

CEEHE Professional Development Resources: Spaces of Disconnection Reflective Activity

The film 'Spaces of Disconnection' challenges viewers' expectations of film conventions, which might create a sense of disconnection with the film. Students and lecturers are out of focus, pointing to the ways students might not have a sense of connection and may feel unimportant to their lecturers. It also conveys how students express not understanding academic practices at university. The film depicts a sense of not being valued or of not being recognised within learning spaces.

"I think for me the main difference that I miss between uni and high school is you don't have that personal relationship with anyone at uni. There is an opportunity for it by all means, you know, I've found if I approach — if I approach lecturers or tutors, you know, they'll happily help me. But at the same time, I also feel like they wouldn't remember me and they're not going to stop me in the street and say, 'How are you going? You did really well in that task.' I think that just comes down to just it's so big. Not because they don't care, it's just so big."

"... if everybody is around you and they're sort of, like, 'Oh, you can't do anything', and you start believing them and you're, like, 'Well, I can't do this.'"

"Like, even in the lectures, like, it can sort of go both ways. But I had one of my teachers for the final exam, like, class he said, like, almost 75 per cent of the students who sat this exam have failed in the past few years. And it's, like, so in one way that's, like, okay, it's not that big a deal if I fail because pretty much everyone fails. But then the other way it's, like, I'm going to fail this exam."

"I think they prefer the students who have the different ideas. They really like the students who like to speak up when they just deliver — I have a very deep impression about a student from my last semester and every class, probably I can exaggerate, every five minutes she [another student] asked a question and so many questions. But the tutor just liked it and at the end of the semester he said [to the other student], 'You are the most intelligent student who I ever met'."

Interviewer: He said that in the class?

Student: Yeah, in the class. Just so many questions, just pumping, pumping... We don't have time, we don't have the opportunities, yeah."

Activity:

Reflect on the film 'Spaces of Disconnection' and the students' accounts of their pedagogical experiences and feelings of disconnection. Some questions that might support your reflection include:

- Do the students' comments included above resonate with your experiences of the challenges students face in higher education?
- What were your responses to the film? Did you have a sense of disconnection and what feelings did that trigger? Do you think students might experience similar feelings of disconnection in higher education?
- How would you feel about being told you are likely to fail?
- What teaching practices might support students' sense of connection and capability in the lecture space? What forms of equity practice might nurture a sense of recognition and belonging in higher education?