

Summer of Ukuleles: Fostering communities and having fun

Sub-theme – Taking Care of Ourselves

Louise Drumm, Edinburgh Napier University l.drumm@napier.ac.uk

Anne Tierney, Heriot-Watt University a.tierney@hw.ac.uk

Introduction

In early 2020, we secured funding to develop a workshop for university staff, which used learning to play a ukulele as a way to demonstrate enquiry-based learning (Kahn & O'Rourke, 2005). Based on a workshop idea originally conceived by Laura Ritchie (*Yes I Can?*, 2020), we wanted to use a skill which was outside an academic's comfort zone (Meyer & Land, 2006) and support them to teach themselves (and each other) how to play the ukulele. Then Covid happened, and we had to rethink our strategy. Like every other academic team, we had to move online. However, this was not a barrier for us as we were the current and former programme leader for the MSc in Blended and Online Education at Edinburgh Napier University (<https://www.napier.ac.uk/courses/msc--pgdip--pgcert-blended-and-online-education-postgraduate-distance-learning>).

How do I play the ukulele?

We recruited 16 potential ukulele players and provided them with a scaffolded course on Moodle, which supported their learning over the course of 10 weeks. In addition, several people contacted us with a request to join the group, as they already had their own instrument.

We used a variety of resources to support the ukulele players. We started with YouTube videos which showed players how to tune the instrument, hold it, make simple chords, and strum simple patterns. We also sourced videos of each of the songs we introduced each week so that players could play along with an accompaniment. YouTube was an invaluable resource as it was possible to slow down videos without changing the song key, so players were able to practice at a speed that suited them. As players became more confident we added ukulele chord notation, which available free on a number of websites. We worked asynchronously as a group, using discussion boards to communicate our progress and share hints and tips.

Community of players – looking after one another

The group came together as a supportive community (Wenger, 1998) in a number of ways. Our *joint enterprise* was learning the ukulele. Our *mutual engagement* was seen in our asynchronous interactions on Moodle, and when we came together during our two sing-a-longs, which we had at Christmas and St Patrick's Day, playing together online after the actual "course" had finished. Our *shared repertoire* was exactly that – a set of songs that we could play, separately, or together. We *brokered* our hints and tips in the discussion board, shared our progress and our challenges, and supported one another in a focused activity that took us away from the pandemic and away from our work and personal situations.

What's in our future?

We still hope to develop our original idea of having a face to face workshop where we can get people playing a song in a couple of hours, entirely self- and peer- taught. We love the idea of teaching uncertainty, experiencing liminality (Land & Meyer, 2006), and the sense of achievement when we do something we previously thought was impossible.

But for now, we present the evolution of the course, and our current plans to take it to a wider audience. The Summer of Ukuleles resources are available to everyone online, as a self-enrol Open Moodle course. If you are interested, pick up your ukulele and have a go.

<https://t.co/bdGDa2smhj?amp=1>

Kahn, P., & O'Rourke, K. (2005). *Understanding Enquiry-based Learning* (All Ireland Higher Education Report). <http://www.aishe.org/readings/2005-2/chapter1.pdf>

Land, R. L., & Meyer, J. H. F. (2006). Threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge: Issues of liminality. In *Overcoming Barriers to Student Understanding*. Routledge.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity*. Cambridge University Press.

Yes I can? YES YOU CAN! (2020, January 9). Lauraritchie.Com.

<https://www.lauraritchie.com/2020/01/09/yes-i-can-yes-you-can/>