

Equality, diversity and inclusion: learning from laying our cards on the table (resource showcase)

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Presentation abstract

In this showcase, we presented a card resource for learning developers who work with staff or students to set up an inclusive learning environment. These are often personal interactions and need to be explored respectfully (Love, Gaynor, and Blessett, 2016; Mahmood, Gray and Benincasa, 2022). The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) cards were created by staff at the University of Hertfordshire and comprise 26 topics and illustrations, ranging from 'belonging' to 'trust', and exist in both a physical and digital format. Resources used as games can encourage participation, reflection, and transformational thinking (Peabody and Noyes, 2017; Clark, Dickerson, and Jarvis, 2022), which are all important for encouraging respectful conversations about EDI issues.

A collaborative project with the University of East Anglia to explore the use of the cards was funded by ALDinHE. Full ethics approval was gained from both universities before beginning. It recruited staff and students at Hertfordshire and East Anglia who worked with EDI issues and gathered reflections from facilitators and participants who used the cards in different learning contexts, such as academic support staff development exercises and student representation workshops. They reported that the card prompts allowed for personal storytelling and they suggested further topics for the cards set.

This session, led by learning developers and teaching staff, explored the idea of the 'brave space' (Arao and Clemens, 2013, p. 142; Palfrey, 2017) and why 'serious play' is important in learning (Rieber, Smith and Noah, 1998, p. 29). It discussed where and when the cards can be used, in terms of: a physical or digital space; the curriculum or

disciplinary context; and the stage of the learner's journey. The EDI cards and new guidance booklet were made available for delegates to take away.

Keywords: equality; diversity and inclusion; cards; conversation.

Community response

The following participant response encapsulated the many benefits of the session, including how the presence of tangible objects (in the form of the cards) increased the engagement of their peers:

This resource interested me in two ways. Firstly, and most obviously, the care with which it has obviously been designed and created, which in itself suggests the importance of the subject matter and how it has been approached. I am reflecting on how these will be useful to me in my role, within the interactions I have with students and the areas of learning we explore. I understand further guidance on their use in an LD context will be forthcoming, and this will be really useful. Secondly, I was encouraged to observe my fellow attendees' responses to the resource. As someone who often uses objects in my teaching, it added to my anecdotal experience that 'people love things'. There was enthusiasm and excitement around the physical resources, with the tactile nature of them, and the way delegates explored them, encouraging discussion. The quality of the resource added to this, and presenters gave time and space for this which helped discussions develop.

Especially in relation to a sensitive area such as EDI, the session also received positive feedback for its ability to open honest conversations – in the environment of the workshop but also in terms of the wider potential use of the cards. Exploring this theme, another attendee remarked:

The opportunity to explore the complexities related to EDI through the activity was welcome. The cards enabled us to discuss issues like belonging, privilege and trust through an element of self-choice and how these issues resonated with us. I especially like the underpinnings of creating a 'brave space' rather than a 'safe space', which one of the presenters and their colleagues describe elsewhere as 'introducing the micro-

skills of compassion in education, [which] can help students to develop an inclusive, tolerant attitude to their peers during difficult conversations, facilitating an empathic and non-judgemental environment' with a commitment to noticing and acting upon distress (Clark, Dickerson and Jarvis, 2022). A commitment to this type of space is very topical and necessary in my view.

Next steps and additional questions

It is apparent that for those who attended, the cards provided a helpful route into discussions about EDI and about creating brave spaces. The presenters provided the following QR codes linked to a guide about how and why to use the resource (Figure 1), and to a previous article from the *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education* (Figure 2), which readers are invited to scan if they would like to read more.

Figure 1. Guidance on using the resource (Clark, Dickerson and Jarvis, 2022).



Figure 2. JLDHE article (Sillence et al., 2023).



Authors' reflection

Reading the community response on the EDI cards has foregrounded two issues that have not featured as prominently in our revised guidance for the expanded set, which will be published soon. The first is the tangible nature of cards, which we discuss in relation to the idea of play. However, the contributor's point that 'people love things' has made us think

about how we can better involve someone through an object. The comment on tactility suggests that we could enhance this property in an otherwise small, smooth surface by creating physical depth; outlining or embossing the image and text, and adding braille to improve accessibility, for example.

The brave space ethos of the EDI cards is something that staff at the University of East Anglia have learnt a great deal about from colleagues at the University of Hertfordshire. The reflection from the community on this approach reminded us of the need to define this carefully when working with staff and students. We need to consider how being brave is not simply about having the courage to tackle a difficult subject, but having the confidence to notice our own feelings, those of others, and address them appropriately. For example, if a student's thoughts on a topic negatively impact another student, one person may become more entrenched in their views if rebuked for their comments, and the other subsequently withdraw. Both parties need to feel empowered to confront not simply the views of others, but those that they hold about themselves. This might involve admitting that our beliefs can be founded on inaccurate assumptions about situations and people.

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The authors did not use generative AI technologies in the creation of this manuscript.

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