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Near-peer led simulation and pedagogical labour in paediatric nursing education: A critical review

Lisa Harvey, Wrexham University

David Crighton, Wrexham University

Abstract

Near-peer led simulation (NPLS) is gaining attention as a way to enhance experiential learning in pre-registration nursing programmes, particularly in areas where placement capacity is constrained and emotional preparedness is essential. Paediatric nursing education faces persistent pressures relating to clinical exposure, rising patient acuity, and the relational and affective complexity of children's care. At the same time, higher education institutions operate within audit-driven environments where teaching is increasingly shaped by recruitment, satisfaction and employability metrics. These pressures create a tension between supporting emotionally grounded, psychologically safe learning and meeting regulatory and institutional performance demands.

This paper offers a critical review of the opportunities and challenges of NPLS through Stephen Ball's concepts of performativity and neoliberalism out there/in here. Drawing on the existing literature, the paper outlines the reported benefits of NPLS, including increased confidence, stronger reflective practice, and a more approachable learning climate. It also highlights recurring challenges such as variable facilitator preparation, emotional labour, psychological safety, and the need for clear role boundaries. The analysis then considers how these pedagogical benefits and risks are shaped by the wider higher education environment, where what is most valued is often what can be easily measured.

Using Ball's framework, the paper argues that while NPLS has significant pedagogical promise, its sustainability depends on how institutions recognise and resource the relational, emotional and supervisory labour it demands. In many workload and quality systems, this labour remains largely invisible. The conclusion identifies two areas for future inquiry: first, empirical research that examines how universities negotiate the competing demands of emotional, critical and performative priorities when implementing NPLS, and second, a small design-focused pilot that tests whether NPLS can be supported in ways that protect psychological safety while meeting institutional requirements. Together, these directions offer a balanced way to develop NPLS as both a pedagogically valuable and institutionally viable approach within contemporary higher education.

Keywords: Near-peer led simulation, paediatric nurse education, performativity in higher education, psychological safety and learning

Introduction

The current Higher Education (HE) landscape in the UK has been shaped by key policy moments and legislation that expanded access and introduced market logics, notably Robbins (1963), Dearing (1997) and Browne (2010). Robbins framed mass expansion and workforce relevance. Dearing normalised tuition contributions, as a necessity to realise broader access to HE. Browne accelerated competition via fee reforms and the removal of recruitment caps, supported by consumer-style information which aims to measure and rank (Hillman, 2013; Scott, 2013; Thiel, 2019). These shifts contributed to the embedding of New Public Managerialism (NPM) and audit pressures that recast faculties as cost-centres, academics as service providers and students as consumers (Radice, 2013; Harvey, 2005; Collini, 2012). The Office for Students (OfS) oversees this audit-driven approach. Its ongoing conditions of registration prioritise financial sustainability through student recruitment and judge success by student satisfaction and graduate employment. While regulatory arrangements differ across the UK nations, these audit and market logics are widely felt across providers. The result is a consumer-focused system where 'quality' is often read through employability statistics and satisfaction metrics (Williams, 2013; Wyness, 2013; Bunce et al., 2017; Ingleby, 2021).

In this context, undergraduate paediatric nursing education faces several challenges: persistent constraints on clinical placement availability (NMC, 2024), growing patient acuity (RCPCH, 2020), and the emotional intensity of working in paediatric care. Together, these factors create a complex learning environment that can limit aspects of work-readiness, especially the relational and emotional competencies central to paediatric care, while also undermining student satisfaction.

The aim of this paper is to explore these challenges through the lens of Stephen Ball's concepts of performativity and neoliberalism "out there" and "in here". Rather than evaluating near-peer led simulation (NPLS) as a pedagogical innovation, the paper uses Ball's framework to surface the tensions and frustrations that arise when care-oriented pedagogies are drawn into performative higher education regimes. We use near-peer led simulation (NPLS) as an approach to examine how paediatric nurse education can meet regulatory demands while also supporting forms of learning less easily measured, such as psychological safety, belonging, and reflective practice. In doing so, the paper highlights how the pedagogical promise of NPLS is shaped, constrained, and at times compromised by institutional and policy pressures. The discussion concludes by considering how future research might investigate the ways higher education institutions negotiate these tensions in practice, and whether NPLS can be sustained effectively in practice.

Background

Simulation Based Education (SBE) has emerged as a key strategy in bridging the persistent theory-practice gap within nursing curriculum (Jefferies, 2020; Diaz-Navarro et al., 2023; NMC, 2024). SBE creates a psychologically safe environment in which students can engage in active experiential learning, where they can rehearse high risk scenarios without causing harm and receive structured feedback (Cant & Cooper, 2017). By creating authentic, emotionally charged situations through high fidelity means, standardised patients, or digital simulations, learners are provided with opportunities to develop clinical reasoning, critical thinking and reflective capacity (Shin et al., 2015). Importantly the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) (2024), now formally acknowledges simulation as a legitimate component of practice hours, provided the experiences are high quality, well-structured and aligned with programme proficiencies.

Despite the well documented benefits of SBE in developing technical and cognitive competencies, there are several areas of concern. Studies highlight that without advanced emotional scaffolding, students frequently report overwhelming anxiety, reduced productivity and intense confusion during simulation, limiting reflective capacity and emotional resilience (Madsgaard et al., 2022). Additionally, facilitator led environments lack vulnerability and shared reflection can exacerbate stress and hinder engagement, indicating a critical gap in emotional preparedness (Newhouse & Polwart, 2025). These concerns are compounded by students' feelings of imposter syndrome and a perceived lack of peer support during simulation which can heighten emotional distress and diminish confidence (Peng et al., 2022), highlighting a need for simulation models that more intentionally support emotional safety and peer connection alongside competence.

Alongside these pedagogical challenges, higher education in the UK has faced growing questions over its funding, structure and purpose over the last few decades. The evolving nature and depth of these debates have been covered extensively (Furedi, 2011; Collini, 2012; Radice, 2013; Feldman & Sandoval, 2018; Fleming, 2021), but a short overview here provides important background to the contextual factors that ultimately influence how successfully SBE can be implemented.

The move from a free but narrowly accessible university system to mass participation supported by student fee contributions has shifted the balance of power within universities (McGettigan, 2013). Students are increasingly positioned, at least at the level of policy, as consumers in need of protection to ensure a fair and valuable service is provided (Brooks, 2018). This has created an environment in which universities, working in conjunction with a range of external systems of measurement and ranking, seek to demonstrate excellence, value for money, and their capacity to produce workforce-ready graduates. In doing so, universities have increasingly metricised many aspects of academic life (Jones, 2022), including teaching hours, teaching quality, and research income.

Within this context, workload allocation models have come into prominence as mechanisms for allocating, measuring and judging academic work. As Ball (2003, p.1053) suggests, "our days are numbered - literally - and those numbers are collated and monitored ever more closely and carefully." At the same time, workload allocation models often ensure that academic schedules are tightly packed, leaving fewer spaces for thoughtful and innovative approaches to pedagogy (Boncori et al., 2020).

Situated within a wider context of marketisation, metricisation and performative governance, simulation-based learning raises questions not only about pedagogical value but about how such innovative practices are recognised and sustained. Against this background, the next sections review the paediatric SBE literature and near-peer learning evidence, not to advocate near-peer led simulation uncritically, but to develop a theoretical case for NPLS as a pedagogy that both complies with and exposes the tensions of performative higher education.

Literature review

This review synthesises what is known about simulation-based education in paediatric nursing and the contribution of near-peer learning, then develops a theoretical reading through Ball's notion of performativity. It will first summarise evidence on paediatric SBE outcomes and the design features that matter. The review will then examine near-peer learning mechanisms and risks. Finally, these strands are brought together to argue for near-peer led simulation (NPLS) as an approach to enhance practice.

Simulation as necessity

Simulation has evolved from a supplementary teaching tool into a curricular necessity, especially in paediatrics where consistent exposure to high stake situations, emotionally complex situations, such as child safeguarding, acute deterioration, or bereavement, is often not guaranteed in placement (Jefferies, 2020; Fielding et al., 2022; Beichlar et al., 2024). When grounded in psychological safety, simulation enhances emotional resilience and clinical reasoning, key attributes in delivering sensitive family centred care, alongside technical competence (Walsh et al., 2020; Turner et al., 2023). Recent policy developments further legitimise SBE, with the NMC now permitting up to 600 hours of simulated practice, contingent on quality in scenario design, facilitation, and learner outcomes (NMC, 2024). Likewise, guidance from the Association for Simulated Practice in Healthcare (ASPiH, UK-wide) and Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW, Wales) promotes inclusive, scalable approaches that position students as co-producers of learning (Diaz-Navarro et al., 2023; HEIW, 2022). NPLS offers a promising response to these imperatives by enhancing access, reducing faculty burden and cultivating peer leadership, all while maintaining pedagogical and regulatory integrity.

While SBE has been widely validated as a strategy for bridging theory and practice, its delivery has traditionally relied on faculty-led models. This raises questions of scalability, cost and delivery. Near-peer led simulation (NPLS) has emerged as a potential response, retaining the pedagogical strengths of SBE while redistributing facilitation roles to trained peers.

Near-peer led simulation- opportunities

Near-peer led simulation involves experienced students facilitating simulated learning sessions for earlier-stage peers, helping facilitators consolidate their knowledge while offering peers a more approachable, less hierarchical experience (McKenna & Williams, 2017). Empirical evidence supports NPLS as a means of improving confidence, skill retention, and reflective practice (Ten Cate & Durning, 2007; Carey et al., 2018). Importantly, benefits are reciprocal, peer facilitators gaining leadership and teaching skills that align with the NMC (2018) expectations (Crowe, 2001; Tai et al., 2020). In paediatric contexts, where students often report anxiety about family interactions, NPLS offers a low-stake environment to develop communication skills and emotional competence (Tai et al., 2016).

Furthermore, NPLS potentially offers a scalable, inclusive, and pedagogically effective response to ongoing educational and workforce challenges in paediatric education. When implemented in alignment with regulatory guidance (Diaz-Navarro et al., 2023; HEIW, 2023; NMC, 2024) and educational theory (Bandura & Walters, 1977; Vygotsky, 1978; Kolb, 1984) NPLS has the potential to enhance learner preparedness and strengthen professional identity (Carey et al., 2018; Irvine et al., 2018).

NPLS presents substantial pedagogical advantages for paediatric nurse education, by promoting active engagement, learner agency, and collaborative skill development (Carey et al., 2018; Irvine et al., 2018). However, its successful implementation within undergraduate nursing curricula necessitates careful consideration of a range of structural, emotional and ethical challenges. Without appropriate safeguards, NPLS may risk undermining both learner wellbeing and educational integrity. The literature identifies challenges that can undermine NPLS if not managed effectively.

Near-peer led simulation - challenges

Whilst the literature highlights clear potential benefits to NPLS, these can only be realised if the challenges associated with the approach are recognised and mitigated. The following section highlights a range of considerations which need to be addressed.

Effective peer facilitation requires structured preparation and supervision; without adequate training, peer-led sessions risk undermining psychological safety and disrupting learning dynamics (Abdullah & Mei-Chan, 2018; Hong-Wong & Shorey, 2022). Furthermore, emotional labour and role ambiguity for peer facilitators highlight the importance of clear boundaries and faculty oversight to prevent burnout and role confusion (Secomb, 2008; Cant & Cooper, 2017). Power dynamics also warrant careful attention; if not thoughtfully managed, near-peer interactions risk replicating traditional hierarchies rather than promoting the intended collaboration and inclusivity (Ten Cate & Durning, 2007; Lockspeiser et al., 2008; Secomb, 2008; Carey et al., 2018).

Facilitator preparedness emerges as a critical factor in ensuring high quality simulation delivery. While experienced students possess relevant experiential knowledge, they may lack the pedagogical skills, emotional maturity, or confidence required to lead complex, emotionally charged paediatric scenarios effectively. Inadequate preparation has been associated with reduced scenario fidelity, diminished psychological safety and variable debriefing quality (Feng et al., 2024).

Alongside these considerations, there is also the issue of workload for student peer facilitators themselves. While near-peer led approaches are sometimes framed as extending learning capacity, the time required for preparation, training, delivery and engagement in emotionally demanding debriefs represents a substantive commitment for student peers (Abdullah & Mei-Chan, 2018; Secomb, 2008). Evidence from systematic reviews of academic peer mentoring highlights that such roles routinely involve sustained time investment and emotional labour, yet often sit ambiguously in relation to formal accredited work (Gehreke et al., 2024). Without clear accounting for this labour, there is a risk that peer facilitation becomes an additional, and largely invisible, demand placed on students rather than a recognised component of their learning.

Evidence from near-peer teaching in medical education highlights similar opportunities and constraints. For example, Gottlieb et al. (2017) describe a formal near-peer teaching programme in undergraduate medicine that delivered clear benefits for both learners and student-facilitators through social and cognitive congruence. However, time management emerged as the most common challenge for peer facilitators and faculty alike, and the programme relied on extensive preparation, training workshops and ongoing faculty co-teaching. These findings suggest that near-peer approaches redistribute, rather than remove, pedagogical labour, raising parallel concerns about sustainability and workload when such models are adopted at scale.

These limitations highlight the importance of carefully designed support structures, training, and governance, which are explored in the next section.

Resource implications

In light of these risks, effective delivery requires structured training, clear oversight and robust governance, aligned with ASPiH standards (UK-wide) and HEIW guidance (Wales), which prioritise clear outcomes, psychological safety, trained facilitators, purposeful scenarios, structured reflection, documented governance/QA, and inclusion (Diaz-Navarro et al., 2023; HEIW, 2022). Opportunities for co-facilitation

alongside academic staff, mentorship, and interactive feedback loops support facilitators in developing both competence and confidence (Kang & Min, 2019; Turner et al., 2023).

A pressing consideration is the maintenance of psychological safety, particularly in paediatric scenarios that often involve distressing content, such as child deterioration or safeguarding concerns. Performing in front of peers, particularly when led by near-peers, may intensify performance anxiety and reduce learner openness (Nestel et al., 2013; Kang & Min, 2019; Lackie et al., 2023; Turner et al., 2023). Embedding trauma-informed pedagogies, including robust pre-briefing, normalisation of uncertainty during debriefs, and consistent reinforcement of a no-blame learning culture can help to support emotional safety and enhance learners' resilience, but this has time and training implications.

The emotional labour involved in supporting peers through challenging scenarios poses risks to peer facilitators' wellbeing. Supporting distressed learners, managing group dynamics and responding empathetically to simulated crises can result in fatigue, stress or compassion fatigue (Nestel et al., 2013). To address this, peer facilitators should have access to regular wellbeing check-ins, protected time for reflective debriefing and access to pastoral or psychological support services. This approach, however, has resource implications in relation to academic staff time and capacity to offer structured NPLS de-brief tutorials.

Peer equity and role clarity are further ethical challenges that require thoughtful governance. Unclear expectations or ambiguous boundaries can create power imbalances, foster interpersonal tensions, or compromise the perceived fairness of peer feedback (Carey et al., 2018). Transparent selection process, formalised role descriptors and clear boundaries are essential to safeguarding inclusive, respectful learning environments (Diaz-Navarro et al., 2023; HEIW, 2023). These measures also help maintain collaborative ethos of NPLS and prevent further embedding of hierarchical norms it seeks to disrupt.

The literature shows real benefits of NPLS: higher learner confidence, better reflection, improved communication, and a more approachable learning climate. It also highlights recurring challenges: the need for training and supervision, safeguarding psychological safety, managing emotional labour, and keeping role boundaries clear. Seen through Ball's lens of performativity and neoliberalism out there/in here, the next question is what this means for academic staff? Who does the extra work, how is it resourced and recognised, and how is success measured in systems that prefer what can be counted?

Conceptual framework and next steps

To move from description to analysis, we now consider what the opportunities and challenges outlined above mean for how NPLS is understood and enacted within higher education, and how Ball's work can help make sense of the pressures that shape its implementation.

From opportunities and challenges to implementation

The literature on near-peer led simulation highlights both clear benefits and recurring challenges. Reported advantages include increased student confidence, stronger reflective capacity, improved communication skills, and the creation of more approachable and less hierarchical learning environments. At the same time, studies emphasise risks around inconsistent training and supervision, the safeguarding of psychological safety, the emotional labour placed on peer facilitators, and the need for clear role boundaries.

These findings highlight the promise and the limits of NPLS. They suggest that its effectiveness is dependent on the institutional structures, resources, and cultures in which it is implemented. What the literature does not yet make clear, however, is how these opportunities and risks are mediated by the broader environment of higher education. In other words, while the evidence shows what NPLS can achieve and where it can falter, it tells us less about how wider policy logics and institutional priorities shape the conditions of its use.

To address this gap, we consider Stephen Ball's concepts of performativity and neoliberalism "out there" and "in here". These provide a useful lens for analysing how near-peer led simulation may be valued, governed, and enacted within higher education systems that privilege what can be measured. This framing allows us to consider not only the pedagogical potential of NPLS, but also the pressures and compromises involved in making it "count" within a performative landscape.

Ball's concepts: Neoliberalism out there/in here

To make sense of these opportunities and challenges, we draw on Stephen Ball's concepts of performativity and neoliberal pressures "out there" and their institutional and subjective enactment "in here" as a conceptual framework. For brevity, I use 'out there/in here' as shorthand for the relationship between these two dimensions.

Neoliberalism "out there" refers to external economic and political pressures faced by universities (Ball, 2016). These include government policies, regulatory frameworks, quality assurance processes and ranking systems. The external "out there" subsequently directs internal processes within institutions. These processes seek to quantify all aspects of academic working practices (Ball, 2015).

Neoliberalism "in here" refers to the ways in which institutions respond to the neoliberal "out there" by creating performance measurement targets and accountability measures designed to improve efficiency. However, neoliberalism "in here" also refers to the way in which individuals in an organisation begin to internalise and prioritise neoliberal demands, it gets into "the head, the heart and the soul" (Ball, 2012, p. 1047). Performativity is the mechanism by which neoliberalism "out there" is understood and mobilised into forms of measurement and monitoring which facilitate neoliberalism 'in here'.

Performativity as a concept represents "a culture and mode of regulation that employs judgement, comparisons, and displays as means of incentive, control attrition and change" (Ball, 2003, p. 216) which influence academic working practices. In a performative environment all aspects of an academic's role are monitored and assessed, enabling high levels of individual accountability (Ball, 2017). Performativity utilises a range of policy technologies to transform unmeasurable human qualities, such as commitment, effort and experience into measurable KPIs (Ball, 2012). In essence, what counts is what can be counted:

> The first-order effect of performativity is to reorient pedagogical and scholarly activities towards those which are likely to have a positive impact on measurable performance outcomes and are a deflection of attention away from aspects of social, emotional or moral development that have no immediate measurable performative value (Ball, 2016, p. 1054).

Framing near-peer led simulation through this lens raises important questions: which aspects of NPLS are likely to be valued and rewarded within performative systems, and which may be overlooked because they are harder to measure? Who bears the labour of making NPLS 'count', and how is that labour recognised (or not) within institutional cultures?

Seen through this lens, near-peer led simulation occupies an ambiguous position. On one level, it creates a rare space for the kind of social, emotional, and critical learning that performative systems tend to marginalise: belonging, confidence, reflective practice, and identity formation (Keeling, 2014). These outcomes, highlighted in the literature, point to the possibility of moving beyond the logic that 'what counts is what can be counted'. Yet for NPLS to be resourced, sustained, and legitimised, it must also be made to 'count' within institutional frameworks, mapped to regulatory hours, employability outcomes, and satisfaction metrics. This tension raises a key question for the analysis that follows: does NPLS open up genuine room for resistant pedagogical practices, or does its very survival depend on assimilation into the performative logics it appears to challenge?

Applying Ball to NPLS

Academics working in the HE sector today are driven by data underpinning their daily reality and, as Ball (2015) suggests, this environment can lead to educators subconsciously prioritising work which has the greatest impact on measurable outcomes. The underpinning metrics are blunt and the key to success is simple, more students recruited, fewer students dropping out, greater student satisfaction and graduates tracked employment; the neoliberalism "out there" (Ball, 2003; Ball, 2012). The problematic nature of these indicators and the tools used to collect the data have been discussed widely (Sabri, 2013; Smith, 2012; Stewart, 2015; Thiel, 2019; Wiley, 2019) but this acknowledgement does not counteract the fact that these performative tools detract from aspects of education which are difficult to quantify such as such as the social, emotional and moral dimensions of education, alongside the development of disciplinary knowledge, critical thinking and professional judgement (Ball, 2015). In essence, academics are manoeuvred, internalising the importance of such metrics, to undertake an approach to teaching, learning and scholarship which reaps the greatest measurable impact. External neoliberal imperatives guide internal decision making of the academic, where neoliberalism "in here" is played out.

For the neoliberalism out there/in here to come to fruition performative tools are required to guide this process, Workload Allocation Models (WAMs) are a key example of this. WAMs are designed to distribute time across core academic duties such as teaching, research, administration, recruitment, and pastoral care. Although often framed as fair and transparent, WAMs also reveal patterns of under- or over-utilisation, subtly signalling whether an academic is seen as offering sufficient 'value' in return for their time (Grisard, 2023). In some cases, they offer flexibility, such as for early-career staff or those with complex personal circumstances (Boncori et al., 2020), but they are ultimately instruments for rendering academic labour visible, calculable, and comparable. For NPLS, this means staff time invested in preparing, supervising, and debriefing peers may be undervalued or omitted altogether in workload models, discouraging uptake despite its potential benefits for students.

This redistribution is not limited to academic staff time, it also raises questions about how student peer labour is recognised and accounted for. Evidence from peer mentoring programmes in higher education suggests that while near-peer roles can offer substantial developmental benefits for student mentors, including increased confidence, leadership capacity and professional identity, these outcomes are contingent on sustained training, supervision and staff support (Dixon et al., 2023). Such programmes are often presented as efficient or capacity-extending interventions; however, they rely on significant and ongoing student labour, raising questions about how peer roles are recognised and accounted for within formal curricular and workload structures.

Increasingly, WAMs are shaped by performative pressures which enable high levels of individual accountability (Ball, 2017). When time is tightly allocated in line with institutional priorities (e.g. recruitment, retention, NSS), any activity not directly contributing to measurable outputs is less valued. In practice, NPLS may fall into this category. While it develops confidence, resilience, and peer belonging, outcomes consistently highlighted in the literature, these are difficult to quantify in audit-driven systems, making them less visible in institutional priorities. Previous studies have highlighted a mismatch between the time allocated for tasks and the time they actually require (Boncori et al., 2020), as well as the lack of recognition for emotional aspects of academic work, labour that often demands 'discretionary effort' beyond what is formally acknowledged (Johnston, 2024). This creates a context in which academics are disincentivised from taking pedagogical risks, particularly those that prioritise deeper or more critical forms of student learning not easily captured by existing metrics. In this environment, pedagogic approaches such as NPLS may struggle to gain traction, not because they lack value, but because they lack measurable yield.

Ball (2015) argues that to defend what matters in higher education, we must recognise how subtle systems of control shape our identities, while resisting the internalisation of imposed values. Such recognition is a necessary first step towards restoring critical and independent thought in the neoliberal university. In this light, NPLS can be understood as a potential space of resistance, as studies show the approach can build confidence, reduce anxieties, and foster reflective practice, qualities that cannot be easily captured by grade profiles or satisfaction scores. However, facilitating NPLS requires academics to 'take a step back' in the learning process, a stance that carries risks. Students may perceive it as disengagement or 'not doing their job,' which in turn could impact satisfaction metrics. Moreover, if NPLS is not formally acknowledged within workload allocation models, it may demand additional discretionary effort from staff, effectively making it a leap of faith for those who choose to embed it. The sustainability of NPLS therefore depends not only on its pedagogical effectiveness, but also on whether institutions choose to recognise the relational and emotional labour it demands from staff.

This invites further exploration of how NPLS might be implemented in practice, and whether such efforts can remain true to their values within a performative system.

Conclusion

This review has outlined the pedagogical promise of near-peer led simulation alongside the structural and ethical challenges that shape its use. NPLS can build confidence, support reflective practice, and strengthen the relational competencies central to paediatric care. Yet its sustainability depends on how institutions recognise and resource the work involved. Without explicit time, training, and workload allocation, the academic labour that makes NPLS possible risks remaining invisible, absorbed into discretionary effort rather than acknowledged as core pedagogical work.

Using Ball's lens, we have argued that the qualities NPLS develops most effectively, such as psychological safety, belonging, and identity formation, are the very aspects most likely to be overlooked in audit-oriented systems. These forms of learning sit uneasily within regimes that privilege standardisation, efficiency, and measurable outputs. The future of NPLS therefore turns not only on whether it works, but on how it is valued, legitimised, and sustained within institutional cultures where what counts is what can be counted.

The analysis presented here is necessarily limited. We have drawn on secondary literature and conceptual framing rather than empirical study. The next step is to investigate how higher education institutions

negotiate these tensions in practice: how they resource, govern, and value NPLS in ways that balance emotional and critical development with performative demands. Such research would not only inform the sustainable adoption of NPLS but also shed light on the possibilities and limits of resistant pedagogies within contemporary higher education, particularly those that seek to foreground care, relationality, and professional judgement.

Alongside this, a small design-oriented pilot could be used to test those insights in practice. A pilot that builds in role clarity, facilitator preparation, and psychological safety from the outset, and that evaluates both measurable outcomes (confidence, progression, mapped hours) and the harder-to-count gains (belonging, reflective capacity, identity formation), would help demonstrate whether NPLS can be recognised and resourced without being reduced to what is most easily counted. Together, comparative institutional study and a targeted pilot would provide the evidence needed to judge not only whether NPLS works, but whether it can endure within today's performative systems.

Biographies

Lisa Harvey is a Lecturer in Nursing at Wrexham University. She trained in children's nursing at the University of Wales Bangor and has worked across acute paediatrics, children's hospice care and community services in north-west and North Wales. She holds a Specialist Practitioner Qualification in Children's Community Nursing and an Independent Nurse Prescribing qualification. Her teaching and scholarship focus on paediatric practice, simulation-based education and near-peer led approaches.

David Crighton is a Senior Lecturer in Education at Wrexham University, where he leads the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education. He trained in community education and later completed an EdD at the University of Huddersfield. His work focuses on academic practice, professional learning, and the impact of performativity on educators' working conditions.

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