






Design thinking as a pedagogical approach for the Jam, a fast-paced cross-institutional programme with a focus on social justice

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ABSTRACT

This contribution reports on the design phase of the Jam, a short, fast-paced, cross-institutional online programme over three days. Its focus is on social justice and specifically access, use and management of community space, as integral part of sustainability. This novel programme aims to enable learning, generate ideas to address complex issues, build connections and support diverse community members engage in cultural exchanges. Developed by the University of Leeds in collaboration with the University of Pretoria, Ls14trust in Seacroft, and Mothong African heritage in Mamelodi, it brings together educators, professional services staff and students and the public in non-hierarchical ways to inspire new and different ways to interact and learn. We present an account of the design phase of the Jam, including an account of our institutional design context, an overview of literature on Jams and Jamming that informed our design of the Social Justice Jam: Spaces for Change 2024.

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Introduction

Institutional context: re-imagining learning opportunities

Discovery at Leeds

Curriculum Redefined is an institution-wide strategic initiative at the University of Leeds in the UK that aims to transform student education. It has sought to strengthen the curriculum by fundamentally revising the educational programmes offered by the Institution to ensure programmes are aligned with our principles and aims to offer transformative learning experiences and inclusively address the needs of our students and wider stakeholders.

A series of projects are underway to support this work. One of them is the review of the Discovery Initiative operating successfully since 2009. This offered opportunities to thousands of students, primarily undergraduate students to complement their studies with modules from other disciplines and programmes they are interested in and therefore diversifying and enriching their experience and diversifying their learning. The Social Justice Jam described here, a prototype course of a new form of learning, is one of the projects that emerged from this process of developing a new complementary Discovery offer at Leeds.

CAS, University of Pretoria

The Centre for the Advancement of Scholarship (CAS) at the University of Pretoria is a transdisciplinary research entity founded to host projects that in interdisciplinary ways tackle topics of social, economic and environmental importance. CAS's mission is to cultivate spaces where challenges can be studied, and solutions sought through collaborative initiatives across disciplines, universities and generations. This mission provides opportunities for interuniversity partnerships and reimagining how sustainability issues are tackled.

New Discovery provision at University of Leeds: SOUL

The Discovery initiative is currently being rationalised and complemented with a new Discovery provision, the design of which is led by a Discovery Delivery Group set up to co-create a more flexible, inclusive and transformative offer designed by staff, educators and colleagues from professional services and students working in partnership. The group proposes a series of Student Orientated Unbounded Learning (SOUL) modules at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. These will operate as open container modules for students who engage in extra- or co-curricular experiential

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learning opportunities such as non-credit bearing workshops and open courses offered by the institution and other providers as well as further lifewide and lifelong learning opportunities including internships and placements for example. In addition, they will encompass non-organised experiential or practice-based activities that lead to learning. This could include working on specialised disciplinary projects or cross-disciplinary learning activities driven by their wider personal and professional interests and curiosity. In the future, students will be able to claim credits for such learning activities via SOUL modules under Discovery therefore bringing this type of learning into their curriculum. In addition, the Discovery Delivery Group is working on a series of blueprints exploring alternative non-credit bearing learning formats via the prototype courses they offer to test these designs. Three distinct Blueprints are currently under development which emerge through a design thinking (DT) enquiry and prototyping process. These are Open, Block and Jam: Open involves learning online in the form of an open short course, Block studying face to face for short intensive periods in term time, and Jam in intensive day or a few days bursts

Our Jam Blueprint: social justice Jam: spaces for change 2024

This contribution focuses on the design work linked to the prototype of the Jam that led to the creation of the first version of the Jam Blueprint. This Jam Blueprint is funded by the Horizons Institute, a platform of the University of Leeds that supports interdisciplinary research at the University of Leeds under the theme: What comes after the UN SDGs? Social Justice is a central theme. The UN SDGs recognise Social Justice in multiple goals and targets, and it is considered an integral component of sustainability which refers to development that safeguards the environment, promotes economic prosperity and ensures social equity, leaving no one behind. Our specific focus on social justice came from extensive discussions with our colleagues at the University of Pretoria as it proved a common theme from both a Global North and a Global South perspective.

Our practical understanding of sustainability is framed by the University of Leeds 10-year strategy, the Climate Plan (University of Leeds, Climate Plan n.d.). The university aims to become a net zero campus and one of its commitments is to offer every student at the university opportunities to engage with sustainability. Similarly, the University of Pretoria is committed to teaching, learning and research that is integrated into society, making community engagement a key strategic priority. The Jam fulfils these commitments by exploring social aspects of sustainability as well as being underpinned by the SDGs and it focuses on localising global sustainability perspectives and solutions.

Before examining our collaborative design process from which our Blueprint has emerged, we'll first examine some of the extensive literature on Jams and Jamming, considering the emergence of Jams from the field of music and how the characteristics have evolved as they have spread across disciplines, noting some of the key features of Jams that make them so attractive to curriculum designers as well as noting recent critiques.

Jams and Jamming

Historical origins

A Jam is defined as a fast-paced learning event of short duration, usually a single day or a few days, open to all, that brings diverse individuals from different backgrounds to collaborate and learn creatively and critically, to conceptualise and come up with solutions to complex interdisciplinary challenges (Tang, Vezzani, and Eriksson 2020). Jams can be organised in different geographical locations simultaneously as well as online and have their origin in jazz events (Cameron 1954) where dialogue and audience participation are vital in the process of improvisation. While jazz Jam events may have started as small and exclusive gatherings of musicians playing together (Pinheiro 2010), the Jam format as we know it today developed as it spread beyond music and nowadays Jams attract many participants. Jams also have similarities to hackathons which are associated with digital innovations, a term that originated in the open-source movement and also draws parallels to game Jams (Briscoe and Mulligan 2014). A hackathon, also known as a codefest, is a social coding event that brings computer programmers and other interested people together to improve upon or build a new software program (Lawrence 2016), but its definition has also evolved to encompass the gathering of people with diverse expertise who are tackling a pressing challenge in a short time frame using and making sense of data and design elements (Martins Pacheco et al., 2024).

Game Jams, design Jams

Game Jams (Meriläinen et al. 2020) and design Jams (Snow et al. 2020) have become popular in recent years and can provide valuable practice and experiential learning opportunities (Fowler et al. 2013). Perhaps the most well-known is the annual Global Game Jam which brings together thousands of gamers from around the world since 2009 to experiment and create games together (Kultima 2021). These games are created by small groups and then shared openly so that everybody has access and can play them (Fowler et al. 2013). Game Jams can be offered in informal, but also formal learning settings, at a smaller scale. They can be community, company or organisation led. Diverse individuals with varying expertise

from different backgrounds and professional areas come together in teams at a physical or online location at the same time. This culminates into collaborative experimentation to produce ideas and problem-solve with the focus on generating a new game, process or solution to a problem. Game Jams often prioritise collaboration over competition, with the focus on collaboratively creating solutions. However, a panel may still select the best games proposed during the Jam (Fowler et al. 2013). In these game and design Jams, there is a focal point around which diverse communities congregate, similarly with PeaceJams we see communities focusing on issues of social justice.

PeaceJams: spaces to transgress

The PeaceJam Foundation operates in 41 countries, and they design PeaceJams which involve Nobel Prize laureates mentoring young people. PeaceJams have a focus on social justice that aims to awaken activism and action among young people. Bruno (2022, 1–2) in her case study research studied PeaceJam participants' perceptions of power, social justice and democratic education and notes that the Jam 'created safe spaces to explore identities and utilise personal and collective power to participate in a democratic society through service learning'.

PeaceJams offer a plethora of possibilities. There is a need to expand clubs and events that create the environments for youth to flourish. Youth organisations, educational institutions, community leaders and youth allies need to prioritise and invest in providing youth spaces to participate in democracy and not just learn about it. PeaceJams offer supported spaces for young people to enact and exercise power and act as active participants rather than apprentices to authority.

Whatever the focal point for congregation it seems Jams offer space for spontaneity, and opportunities for unstructured learning outside usual structures and hierarchies that prove intriguing for curriculum designers. We would hypothesise the combination of the short period of time (One to three days), and the challenge set creates an intense focus for the group. With a clear focus and short timeframe, there's an energy and immediacy to Jams that generates an impetus for participants to work collaboratively. This collaborative energy appears to supersede usual barriers that frequently stifle groupwork.

Sustainability Jams

Jams have also been linked with sustainability as they can bring people together to solve problems creatively. Specifically bringing diverse stakeholders together is particularly valuable in sustainability as it enables multiple views on the problems and ensures

solutions are equitable and take into account diverse needs. Jams with this focus have the potential to contribute to changed social practice (Kagan et al. 2020). Sustainability Jams can be effective if they focus on challenging topics of interest to the specific stakeholders, are structured, and bring skilled people together to problem-solve by acknowledging all contributions and working flexibly (Carlsson et al. 2015). The Global Goals Jam is run annually in September by the Digital Society School and UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), supported by World Design Organization. Every year the challenge focuses on a new SDGs and related topics: diverse organisations across the world are invited to host it and appropriate people are invited to creatively problem solve context specific challenges (Global Goals Jam 2024).

Jams – bridging curricular and co- or extra-curricular learning

Jams are versatile and can be offered as standalone extra- or co-curricular learning opportunities. They can also be used within modules and programmes of study for specific cohorts of students as curriculum design interventions for smaller diverse groups working on particular challenges. According to Fowler et al. (2013) speaking about game Jams specifically, when they are offered outside the curriculum, they present an opportunity for self-directed learning to be brought into the curriculum and there is thus an opportunity to recognise this type of informal learning through independent study credits. Fowler et al. (2013, 6) referring to a specific example in relation to a Global Game Jam (GGJ) activity, state:

In one case, at the California Polytechnic State University, one unit of independent study credit was offered to students, who both participated in GGJ and later agreed to improve their game the rest of the term according to the instructor's feedback. Interestingly, even though the GGJ is a single weekend, more hours could be spent on that project than would otherwise be spent on a 10-13-week long course and provide the opportunity to assess the learning outcomes.

Another example is the Global Culture Jam. This was an extracurricular open and online event over 5 days with creative and playful learning features designed to explore together with learners, the concepts, practices and value of community, creativity, collaboration and sustainability. The event was co-designed and co-organised in partnership with staff and students at a UK higher education institution during the pandemic and enabled cross-cultural learning beyond boundaries as part of the Learning and Teaching Festival and contributed to the Internationalisation agenda of the institution (Nerantzi et al. 2023).

Jamming: which elements can be appropriated for teaching Jams?

Urgent design challenges, particularly in disciplinary and professional areas, often provide a backdrop and focus for a Jam. The focus is on collaboration and not competition, and in the last few years, there have been Jams that combine design thinking with sustainable development. Mayr and Vollmer (2024) note Global Goals Design Jams as such an example, where design thinking is applied to sustainable development contexts, and this study indicated that Jams can increase intrinsic motivation to participate and act. In contrast to these positive findings, Kagan et al. (2020), referencing a particular sustainability Jam in Germany, call for caution when using design thinking to explore sustainability challenges within Jam formats. They have found certain aspects of design thinking present limitations regarding how this Jam was experienced. Specifically, user orientation, the use of personas and prototypes, as well as insufficient complexity and insufficient embodiment were seen as problematic.

The user-centred DT approach as used traditionally in the business-oriented field and as practiced in our Case proved to be too individualistic. The Sustainability Jam/SJ reproduced a business frame and left little space to explore beyond an individualistically biased framework. Furthermore, the introductory phase of the SJ failed to create a common understanding of global sustainability challenges, a deficit that led to a limited understanding of the conception of desired futures. The development and utilisation of ideas were neither aimed at resolving global sustainability challenges, nor related meaningfully to the local context; rather they addressed the usual corporative logic of creating innovations for business. (Kagan et al. 2020, 8)

Kagan et al. (2020) propose instead the use of scenarios and particular dialogue and role-play formats in combination with art and design thinking as these will help participants to connect and relate to a particular situation and envision alternative futures. They suggest not seeing the end of the Jam as the endpoint of the inquiry but rather the start and injecting an open-endedness to the Jam could provide a useful framing that will enable the ideas and solutions proposed to be carried forward to the next stage of inquiry. Whilst Kagan et al. (2020) findings may relate to a specific case study, they highlight the need for caution, creativity and critical thinking to develop a bespoke Jam design tailored to a specific audience addressing a particular challenge.

Jams a focal point for diverse communities

Jams offer participants many opportunities to gain disciplinary and cross-disciplinary knowledge through play and enable rapid learning through collaborative

inquiry into authentic situations with a particular focus and can be very productive in terms of outputs (Bayrak 2017). Jams are naturally boundary-crossing and bring diverse individuals together with a common interest and commitment to collaborate on a process, an output, a solution. This boundary-crossing characteristic, specifically the value of forums open to diverse individuals has also been recognised in research examining open cross-institutional professional development (Nerantzi 2017; Nerantzi 2019) and online learning (Papageorgiou, Meyer, and Ntonia 2024). Papageorgiou, Meyer, and Ntonia (2024, 10) in a multiple case study analysis found that

Participants placed significant emphasis on envisioning and creating numerous opportunities for social interactions not only among students but also between educators and students, as well as between students and other communities or learning networks.

This flat non-hierarchical structure characteristic of Jams presents a reflexive opportunity to work within and across groups. In this context, the learning community becomes its resource and diversity is acknowledged as valuable.

Jams: opportunities for connection, collaboration and communication

There is evidence that suggests Jams enable participants to develop social connections, collaboration, communication and negotiation skills (Fowler et al. 2013; Meriläinen et al. 2020). Fowler et al. (2013) propose that Jam formats could also be considered for conferences and to disseminate research and community building, while Bayrak (2017, S3951) illuminates the opportunities Jams could bring to solve complex societal challenges, come up with workable solutions and therefore boost social innovation noting characteristically:

Future work should explore specific stages of this model, especially in relation to speculative design and focused events in order to foster effective scenarios in contribution to design for social innovation.

Similarly, Papageorgiou et al. work (2024, 13) identifies the importance of narrative as both a means to conceptualise learning design and weave together different perspectives. They recognise the significance of this for both staff and students explaining that

One of the most pertinent findings in our study was the participants' creation of narrative threads that wove a story or stories for learning, signalling a departure from the educators' disaggregated thinking ... towards holistic learning journeys for students. Weaving can be a meaningful metaphor, aptly describing how the participants established new relationships, affordances and interactions between different learning components at multiple levels including module-wide, weekly and activity-level.

They expand on this to explain how this use of storytelling allowed ‘the participants [to] leverage their personas and expertise to develop interesting and context-sensitive narratives to scaffold students’ learning and evoke cognitive and emotional connections with relevant knowledge and professional practices’ (ibid).

Critiques

Beyond the many benefits documented in the literature, there are critical voices that indicate that, for example, game Jams as noted in Kultima (2021), may promote a rushed approach to game-making, could boost impatience and focus on rapid creation without necessarily having enough time to test ideas, involve the end user and also feel exhausting due to the intensity of the experience.

Bayrak (2017) highlights the need to find ways to manage and minimise the potential disempowerment of Jam participants in cases where ideas and solutions may not be taken forward. Further research and specifically longitudinal studies are needed to examine the possibility of long-term commitment awakened by the engagement in Jams, which was also acknowledged by Tang, Vezzani, and Eriksson (2020).

A further critique by Kagan et al. (2020) highlights the issues that arose due to mismatch of philosophical educational objectives and the utilisation of design thinking which they critique as ‘an individualistically biased framework’ that reproduces a business frame. This proved in their experience inappropriate for a Jam focused on sustainability and social justice. They explain that this mismatch failed to create a common understanding of global sustainability challenges, a deficit that led to a limited understanding of the conception of desired futures. The development and utilisation of ideas were neither aimed at resolving global sustainability challenges, nor related meaningfully to the local context; rather they addressed the usual corporative logic of creating innovations for business.

Further to this Kagan et al. (2020, 8) ‘Defining “the problem”, creating personas, producing solutions and announcing “the winner” are typical practices encountered in DT for business purposes, which provide an inappropriate framing for sustainable development questions’. This provides a note of caution in a field marked by cross fertilisation of ideas and practice leading to plethora of rich learning opportunities.

Boundary crossing opportunities

Noting these critiques, nonetheless, Jams seem to offer particular benefits and opportunities to learning designers, educators and colleagues from professional services; boundary crossing both in terms of where

they sit in the curriculum in the liminal space between taught and self-directed learning, and also in how they can draw together novel, diverse learning communities. In the fertile arena where Jams and hackathons cross fertilise with design sprints, new hybrids expand the range of tools available to us as learning designers. They appear to offer more opportunities to be transgressive and creative re-imagining how we organise, structure and invite participants in to learn collaboratively, but also in how we work together where whatever our role (professor, subject academic, administrator, academic developer, learning technologist) on this project we were all learning designers. The detailed analysis of design tools and sprints suggests the need to proceed with caution to ensure methods align closely with values. The critiques provide a tacit critique of reductive curricula and learning design and also identify approaches and tools of particular interest such as storytelling and rich embodied scenarios which indicate a different conceptualisation of learning and sharing learning are possible. This and our particular design decision making in creating our 3-day Social Justice Jam is what we turn to in the following section.

Method

This study is framed methodologically as a collaborative reflective narrative inquiry that aims to capture the messiness of the design decisions, reflect on the process in action and illuminate new insights that indicate learnings from this process in readiness to launch the Social Justice Jam: Spaces for Change (or short Jam) in June 2024. The reflective part of this inquiry links to the collaborative, creative and critical aspects of a design thinking process following Lockwood’s (2010, 5) definition of design thinking as

A human-centered innovation process that emphasises observation, collaboration, fast learning, visualization of ideas, rapid concept prototyping and concurrent business analysis.

These features very much characterise the design approach used to co-create the Jam.

Developmental evaluation provided an additional lens for this work. Preskill and Beer (2012) describe developmental evaluation as a process of decision-making where adjustments are made based on insights gained during the design and development stages of the innovation. This is a process that tends to be used for social innovations, usually applied to experimental initiatives under development, to respond rapidly to uncertainty, and challenges. While this project is focused on curriculum innovation we identified a series of parallels, and thus we felt that it would be beneficial to apply developmental evaluation to our work.

The experimental nature of our design work, the multiple factors of uncertainty and challenges, and the need to be responsible and flexible in our thinking and make adjustments as we were thinking, unthinking and rethinking but also designing, undesigning and redesigning for the Jam, made it a valuable lens to articulate our need to be responsive and make rapid decision for adjustments to be made based on emerging insights gained during the design and development stages of the Jam.

The Jam designers

The Jam designers were a task and finish group that was put together for the purpose of designing the Jam blueprint using a design thinking approach with the co-authors of this paper. The group is diverse and includes academics from a range of disciplines, colleagues from professional services, and students representing two higher education institutions: one from the Global North and one from the Global South, along with members from the two local communities. Community leaders from our respective communities have worked closely with us sharing the challenges they face and together we have collaboratively developed this into a stimulus for group learning.

This group included colleagues with expertise in designing and facilitating educational jams. In addition to this, one member of the team had completed the Global Goals Jam training and shared their insights with the rest of the team. This helped the whole team to familiarise with the Jam format. Their goal was to develop a topic agnostic Jam blueprint as an Open Educational Resource that could be used in the future as a scaffold design for the new SOUL modules as well as in other educational situations.

Design thinking

This specific prototype was used as an experimental testbed for the Jam blueprint. It has been rapidly co-designed using features of design thinking in the development process. Features of which are also integrated into the curriculum design for the Jam itself. While our prototype Jam had a focus on social justice. This does not mean that any future Jams would necessarily be restricted to the same focus. The ambition is to design a Jam blueprint that could be used flexibly for a wide range of topics and areas of interest aligned with the SDGs and beyond. In future, it could be used to design stand-alone formal or informal educational offers. The Jam blueprint could also be integrated into an existing programme or module of study in higher education or in other educational settings as a collaboration between educators, professional services staff and students.

Designing the Jam

The pedagogical design of the Jam borrows elements from design thinking particularly, the Double Diamond Framework (Design Council 2024) and its process: Discover, Define Develop and Deliver. These elements of the design processes were applied by the Jam designers and used as a pedagogical design for the Jam itself with participants.

Human-centred design has people at its heart, and we have drawn inspiration from other Jams to meet the needs of students, staff and community members. We started with the hope that this event will bring people together to create meaningful connections and generate a positive impact, but then through designing it, we began to develop insight into the challenges – internal and external that we have to tackle.

Discover

The first step in this process was exploratory and so in designing the Jam, the designers started to examine how Jams have been organised and identified key lessons from those events. They also contacted internal and external colleagues with diverse expertise in experiential, community-engaged and challenge-based learning to consult regarding how Jams are run and to explore the potential challenges and opportunities. During the institutional Student Education Conference in January 2024, a workshop was organised to collect the views and feedback of students and staff at the very first sketch of the Jam which expanded the pool of ideas to generate choice.

Define

The designers then consulted the two communities, Mamelodi, in Pretoria, SA, and Seacroft in Leeds, UK, to help construct an authentic challenge for Jam participants to help them better understand the difficulties these communities are facing. Together we explored the varied possibilities the Jam presents, considering its form, shape, duration, mode and media. After gathering the requisite information and exploring the possibilities during the Discovery phase, various options were carefully considered, and we moved to determining the focus of the Jam and its key features, namely that the Jam would be a short fast-paced cross-institutional event offered over three days in June 2024 with a focus on social justice.

Develop

Whilst we agreed on the key characteristics during the Define phase, Develop is where we designed the Jam itself, and put together a programme of activities, resources, as well as constructed the challenge itself in a particular format. The review of related Jam literature as well as the varied pedagogical experiences and

expertise within the team, led us to further specific design considerations and decisions. These are outlined below.

Deliver

The prototype Jam was offered in June 2024. We evaluated and learnt from it, to apply lessons for any future Jams and consider what needs to be changed and adjusted. The active involvement of co-hosts, participants and facilitators was instrumental in its delivery.

The design phase

Institutional remit

The Jam is an informal learning opportunity for students, staff and partners that could, in the future, be offered as a scaffolded approach leading to the SOUL modules currently being designed for students at the University of Leeds. Thus this pilot is strategically significant to us as we ran the Jam to establish a link and bridge between informal lifelong and lifewide experiential learning and formal recognition of learning for academic credit

The focus is on bringing together educators, students, and communities in a non-hierarchical and democratic platform, inspiring new and different ways for students, university staff and communities to interact and learn together (Nerantzi 2017; Nerantzi 2019; Papageorgiou, Meyer, and Ntonia 2024). Thus the Jam will model a fresh, alternative, creative and inclusive way to co-create, co-learn and co-facilitate learning all levels, boundaries and roles.

Jam 2024 What's the focus?

The focus is on bringing together educators, students and communities in a non-hierarchical and democratic platform, inspiring new and different ways for students, university staff and communities to interact and learn together (Nerantzi 2017; Nerantzi 2019; Papageorgiou, Meyer, and Ntonia 2024). Thus the Jam will model a fresh, alternative, creative and inclusive way to co-create, co-learn and co-facilitate learning all levels, boundaries and roles.

The Jam will enable participants to address social justice-related challenges, as defined by the communities themselves. The aim of the 3-day event is to support teams to develop workable ideas and solutions to complex challenges.

Scenario creation: relational empathy

As previously noted not all design approaches are universally applicable. Specifically, Kagan et al. (2020) noted in their study of a particular sustainability Jam where design thinking was used it was not helpful to use prototyping or personas as these were seen as inappropriate in exploring pedagogical challenges.

Instead, they suggest the use of scenarios and approach that is common within Problem-Based Learning (PBL) (Barrows and Tamblyn 1980). This directly informed our thinking and as a consequence in the case of the Social Justice Jam, a form of inquiry-based learning using a scenario with challenges has been appropriated as a strategy to authentically inquire, individually and in small groups, into real challenges faced by our two communities. The scenario was co-constructed in a form of a dialogue based on authentic challenges communicated by the communities themselves and was used as a learning trigger during the Jam.

The designers constructed the scenario using evidence-informed guidelines and related scholarship. The aim of presenting the challenges in a scenario or story format was to enable deeper, meaningful and affective engagement with the challenges (Kagan et al. 2020; Moon 2010; Papageorgiou, Meyer, and Ntonia 2024). The scenarios are complemented by two videos of the two community-based organisations in Leeds and Pretoria, highlighting the two sites so that participants can develop more connections with the places and empathy towards the communities.

The Jam designers (partners from Global North and South) had frequent meetings to discuss the design of the Jam, as well as this in all the Jam sessions all views were included, shared and reflected upon. Initially this process was with the main partners and then with our co-hosts, facilitators, and attendees so between 5 and 50 people were involved.

FISh: frame for individual and collective inquiry

The FISh model: Focus, Investigate, Share (Nerantzi and Uhlin 2012) developed originally for the open cross-institutional PBL course: Flexible, Distance and Online Learning (FDOL), has been appropriated for this Jam to enable individual and collective inquiry, and provide a learning scaffold. The model enables participants to work systematically through some of the challenges captured in the scenario, autonomously or in small, facilitated groups of up to 10 individuals, and co-facilitated by staff and students. Facilitator training was provided in advance to familiarise everybody with the process and introduce a staff-student facilitation buddy system.

Group formation

As participants can be students, university staff, or community members, special attention was placed on setting up diverse groups to maximise opportunities for a wider range of perspectives to be shared and considered, that aims to be enriching. Treviranus (2016, 7) says characteristically:

In our interconnected and crowded society, we need to go beyond tolerating or respecting diversity, we

need to prize and learn to orchestrate and create synergy out of our differences. We should shift focus from how we are each better or worse in the same skills, to the unique, evolving set of talents, passions, and competencies we each bring to tasks at hand. It is our variability that gives us collective strength.

Group size

The size of the groups is based on the findings of a phenomenographic study (Nerantzi 2017) investigating the lived collaborative learning experience in open and cross-institutional academic development contexts, in which two distinct participation patterns emerged: immersive and selective collaboration (Nerantzi 2017; Nerantzi 2021). It was noted that due to the open nature of the two open courses, there were instances where smaller groups of four, for example, had to merge with other groups due to reduced engagement by some and others who were absent. Merging groups was possible as the course duration stretched over 8–12 weeks. However, it did create additional administrative burden while the courses were live and also created disturbances for those learners affected.

In the case of the Jam, which is a fast-paced 3-day event, smaller groups may create similar issues to those above. To avoid or minimise collapsing groups due to potential reduced engagement by some learners, a larger number of participants were assigned to their respective groups from the outset. The FISh model provided a frame for learners in defining the challenge in context, collecting information from various sources, including some of the input sessions during the Jam, to make sense of the challenge, generate ideas and possible solutions, and presenting these on day 3 to the community members as part of a panel that will review the proposals.

End point

While we designed the Jam as a three-day, fast-paced, intensive event, our intention was for this Jam to be an open-ended invitation and the beginning of the opportunity to build relationships with the communities involved and take future action.

This way of working links back to Kagan et al. (2020) as their findings showed that a Jam should not just be seen as a one-off short event. It is also hoped that the open-endedness of the Jam will provide personal and collective empowerment for continuous engagement and avoid disempowerment, something highlighted by Bayrak (2017) as a phenomenon that Jam participants may experience when they realise that their ideas and solutions may not be considered for implementation.

What have we learned?

One of the main learning points from the design phase has been how to develop an international and inter-

organisational partnership. Designing a programme in this way involves taking and making more time: time to get to know each other, develop trust, to be explicit in our aims, check with partners, explain, invite and create space for contributions, and continually sense and value check the design. It also involved developing empathy and patience as people in different contexts use different language, tools, frameworks, ways of working and have different capacities. There was a need to reconcile different views and ways of working to be inclusive.

Prepare for scrutiny and messiness

This process dismantles programme design, every component needs to be examined by a wider group of stakeholders. You need to be ready to explain, justify and if necessary, let go, of favourite activities, the overall endeavour is larger than any component piece. The messiness of this design process involving multiple collaborators reflects an intrinsic quality of complex collaboration. As Johannesssen comments on institutional change;

Organizing can neither be linear nor planned, as communication doesn't follow the logic of linearity and planning. (Johannesssen 2022:80)

This led us to embrace messiness of process and develop trust.

Tolerance of ambiguity and complexity

The process of designing with community collaborators feels more expansive rather than reductive, posing questions rather than identifying outcomes. It involves designing spaces for participants to collaborate and embracing the complexities that this entails. Making the course open to a range of participants means more unknowns, more unresolved questions; for us as course designers this involves a need to develop a tolerance of ambiguity. Rather than specifying precisely the learning that will be achieved we created stimuli to inspire learning and spaces for learning to happen, engaging diverse groups; somehow the warp and weft is much looser, crochet work rather than a tight knit weave. In this kind of design, we establish principles and broad directions of travel, bounding spaces for contribution rather than seeking to control the precise outputs. This feels like a very different direction of travel to usual module and course design, which in itself is risky and requires a certain trust and developing tolerance of ambiguity. The topic of the Jam and the interweaving of challenges from the Global North and South also added to the complexity of the programme with organisers having to navigate the tensions that can arise from such mixing with the risk of a simplistic representation of

the two community challenges. Thus we had to coordinate with partners and share with them all materials and identify how the challenges could be presented in a way that does not add to the asymmetries but invites participants to reflect on them and understand similarities and differences that could be leveraged in search for solutions.

Teamwork: honing emotional intelligence

On a programme designed to explicitly focus on social justice that seeks to work intersectionally in design and delivery, we consciously expanded the range of actors which impacted the learning and teaching relationship. This, consequently, throws the spotlight on the process of team working. The learning programme that we planned for and designed is not a process of information transmission it is an affective, dynamic, emergent and profoundly relational work, as was the process of designing it.

Modelling respect and appreciation in cross-team communication, we see at the heart of this process is a sense of the very human quality of collaboration, of listening to contributors and being genuinely appreciative of different perspective and approaches. This foregrounding of team processes rather than outputs aligns with recent work on relational pedagogy (Gravett 2024) and notions of team emotional intelligence (Ortiz-Bonnin et al. 2022).

Our course design involved a snowballing number of colleagues, creating outputs with a strong sense of the collective. Educators, professional services staff, students and partners all working closely together. In reflecting on the process, attention to minutiae of group interaction (ensuring all parties we invited to contribute, flat hierarchies in meetings, information shared in various channels to be inclusive, etc.) demonstrates how as a team we established group norms. This Team Emotional Intelligence (TEI) or ‘the ability of a group to develop a set of norms that manage emotional processes’ (Druskat and Wolff 2001, p. 133) contributed to our collective resilience and buy in to the shared project. This Team Emotional Intelligence is a quality that has been positively correlated with qualities such as team trust, team performance, team cohesion (Ortiz-Bonnin et al. 2022). This emotional intelligence enabled us to work with colleagues across professional and academic roles and bring them together to pursue a common vision for the Jam, fostering excitement on the basis that we are developing an innovative approach to learning. There were times of reminding ourselves and everyone that this design process can include elements of fun and we pursued opportunities for informal personal exchange that strengthened our team spirit.

Programme design for open intensive Jams also due to their diversity of people involved and perspectives represented, requires us as course designers to pay

much more attention to quality of teamwork and the relational aspects of our collaborative processes. Some members thought that the online format of the collaboration was flexible but expressed their concerns that it may not lead to sustainable partnerships if it is not followed by in person meetings and further connection.

Opportunities for future research and collaboration

The Jam can provide opportunities for further research and collaboration as we are already having discussions on applying an evaluation framework and hosting reflection sessions with organisers, facilitators and participants. This can help us investigate the benefits and challenges of various stakeholders engaging with Jam and its online, cross-cultural and collaborative format. It can open doors to further collaboration among educators, professional services staff, students and with our partners in terms of applying solutions and evaluating their impact and help us adjust future Jam iterations, which can close the cycle of the design thinking applied. Furthermore, other research questions but also practical challenges and opportunities can arise and us, our partners and our communities would like to engage in a sustainable partnership that can be mutually beneficial now and in the future.

Concluding remarks

Jams provide intriguing opportunities for intensive, spontaneous learning. Key features of intensity, spontaneity, openness in terms of community as well as the ability to travel across disciplines and fields and the promotion of learner agency makes them attractive to designers and learners alike. This very mutability is also the key source of critique of Jams as vehicles for learning. A key lesson from this experience has that there are no off the shelf, ready to wear versions available and significant input in terms of human and material resources are needed. Both the literature and our experience emphasise the need for heightened critical awareness and need to scrutinise every element to ensure each element aligns with your pedagogic purpose and values. This type of collaboration may still be novel in higher education, however, our experience showed that there is value in diversifying curriculum and learning design and working in boundary-crossing partnerships with educators, professional services staff, students and others external to an institution to enrich the design and the learning experience and outcomes as a result. Above all the challenge of convening and facilitating groups where there is little obvious commonality other than shared purpose, has an on-course design in that it foregrounds relational teams’ processes and refocuses

our attention in planning on means of collaboratively creating meaning, both for course participants and course designers.

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