

Research article

Collaborative cultures: *Ubuntu* as a pedagogical foundation for educating independent film-makersNyasha Foya¹, Chloe Holness², Samantha Iwowo³, Hoang Thu Huyen Lê², Reina-Marie Loader^{4*} and Oluwamuyiwa Oyelaran²¹MA Student in Directing Film and Television, Department of Media Production, Bournemouth University, Poole, UK²MA Student in Producing for Film and Television, Department of Media Production, Bournemouth University, Poole, UK³Principal Academic in Directing Drama for Film and Television, Department of Media Production, Bournemouth University, Poole, UK⁴Principal Academic in Film Production, Department of Media Production, Bournemouth University, Poole, UK*Correspondence: rloader@bournemouth.ac.uk

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Abstract

This case study centres on the Ubuntu Collaboration Model introduced to Bournemouth University in the UK in 2018. Initially focused on undergraduate teaching, the model is now embedded as part of the university's practice-based and industry-focused Media Production master's programmes (2019–ongoing). The goal of this initiative is to develop and install a practical approach to film teaching that deliberately fosters a consciousness of cross-cultural collaboration among emerging independent film-makers coming from diverse backgrounds. The model is founded on the principles of the African philosophical concept of *Ubuntu*, which suggests, among other things, that we can only progress productively through a shared value system that finds expression in respectful social

interaction (that is, collaboration). Co-authored with master's students, this case study contextualises and analyses the experiences of the master's film production cohort who were part of this pedagogical journey in 2022/3.

Keywords Ubuntu; independent film-making; postgraduate teaching; collaboration; film production

Introduction

Ubuntu is an African philosophy that is deeply integrated into the fabric of several African societies across the continent. Originating in sub-Saharan countries, *Ubuntu* views humanity and a sense of societal belonging as 'inextricably' linked to the humanity and dignity of others (Tutu, 1999). Promoting peace, reconciliation, empathy and community-building as a philosophy, South African leaders such as Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela explicitly incorporated *Ubuntu* principles into the post-apartheid legal system and reconciliation efforts. Tutu describes *Ubuntu* as a way to understand who we are as human beings: in comparison with the Cartesian concept of 'I think, therefore I am', Tutu describes *Ubuntu* as situating our humanity rather in our ability to *belong* than to *think*. In other words, *Ubuntu* suggests that 'I am human because I belong' (Tutu, 1999: 34–5). Elsewhere, Justice Yvonne Mokgoro summarises the spirit of *Ubuntu* as a shared value system with collective respect for human dignity at its core, which can only find expression through social interaction. As a 'humanistic orientation towards fellow beings', the principal belief guiding the philosophy is 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu', which roughly translates as 'a person can only be a person through others' (Mokgoro, 1998: 17–18). While this expression is often used by Nguni speakers (the language most associated with *Ubuntu*), the principle it denotes can also be found in other African languages – especially Sotho-Tswana, in which case the same expression above translates as: 'Motho ke motho ka batho babang' (Metz, 2011: 536–7). Augustine Shutte (2001) suggests that although the basis of this world view lies in one's placement within a community, such approaches do not exclude personal fulfilment. This fulfilment, however, is realised through selflessness (Shutte, 2001). In this sense, living for others leads to a life with meaning, which in turn results in personal fulfilment. Within Western conceptualisation, self-expression is regarded as an individualistic act aimed at distinguishing oneself from other members of the group. Far from being incompatible with an Afro-communitarian perspective such as *Ubuntu*, self-expression is central to the 'honouring of communal, harmonious and friendly relationships' in a way that ultimately promotes caring for the quality of life of others (Metz, 2015: 400). Discussions of *Ubuntu* are not without some dissent particularly related to questions of gender inequality. In particular, Manyonganise (2015) argues that *Ubuntu* can articulate aspects of misogyny which silence women in familial, as well as in sociocultural, spaces. This position, however, tends to overlook the emphases upon equality, compassion and reciprocal respect which underpin *Ubuntu*, and dictate that the reinforcement of one another's dignity is indispensable to community building (Mbigi, 1997).

Applying the moral theories of *Ubuntu* to a collaborative educational space provides interesting opportunities to encourage university students to question their own conception of individual creative fulfilment. For here, students are encouraged to find ways to satisfy their desire for self-expression while remaining attentive to the needs of the creative community to which they co-belong. Metz (2020: 140–1) further argues that a university is a space where different people interact, or 'commune', which suggests that 'African conceptions of communal relationships ha[ve] much to offer'. According to Metz (2020: 140), 'communion consists of relationships of identity and solidarity', and in the context of a university, this 'means that [one] should strive to foster well-being, promote virtue, support culture, facilitate cooperation, and rectify injustice'. From this perspective, our application of *Ubuntu* as a pedagogical tool is not intended to reject Western approaches. Nor does it seek to replace traditional film production structures and roles (such as those of the director or producer). Rather, it seeks to add to them by providing students with an additional avenue to negotiate collaborative spaces, thereby supporting them in building strong professional relationships across cultural and creative boundaries.

Ubuntu has found expression in many diverse contexts that involve collaborative work required to negotiate the potential for conflict. One such context has been the Nigerian film industry. Iwowo (2018) argues that the culture of Nigerian film collaboration manifests the African philosophy of kinship, respect, goodwill, dignity, reciprocity, collective survival and shared ownership. Since 1992, these *Ubuntu* communal traits were unconsciously mobilised by Nigerian independent film-makers to address the prohibitive costs of film-making in Africa (Iwowo et al., 2023a) – a harsh reality also described as colonialism’s vestiges of ‘technological paternalism’ (Diawara, 1992). Moreover, to operate under these constraints, film-makers recognised the need to incorporate individual expertise, intersectional identities, and a diversity of socioeconomic locations to advance not only the industry, but also Nigerian communities (Iwowo et al., 2023b). Consequently, *Ubuntu* as a philosophy that fosters diversity and inclusion over hierarchical structures became an ideal mode of expression in Nollywood’s independent film practices (Iwowo et al., 2023b). Today, Nollywood is the second largest film industry in the world based upon its annual number of releases (Assherton, 2022; Igwe, 2015; MasterClass, 2022).

From this perspective, Iwowo (2018) developed ‘The Ubuntu Collaboration Model’, which seeks to address collaboration tensions of scarce resources and hierarchical roles in (student) film productions via the ethical maximisation of limited production resources by recognising each other’s humanity (Iwowo et al., 2023b). Designed as a tool for collaboration in student film-making, the model comprises three phases (Iwowo et al., 2023b: 11–15):

Phase 1: Fostering an ontological understanding of *Ubuntu*

Phase 2: Defamiliarising film-making roles via *Ubuntu*

Phase 3: Supporting *Ubuntu*-internalisation processes via proactive scaffolding.

The first stage derives from the awareness that the value of *Ubuntu* remains untapped in Western knowledge constructions (Ngubane and Makua, 2021). Learners in these areas must first be introduced to the concept via a set of robust learning activities undergirded by lectures, and workshops that offer opportunities for conversation. The second stage involves proposing a method of collaboration where the hierarchical style of Hollywood approaches to film-making are juxtaposed with the student experience – that is, realities of scarce resources only negotiable with pro bono support and reciprocal commitment. In this phase, the conventional role hierarchies are also underscored and problematised (Iwowo, 2024; Iwowo et al., 2023b), while foregrounding equity approaches to film collaborations stemming from the *Ubuntu* principle of reciprocity (Iwowo, 2024). In this sense, the runner’s role is viewed as equally important to those of the director and producer, and vice versa (Iwowo, 2024). The third stage details that a support system of ‘ubuntu people’ (Tutu, 1999) is required to internalise *Ubuntu* processes by proactive enquiries to understand how students collaborate. At this stage, moments of conflicts can be openly addressed through group discussion. Here, grievances are acknowledged and addressed with the goal of fostering better understanding and reconciliation between those in conflict. This is intended to enable learning, as well as more effective collaboration within the production process.

Methodology

In their study of student collaboration within Australian screen production, Kath Dooley and Larissa Sexton-Finck highlight that teaching teamwork skills ‘is an area of pedagogy that is frequently absent from the University screen arts curriculum, and has received little attention in terms of both local and international research’. They note that educators are often left to deal with unravelling student projects ‘due to failed collaboration and destructive conflict’ (2017: 75; Sabal, 2009). The impetus for this study concerns a similar observation. Some student projects clearly demonstrate excellent collaboration with little to no internal disagreements, while others break down quickly due to a high level of conflict or lack of commitment from team members. The Ubuntu Collaboration Model seeks to

address this tendency by offering entire cohorts an *Ubuntu*-inspired foundation upon which to ground their collaborative work.

Already applied in teaching at Bournemouth University, UK, since 2018, the model was first extended across the Media Production master's programmes in 2022. One objective was to determine the 'types' of conflicts students encounter during their productions, and how an *Ubuntu* approach could assist them in navigating those conflicts in a way that would mould them into effective independent film-makers (see Phase 3, above). At Bournemouth, master's students are organised within a production framework consisting of six programmes focused on core disciplines within the film and television industries: producing, screenwriting, directing, cinematography, editing and sound design. The cohort of 2022/3 consisted of approximately 130 students coming from diverse backgrounds (China, Hungary, India, Lebanon, Nigeria, Taiwan, the UK, the USA and Vietnam, to name but a few).

To introduce the principles of *Ubuntu*, and to demonstrate their value to student collaborative production work, a five-hour workshop was organised at the beginning of the year: one of the first sessions in which the entire cohort came together. Significant time was dedicated to introducing students to the rich history of *Ubuntu*, its crucial role during the transition from apartheid to democracy in South Africa, and how Nollywood film-makers developed their industry by applying an *Ubuntu* mindset. Most of the cohort had never heard of the concept. Therefore, it was highlighted early on that for students to internalise *Ubuntu*, significantly more time has to be dedicated in future to further nurturing their understanding of what collaboration means from the perspective of this world view (see Phase 1, above).

As a starting point, however, students were required to collaboratively develop discipline-specific and *Ubuntu*-inspired 'codes of practice' (or memoranda of understanding) before embarking on their first collaborative experience together. Students were organised into different 'production houses' (a process managed by the framework's Production Coordinator, Dr Jennifer Durrett), in which they were to produce projects in the first semester, and develop 'slates', that is, a series of films per 'house' to be produced in the second semester. These 'houses' were made up of a diverse range of students to encourage cross-cultural and transnational engagement. It was also intentionally structured as an independent exercise, with limited staff involvement in organisational and decision-making processes. The goal was to create an environment where students could experience the needs and dynamics of creative collaboration through trial and error. However, each 'house' still had a dedicated member of staff who gave advice and acted as an anchor point, should things become too challenging for students to manage on their own. At the beginning of the second semester, another extended session was organised – this time with directors and producers only. During this meeting, staff supported students to evaluate their first collaborative experiences in the first semester from the perspective of *Ubuntu* (see Phase 2, above). These student perspectives were documented and subsequently analysed for this study by the co-authors. The co-authors consist of two lecturers (Loader and Iwowo) and four MA students (Foya, Holness, Lê and Oyelaran), whose interest in academic work and participation in collaborative work during the year motivated an interest in participating in this research. Three of these students came from the producer programme (Holness, Lê and Oyelaran), while another came from the director programme (Foya). Co-authoring occurred via a back and forth process, where each author was asked to contribute their input to successive drafts of this article. These inputs were then woven together, with drafts regularly circulated between all authors for editing. The pedagogical background and contextualisation were predominantly supplied by Loader and Iwowo, while the description of student experiences was driven by the student authors. The experiences of the wider cohort were also included via the accumulation of data during the sessions described above. The entire process was subjected to a thorough internal ethical review at Bournemouth University.

Based on this process, and the lack of initial understanding of *Ubuntu*, the MA framework will develop a more extensive programme in 2023/4, with regular *Ubuntu* collaboration sessions timetabled for the arrival of the next cohort. The following section summarises some of the key issues that students identified during their nine-month collaboration with each other, which could be addressed by applying an *internalised* sense of *Ubuntu*.

Challenges faced during collaborative work

In his article 'Towards an African philosophy of higher education', Yusef Waghid (2020) argues for the incorporation of *Ubuntu* principles into educational systems. He specifically stresses that effective learning relies on interactions founded on three core elements inspired by *Ubuntu*: attentiveness to others, autonomous human practice and co-belonging (Waghid, 2020). When considering the self-professed challenges students face during their independent collaborative work, the need for students to internalise these three elements becomes apparent. This is especially the case since effective teamwork and a sense of belonging within a group require equal levels of commitment from all students involved in a project: an ideal situation which, of course, does not always transpire.

Students frequently noted a *lack of attentiveness to each other*, citing that they were not always granted the opportunity to express their views within a team dynamic. This often related to the fact that the limited production experience of students led to unrealistic expectations; not only in terms of what is practically achievable within the time frame, but also regarding what individual team members can realistically achieve within an educational setting. Such expectations usually relate to the assumption that certain roles should serve the demands of others (that is, those of a producer or director), leading to an unequal work division across the team. This, students have found, is unsustainable, and risks team members becoming disengaged due to feeling overwhelmed. Students quickly learned that these expectations should be managed during the initial stages of the pre-production phase, with everyone agreeing to remain attentive to each other's needs. This is vital, since the lack of commitment and attentiveness places too much strain on only a few team members who are left to pick up the slack – which, in turn, further strains effective management of expectations.

The need for *attentiveness* and the management of expectations were also noted by students who felt that their *autonomous creative inputs* were overlooked or disregarded by team members. When starting a new course, students felt excited and enthusiastic, wanting to jump into creating projects together, without yet really understanding the dynamics of effective collaboration or the needs of a production process. When students realised that listening to each other during creative collaboration was not as straightforward as they might have expected, disappointment and feelings of disillusionment risked undermining the motivation to work with each other. The desire to learn how to deal with inevitable setbacks (both in terms of the production logistics and the collaboration with fellow students), jump to the top of student feedback the moment they start working together. A key question in this regard is: how can team members remain supportive and deal with disappointment without blaming each other when things happen outside of their control, or due to an understandable lack of experience? In this sense, students want a workable foundation that would allow them to: (1) remain professional during challenging collaborations; (2) retain a collaborative spirit; and (3) preserve an ability to recognise the value of even a flawed collaborative experience that does not match initial expectations. From this perspective, collaborative work requires a leap of faith and trust in team members; and, when this is broken, students need pedagogical support and practical strategies that enable them to deal with the effects of disappointment, lowered confidence and feelings of isolation. It is in this regard that *Ubuntu's* history in transitional and restorative justice approaches can be useful when applied to conflict/disappointment within a production setting. This is supported by indications from students that even though, in some cases, collaboration broke down, their shared values and professional conduct were still supported by *Ubuntu* principles. This largely enabled them to successfully navigate feelings of failure. In our experience, teaching students the ability to navigate interpersonal conflict consciously is hugely appreciated by student film-makers, since it provides them with the tools to effectively traverse real-world challenges that they will inevitably encounter in the industry.

Connected to the above, students repeatedly expressed the need for structured guidance and clear rules of engagement, according to which they could frame their professional relationships with one another. This, they noted, would help them manage engagement and expectations. Students stressed

that, as developing independent film-makers, they needed to be equipped with strategies to 'anticipate problems' associated with group work prior to entering a collaborative creative setting. Without such rules, they maintained, it is difficult to solve problems amicably and efficiently. For some, finding their way independently through collaborative work is more difficult than being provided with a set of strict rules that clearly define the parameters of collaboration. Without such parameters, they struggle to navigate tensions when they arise between group members, since this relies on a willingness to negotiate and accept group decisions/different opinions.

Interestingly, this would suggest that some students reject *autonomous human practice* (in this sense, independent thinking and contribution) when they are confronted with unpleasant production scenarios. They do not want to have to work things out themselves, rather wishing to be supplied with solutions; perhaps believing that this is the function of education. In this regard, several students lamented how they were required to take independent initiative during collaborative work to find solutions to problems themselves. These students maintained that they would rather be told what the solutions are before encountering the problems. In other words, they wish to be told how to act before being confronted by the realities of their own actions when placed in actual production scenarios as thinking, feeling and, indeed, fallible human beings. *Ubuntu* and its focus on 'autonomous human practice' (Waghid, 2020: 304), however, require people to think independently and experience human interaction, for, only then, can true learning happen. It is through the conscious and open engagement with lived experiences that we internalise *Ubuntu* and learn how to engage responsibly with each other as co-creators. However, it is essential that this internalisation occurs through the exposure to a diverse range of social scenarios, which are as likely to be riddled with interpersonal conflict as they are to be harmonious. Through this exposure, one learns how to meet each other in our common humanity, and to develop a mutual sense of fairness when it comes to collaborative human interaction. One student noted in this regard that the value of *Ubuntu* lies in an individual's willingness to learn from negative experiences, while recognising and accepting each other's fallibility. This equates to autonomous human practice that allows one to accumulate knowledge through lived experience and move productively forward as a more rounded individual.

Leading on from this, it is interesting to highlight significant differences in opinion among students in terms of what film collaboration is or should be. On the one hand, some students see film-making as a *hierarchical practice* wherein a group of individuals work towards a single vision and some form of personal gain/professional progression. From this perspective, certain students seem to understand effective collaboration not as a process built on consensus between autonomous creatives, but as a process founded on the adherence to a hierarchal division of roles and authoritative responsibilities. On the other hand, some learners prefer to see collaboration (especially in an educational setting) as a *democratic process* where people, acting as autonomous thinkers with agency, work towards a common goal founded on the sum of all their creative inputs. In regard to the latter, students stressed the importance of open discussion, and tended to find that collaboration was most successful when project work involved a process including a multitude of perspectives, the constant exchange of ideas and attentive group discussion. It is therefore unsurprising that when students worked together with differing views on what collaboration itself means within a production context, tensions inevitably ensued. In contrast, positive production experiences reported by students all seem to emphasise the latter approach. One student noted that their productions ran smoothly because, when creative and logistical problems occurred, everyone jumped in to solve them together. Another student with a positive production experience noted the following in relation to their application of *Ubuntu's* focus on respect, empathy, attentive communication and kindness:

When working through any kind of conflict it is important to remember not to directly blame or accuse anyone – even if their behaviour is frustrating. There can be many causes for their actions. It is more productive to instead ask: 'What do they need help with? Is there a

misunderstanding of the tasks? Are they struggling with the workload? Is there a language barrier?' ... In my experience, I have found that holding regular meetings allows space for these types of obstacles to be brought to light. Reaching out to team members individually is also beneficial in creating a space for vulnerability where someone can admit that a task is difficult to complete. It is a question of conscious communication. Instead of an accusatory 'Why haven't you done this?', it is more productive to ask a struggling team member 'How can I help you get this done?'

Conscious communication is often highlighted as key to either navigate or prevent tensions. However, students often felt unable to communicate properly when tensions and stress levels were already high. They also struggled to organise in-person team meetings independently. Some took the initiative and participated throughout, while others did not show up for key sessions. As a result, students often reverted to WhatsApp group chats, substituting in-person discussions with text-based interactions. Inevitably, this resulted in frequent miscommunication and/or misunderstanding of tone and intention. Feedback from students indicated a tendency to point fingers in such situations, making it difficult to return to a point where students could regain collective camaraderie. In a cohort predominantly consisting of international students with diverse cultural and/or ethnic backgrounds, in addition to varying levels of English proficiency, such informal forms of communication place huge strain on students new to cross-cultural and transnational collaboration. It is clear, therefore, that, on a pedagogical level, students need to learn how to organise production meetings and – especially – how to communicate during those meetings in a way that promotes a shared commitment to creative reciprocity. During the second *Ubuntu* session, for example, students were asked to 'act out' hypothetical production meeting scenarios with the explicit instruction of applying *Ubuntu*. One scenario was focused on an idea devised by a single individual. This idea was already fully formed, but, in this instance, students noted that collaboration felt forced. However, when a meeting was approached with the openness of gathering thoughts to flesh out an unformed idea as a group, students communicated easily and with enthusiasm. The feedback of this exercise was overwhelmingly positive, with students remarking on a more pronounced awareness of how previously arduous production meetings could become a creatively fuelled environment.

The importance of learning how to effectively conduct production meetings was often noted by students in regard to negative experiences, including the breakdown of communication. In moments of frustration, some students even went so far as to block others from collaborative platforms used to communicate as teams (for instance, WhatsApp or Facebook). This, in turn, led to resentment and emotive moments of finger-pointing between team members. In these instances, students recognised immediately the need to re-evaluate their professional processes from the perspective of *Ubuntu*. They identified the need to develop more streamlined working processes founded on respectful communication and better professional practices. In this regard, transparent communication, the minuting of meetings, and the consistent documentation of collaborative decisions were often noted as areas in need of improvement for the prevention of conflict. Such procedural tools serve as safeguards and tangible points of orientation that can be referred to when disagreements happen, thereby aiding the de-escalation of emotions.

Finally, the question of *if*, *when* or *how* such an inclusive process should make way for a single vision remains a returning theme among both students and staff. One of the first student questions asked by staff at the beginning of the academic year is who was the 'owner' of an idea or the 'author' of a project. Students frequently struggle to negotiate who is or should be 'in charge' of a creative process, an element that equally leads to discord within the industry, especially between directors and producers. One student's experience prompted their re-evaluation of the roles of the producer and director, stressing that this relationship must be founded on an aligned vision. However, this ideal scenario can only be realised when the producer–director relationship is built on trust and transparency, and a willingness to share ownership of the idea and vision. Conversely, students express concern that if their collaborating team members do not understand and agree to role boundaries, it becomes difficult to reject ideas without

some individuals feeling disregarded as valued contributors to the overall vision. Co-belonging to a collaborating community that values inclusive input across disciplines is the goal, but not, as it seemed to some students, at the expense of a single vision. The desire to retain creative independence as student producers, directors, screenwriters, cinematographers, editors and sound designers while working on collaborative projects was found to be a major factor leading to conflict. In this sense, independence/autonomy and collaboration/co-belonging can become conflicting value systems, since co-creation can be viewed as compromising individuality and creative identity. Connected to this, the assumption by one or more team members that their role is superior to that of other team members repeatedly led to conflict among students. Some learners called this form of collaboration out as disrespectful and even exploitative.

Conclusion

In summary, the Ubuntu Collaboration Model is a framework according to which students can gauge and direct their own behaviour within a production setting. It allows the independent film-makers of the future to think beyond themselves by valuing difference: be those differences in race, gender, religion or even differences of opinion. Through *Ubuntu*, every member of a team has a voice, bias is bracketed, and intercultural understanding is encouraged. Through *Ubuntu*, every member of a learning cohort becomes 'an equal part of one body', moving together into a competitive industry that, we argue, would itself benefit from more kindness, empathy and meaningful human connection.

The initial collaborative phase during the first semester deliberately challenged students to act as a team without the scaffolding of the 'production houses'. Students noted that this led to a steep learning curve, which was not without frustrations, but which was nevertheless meaningful to their learning. When subsequently approaching the second semester's collaborative work, it was evident that students were already able to work more confidently together, albeit not always without conflict. At the time of writing, students are working on their final projects, which will take them to graduation. We have found so far that these final projects are characterised by a noticeable increase in confidence and community forming. A group of students even came together to legally establish their own independent production company, under which they are producing a slate of collaborative projects to be taken forward to festivals and funding opportunities after graduation. What is evident from applying the Ubuntu Collaboration Model is that students benefit from *Ubuntu*-inspired approaches when it comes to conflict management and the inclusion of diverse voices, albeit not always with equal degrees of awareness, commitment or appreciation. In some cases, students failed to apply *Ubuntu* as a unified group, resulting in conflict that isolated individuals and fostered resentment. Other instances showed that they consciously incorporated aspects of this African tradition, resulting in projects that avoided conflict and engendered a positive sense of community.

Through its focus on attentiveness and kindness, respect for inclusive autonomy, and sense of co-belonging, *Ubuntu* provides a useful foundation for educating independent film-makers through a culture of collaboration. This initial investigation into student experiences illustrated for us a clear increase in student confidence and enjoyment of co-creation, once they begin to internalise inclusive practices. In our experience, if students do not internalise such practices, conflict ensues. The negative experiences reflected in this case study further highlight just how necessary an *Ubuntu* mindset is for effective learning. As the Ubuntu Collaboration Model suggests (especially in its second phase), these student experiences indicate strongly that while film-making requires working towards a unified goal, it is perhaps necessary to redefine what a 'single vision' of a film is when inspired by *Ubuntu* principles. Many see the director as the primary figure with authoritative responsibility for developing the overall vision of a film, which is then realised through structured and often hierarchal teamwork. An *Ubuntu*-inspired vision, however, would be developed and decided on *collectively*, through active participation and co-creation across all departments from the outset, with the director being responsible for ensuring that this 'collective

vision' is adhered to and ultimately realised. This is not to say that traditional roles reflecting industry practice should be disposed of within the pedagogical process. In fact, students have expressed that clear role divisions/boundaries aid effective collaboration and make them more confident independent film-makers. It becomes problematic, however, when role divisions/boundaries are confused with power structures associated with industry hierarchy. In such instances, collaboration breaks down when students within certain roles start dictating what others *must* deliver on demand. From a pedagogical perspective, the *Ubuntu*-inspired vision described above opens several opportunities to create an educational setting built upon inclusivity and a respect for diversity, while adhering to the responsibilities of specific occupational roles within industry practice. As set out in the Ubuntu Collaboration Model, applying the principles of *Ubuntu* within a film-production educational setting could therefore set a strong foundation for students to enter the industry as independent film-makers who are able to effectively communicate and collaborate.

Declarations and conflicts of interest

Research ethics statement

The authors declare that research ethics approval for this article was provided by Bournemouth University's ethics board.

Consent for publication statement

The authors declare that research participants' informed consent to publication of findings – including photos, videos and any personal or identifiable information – was secured prior to publication.

Conflicts of interest statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest with this work. All efforts to sufficiently anonymise the authors during peer review of this article have been made. The authors declare no further conflicts with this article.

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