

**STORYTELLING FOR VISUALISING RACIAL AND SOCIAL JUSTICE.
AN ACTIVITY SYSTEM FOR VISUALISING JUSTICE IN HIGHER EDUCATION.**



“How do we tell the stories of marginalised student voices, understanding their experiences and amplifying their courage to create change in ways that are real and authentic?”

- Kevin J Brazant

A Reflective Practice-Based Research Paper on Student Partnership, Creative Knowledge Exchange, and Institutional Change.

Working Paper / Research Report

Author: Kevin J. Brazant

Senior Educational Developer and LCC Changemakers Lead
University of the Arts London

Dated: 16/2/26

Abstract

This paper documents and reflects upon *Storytelling for Visualising Racial and Social Justice*, a student partnership knowledge exchange initiative developed through the LCC Changemakers programme at the London College of Communication. The project invites students, graduates, and institutional partners to explore the question: “*What does racial and social justice look like through your creative lens?*”

Through artistic responses, collaborative workshops, and cross-institutional dialogue, the initiative examines how creative practice can function as a mechanism for visualising, narrating, and interrogating experiences of racial and social justice within higher education.

Drawing upon principles from student partnership theory, critical race-informed pedagogy, and Cultural-Historical Activity Theory, the project positions creative storytelling as both a research method and a form of institutional intervention. In doing so, it extends the *Disrupt the Discourse* framework by demonstrating how student-led creative outputs can function as knowledge exchange artefacts, curriculum interventions, and reflective tools for institutional learning.

The paper reflects on the project’s conceptual foundations, collaborative structures, and emergent themes, arguing that creative co-production enables universities to move beyond symbolic inclusion towards structurally embedded practices of equity and social justice.

1. Introduction

The question “*What does racial and social justice look like through your creative lens?*” sits at the heart of the *Storytelling for Visualising Racial and Social Justice* initiative. Developed through the LCC Changemakers programme at the London College of Communication, the project invites students, recent graduates, and institutional partners to explore how creative practice can articulate experiences of justice, belonging, marginalisation, and collective agency within higher education.

Universities increasingly recognise the importance of student partnership in advancing inclusive educational practice. However, student voice is frequently operationalised through consultative mechanisms that limit opportunities for students to shape institutional narratives. This project attempts to move beyond consultation by positioning students as **creative co-researchers and knowledge producers**.

Within this context, storytelling and artistic production become methods through which marginalised experiences can be documented, interpreted, and communicated. By foregrounding creative responses to questions of race, social justice, and equity, the initiative explores how visual and narrative practices can contribute to institutional reflection and transformation.

2. Conceptual Framework

The initiative draws upon multiple intersecting theoretical perspectives informing practice-based research within higher education.

Critical Race-Informed Pedagogy

The project builds upon the *Disrupt the Discourse* framework, which applies critical race theory to interrogate structural inequalities within educational environments. Within this framework, storytelling is understood as a method for challenging dominant narratives and making visible the lived experiences of marginalised communities.

Student Partnership and Scholar Activism

Student partnership models emphasise collaboration between students and staff in shaping educational practice. In this project, partnership extends beyond curriculum consultation to include **co-authorship, creative production, and institutional knowledge exchange**.

Student partners act as:

- cultural interpreters
- creative researchers
- contributors to institutional learning

This aligns with broader notions of scholar activism, in which research and practice are mobilised to challenge inequities within institutional systems.

Cultural-Historical Activity Theory

The initiative is also informed by Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), particularly the expanded activity system model developed by **Yrjö Engeström**. CHAT provides a lens through which collaborative activity system, such as student partnership initiatives can be analysed in terms of their social actors, mediating artefacts, and institutional structures.

In this project, creative outputs such as artworks, installations, and digital media function as **mediating artefacts** that facilitate dialogue between students, staff, and institutional systems.

3. Project Design and Collaborative Architecture

The initiative operates as a cross-institutional knowledge exchange project connecting academic programmes, professional services, and external partners.

Key collaborators include:

- College Educational Teams
- Library and Information Services
- Careers and Employability
- Knowledge Exchange partners
- student partner networks including Climate Advocates, Digital Champions, and EDI Champions

The project also extends beyond the university through collaboration with **SOAS University of London**, enabling dialogue between student communities across institutions.

This collaborative structure reflects a deliberate strategy to situate student partnership within broader institutional ecosystems rather than isolating it within specific academic programmes.

4. Creative Methodology: The Visual Glossary

A central output of the initiative is the development of a **Visual Glossary of Racial and Social Justice**, created through an open call inviting students to respond creatively to key concepts associated with equity and social justice.

Themes explored include:

- anti-racism
- allyship
- advocacy
- culture
- intersectionality

Students are invited to interpret these concepts through a range of creative forms including:

- illustration
- photography
- digital media
- immersive installations
- interactive learning experiences
- Performance improvisation etc.

The resulting artefacts contribute to a **digital archive and exhibition**, forming a collective visual language through which students articulate their understanding of justice.

In this sense, the glossary operates simultaneously as:

- a creative archive
- a pedagogical resource
- a reflective research artefact

5. Emergent Institutional Themes

Through workshops, collaborative discussions, and creative submissions, several themes have emerged within the project.

Creativity as a Language of Justice

Participants frequently describe artistic practice as a means of articulating experiences that are difficult to express through traditional academic discourse. Visual and narrative forms allow students to communicate complex emotional and social realities linked to identity, belonging, and marginalisation.

Community and Collective Agency

The project highlights the importance of collective participation in addressing systemic inequities. By creating shared spaces for storytelling and dialogue, participants contribute to a sense of community that extends beyond individual academic programmes.

Institutional Reflexivity

Creative outputs generated through the project provide institutions with new forms of qualitative insight into student experience. These artefacts function as reflective prompts through which universities can examine how structures and practices shape student belonging and participation.

6. Knowledge Exchange and Institutional Impact

The project demonstrates how creative student partnership initiatives can function as mechanisms for institutional learning and external engagement.

Outputs emerging from the initiative include:

- a digital visual glossary hosted on institutional platforms (see table below for illustration).
- student-led exhibitions and public showcases
- workshops and symposium discussions
- reflective publications documenting the project's impact

These outputs contribute to the wider conversation surrounding equity, inclusion, and student partnership within higher education.

Importantly, the initiative also creates opportunities for students to develop professional and creative skills through participation in authentic practice-based projects.

Fig.1 illustration of Table with a glossary of potential terms:

Term	Definition/ meaning
Micro aggression:	“ Microaggression is a term used for brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative attitudes toward stigmatised or culturally marginalised groups.”
Social Justice:	“Social justice is both a process and a goal. The goal of social justice is full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable, and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure.”
Any others?	



K. J. Brazant, *Disrupt the Discourse* (2021).

7. Reflection: Towards Creative Institutional Change

The Visualising Justice initiative suggests that creative student partnership projects can operate as catalysts for institutional reflection and transformation. By positioning students as storytellers, artists, and co-researchers, the project challenges traditional distinctions between research, teaching, and knowledge exchange.

Rather than treating social justice as a thematic topic within curriculum content, the initiative embeds justice within the **processes through which knowledge is produced and shared**.

This shift reflects a broader movement towards participatory and practice-based approaches to educational change.

8. Conclusion

Storytelling for Visualising Racial and Social Justice demonstrates how creative student partnership initiatives can contribute to institutional conversations around equity, belonging, and representation. Through artistic storytelling and collaborative knowledge exchange, the project creates spaces for students to articulate their experiences while simultaneously informing institutional practice.

As universities continue to address structural inequalities, creative co-production offers a powerful methodology for integrating lived experience into institutional learning processes.

Projects such as Visualising Justice illustrate how student-led storytelling can move beyond symbolic representation to become an active component of educational transformation.

References

Brazant, K. (2021). *Disrupt the Discourse: Applying Critical Race Theory as a conceptual framework for learning and teaching*. Equity in Education & Society.

Engeström, Y. (1987). *Learning by Expanding: An Activity-Theoretical Approach to Developmental Research*. Helsinki: Orienta-Konsultit.

Engeström, Y. (2001). Expansive learning at work: Toward an activity theoretical reconceptualization. *Journal of Education and Work*.

Engeström, Y. (2015). *Learning by Expanding* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Appendices:

The following appendices present the strategic application of the research framework described in this paper, demonstrating how conceptual insights were translated into institutional practice.

Appendix A – Institutional Strategy Framework

Strategic Implementation Framework An Activity System for Visualising Racial and Social Justice
--

Prepared by:

Kevin J Brazant, Senior Educational Developer and Changemakers Coordinator.

Date: 2 March 2026

1. Strategic Context

The *Visualising Racial and Social Justice* initiative forms part of a wider institutional effort to advance inclusive and critically engaged educational practices within the creative arts. The initiative seeks to explore how storytelling, creative practice, and collaborative knowledge exchange can support universities in amplifying marginalised voices and generating meaningful institutional change.

The guiding question underpinning this work is:

How do we tell the stories of marginalised student voices, understanding their experiences and amplifying their courage to create change in ways that are real and authentic?

— Kevin J. Brazant

This strategy outlines the conceptual and operational framework through which the initiative translates research-informed ideas into institutional practice.

2. Conceptual Foundation

The initiative is informed by **Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)**, particularly the expanded activity system model developed by Yrjö Engeström.

Within this framework, institutional change is understood as occurring through interactions between:

- subjects (students, staff, partners)
- mediating artefacts (creative outputs, dialogue, exhibitions)
- institutional rules and structures
- communities of practice

By adapting this model to the context of higher education co-creation, the initiative positions creative storytelling and artistic practice as mediating tools through which students and staff collectively examine and transform institutional practices.

The framework also draws upon critical race-informed pedagogical approaches articulated in the *Disrupt the Discourse* research programme (Brazant, 2023), which emphasises the importance of addressing structural inequalities within educational environments.

3. Strategic Objectives

The Visualising Justice activity system operates with four interconnected strategic objectives:

1. Amplifying Marginalised Narratives

Create platforms through which students and creative practitioners can express experiences of racial and social justice through artistic and narrative forms.

2. Embedding Social Justice in Curriculum and Practice

Support academic programmes and professional services in integrating critical and inclusive frameworks into teaching, learning, and student partnership initiatives.

3. Strengthening Cross-Institutional Collaboration

Facilitate collaboration between departments, professional services, and external partners to ensure that work on equity and social justice operates across institutional boundaries.

4. Extending Sector Impact

Position the initiative as a model for knowledge exchange that connects creative higher education to industry, cultural institutions, and wider public discourse.

4. Strategic Partnerships and Institutional Integration

The Visualising Justice initiative deliberately operates across institutional structures to demonstrate systemic impact and address forms of marginality and educational alienation identified in prior research (Brazant, 2023).

Key collaborations include:

Information Centre

Collaboration through the **Taking Over Spaces: Visualising Justice** initiative, supporting the development of a student-led *Art in Conversation* series and symposium exploring social justice within creative practice.

This programme provides a platform for students to present artistic responses to themes of justice, identity, and representation.

Academic Development

Collaboration with colleagues including Dr Helena Walsh and Sarah MacDonald through Radical Pedagogies initiatives.

This work focuses on embedding critical pedagogical approaches within:

- curriculum development
- learning development practices
- staff development activities

Knowledge Exchange

Partnership with SOAS University of London extends the initiative beyond institutional boundaries and supports collaborative dialogue around race, justice, and creative practice within higher education.

Careers and Employability

Collaboration through the Brand Insights initiative connects discussions of social justice within creative education to industry contexts.

Outputs include sector-facing dissemination through platforms such as jobs.ac.uk.

Student Partnerships

Work with institutional colleagues supports the development of a student-led publication model, enabling students to contribute directly to knowledge production and public dialogue around social justice and creative practice.

Library and Learning Resources

Collaboration with Library and Learning Resources explores issues of representation, decolonial approaches to knowledge, and alternative ways of knowing within library collections and academic resources.

5. Activity System Model

The Visualising Justice framework operates as a collaborative activity system involving multiple stakeholders.

Core elements include:

Subjects

- students
- educators
- professional services staff
- external partners

Mediating Artefacts

- artistic responses and visual storytelling
- exhibitions and installations
- symposium discussions
- student-led publications

Community

- academic departments
- student partnership networks
- cultural and external collaborators

Outcome

A more inclusive institutional culture that recognises creative practice as a powerful medium for exploring and addressing racial and social justice.

6. Strategic Significance

Visualising Justice represents a shift from short-term project-based activity towards a more integrated institutional approach to equity and social justice.

The initiative demonstrates:

- cross-silo collaboration between academic and professional services
- embedded knowledge exchange with external partners
- industry-facing engagement through employability initiatives
- integration of social justice themes within curriculum development and professional practice

Through these mechanisms, the initiative contributes to the development of sustainable institutional practices that recognise creative storytelling and artistic practice as legitimate forms of knowledge production.

7. Implementation and Future Development

Future development of the initiative will focus on:

- expanding student-led creative outputs and exhibitions
- strengthening cross-institutional partnerships
- developing digital archives and visual glossaries documenting student work
- disseminating insights through publications, symposia, and sector engagement

These activities will support the continued development of Visualising Justice as both a pedagogical framework and a model for institutional innovation in creative higher education.

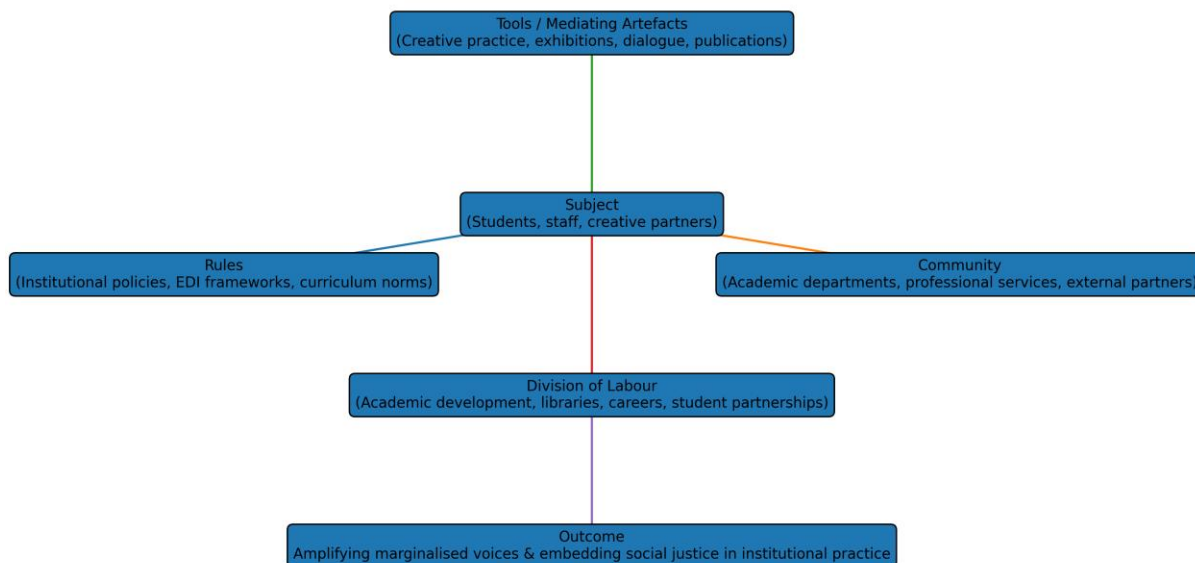


Figure 1: Activity System model adapted from Yrjö Engeström illustrating the collaborative framework underpinning the *Visualising Justice* initiative. The model demonstrates how creative practice and storytelling function as mediating artefacts through which students, staff, and institutional partners engage in dialogue around racial and social justice, enabling new forms of institutional learning and transformation.

References

Brazant, K. (2023). *Disrupt the Discourse: Applying Critical Race Theory as a conceptual framework for learning and teaching*.

Equity in Education & Society. SAGE Publications.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/27526461231163325>

Engeström, Y. (1987). *Learning by Expanding: An Activity-Theoretical Approach to Developmental Research*. Helsinki: Orienta-Konsultit.

Engeström, Y. (2001). Expansive learning at work: Toward an activity theoretical reconceptualization. *Journal of Education and Work*, 14(1), 133–156.

Engeström, Y. (2015). *Learning by Expanding: An Activity-Theoretical Approach to Developmental Research* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.