



# Searching for Home

## PG Cert Academic Practice

Ravin Raori



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# Introduction

## My background:

Lecturer in Narrative Media Design, BA Graphic and Media  
Freelance Creative Producer

## About:

Investigating the role of community and belonging as a key aspect of student experience.

## Project Rationale:

Reflecting on my own experiences of having lived in 3 cities, and been a student in multiple contexts, I've always been searching for home in some ways. As a student, whenever I felt displaced, my happiest memories ones from studio and in-class activities; particularly ones where I felt engaged with the task I was doing and the people I was doing them with including our tutors and lecturers.

Increasingly, I am thinking social justice is in the little things. It has to be simple. It has to be small and granular. The more I try to complicate it, the more it slips away from me.

In thinking about belonging and community, little things can be moments and/or experiences, factors or influences, workshops or classroom activities that enable students to connect, deepening their bonds with each other and with us.

If at the end of this I can look back at my project as a series of experiments (successful and failed) that contribute as a toolkit/means for reflecting on what it means to create belonging in a HE context, I will be happy.

[From Blog Post on Belonging, Ravin Raori](#)



# Key Terms

## Themes

Belonging

Friendship

Community

Critical Friendship

Studio Environment

Safe spaces

Practical Wisdom

Collective Experience

## Methods

Naturalistic Inquiry

Observation

Focus Groups

Ethnography

Field Notes

Documentation

Participation

## Documentation Tools

Miro

Padlet

Photography

Videography

## Interventions

Object Based Learning

Group Work

Co-authoring

Field Experiments

Spatial Arrangements



# Intervention 1

## About:

Exploring the impact of group work in an external environment.

## Key Findings:

- Unexpectedness of being outdoors as an icebreaker
- Easier to talk about complex social issues
- Engaging through fun and play
- Collective experience

## Challenges/Limitations

- Accessibility
- Power Dynamics





# Intervention 2

## About:

Using Object Based learning to foster dialogue.

## Key Findings:

- Unexpected discoveries
- Shared memories
- Diverse perspectives

## Challenges/Limitations

- Cultural Difference
- Invisible Pedagogy (Bernstein, 1975)
- Clarity around task





# Intervention 3

## About:

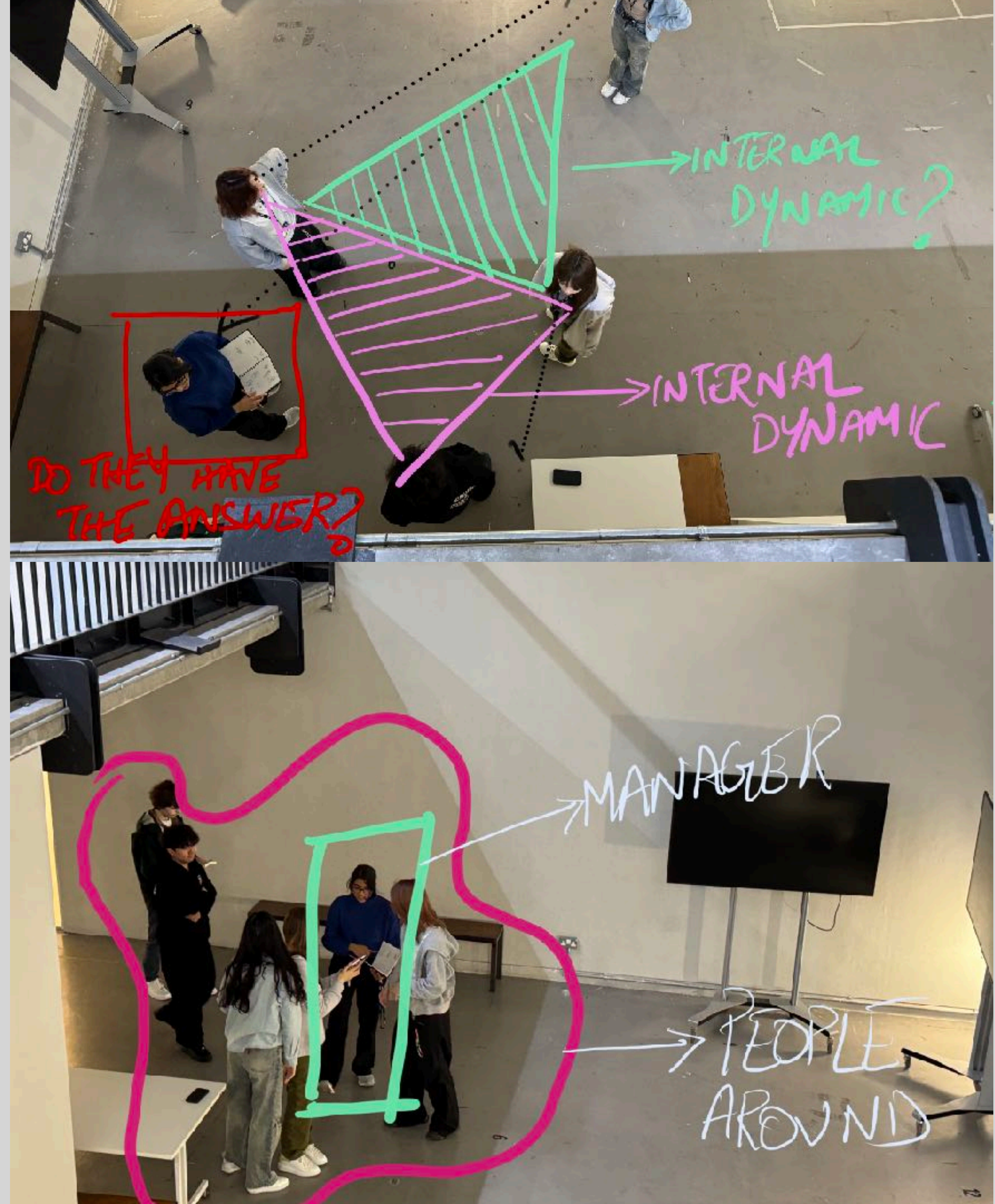
Assigning Roles in Group Work

## Key Findings:

- Everyone can contribute
- Deeper sense of purpose
- Embracing play
- Positive Disruption

## Challenges/Limitations

- Student confidence
- Internal Dynamics of the group





# Intervention 4

## About:

Relationship between community and learning new skills

## Key Findings:

- Pushes one to communicate and collaborate
- Collective ownership
- Learning together

## Challenges/Limitations

- Time
- Clarity of communication

Student 1: "I found the idea of combining the objects of other people into one quite intriguing, especially when you take specific parts of objects. This idea is actually could serve as a foundation for my SDP project where I wanted to explore 3d modeling. Taking random things and combining them into one. Perhaps if there had been better communication, the outcome could've been a bit more complex but overall I liked this project."

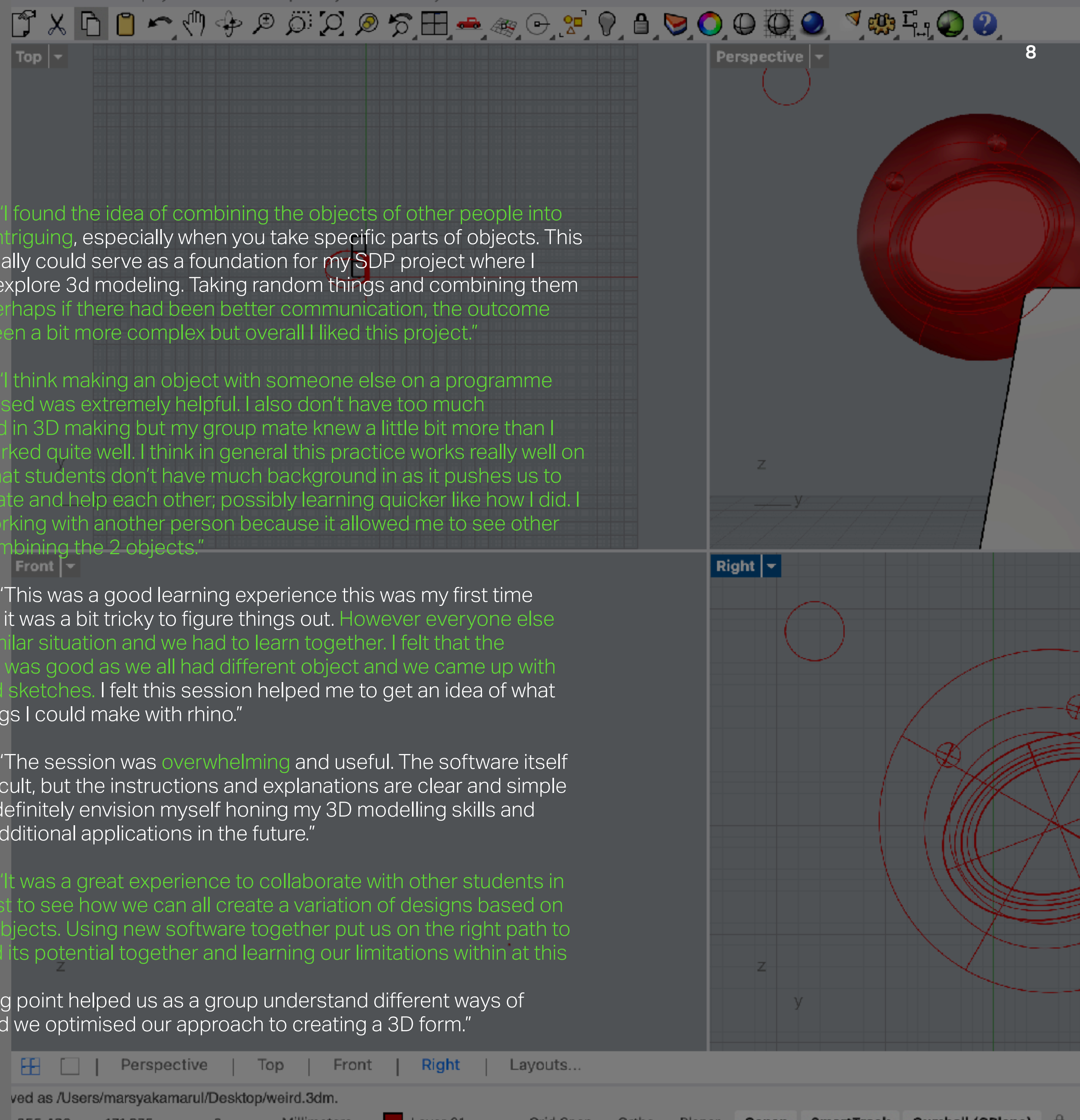
Student 2: "I think making an object with someone else on a programme I've never used was extremely helpful. I also don't have too much background in 3D making but my group mate knew a little bit more than I did so it worked quite well. I think in general this practice works really well on activities that students don't have much background in as it pushes us to communicate and help each other; possibly learning quicker like how I did. I also like working with another person because it allowed me to see other ways of combining the 2 objects."

Student 3: "This was a good learning experience this was my first time using rhino it was a bit tricky to figure things out. However everyone else was in a similar situation and we had to learn together. I felt that the experience was good as we all had different object and we came up with some good sketches. I felt this session helped me to get an idea of what kind of things I could make with rhino."

Student 4: "The session was overwhelming and useful. The software itself is fairly difficult, but the instructions and explanations are clear and simple to follow. I definitely envision myself honing my 3D modelling skills and exploring additional applications in the future."

Student 5: "It was a great experience to collaborate with other students in this task just to see how we can all create a variation of designs based on the same objects. Using new software together put us on the right path to understand its potential together and learning our limitations within at this stage.

This starting point helped us as a group understand different ways of thinking and we optimised our approach to creating a 3D form."





# Intervention 5

## About:

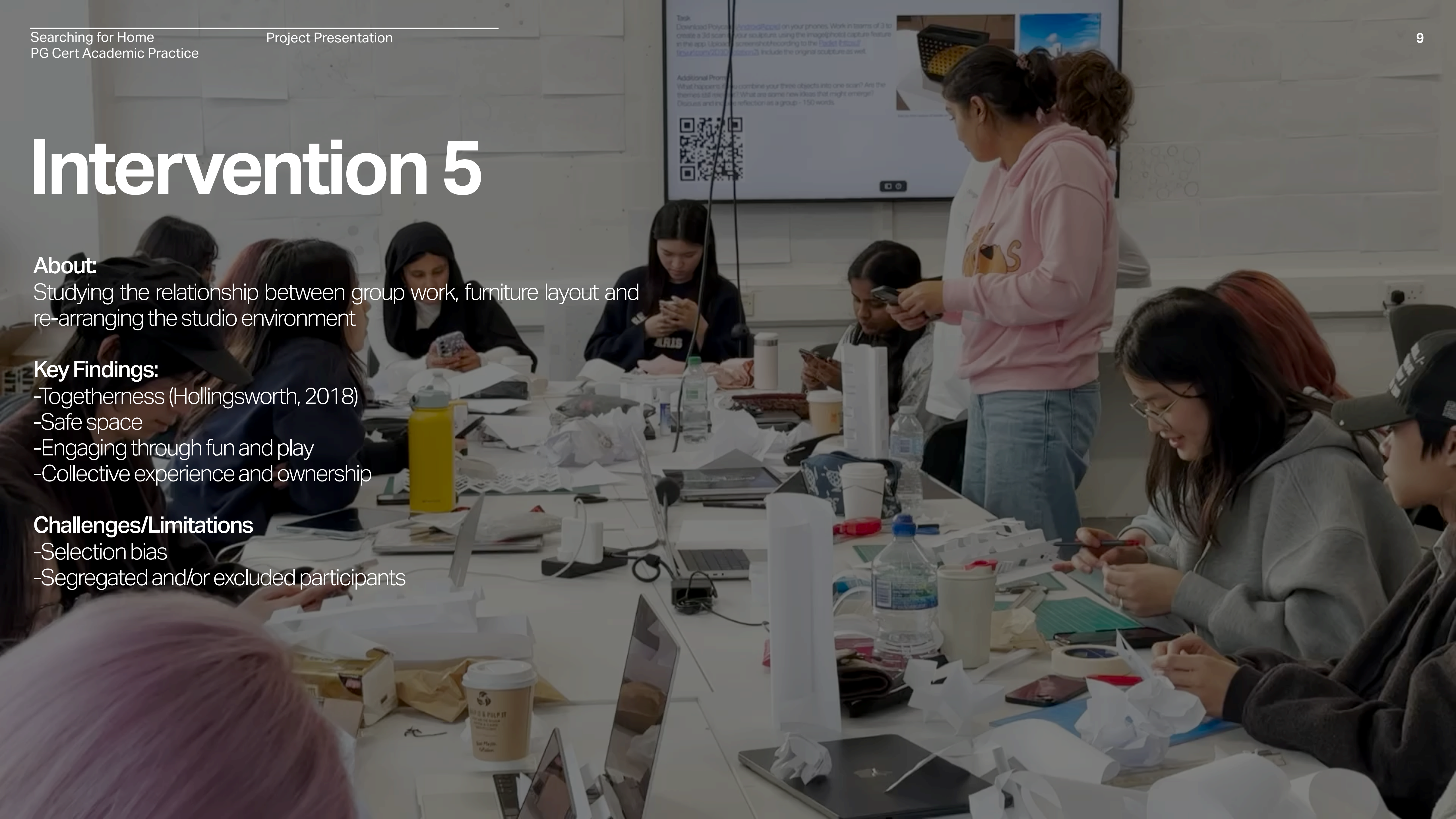
Studying the relationship between group work, furniture layout and re-arranging the studio environment

## Key Findings:

- Togetherness (Hollingsworth, 2018)
- Safe space
- Engaging through fun and play
- Collective experience and ownership

## Challenges/Limitations

- Selection bias
- Segregated and/or excluded participants



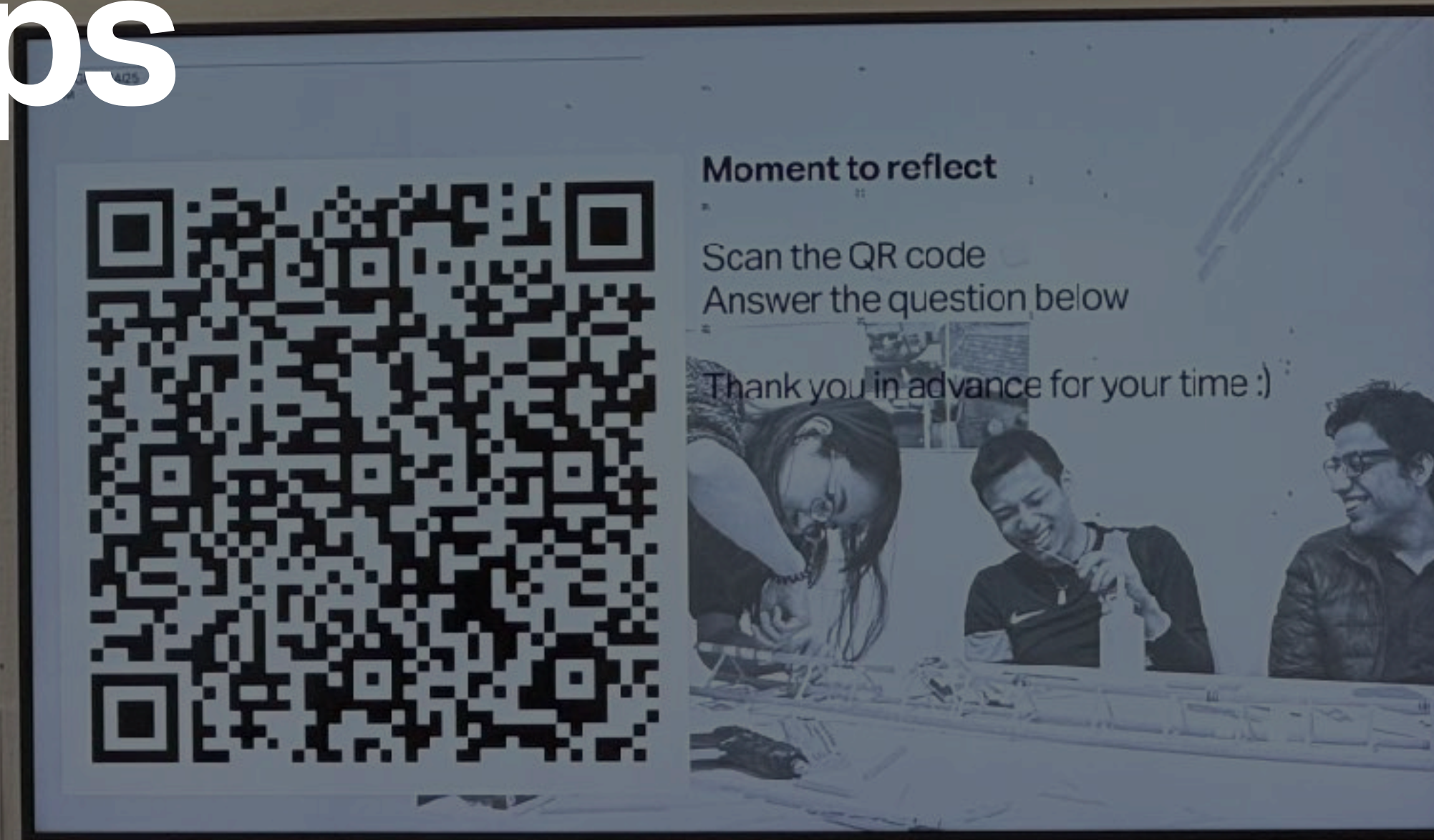


# PAUSE...

## Maybe I need to hear from the students



# Focus Groups



## Precursor:

Before convening the focus groups - I thought it could be nice to cast a wider net and get a general temperature check of what the folks in Year 1 are feeling about their sense of community and belonging.

In 150-200 words, describe how your first few months at University has been. Reflect on any new friendships you have gained and the role the play in your learning journey, sense of community and belonging.

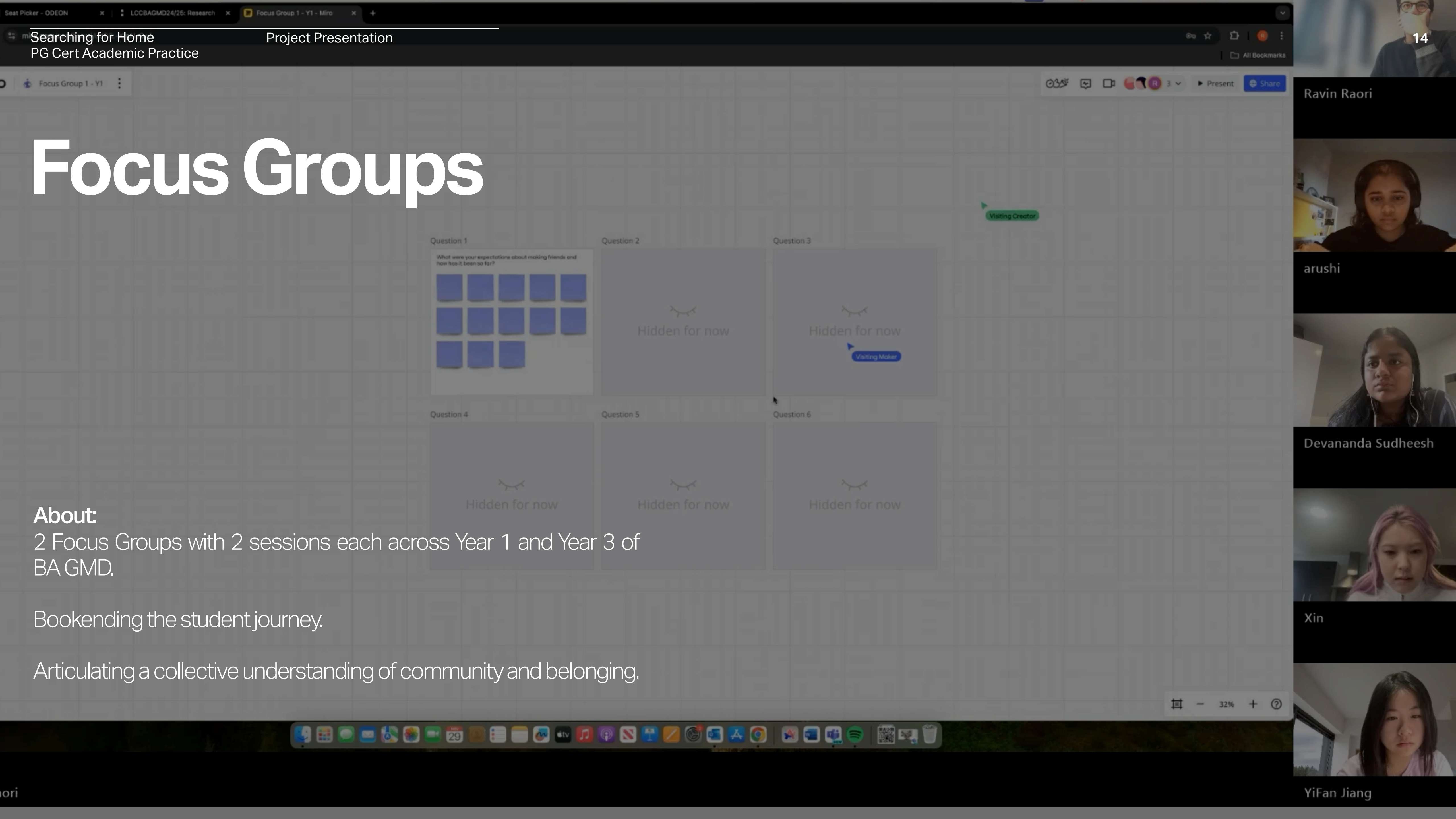


I have made a solid group of friends a lot quicker than I thought I would, it's been really nice and has definitely made my uni experience more enjoyable. good. I found a bit overwhelming at first due to its size of the campus but I have pushed myself to make friends. As I kept meeting new people, I felt more comfortable and felt more happy. When it comes to the curriculum of the university, I was able to focus and organise my schedule with personal work. My first few months at university have been smooth. I have made a few friends and have one friend that I get on extremely well with! Everyone is welcoming and I am comfortable around my new peers. I have made new friends on the course and they are good to have for my learning journey as we all have different perspectives to design so hearing their input can be interesting and help shape your ideas if you are open to theirs. It's been better than I thought, I'm still working on my social skills but I've managed to make a few friends. Workload is fine and I'm not as stressed as I thought I would be. I have a few friend from m hometown in London, but just a few so I basically making friends on purpose, try as possible as I can to talk to anybody on my sessions, because I know that socializing is crucial to living in London and also for getting more opportunities in here. The first few months have been very eventful, a lot of unexpected and expected things have happened and it is all a lot to take in in the moment. I have made a lot of friends who I've gotten incredibly close to in such a short amount of time and have really enjoyed spending time and getting to know people better. I realised one of the biggest reasons I'm excited to come to University is because of my friends. Though, initially I felt like a lot of people shied away from talking about work, it is now a casual part of our conversations and it is useful to know how your friends are doing in terms of the work as it lets me gauge my own progress and determine if I'm at a good level of work. It's been easy to make friends in the studio, but it's been hard to carry out that friendship beyond university. So they seem quite surface level and I can't connect deeply with the people. Even though I have been in London for a while, I don't really feel a sense of belonging or community unfortunately. I feel like nothing and no one here is mine, if you know what I mean. Life as an international student feels very unstable. Nothing is the same and nothing ever remains the same, the constant change is exhausting. I keep searching for home, but I don't really know where home is. I'm tired of studying. There is a lot of knowledge to learn, which is very hard for me. I have insomnia symptoms, which makes my life very hard. At start we don't know each others name but we have ice break and some team work we start familier with others. When I learning, I don't feel so hard, different tutor teach us slowly I learnd a lot new knowledge from class. My first few weeks of uni have been fun and pretty exciting. It's a unique experience in an environment I'm not familiar with so it's been different from college life. Meeting new people and making friends has also been fun and collaborating with people has been enjoyable I've also got quite a few friends from college who also enrolled into ual So my friends have overall just made me feel a little more connected to uni and the transition feel a lot smoother. I have been really anxious at the beginning of the year since it's my first time living in London, but I met a lot of friends in my course who are patient and supportive. They encourage me to speak up and express myself when I struggle to speak English, and have always tried to understand my words as English is my second language. They have supported me emotionally and in academic ways, sharing their experiences and inviting me to workshops. My first few months at uni have been great mainly due to the friends I've made especially when meeting my flatmates and course mates. pretty cool. have few friends not loads. class very cliquey. At first, my university experience was pretty overwhelming as I didn't know anyone who would attend this university as most of my friends decided to go to a different university. But once I got to know people and make knew friends I started to settle in better. In my first 3 months at university, I have already learnt a lot and met many new people. I have met people from different parts of the world and cultures, formed bonds and friendships. The UAL community is very open with different ways to express yourself in sense of societies and within the studios. The studio is very diverse, everyone willing to speak and collaborate with each other as it is our first time in university so we share a common thing. A bit dont know how to do things correctly, a bit hard to understand. A lot of my friends from Hong Kong are studying in London as well, so I was afraid I would stick to them out of familiarity, but I ended up making a lot of new friends through my course and by living in student accommodation. It's nice to meet people from various backgrounds because this has helped me to see things from new perspectives. Although we are all from different places, we are in the same situation currently, so we are able to bond through that. I think this has helped me avoid being homesick; I don't feel lonely here, it's just a new experience with new people. I would say it's been pretty cool so far. 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# Focus Groups

## About:

2 Focus Groups with 2 sessions each across Year 1 and Year 3 of BA GMD.

Bookending the student journey.

Articulating a collective understanding of community and belonging.



# Focus Groups

## YEAR 1

- Initial Expectations:  
What were your expectations about making friends and how has it been so far?
- Defining Friendship:  
What does friendship mean to you in the context of university life?
- Community Perception:  
How would you describe the sense of community in your cohort or the university as a whole?
- Challenges:  
Have you faced any challenges in forming connections?
- Support Systems:  
In what situations/contexts/scenarios have you made new friends?
- Future Outlook:  
How do you imagine these relationships evolving as you progress through the course?

## YEAR 3

- Reflection on Expectations:  
Looking back to your first year, how did your expectations about friendships and community evolve over time?
- Role of Friendships:  
How have friendships influenced your academic experience, creativity, or personal growth during the course?
- Community Impact:  
In what ways has being part of a community (or lack of one) shaped your time at university?
- Significant Relationships:  
Are there any specific relationships or moments that stand out as particularly impactful?
- Challenges and Growth:  
Did you face any challenges in maintaining or building connections, and how did you navigate them?
- Advice for New Students:  
What advice would you give to first-year students about fostering friendships and a sense of belonging?



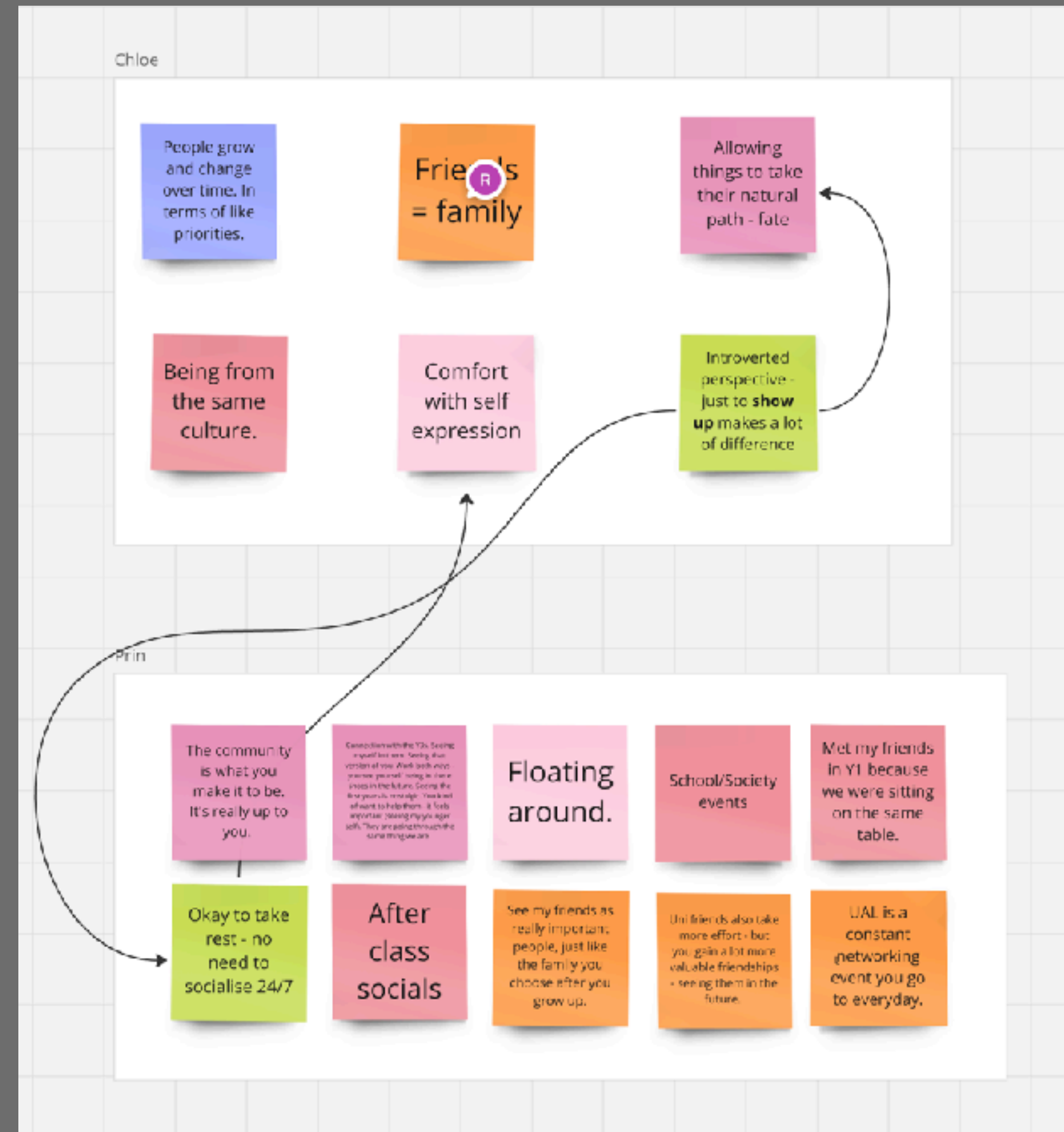
## Year 3



# Focus Groups

## 1st level of Data Analysis:

Look at what stood out as a group, either from your own reflections or someone else's



Devananda

- A home away from home
- A space where I am not judged
- Vulnerability
- When you lock eyes with someone and you both smile
- Creating Memories

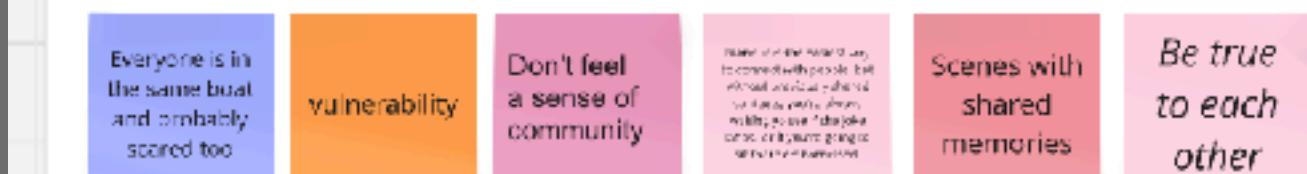
Xin



Denise



Ravin





Sorting these under certain themes or categories as a second layer of articulation

Friends = family	accidentally	nothing is off-limits but, not everyone wants to be in the middle	Support, maybe even a vote goes on someone else but never their choice	It's all friends and not romantic	People who live with each other even, but at least they're in government houses
to warling	growing together				
community	family?	company			

**DEFINITION**

[illegible]

just to be  
myself when  
needed

be there at  
the media  
that  
statisticians

Keep  
contact

commentaries

spending  
time  
together

COMMITMENTS

Recall after  
socializing

After having a  
breakdown of  
their an-  
xiety data

In addition to  
the social  
anxiety data,  
we also  
collected data  
on the  
anxiety  
level of the  
individuals  
in the  
social  
network

**OTHER**



# Outcome

we define community as **COMFORTABLE SILENCE**,  
our values are **TRUST**,  
we are committed to **BEING THERE AT MOMENTS**.

This isn't really an outcome but a combination of self-indulgence and a commitment to keep working on this project

I would like to continue to articulate some of these findings that I have co-generated with the focus groups as a sort of mission statement/mini-manifesto to put back out into the ether.



# Findings

There is a degree of vulnerability that was brought forth by the students during the focus groups. And in general, vulnerability is a key aspect of community and friendships.

There is tremendous value in studying the semiotics of interaction; subtle gestures and body language go a long way in making the studio feel safe and friendly.

Group work and peer-interaction can foster a sense of engagement. However, several parameters and variables affect the degree of success. Things like group dynamics, individual personalities and cultural differences are important to consider.

Collective experience is quite important with a higher degree of emphasis on non-studio activities. This could still be on the periphery of academic experience.

Values are generally shared. Humour is important amongst things like trust and empathy through dialogue. It seems obvious, but a smile can go a long way in making someone feel included.

Teaching activities that balance collective ownership of the end-result with a sense of play make for more engaging learning experiences.



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Allison Costa (US), Ana Prendes (GB), Christiana Kazakou (GB), Cui Yin Mok (SG), Hyash Tanmoy (IN), Ilyia Szilak (US), Ilona Puskas (HU), Justin Berry (US), Kavita Gonsalves (AU), Kazz Morohashi (GB), Kofi Oduro (CA), Komal Jain (IN), Lizzie Crouch (GB), Madhushree Kamak (IN), Maria Kuzmina (RU), Mark Bolotin (AU), Matt Gingold (AU), Nicholas Medvescek (US), Ravin Raori (GB), Robin Reid (US), Viviana Quea (AT), Zeynep Birsel (NL)  
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# Questions?