UAL CREATIVE MINDSETS: DEVELOPING GROWTH MINDSETS TO ADDRESS ATTAINMENT INEQUALITIES IN ART AND DESIGN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper highlights key areas of the UAL Creative Mindsets project that were explored during a Mobile Thematic Session at ELIA Biennial 2018 as part of the Art & Social Cohesion strand.

UAL Creative Mindsets[42] is a research intervention project that involves both staff and students to address attainment differentials by developing growth mindsets to reduce the self-limiting effects of stereotype threat (Osbourne & Walker, 2006) and implicit bias (Staats, 2014; Devine et al., 2012). Based upon Dweck's research on implicit theories of intelligence, a growth mindset is the belief that ability can be developed through effort and by embracing challenge. Through subject-specific workshop design and inclusive pedagogy, UAL Creative Mindsets aims to tackle the inequitable outcomes in student experience, progression, academic attainment, and employability experienced by students studying art and design in higher education in the United Kingdom.

42 UAL Creative Mindsets Blog. See http://ualcreativemindsets.myblog.arts.ac.uk/

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INTRODUCTION

In the higher education sector in the United Kingdom, across all subject areas, there is a persistent gap between different groups of students who are awarded a "good" degree (students who gain a 1st class or 2:1 degree). The greatest difference in outcome is predicated on ethnicity. This attainment gap is increasingly referred to as the awarding gap, to shift responsibility towards the institution and to avoid a student deficit model. University of the Arts London (UAL) attainment differentials between home white students and home black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME) students has reduced from 22% in 2016/17 to 16% in 2017/18. UAL states[43] that by 2022 the percentage of first degree home BAME students achieving a first or 2:1 will be the same as for first degree home white students. BAME is a contested term, as it homogenises groups but is commonly used in the UK for data analysis.

UAL Creative Mindsets developed from Changing Mindsets, a research intervention funded by the Office for Students (OfS).[44] Led by academics in the Psychology Department at the University of Portsmouth, Changing Mindsets is a partnership between

Figure 1. What is Talent, What is Failure? opening event. Photo: Gareth Johnson

the University of Portsmouth, University of the Arts London (UAL), the University of Winchester, and the University of Brighton. During the pilot year 2017/18, three courses across three different UAL colleges (Camberwell College of Arts, Central Saint Martins, and London College of Communication) participated in the intervention. The pilot year comprised staff and student workshops, quantitative and qualitative data collection, and peripheral events, such as the student-led exhibition *What Is Talent, What is Failure?*[45] at the Wilson Road Galleries in February 2018, and *UAL Changing Mindsets with Grayson Perry*.[46] Emerging findings of the pilot year can be found in the Changing Mindsets Mid-Project Report.[47] The research work in the pilot year informed the subject-specific approaches that were tested and developed in subsequent workshops.

The fifth strand in the UAL Learning for All Attainment Programme, UAL Creative Mindsets is supported by the Teaching and Learning Exchange. Drawing upon research presented in the HEFCE report, *Causes of differences in student outcomes (*Mountford-Zimdars, Sabri, Moore, Sanders, Jones, & Higham, 2015), the intervention supports staff and

43   UAL Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Report 2018. Retrieved 09 January 2019 from https://www.arts.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0021/89211/UAL-Equality-Diversity-Inclusion-Report-2018.pdf

44   Changing Mindsets Project Website. See http://mindsets.port.ac.uk/

45   UAL Creative Mindsets interview with Graduate Intern, Daisy Young, curator of *What is Talent, What is Failure?* Retrieved 12 January 2019 from http://ualcreativemindsets.myblog.arts.ac.uk/what-is-talent-what-is-failure-changing-mindsets-at-ual/

46   Retrieved 12 January 2019 from http://ualcreativemindsets.myblog.arts.ac.uk/ual-changing-mindsets-workshop-with-grayson-perry/

47   Changing Mindsets Mid-Project Report. (2018, June). Retrieved 12 January 2019 from https://bit.ly/2RH8dw6

students to explore psychosocial and identity factors that influence differential outcomes. This is defined as the "extent to which students feel supported and encouraged in their daily interactions within their institutions and with staff members… as such interactions can both facilitate and limit students' learning and attainment." (Mountford-Zimdars et al., 2015: ii)

GROWTH MINDSET WORKSHOP DESIGN

The Growth Mindsets workshop opens a space to consider the relationship between Dweck's theories of intelligence and the art school concept of "the crit"—focusing on risk/failure,

talent/intelligence, and language/feedback. The crit is often a contested space within art education; historically derived from asymmetrical power relations between students and teacher, it can be stressful and problematic, particularly for those from widening participation and international backgrounds, as it can be seen as an assessment of cultural capital and oral skills (Blythman, Orr, & Blair, 2007). To demonstrate a growth mindset (and to build resilience when faced with risk/failure), students are invited to identify a challenge they have faced in their first term at university and to discuss, in pairs, strategies that were applied to overcome it. This builds an inclusive sense of belonging in the lecture theatre or studio and acknowledges prior knowledge and lived experience, just as Biggs (2014) reflects on the importance of identifying behaviour and experiences and linking these to the context in which they are to operate.

Before asking for feedback, one of the UAL Creative Mindsets Team (a paid group of students and alumni who have been trained in workshop theory and facilitation) shares their experience of challenge in the first year. This draws upon work by bell hooks on inclusive pedagogy (hooks, 1994) in that, by valuing every voice in the classroom, power is challenged. The opportunity to share ideas draws upon experience outside the academic environment to acknowledge that "difficult experiences may be common" and to demonstrate the importance of "integrating theory and practice: ways of knowing with habits of being." (hooks, 1994: 43).

Student feedback suggests that self-reflection on risk/failure occurs and can impact positively upon future approaches to learning and considerations of the crit. According to one student participant, "To realise that anxiety and worrying about the challenge is the biggest obstacle of a challenge."

The second aim of the session is to challenge notions of intelligence/talent being static, fixed, or biological concepts. This was informed by filmed research interviews with Dr Gurnam Singh, Principal Lecturer in Social Work at Coventry University and Visiting Fellow in Race and Education at UAL: *Critical Pedagogy Bites 1,2,3 &4*[48] and *From Implicit Bias to Unconscious Non-Bias*[49] and *Navigating with the Birds Series* (Vikki Hill with Dr Gurnam Singh).[50] Students were asked to consider how to define "talent" and to then anonymously post it on Menti (an online learning tool). The responses clearly fell between two positions: those who thought talent was something innate, something "you are born with," and those who considered it to be something that developed through practice and perseverance.

Figure 3. Student responses to Menti activity. Credit: Vikki Hill

Students were then presented with Dweck's mindset theory, including evidence on neuroplasticity to demonstrate physical transformations in the brain when learning occurs. This is followed by an opportunity for critical dialogue where students are able to discuss their responses to the theory. The feedback demonstrated a successful approach to achieving learning outcomes through the chosen pedagogical approaches. "Interesting and thought provoking, some of the questions I felt really made me think about something I'd never considered," commented one student participant.

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48 *Critical Pedagogy Bites 1,2,3 &4*. See http://bit.ly/2GaMLY0

49 *From Implicit Bias to Unconscious Non-Bias*. See https://youtu.be/vsFsaRLT8DU

50 *Navigating with the Birds Series*. See https://youtu.be/nC57wFpZr3U

To explore language/feedback, the discussion centres on growth mindset language and the "power of yet"—positive message but fixed mindset language and fixed mindset language. The UAL Creative Mindsets Team facilitators share examples of how language used in both formative and peer assessment practices can develop a growth mindset or produce a fixed mindset position which can either encourage resilience or, conversely, elicit feelings of failure or inadequacy. Students are then asked to identify areas of their own life and learning where they could apply theory to practice, once again drawing on engaged pedagogy (hooks, 1994). Students are offered the opportunity to share this with the whole cohort.

Figure 4. UAL students and staff completing online survey. Photo: Gareth Johnson

The final activities of the workshop include a final group design task to complete the learning cycle (Kolb & Kolb, 2005), with opportunities for converging, accommodating, diverging, and assimilating knowledge. Experiential learning can be an effective teaching and learning approach to challenge entrenched beliefs, and this encourages students to work with the theory and design a subject-specific growth mindset product or activity for students on their course to address risk, challenge, failure, or language. The concepts that are shared range from app designs to VR activities, marketing campaigns, peer support tasks, and small modifications to language or behaviour in the crit, to evidence challenges faced and strategies employed, to further reflect on the process.

CONCLUSION

In Year 2 of the intervention (2018/19) the UAL Creative Mindsets Team has so far delivered over 60 workshops to both staff and students across five colleges (Camberwell College of Art, Chelsea College of Arts, Central Saint Martins, London College of Communication, and London College of Fashion), and has worked with approximately 30% (1,500) of the Year 1 students at the university. The current model has been to deliver two workshops to each course team that is participating, one workshop on growth mindsets and the other on stereotype threat and implicit bias. Work is underway to evaluate the efficacy of this model and to create an embedded approach to eradicating the 16% that symbolises the inequalities that face our students of colour.
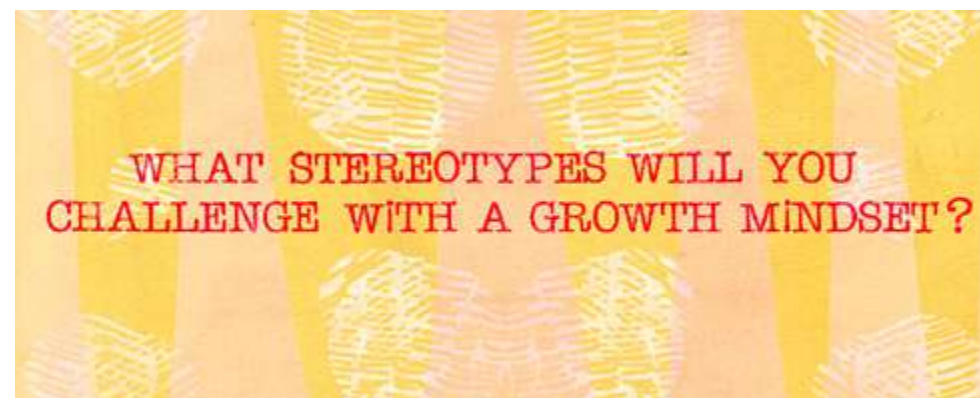

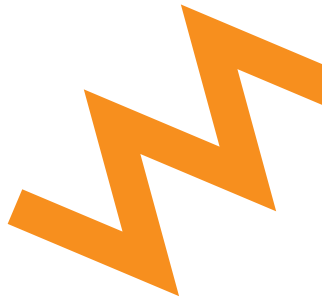*Figure 5. Creative Mindsets takeaway question, design by Andreea Stan*

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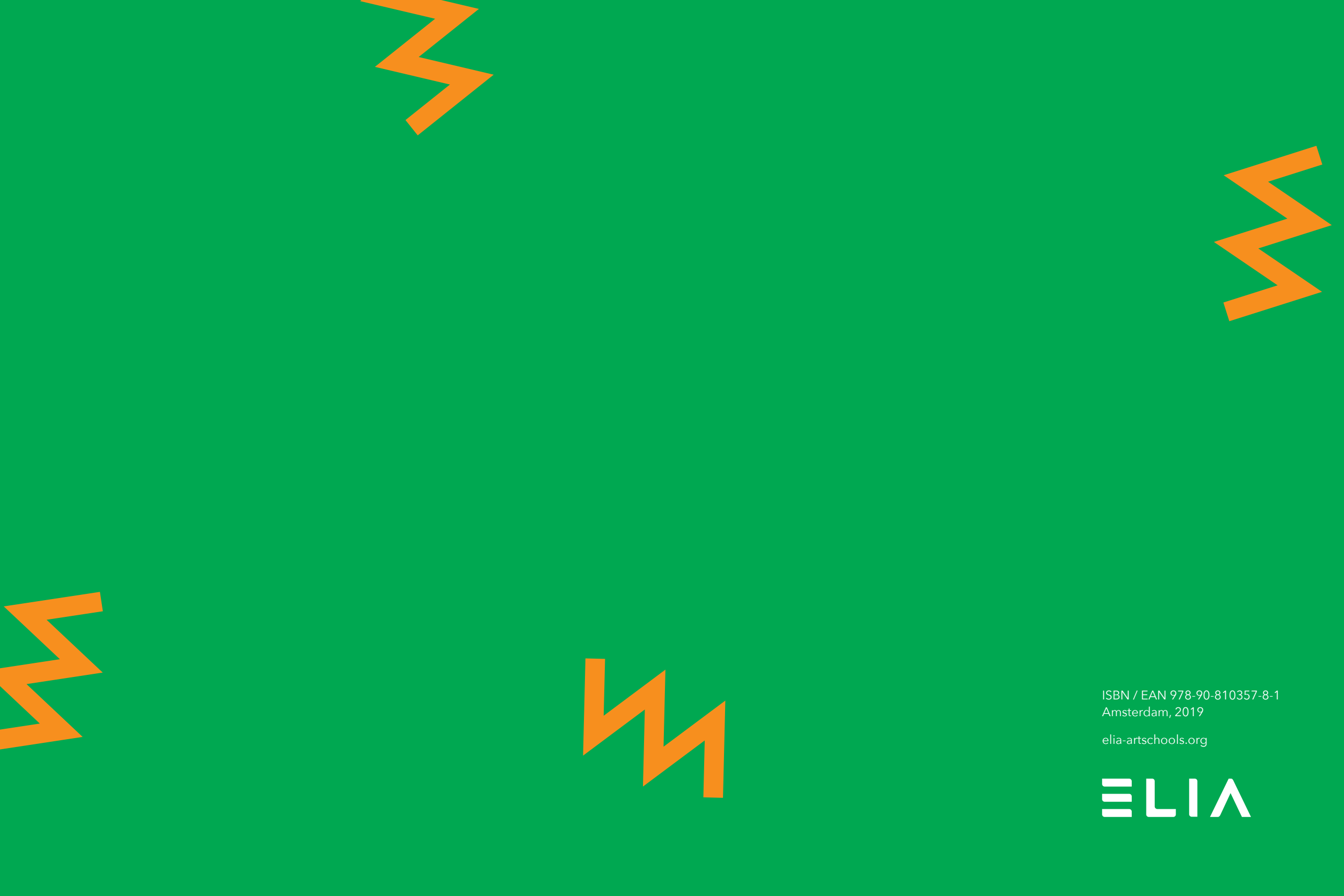
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