

Learning without Limits: thriving (*not just surviving*) in Wonderland

The current higher education landscape represents the set of a crazy production of Alice in Wonderland. Like Alice (in the context of policy decisions for example) we are often expected to believe as many as six impossible things before breakfast. Or like the White Rabbit, we end up defaulting to rather manic and reactive behaviour; it feels the only way to cope sometimes with everything that is thrown at us. So as educators and leaders how do we navigate Wonderland? A world obsessed with data, metrics and league tables. A world of TEF, NSS, REF and soon KEF. In the new age of metrics how do we operate in a way that not only aims to safeguard our own principles, values, sense of integrity and well-being, but that also (and most importantly) benefits our students?

Together we will explore the key pedagogical principles of 'Learning without Limits'¹, a movement that has gathered momentum in schools over the past 15 years, but which has been slow to gain traction within higher education. We will explore how the principles of 'Learning without Limits' align to the SEDA values and how the approach rises above and goes beyond the instrumentalism of metrics, transcending the 'Wonderland' within which we find ourselves. By creating space to reflect upon what really impacts upon learning and achievement we also present ourselves with a challenge. That challenge is to grasp and take forwards a more hopeful but also more courageous approach to teaching and supporting learning; an approach that may be metrics-minded, but that should never, ever default to being metrics-driven. An approach that hinges upon a pedagogy of transformability for the benefit of all.

¹ Claire was one of nine teacher practitioners who were part of the original 'Learning without Limits' research project at the University of Cambridge, documented in Hart, S., Dixon, A., Drummond, M. J., and McIntyre, D. (2004) Learning without Limits. Maidenhead: OUP.