Breaking down attitudinal barriers in the fortress of academia: learning from a UDL project to engage students with academic reading

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‘HEIs continued to replicate [the] status quo, and whether unwittingly or purposefully, erected barriers that blocked participation from individuals or groups who differed from those traditional students who excelled with predictable, inflexible, “one-size-fits-all” curriculum and instruction’.

Is the fortress changing?

Pokorny & Warren (2016, pp.1-2) also discuss how global challenges and reforms to HE are challenging the idea of the fortress, e.g. marketisation, consumerisation, league tables, widening participation agendas, etc.

These issues require a greater focus on how students learn, not just what knowledge is held in the fortress.
Reading as a barrier

Educational background and expectations, learning differences (e.g. dyslexia), and time-poverty all impact on a student’s ability and willingness to read.
A technological solution to the environmental barriers:

adding accessibility tools to our Resource Lists (online reading list) system to enable multi-modal reading
Revealing attitudinal barriers

“There are problems with the tools”

“I need to be a super user”

“Where’s your evidence?”
Emotional / contextual barriers and vulnerability

“The spoken word is a different set of skills to following a novel being read aloud - is there any research on this?”
Emotional barriers #2

Ashwin et al (2016, pp.55-56) argue that emotional or personal barriers can impede reflective teaching practice.

We need to recognise that reflection is both an emotional and an intellectual exercise.
Battering rams and bombs...

Our initial research caused some disturbance to the fortress, but Covid has lit a fuse underneath it with ‘the digital pivot’ (Salmon, 2020)

Battering ram image from The Other Dan via Flickr via CC BY-NC 2.0 licence
Bringing down attitudinal barriers

Fried (2016) argues that the missing element for embracing change is courage. This is only found when people become willing to make a journey.

Covid has supplied this missing courage.
What next?

1. Continuing pedagogical change that focuses on reading

2. Developing a trusting, supportive community of practice (Ashwin et al, 2016)

3. Embracing the digital
Any questions?

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