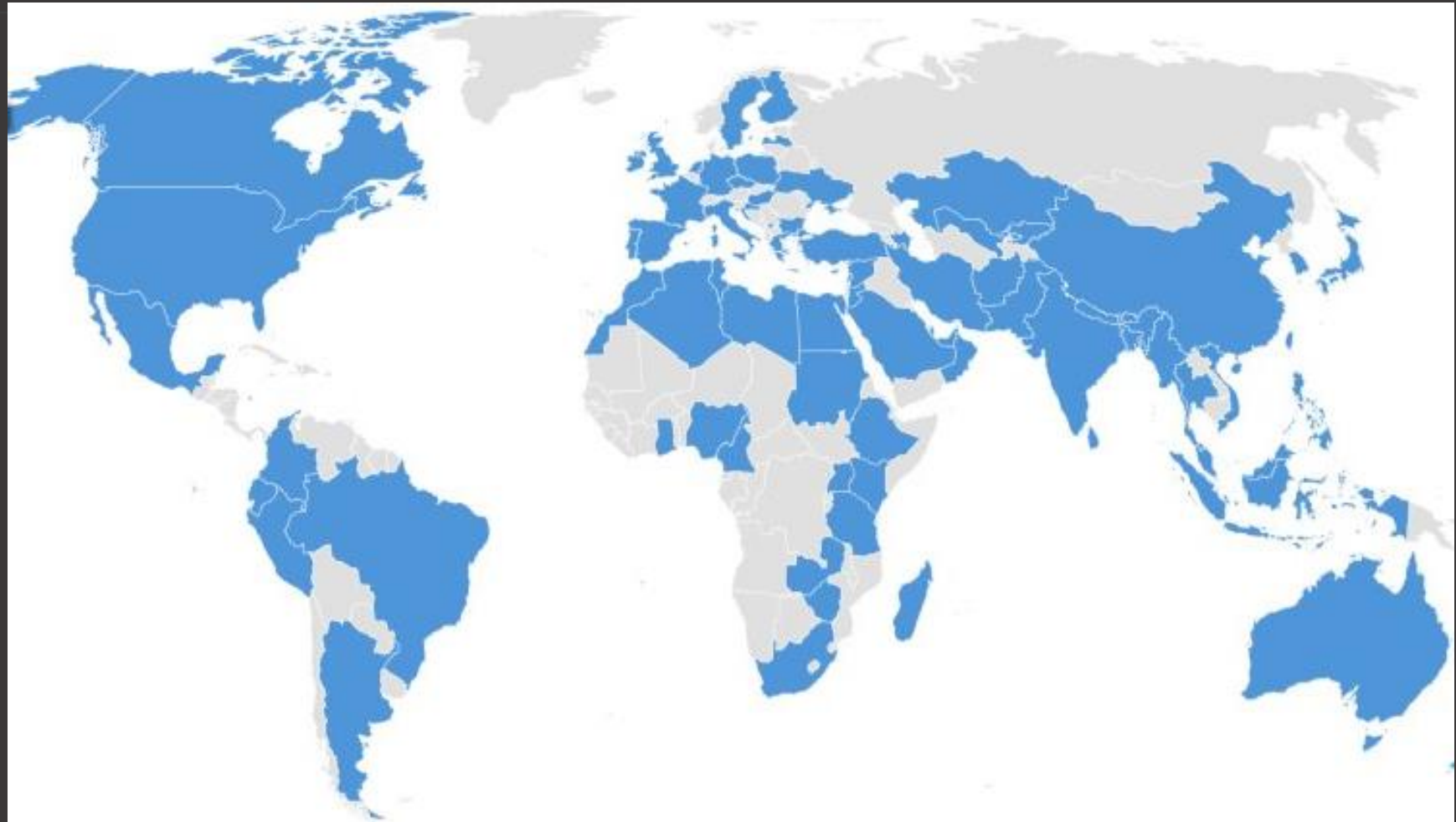
Quantitative and qualitative data collected via the following mixed-methods:

- Optional online discussion forums within various learning sections of the course, which promote reflection of learning and current practice.
- Optional anonymous online post-course survey that course users are invited to complete at the end of the course and again six months after.
- An invitation for course users to share their email address to consent to contact in future, should resources become available for further data collection, associated with evidence of impact (for example, via a focus group or 1:1 interview).

Pilot Findings

Pilot data collection took place for three months from January 2025.

Currently we have
~ 875 enrolments
over 100 countries



Pilot Findings

Pilot data collection took place for three months from January 2025. Research Fellow analysed the available data April 2025.

Initial Post-course Survey Responses:

- 100% of course users reported the course had met or exceeded their expectations.
- 100% of course users reported they had gained new knowledge or skills.
- 64% of course users reported that they have already shared their new learning.

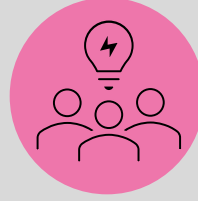
Pilot Findings

Initial Themes from Thematic Analysis



METACOGNITIVE AWARENESS

- Create space for reflection
- Practice emotional intelligence
- Be aware of insecurities and inconsistencies
- Maintain boundaries
- Prioritise personal development
- Balance of multiple role requirements
- Awareness of expectations
- Acknowledge personal experience



INCLUSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

- Inclusivity is valued
- Show students their voices are heard
- Create a safe environment
- Respect for all
- Review strategies for introvert v extrovert students
- Student-centered approach
- Encourage authenticity
- Increased interaction
- Flexible pedagogical practices
- Provide opportunities to engage
- Be aware of biases



EMPOWERING STUDENT AGENCY

- Provide choice for students
- Build confidence in students
- Academic achievement v personal growth
- Individual over content (good citizen, over grades)
- Engagement = outcomes

Metacognitive Awareness



"I used to think that being more connected to students may cause time wasting instead of content delivery so I thought of putting a stop to it but now I would rather improve that aspect."

"I think the point of looking after yourself is important."

"Teaching is not just a profession; it is a calling, a responsibility."

"The relationship with the teacher is very important and can determine success or failure."

Inclusive Learning Environments



"Setting the idea that you are all learning together and that students' different perspectives are welcomed is conducive to an accepting classroom where open discourse is unleashed!"

"Realistic expectations are very important in keeping that mutual and reciprocal relationships between students and their educators."

"I previously may have not thought about introverted or extroverted students."

"The best we can do is to be aware of our own biases and remember that there are always other possibilities and interpretations."

"It is also important to be inclusive and represent diversity in order to show that this diversity exists and is to be embraced and respected. You're almost modelling how society should be in mini form in the classroom."

Empowering Student Agency



"Learning is not just about transferring knowledge but about building connections that empower students to achieve their full potential"; "My goal for student outcomes is lifelong learning."

"Make it clear to students that their voices are heard and their opinions matter. Regularly check in with them not just about academic progress but also about how they are managing other aspects of their lives."

"Teaching diversity from an early stage ensures that students grow up with a broader perspective, preparing them to become respectful and socially responsible individuals."

"The idea that it's not about sitting back, but about actively seeking other voices and experience is important here."

"My approach ensures students feel supported, engaged, and empowered to apply knowledge beyond the classroom."

Testimonials

"It's genuinely transformed how I see my own teaching practice. It helped me understand **why** I approach my teaching the way that I do"

"This wonderful course is not only educative and informative for Higher Education, but also, **humanitarian!**"

The Heart of Teaching: Reflective Practice in Teaching and Learning

Enrol Today

Don't miss this opportunity to enhance your teaching practice and create a more engaging learning environment for your students.

Scan the QR code or [click here](#) to learn more and join the course.

Connect with us: l.flannery@uea.ac.uk



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