

THESIS – TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION: SUPPORTING AND INSPIRING STUDENTS

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About us

THESIS (<http://pc.rhul.ac.uk/sites/thesis/> (<http://pc.rhul.ac.uk/sites/thesis/>)) is a pedagogic group led by teaching-focused staff based in the Department of Psychology. Our aim is to design creative and inclusive educational initiatives that complement and enhance our curriculum. THESIS provides a platform for both

students and staff to share good practice and relevant experiences.



Examples of innovative educational initiatives

Since THESIS was established three years ago, we have designed and delivered several educational initiatives, often involving students. One example are the blogs published on the THESIS website:

Student blogs (<http://pc.rhul.ac.uk/sites/thesis/category/student-blog/>) - these are written by students and provide targeted information for specific groups. These also provide an opportunity for students to practise writing and publishing skills that enhance their employability. Some examples include:

- Y3 writing blogs about their work experiences/placements aimed at Y1/Y2 students (see an example blog here (http://pc.rhul.ac.uk/sites/thesis/2018/06/12/y3-blog-competition_blog-3/))
- Postgraduate students writing about their experience to encourage undergraduates (see an example blog here (<http://pc.rhul.ac.uk/sites/thesis/2019/10/08/msc-clinical-psychology-placement-romany-murray/>)).
- Y3 writing blogs about how RHUL prepared them for what comes next in their life (see the winning blog here (<http://pc.rhul.ac.uk/sites/thesis/2019/05/31/year-3-blog-competition-201819-blog-1/>)), etc.

Staff blogs (<http://pc.rhul.ac.uk/sites/thesis/category/staff-blog/>) - these are written by staff and aimed at students, to help them improve their academic skills and their wellbeing.

For other initiatives, please see our THESIS webpages (<http://pc.rhul.ac.uk/sites/thesis/>).

Inclusive educational activities in 2020/21

In the last year we have developed several activities which have specific diversity dimensions:

- Cultural diversity – we invited BAME students and staff to write articles to enable an open discussion and improve student and staff experience. Three articles (<http://pc.rhul.ac.uk/sites/thesis/equality-diversity/>) were published on the THESIS website. This was partially initiated following reports of the discrimination that some of our students face, and the reflections of BAME staff on related college policy changes.
- Educational/cultural diversity – we organised a college-wide seminar on reducing inequality in educational outcomes. This talk, delivered by an external expert, covered the evidence surrounding the attainment gap, reasons behind this gap, and how we can implement inclusive assessment and feedback practices. Furthermore, THESIS (<http://pc.rhul.ac.uk/sites/thesis/>) has been instrumental in sharing departmental equality and diversity initiatives beyond the department and RHUL (e.g. ‘Decolonizing the Curriculum’ initiative and ‘Widening Participation Project’).
- Circumstantial/dispositional diversity – we organised a competition for students to create content on how to break mental health, confidence and motivational barriers that hindered learning and wellbeing during COVID-19. Their produced content was published on the THESIS website. (<http://pc.rhul.ac.uk/sites/thesis/category/staff-blog/>) In addition, Dr Ines Mendes wrote two blogs (<http://pc.rhul.ac.uk/sites/thesis/mental-health-well/>) for THESIS on supporting students during COVID-19 and the importance of self-compassion, and two vlogs (as part of a wider departmental initiative) on looking after mental health during this difficult time, which were shared on the THESIS

website. Additionally, we organised a college-wide symposium concerning ‘Psychological Core Skills in Higher Education’ delivered by three THESIS members. This provided an overview to key psychological skills (self-esteem, self-compassion, resilience) and how they might influence outcomes in an academic domain. This symposium raised the need to consider psychological skills in higher education, thus contributing to the visibility of dispositional diversity and to greater inclusivity in higher education.

As part of our wider inclusive education theme, we will continue develop other initiatives such as organising a symposium on reducing inequality in education.

Evaluation of THESIS

- THESIS has received excellent feedback from staff and students. It has been recognised for impacting students as well as developing a national profile for the department. Three years after being established, THESIS was recognised as an official pedagogic research group in the Department of Psychology, giving the group equal status with other existing research groups in our department.
- THESIS website currently has over 10,000 views, which shows that our resources are widely accessed. Around 70% of users were UK-based and 30% from a variety of other countries. THESIS twitter account (@THESIS_RHUL) has over 200 followers.
- THESIS received very positive feedback to the ‘Supporting BAME Students’ initiative from the Senior Vice Principal (Education) and Department of Psychology/LSE leadership. The articles were praised for their “honesty” and the initiative for being “open with these discussions” and for enabling students and staff to express their views.
- THESIS’ symposium and seminar received excellent feedback, each attended by approximately 40 staff from various RHUL departments. Feedback from colleagues: “excellent talk”, “really useful”, “I really enjoyed all of the talks today”, “really interesting talks today”.
- Several THESIS materials are popular with students and have been adopted as teaching resources. For example, staff blogs on mental health and on writing essays are now used in PT meetings. Furthermore, student blogs on postgraduate placements are used as postgraduate Moodle resources.
- THESIS enabled many students to be engaged as partners, for example by inviting them to write blogs to provide academic and career advice to their fellow students. Students’ contributions were recognised by posting about them in the departmental and school newsletters and social media, providing additional sources of evidence for students to include in their CVs.

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