

Bridging Educational Divides? An Inclusive Approach to Teaching First Year Planners

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Abstract

This contribution describes a pedagogical innovation within a core module 'Aspects of Effective Communication' taught at Liverpool University's Department of Civic Design that brought first year planning undergraduates together with a charity working with adults labelled as 'learning disabled'. The innovation is theoretically underpinned by Morrow's (2002) principles for teaching inclusive design, which provide important moral, sustainable, professional, economic and legal arguments for teaching universal design in the classroom. It is further motivated by the positive duty to promote equality of opportunity enshrined in the Disability Discrimination Act. An emphasis is placed on the need for planning students to be alert to the consequences of a disabling and non-inclusive environment and suggests ways to overcome this. The module leader and her assistant critically reflect on this co-educational experiment as a way to strengthen 'town-gown' relations. An argument is made for student learning to be embedded in a particular social reality as a way to support students in making the transition from school to university and to make education purposeful.

Keywords: Inclusive Design, Transitional Year, Positive Duty, 'Learning Disabled'

Context and Motivation

The innovative pedagogical approach applied in the module 'Aspects of Effective Communication' was motivated by a number of aspects.

On the one hand, the module design seeks to translate one of the four main purposes for higher education namely "to play a major role in shaping a democratic, civilised, inclusive society" into practice (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, 1997, para. 23). Clearly, how individual disciplines interpret and put such ideals into practice will vary, but there is strong evidence in the planning literature to suggest that creating contexts in which "students, faculty, and community learn together" (Dewar & Issac, 1998, p. 346) can be mutually beneficial.

On the other hand, in the UK, the positive duty to promote disability equality, the Disability Equality Duty, is a relatively new statutory requirement introduced under the Disability Discrimination Act (Great Britain, 2005). It posits new challenges to planning educators with respect to better understanding disability, and integrating a relatively more sensitive appreciation of physical and mental health issues in the context of the built environment (Peel, 2006). Significantly, the new duty shifts the onus of responsibility beyond the obligation not to discriminate, and asserts instead the need to strive to eliminate discrimination and promote equality. As such, the positive duty clause places an important responsibility on public bodies to promote equality for disabled people. More importantly in the context of pedagogical practice, the duty extends to higher education institutions and, as such, offers a constructive action space for individual planning educators to enact the duty in innovative ways.

The module leader was, from both a theoretical and a pedagogical point of view, concerned with the implications of inclusivity for planning education. The chosen teaching approach was then informed by a constructivist approach to learning, which emphasises enabling learners to construct their own sense of the world. In practice, the module design is the outcome of a learning experience in co-educational teaching through a university-community partnership at the University of Liverpool that creates shared learning opportunities between first year undergraduates on an accredited planning course and a charity that works with adults labelled as 'learning disabled'.

This charity, Moving on With Life and Learning (MOWLL), is an organisation that works with adults from a range of backgrounds to develop the skills, confidence and knowledge required for independent living, job seeking, and other life choices. MOWLL deploys a variety of pedagogical methods, designed with the people with whom they work, to ensure that the sessions are relevant, tailored, and person-centred.

The collaborative project with the Department of Civic Design stemmed from discussions between the authors and members of MOWLL about the potential for MOWLL students to learn more about planning in the city. It built on an earlier (but

unrelated) project in which MOWLL students had explored the city to assess its accessibility. As a result of that project, there was a strong view held by the MOWLL staff and students that many of the new buildings being constructed in the city were not fully accessible, and that the nature of Liverpool's celebrations of its status as European Capital of Culture was not sufficiently inclusive, and was unlikely to leave a fully representative legacy of – or for – the city.¹

Whilst the use of university-community projects is not new (see, for example, Feld, 1998), the initiative discussed here represents an attempt both to work in partnership and, at a personal level, to enact the new positive duty to promote disability equality in the UK. The teaching innovation resulted in the delivery of a module in which MOWLL shared their experiences and feelings of being alienated from the city and the regeneration process with a cohort of first year planning students.² The principal idea was to develop an understanding of social inequity in the context of the built environment, and also to raise awareness of how disability may be understood, experienced, and perpetuated through insensitive practices. At its most fundamental, the teaching objective was to encourage first year undergraduates to think about accessibility and access issues in the built environment. The design of the module therefore offered opportunities for the MOWLL peer advocates (mentors) and students to share their understandings of planning in Liverpool. Specifically, this involved working with the MOWLL peer advocates who manage the Peer Advocacy Changing Things Together initiative which involves individuals with the experience of exclusion in education and employment working to support others to take on new challenges. The project brought together first year Urban Planning and MOWLL students at different stages of involvement with the charity. Importantly, the peer advocates and staff at MOWLL acted as vital mediators and contact points for the delivery of shared teaching sessions.

The subsequent sections describe the module, its objectives and rationales, the intended student learning outcomes, the nature of the project assignment and the assessments involved in the teaching and learning strategy, and the mode of delivery.

¹ The European Capital of Culture is a European Union designation whereby a city can celebrate its cultural life and development for a period of one year. Liverpool successfully bid for this status for the year 2008. Even though there was a strong emphasis on community involvement, questions have been raised as to whether this cultural year of celebration could overcome the social divisions in the city (Jones & Wilks-Heeg, 2004).

² The undergraduate module, Aspects of Effective Communication, was delivered to 35 first year students undertaking the BA in Environment and Planning, BA in Urban Regeneration and Planning and undergraduate Master of Planning in the Department of Civic Design, University of Liverpool. Ten MOWLL students and four staff participated.

Overview of the Module

The module selected to work collaboratively with MOWLL was a first year, first semester study skills module, 'Aspects of Effective Communication'. This module has been run by different faculty members for several years in the Department of Civic Design at the University of Liverpool. It is first and foremost intended to provide important learning and study foundations for students largely new to the city and predominantly new to university education. It may thus be understood as incorporating many of the common study skills provided at this level, whilst tailoring and embedding them (Thomas, 1994) to the particular requirements of a planning education. The specified student learning outcomes for this module address communication, research, and group-working skills, and aim to familiarise students with the city (Figure 1). The assessments are configured to test these outcomes.

It is intended that students successfully completing the module will have demonstrated:

- an ability to access planning-related information from a range of sources;
- an ability to synthesise relevant material from a range of sources to produce a coherent individual report;
- skills in using some of the University's library and computational facilities;
- an ability to generate a document using word-processing, and graphics/presentational software in an integrated way;
- an appreciation of the opportunities and challenges of group working;
- simple oral and visual presentational skills using PowerPoint; and
- an understanding of Liverpool's historical development and future potential.

Figure 1: Intended Learning Outcomes

In practical terms, 'Aspects of Effective Communication' is a 12-week module worth 15 credits, and representing 150 hours of student effort. It involves 24 hours of staff contact time. The remainder of the time is independent learning. The module was delivered by one full-time academic with invited guest lectures from local practitioners and a community leader living in the city. The teaching for Assignment 2 (group presentations) and assessment was supported by a doctoral student/teaching assistant.

The module has always involved students in an imaginary project to access regeneration funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund.³ This serves to introduce students

³ The Heritage Lottery Fund was set up by Parliament in 1994 as an independent body to give grants to a wide range of cultural and heritage projects involving the local, regional and national heritage of the United Kingdom. It is a 'non-departmental public body' and money is raised by the National Lottery for Good Causes.

to the subject and to begin to find their way about the city. Prior to the involvement of MOWLL, students had been able to select any building in the city. As a consequence, projects tended to provide leisure facilities for students (bowling alleys, cinemas, etc). The engagement of MOWLL as a designated client with specific needs provided a much clearer and more focused context to the project.

The undergraduate project assignment involved the first year students selecting a derelict or redundant building in the city centre of Liverpool in order to renovate and rehabilitate it as a potential Welcome/Visitor Centre for MOWLL. This client-driven approach provided the mechanism for the students to envision what an inclusive city might involve. Not only were the students encouraged to bridge a gap in their understanding and experience (few had experience of the implications of disability and limited opportunities to hear about being excluded by those who are directly affected), but, through the project, the students were encouraged to be imaginative in building social bridges to a more inclusively (universally) designed environment.

The project was assessed through two assignments (each comprising 50% of the available marks). Assignment 1 involved a written report to the Heritage Lottery Fund to try to obtain funding to enable the rehabilitation of the selected building. Assignment 2 required the students to prepare and deliver a group PowerPoint presentation to a (fictitious) Heritage Lottery Fund Board, but which included a representative from the local Urban Regeneration Company, Liverpool Vision, and members of MOWLL. The teaching strategy deployed is set out in Figure 2.

- face-to-face lectures and blended learning, supported by PowerPoint lectures and a quiz on academic referencing and citation available on Blackboard™;
- a study guide (A4 lever arch file of chapter work-sheets on study skills relating to the planning and regeneration context of the city and the weekly lectures);
- study visits with a client group, MOWLL, including a joint visit to a cultural building in the city which has embraced the principles of inclusive design and ease of access;
- guest lectures from practitioners within the city with experience of obtaining research funding from the UK Government's Heritage Lottery Fund; and
- the use of videotape to help students improve their presentation skills.

Figure 2: Module Teaching and Learning Strategy

In order to put a model of inclusive teaching into practice, the delivery of the teaching was sensitively designed to include joint sessions with both cohorts. In week 1 students were introduced to the module, given the client brief, and met with the client. This session included interventions by MOWLL staff and students working as peer advocates. In weeks 2 and 3, local practitioners explained regeneration issues in the

city and how Heritage Lottery Fund funding can support regeneration. In week 4, there was a co-educational joint site visit to St George's Hall, a recently renovated building in the city, which benefited from Heritage Lottery Fund funding and addressed accessibility issues in a range of ways. This involved an access officer meeting and talking with all of the students. The individual assignment was submitted in week 6.

Students were then assigned to groups using a mix of self-selection and lecturer-led allocation, which sought to build on the students' backgrounds, profiles, and prior knowledge of the city. The group task involved each student sharing the findings from their individual project fieldwork in the city and the group selecting the preferred project to present to the class using PowerPoint. Week 10 was set aside for rehearsal presentations with staff feedback in preparation for Week 11 - the formal (assessed) presentation to the Heritage Lottery Fund Board.

Given the nature of the innovation, and the person-centred teaching philosophy of MOWLL, the design of the module sought to be collaborative, participative, and reflective. This meant continually seeking feedback from MOWLL as to how the periods of interaction between the two sets of students might best be facilitated. Time was systematically taken after each shared session to discuss the effectiveness of the experience and regular contact was made with MOWLL over the 12 week period. These arrangements ensured that MOWLL was not a client by-stander, and was actively involved in the project preparation, delivery, and evaluation.

The following sections discuss this initiative in terms of how it illustrates a bridging of particular divides and an understanding of a model of inclusive city planning and engaged practice. It begins to illustrate the transferable elements of this initiative which individual educators may be able to translate and adapt to their own contexts.

Physical Divides: Overcoming a Disabling Environment?

An important impetus for the MOWLL project stemmed from a recognition that “[t]he built environment can exclude and discriminate against certain groups in society at certain times” (Morrow, 2002, p. 2). Indeed, even though attempts have been made to alert planners and related professionals to the potentially disabling consequences of a poorly designed built environment (Goldsmith, 1997; Oliver, 1990), the challenge of bridging the disability divide remains highly problematic. Livingston (2000, p. 182), for example, claimed that: “It is nearly impossible for able-bodied students to understand fully the real and day-to-day experiences of people with permanent disabilities”. Moreover, Imrie (2002, p. 3) has asserted that: “Very few planning schools teach trainee planners about disabled people's access and mobility needs, while the architectural schools in the UK are bereft of anything other than minimal and often dismissive references to disability and inclusive design”. Indeed, Imrie (2002, p. 3) has urged that: “Changing the education and practices of architects, designers, and others

involved in the production of the built environment is...a priority". This is entirely consistent with the established UK policy emphasis on social inclusion.

Inclusive - or universal - design is a complex and contested term.⁴ This teaching project used Morrow's (2002, p. 2) broad definition which states that: "Inclusive design is a process that results in inclusive products or environments which can be used by everyone regardless of age, gender or disability." The important point here is that inclusive design is not restricted to a narrow construal of disability access as equating to the needs of 'the wheelchair user', but embraces a much richer interpretation of the realities of exclusion. It also suggests that there is a parallel requirement to ensure that there are inclusive decision-making processes to support the physical design and management of inclusive environments.

Following Morrow (2002), there are five mutually reinforcing arguments to support the teaching of inclusive design in the built environment disciplines. These involve:

- **a moral argument** - access to the environment is a basic human right and it is important to understand that different value bases determine the nature of planning and development. There is a moral obligation to tackle the barriers and obstacles to creating and sustaining an inclusive environment;
- **a sustainable argument** – adaptable and flexible buildings and environments are better able to accommodate the changing needs of society and respond to evolving life-style and life-stage requirements. This can nurture social capital and support more cohesive societies;
- **an economic argument** – society can ill afford not to create and manage accessible environments since excluding individuals from the workplace and the market does not make business sense;
- **a legal argument** – the (evolving) statutory context is requiring a proactive approach to be more socially inclusive. The UK's Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) (Great Britain, 2005), for example, stipulates the following requirements:
 - a) the need to eliminate discrimination that is unlawful under the Act;
 - b) the need to eliminate harassment of disabled persons that is related to their disability;
 - c) the need to promote equality of opportunity between disabled persons and other persons;

⁴ Morrow (2002, p. 2) identified inclusive design as forming part of a family of terms which include "universal design, design for all, lifespan design, and most recently, 'respect for people' and designing for diversity".

- d) the need to take steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, even where that involves treating disabled people more favourably than other persons;
- e) the need to promote positive attitudes towards disabled persons; and
- f) the need to encourage participation by disabled persons in public life.

The Disability Equality Duty is a core element of the DDA and came into force on 4 December 2006. This complements the individual rights focus of the DDA and seeks to enhance public services and outcomes for disabled people as a whole. Significantly, the Disability Equality Duty requires public authorities to act proactively on disability equality issues. Notably, in the context of the university sector, the responsibility for putting the duty into effect lies with the higher education institutions (Disability Rights Commission, 2006b); and, finally,

- **a professional argument** – codes of conduct require practitioners to operate within an equal opportunities framework. In the context of this article, the Royal Town Planning Institute's (2007) Code of Professional Conduct, for example, states that members "shall not discriminate on the grounds of race, sex, sexual orientation, creed, religion, *disability* or age and shall seek to eliminate such discrimination by others and to *promote* equality of opportunity" (point (d), emphasis added). In effect, this requirement means that individual Institute members have a professional responsibility to go beyond simply not discriminating and 'do the duty' (Disability Rights Commission, 2006a).

Taken together, these pragmatic, practical, professional and ethical arguments provide an important justification for teaching inclusive design. Important pedagogical questions then turn on when this should – or, indeed, might – be introduced into the planning curriculum, and how this could be done in practice.

Community-University Divides: Co-Educational Learning

A symposium edition of the *Journal of Planning Education and Research* (vol. 17 (4), 1998) offers a useful set of insights into the potentially transformatory relations that can be derived from universities working in collaboration with their local and regional communities. Feld (1998), for example, sketches the notion of a new paradigm around community development and regeneration, based on such partnerships. This may, of course, happen at a number of scales. The notion of the university as an anchor institution is indicative of the important institutional role that universities can play in their host communities. The much more modest objective described in this article relates to a small classroom initiative. It nonetheless aspires to embrace Feld's (1998) arguments that partnership working can support capacity building for understanding, facilitate shared learning among individuals, and foster sustainable, quality environments. This

teaching innovation further represents a personal response to the professional code of conduct and duty to promote disability equality.

The decision to innovate with a co-educational project in the particular module 'Aspects of Effective Communication' was taken in the summer of 2007. A number of meetings were held between the module leader and staff and a peer advocate from MOWLL in order to design a course that could involve students from MOWLL in a constructive way. An important motivation for the project was to address the concern articulated by several of the MOWLL students that 'planners don't listen' and that regeneration and new-build schemes in the city are inaccessible and poorly designed. The 12 week module was designed to include the MOWLL students in a way that accommodated their specific needs and in a way that was not threatening to any of the students. It was felt that this type of learning experience raised different issues for the diversity of students involved, and that the progress of the project needed to be carefully monitored. In practical terms, the client-based element was nested within a relatively traditional study skills module. Nevertheless, taken as a whole, the active engagement of MOWLL students represented an important opportunity to test a very particular model of inclusive policy in higher education. It meant ensuring the appropriate arrangements and staff support were then put in place to meet the needs of the cohort when the students were in shared learning situations.

Educational Divides: From School to University

Bridging the different study environments and degrees of personal responsibility that exist between school and university is no easy task, particularly where it risks being delivered through a stand-alone study skills module. It is held that such modules may only 'deliver' a small proportion of the skills required; may risk becoming a 'turn off' to many students; and may not engage the interest and motivation of students (Thomas, 1994, pp. 23-24). As a consequence, Thomas (1994), for example, suggested that developing a habit and culture of studying necessitates: embedding study skills into an overarching teaching and learning strategy; linking and demonstrating the clear relevance of 'study skills' to each individual student's programme of study and future career path; and supporting students to learn about their learning strengths and weaknesses, perhaps through a self-study package.

The importance of some form of introductory support framework for students to begin to acquire and develop the study skills necessary for higher education is nevertheless fundamental to any degree programme. Study skills handbooks (see, for example, Cottrell, 2003) illustrate the type of guidance available to new students and emphasise the step-change in the learning environment and degree of student responsibility required in making the transition from school to university.

In recent times, a greater awareness of the skill of 'learning how to learn' (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, 1997) has focused attention on

strengthening and better supporting independent study skills to support a lifelong learning culture (Peel, 2005). The increasing complexity of how best to nurture students in acquiring the breadth of study skills required in the social sciences is evident in the available scholarly literature. Here, debates around information literacy ('study skills', 'research skills' and 'library skills') for university study (see, for example, Stephenson and Caravello, 2007) and the nature of the relationships between faculty and librarians (Hardesty, 1995) highlight a number of important gaps in our understanding and practice which may ultimately impede research, analysis and bibliographic instruction – and student learning. As Biggs (1999) and others have documented, these challenges are further exacerbated by the changing nature of university teaching, particularly in terms of resources, staff-student ratios, and competing academic priorities.

Critical to assisting students successfully to bridge school and university is the need for faculty staff, service providers, and management to understand the expectations and capabilities of today's millennial students so as to support them in the transition from compulsory to higher education, and to adjust to university life (McInnes and James, 1995). Moreover, the totality of the student experience of the university environment (Price *et al.*, 2003) entails not only understanding each individual student's experience of the social and economic aspects of the university life-world, but also appreciating student ambitions, goals and study habits (McInnes *et al.*, 2000). Such arguments highlight the need for a sensitivity to a particularly dynamic context for learning and to the changing characteristics of contemporary students.

There is, for example, a burgeoning literature around learning how to learn. This recent interest in learning is, in part, accentuated by the growth in information and communication technology and a global emphasis on the promotion of the knowledge economy (Hepworth, 1999). As Plotnick (1999) concluded:

'In this next century, an "educated" graduate will no longer be defined as one who has absorbed a certain body of factual information, but as one who knows how to find, evaluate, and apply needed information' (Breivik, 1998, p. 2). Our ability to be information literate depends on our willingness to be lifelong learners as we are challenged to master new technologies that will forever alter the landscape of information.

This perspective emphasises that information skills and literacy are part of a particular culture of learning which assumes a continuity over the lifetime of an individual. It also reaffirms the importance of understanding individuals' learning trajectories and their relationships to learning (Peel, 2003). It follows that a student's first year at university requires considerable care and attention if she or he is successfully to manage the transition from school, to bridge the different dimensions of learning as a deliberative and critical university student, and to develop a culture of positive learning. It is a crucial stage in becoming an engaged student.

Theoretical Divides: Passive or Active Learning?

The pedagogical rationale for introducing the MOWLL project, supported by traditional lectures and a self-study guide, was based on a commitment to make a study skills module 'come alive' and be more meaningful for the students. It was to demonstrate that planning is essentially a value-based, purposeful and socially engaged activity.

Following Shuell (1986), over time, the way educators have thought about learning has had important implications for the ways in which knowledge, practice and learning are understood and how teaching is then undertaken and socially constructed. This, in turn, has had consequences for the extent to which educators are able to facilitate a layered approach to learning and to support students through progressive levels of understanding (Peel, 2000). The pedagogical rationale for the MOWLL project aligns itself with Shuell's (1986) argument for the need to support active learning environments. Shuell (1986, p. 415) usefully contrasted cognitive and behavioural approaches to learning as being, on the one hand, "active, constructive, and goal-oriented" and "dependent upon the mental activities of the learner" or, on the other hand, relatively more passive in response to various environmental factors.

Applying a cognitive theoretical perspective to one's teaching has important practical implications for the design of curricula. Indeed, Shuell (1986, p. 429) contended that:

Since learning is an active process, the teacher's task necessarily involves more than the mere dissemination of information. Rather, if students are to learn desired outcomes in a reasonably effective manner, then the teacher's fundamental task is to get the students to engage in learning activities that are likely to result in their achieving these outcomes, taking into account factors such as prior knowledge, the context in which the material is presented, and the realization that students' interpretation and understanding of new information depend on the availability of the appropriate schemata. Without taking away from the important role of the teacher, it is helpful to remember that what the student does is actually more important in determining what is learned than what the teacher does.

Furthermore, Shuell (1986, p. 430) asserted that:

good teachers are not merely people who can articulate a large number of relevant facts and ideas (although a sound understanding of the subject matter they are teaching is certainly essential); effective teachers must know how to get students actively engaged in learning activities that are appropriate for the desired outcome(s).

Given what needs to be taken into account in facilitating transitional years, such as, the diversity of student backgrounds, and the context in which lecturers operate, this is clearly a challenge. Moreover, much of the available literature relating to teaching study skills to undergraduates is generic. Research, however, suggests that it is important

both to contextualise, situate and orient the student to the relevant discipline being studied, whilst also providing support in the development of transferable skills (Durkin and Main, 2002). As Biggs (1999) and others have emphasised, this reaffirms the importance of understanding motivation in the student learning experiences.

There is an established theoretical literature on the value of experiential learning to support deeper and more meaningful learning (Kolb, 1984). Here, Kotval (2000), for example, detailed how the need for practical community-based learning is critical to the training and education of urban planners, providing the necessary exposure to 'real life' situations in planning practice. Her discussion of a community-based project at Michigan State University critically documents a capstone practicum course that serves to ground final year students in planning practice, describing it as "a mechanism for substantive learning and the integration of techniques with theory" (Kotval, 2000, p. 307). This first year MOWLL project is designed as a first step in a progressive model of learning from initiate to a relatively more mature and experienced professional. It seeks to emphasise that planning is action- and goal-oriented, and requires sound research skills to provide an informed basis for social intervention and engaged action. Moreover, in seeking to bridge the potential divide in the academic and community life-worlds, the module also sought to illustrate the importance of communication, relationship-building, and a sensitivity to difference in the design and management of the built environment. This was achieved through experiential learning.

Discussion

At one level, the module, 'Aspects of Effective Communication', provides an introduction to written, oral, and visual aspects of communication, including writing for various purposes, accessing library and internet resources relevant to the field of planning, associated research and computer-based learning, and presentation skills. Working with a client group where being labelled as 'learning disabled' is a central issue, became an important justification for a co-educational partnership to address the different learning needs of both groups. The available literature and the emerging UK statutory context relating to the active promotion of equality in the built environment further offer a number of powerful arguments that the creation of inclusive environments is a practical issue to be proactively addressed in planning curricula. The positive duty to promote disability equality provides a constructive opportunity for knowledge-in-action in the field of planning and within the university context. Proposing the regeneration of a site to create a new inclusive and accessible Visitor/Welcome Centre for MOWLL in the centre of Liverpool not only offered an opportunity to familiarise the students with their city of study and general planning considerations, but also helped them to think about the accessibility requirements of the client group, and, in communication terms, encouraged them to think about how to communicate the specific project objectives and benefits in a simple and clear way.

The marking of the individual reports provided an opportunity for the module leader to critically reflect on the students' understanding of the needs of the client, MOWLL. It was evident from the students' fieldwork and the contents of the individual reports that they had engaged very positively with design and access issues and showed a deep sensitivity to the elements of the built environment that can disable. This included the various physical aspects, and also the visual elements. A 'more than basic' understanding of inclusive design ideas was very clear in the students' work, which formed a strong basis upon which to develop and progress their more detailed knowledge and understanding in subsequent years of study, and professional practice.

The six group presentations were assessed by academic staff members and external visitors as being to a very high standard and there was visible evidence that the students had used the rehearsal feedback to good effect. Positive group dynamics were apparent in the dress and thematic aids used by the students. They all engaged very effectively with the Heritage Lottery Fund Board and made strong and confident eye-contact with MOWLL members. The impacts of the project can best be illustrated by some of the feedback from the undergraduate and MOWLL participants. These comments illustrate the power of a client-based project and fieldwork element in motivating students to engage with the discipline of planning.

Sample of Undergraduate Student Feedback Comments:

All of the [MOWLL] members and advocates we met were wonderfully open about how we, as planning students and the next generation of planners, can actively engage all members of the community in the development process; whether it's a consideration of the accessibility of an individual building or pathway through the city; or contemplation of significant 'gaps' in current services and the built environment for people with additional needs.

...the teaching methods used in our module...were active, different and with a specific goal. Working with MOWLL presented a good example [of] how to work considering requirements given. Additionally co-operation with MOWLL made me more serious about work. I was truly interest[ed] to do my work for possible benefit - for MOWLL.

What's special about MOWLL? Everything! In no other module were we given the opportunity to not only listen to and interview real people and professionals, but to gain an intimate insight into the real difficulties experienced. It brought important issues of widening participation to light in a very tangible way.

MOWLL Peer Advocate response to being engaged in the module:

Personally it made me see the bigger picture...It really made me think about people and buildings and spaces...My eyes have been opened to what town

planning is about and how important it is to talk to everyone about the shape of their city.

Concluding Remarks

A fundamental purpose of university education is “to play a major role in shaping a democratic, civilised, inclusive society” (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, 1997, para. 23). This is particularly pertinent for those working in the field of planning where inclusive design and social inclusion are important principles. The Disability Equality Duty has been identified as a critical obligation that asserts a new emphasis on encouraging a more proactive approach to tackling discrimination and marginalisation. With the responsibility of putting the duty into effect lying with universities (Disability Rights Commission, 2006b), there is a potential risk that implementing the duty falls between institutional gaps and differing administrative, managerial, departmental and curriculum priorities. The case made in this article is that ‘doing the duty’ becomes an important responsibility that falls to each individual planning educator.

Given the sensitivities of the first year encounter with university and the importance of bridging school and higher education, some educators might raise questions about the validity of this approach at first year undergraduate level. Yet, the on-going feedback and continuing working relationship between the Department of Civic Design and MOWLL suggest that this transitional module served as an important bridge for those who were involved, or who contributed to, this module, whether they were from the academic, practitioner, voluntary, student, or local community. The success of this module may have been a consequence of the personalities involved and the commitment to build bridges. The positive duty to promote disability equality certainly provided an important legal and professional fillip. In addition, there are important sustainable, economic, and ethical arguments to support inclusive approaches of this sort. This is not to underestimate the practical issues of, for example, time-tabling and staff support.

For the undergraduate students, the focus of the project, and the involvement of MOWLL, served as a significant incentive to deliver individual and group assignments of a high standard. The student feedback from the planning undergraduates, and discussions with the MOWLL participants, provide a strong indication that this real world and active experience of a university-community collaboration resulted in transformatory learning (Jerome, 2008). Simply being included and considered central to the project was highly valued by MOWLL. Moreover, some of the MOWLL students also gained from the opportunity to collaborate on the design of the module, present and share their experiences and aspirations, and provide feedback on the planning students’ presentations. For the faculty staff, the sensitivities of working in a co-educational environment served to provide a thought-provoking context for raising

awareness of 'hidden' issues and for generating a context for greater self-awareness, and a questioning of the potentially disabling consequences of societal action. The experiences of working with MOWLL intensified the learning environment and, for many of the students, provided a fresh learning platform for understanding the world around them, and for engaging with the complexities of planning.

During the delivery of the module, the label 'learning disabled' became a powerful device for thinking about 'learning how to learn'. It focused attention on the challenge of social learning in planning, and provided an important basis for talking about learning with the students as they were about to embark on a new stage in their own learning. Moreover, in a small way, the co-educational MOWLL project made a big difference to understanding the regeneration work in the city and the celebrations associated with the European Capital of Culture. Finally, the project itself enabled a personal celebration of the city. As Terry Kelly, one of the founder members of Peer Advocacy Changing Things Together said of the MOWLL Project '08:

Working together really made me think of the world around me and how important it is for people to communicate and get things right. ... It was a proud feeling, the students at MOWLL working and learning from other students in the University. We showed that we could do this project together and learn something from each other. I felt proud of myself and proud of the project we helped to design.

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