

## Poster Abstract Book (All Poster)

0085

Rise at Manchester Met: An Open World Landscape in Higher Education

John Lean, Mark Peace

**Abstract:** Students' 'learning journeys' often tread well-worn paths constrained and encouraged by the framing that educators and institutions put on them, even when these pathways come from a student-centred perspective. In this poster, we flip the metaphor of the learning journey to focus instead on the 'landscape' through which it takes place, and try to understand how students might find other ways to navigate their education. We use the extended metaphor of the open world videogame as a *curated landscape* in order to explore how experiential learning might be better designed for students. As a case study, within the context of Manchester Metropolitan's innovative Rise programme, we use design principles drawn from open world videogames to guide and provoke students without providing a defined path to follow. This in turn uncovers new possibilities for researching and designing for learning in other HE contexts.

**Poster Outline:** The language of a 'learning journey' is common, but we note that these journeys very often tread the well-worn paths confined by presupposed progression in a formal or habitual curriculum. Whilst 'student-centredness' helps to attend to the agency of the learner within this journey, possibilities for students are nonetheless often constrained or encouraged by their external framing.

In this poster, we flip the metaphor of journey to focus instead on the 'landscape' through which it takes place. This metaphor is a familiar one in higher education, often evoked to describe how policy transforms the shape of institutional practice at a macro level. However, its implicitness in discussions of the learning journey begs an interrogation; of the ways institutions and educators construct possible and preferred journeys, and the ways in which students consequently *navigate* their education.

Our context is the RISE programme at Manchester Metropolitan University; an initiative established to enhance graduate outcomes by providing a platform for co-curricular experiential learning activities. Its structure is intentionally open, with students drawing together multiple experiences and opportunities into their own unique narrative. This openness has delivered exciting impacts on students, but also challenges – particularly in terms of the alienation which students can feel in experiencing an education 'off the rails'.

In responding to this tension, we have borrowed from another field; open world videogames such as *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild (BotW: Nintendo, 2017)*. Appearing as geographically realistic spaces, they are in fact *curated landscapes*; half-real spaces where everything, from the placement of hills and valleys, to the shape of trees, is there to guide player experiences without providing an obvious path to follow.

This poster engages with this extended metaphor, examining the research question of how understanding an educational space as an open world might better enable us to design for student experience.

We incorporate metaphorical features of open world game design into our vision for Rise. Inspired by *BotW*, design principles including *plateaus*, *towers*, *shrines* and *villages* influence and drive the student journey without dictating it, effectively creating our own curated landscape of experiences for students to explore. This poster outlines and explores some of these features, with a focus on how we use open-world design to enable new forms of experience and participation.

Thinking in this way about open worlds in higher education unlocks a new ways to consider student experience; by letting go and embracing the freedom that the metaphor provides, we focus our design not on the result but the process, and students explore with agency that they might use on other courses. Taken together, these approaches suggest a renegotiated conception of learning in HE that might challenge and transform practice elsewhere.

**Poster References:**

Gee J. P. (2007) *What video games have to teach us about learning and literacy*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan

Moon, J. (2010) *Using story in higher education and professional development*. Abingdon: Routledge

Nintendo (2017) *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild*. Nintendo Switch. [Videogame] Kyoto: Nintendo

Salen, K. and Zimmerman, E. (2003) *Rules of play: game design fundamentals*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Stevenson, J., Burke, P.J., Whelan, P., Sealey, P. and Ploner, J. (2014). *Pedagogic stratification and the shifting landscape of higher education*. Project Report. York, Higher Education Academy.