Reflective Report - Embedding Nonviolent Communication and Community Building in the MA Commercial Photography Course

Throughout this unit, I have developed and refined a multifaceted pedagogical intervention designed to support inclusive learning within MA Commercial Photography at LCC. Focusing on community building and Nonviolent Communication (NVC), the intervention aims to ease the transition into postgraduate study for our diverse student cohort by creating space for empathy, mutual respect and supportive, relational practice. Initially conceived as a two-week series of induction activities, the intervention has evolved into a more phased and sustainable framework which I hope to implement during Term 1 of the 2025-2026 academic year. The evolution has been shaped by peer feedback, practical training, theoretical exploration, and my personal and professional experiences in education and industry.

While considering what would bring about meaningful change for our course, I spent time analysing our 2025 PTES results. We had fantastic results however a constant for our course is to score lower on the 'community' section (see Fig 1 & Fig 2 below). While the results are higher than the UAL benchmark it is clear there is space for improvement. The PTES happens in early February - at the beginning of the college wide Collaborative Unit. At this juncture students are feeling anxious about group working as they haven't worked collaboratively on a project until this point. It can be difficult to connect with other courses across UAL – particularly during Term 1 - due to staff workloads and the Collaborative Unit is unhelpfully timetabled on different days across courses. These issues aren't excuses but scenarios to be worked around. It is a strong wish of myself and colleagues to improve our student's experience of 'Community'. This has ultimately shaped my intervention design and its success will hopefully be measured during the 2026 PTES results.
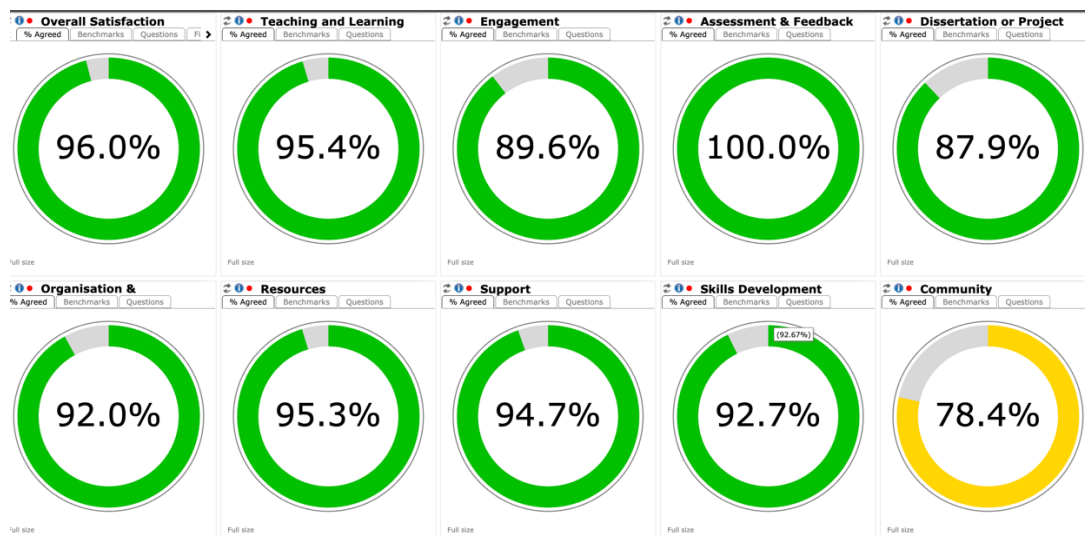

Figure 1. PTES 2025 Summary - MA Commercial Photography, UAL (2025)

Figure 2. PTES Community question results - MA Commercial Photography, UAL (2025)

My initial design used the first fortnight of Term 1 to establish an inclusive culture. Week 1 featured community building social interactions - a peer portfolio review, gallery visit and informal social gathering alongside inductions. Week 2 then introduced a facilitated non-violent communication (NVC) workshop and launch of a photographic brief 'This is London Now' (delivered by my colleague Kalpesh Lathigra). In response to the brief, students are asked to capture portraits depicting their vision of contemporary London. It's important to note that 95% of our students are new to London. This brief was designed to encourage exploration and engagement with the city. With our Community PTES metrics in mind, I feel this brief - previously delivered as an individual task - could be an opportunity to encourage supportive collaboration early on - where students assist each other in making their work, in randomised pairs. My tutor Victor quite rightly raised the concern that pairing students too early - especially across diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds - could introduce imbalances or inadvertently isolate individuals. He suggested that working in groups of three would create a more supportive and flexible dynamic, allowing for greater emotional safety, shared responsibility, and balanced communication. Taking this advice on board, I have adapted the collaborative structure to promote triads rather than pairs, aligning with inclusive pedagogical values and acknowledging the emotional complexity of early-stage collaboration. By embedding collaborative working as a core value from the outset, the intervention supports the development of interpersonal resilience and communication skills needed for professional practice. This mirrors bell hooks' (1994) vision of education as a collective, caring act that acknowledges students' emotional, social and intellectual lives. In promoting collaboration, peer support and emotional safety, the intervention reflects her call for classrooms to be spaces of mutual growth, dialogue and transformative relationships.

Another 'turning point' occurred during our design presentations. Colleagues raised concerns surrounding the potential anxiety inducing activity of hosting a portfolio review early on. It is true that our students come from a variety of backgrounds including those who are job changing. We discussed how hosting this early may have a negative impact so I have removed it from the intervention. As an alternative design community, I will instead build a session in to the first term for new students to informally peer review the Final Major Project work of our outgoing students. This will happen in week 3 or 4 once new students are more settled.

A further evolution materialised following my own experience participating in an 'Introduction to NVC' workshop' and subsequent discussion about the experience in our group presentation. Through both of these interactions I realised that NVC might be too overwhelming for students to properly engage with at the start of their academic MA journey.

My own experience participating in an NVC workshop made me aware of how emotionally demanding the content could be - both for facilitators and students who may not yet feel psychologically safe within the learning environment. As a result, I will reposition the core NVC session to later in the Autumn term, towards the end, which will be closer to the intensive Collaborative Unit that starts in January. By this stage, students will have experienced early collaborative experiences with their MACP peers plus community building interventions in diverse groups and may have already encountered communication challenges.

In the earlier weeks of Term 1, a focus on creative collaboration, peer sharing, and social connection will lay the foundation for trust and openness. Later, the structured language of NVC will serve as a framework for navigating tensions and fostering more conscious, compassionate dialogue before our students branch out beyond the course to collaborate with others during Term 2's Collaborative Unit.

My positionality as a working-class, neurodiverse, first-generation university graduate and a mother (in a predominantly male industry) strongly informs the multiplexity of the intervention design. I have often felt the need to translate my communication style to be understood in academic and professional contexts while often being side-lined for others. These experiences have made me deeply aware of the ways that institutions often unconsciously signal who belongs and who does not. These lived insights underpin the values embedded in my intervention: empathy, equity, care, and clarity. I believe inclusive learning must begin with relational trust, and that students are more likely to thrive if their full selves are welcomed into a supportive community.

With this in mind, I would like to introduce a small but meaningful intervention into the overall design. Informed by conversations with colleagues during the NVC introduction workshops - we discussed how little students engage with the official UAL Student Charter and how this may affect their behaviour and sense of belonging. I would like to invite MA Commercial Photography students to create their own course specific charter. This idea is inspired by my experience attending Becky Warnock's *Welcome Table* at Peckham 24 (Warnock, 2025), a participatory artwork that fostered thoughtful and inclusive engagement. Warnock's installation used large sheets of paper to line communal tables, where participants could contribute through writing or conversation at the table, or engage by observing and listening from seats placed around the edges of the room.

Figure 3 & 4: Photographs documenting 'A Welcome Table' at Sunset Studios, Peckham 24. (Warnock, B. 2025). Those at the table were actively participating – by talking or writing. Those sat around the table were actively listening.

Inspired by this methodology, we will open the induction day of MA Commercial Photography by inviting students to co-create a group-authored student charter. Mirroring Warnock's structure. This invitational format recognises diverse communication preferences and supports emotional safety, while fostering a shared sense of ownership and togetherness for our course community. While LCC already offers a general student charter (UAL, 2025), I believe it lacks specificity in reflecting the values, expectations and lived realities of this particular course and cohort. Using this co-created format, an MACP- specific charter will emerge from the students themselves, ensuring the values guiding their experiences are both relevant and relational.

Alongside bell hooks (1994) I am inspired by the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) on intersectionality, Janis Rekis (2023) on epistemic injustice, and Sara Ahmed (2012) on institutional inclusion. Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality provides a framework for understanding how multiple systems of disadvantage interact, particularly for students who may belong to more than one marginalised group. Rekis helps illuminate how exclusion can operate not just through overt acts, but through subtle dismissals of knowledge, language, or ways of being; what she terms "epistemic injustice." Ahmed's writing in *On Being Included* has helped me question the performativity of diversity work and refocus on structural change. All have enabled me to consider that I need to train to a higher level in NVC (for which I am seeking funding) and that it may not be for everyone, for example cultural backgrounds may influence how comfortable students may or may not feel sharing personal topics during workshops.

UAL recently updated staff on the *Managing Conflict in Learning Spaces* project (UAL, 2025). The alignment between my design and institutional priorities is encouraging. It echoes many of the same principles - particularly the need for preventative, embedded strategies that prepare both staff and students for the emotional complexity of group dynamics.

To conclude, during Unit 2, my intervention has evolved from a 2 week roll out of activities at the start of the academic year into a phased, responsive framework delivered throughout Term 1. Each activity builds upon the last and is designed to support a long-term cultural shift. My overall goals remain constant: to build early community, support communication across difference, and prepare students for the emotional realities of collaborative creative

work. However, the delivery model has become more nuanced - offering flexibility in timing and the participation style

Looking ahead, I hope to pilot the revised design during Term 1 of the coming academic year and evaluate its impact via our 2026 PTES results. I also intend to train further in NVC and explore how it's principles and inclusive dialogue might inform other aspects of course delivery - particularly critique practices, pastoral tutorials and tutor feedback. My longer-term aim is to co-develop models that can be adapted across the photographic postgraduate courses ensuring that care, connection, and equity become embedded values, not just aspirational ones.

New Intervention Design

Induction Day:	Creation of an MACP Student charter utilising the methods of 'A Welcome Table' (Warnock, B. 2024)
Week 2:	A group gallery visit to National Portrait Gallery
	Launch of 'This is London Now' – live photographic brief to be completed in randomised trios
Week 3 or 4:	New cohort informal peer reviews of outgoing cohorts Final Major Projects
Week 5:	Launch survey to better understand student's experiences to date – this will help shape the NVC workshop.
Week 10:	NVC workshop with core staff and MACP students

Imagery

Figure 1. PTES 2025 Dashboard – MA Commercial Photography: Summary Results [Screengrab] UAL (2025). Available at: https://dashboards.arts.ac.uk/dashboard/ActiveDashboards/DashboardPage.aspx?dashboardid=43458172-cecf-4c20-97b8-3c06a43c9a6c&dashcontextid=637169217954162575 (Accessed: 24 July 2025).

Figure 2. PTES 2025 Dashboard – MA Commercial Photography: Community Results [Screengrab] UAL (2025). Available at: https://dashboards.arts.ac.uk/dashboard/ActiveDashboards/DashboardPage.aspx?dashboardid=43458172-cecf-4c20-97b8-3c06a43c9a6c&dashcontextid=637169217954162575 (Accessed: 24 July 2025).

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