

Rethinking Interdisciplinarity as Intercultural Dialogue: Peer-to-peer conversations and inclusive research culture

Ayten Alibaba,¹ Yanyan Li,² Joana Almeida,³ Gill Frigerio⁴
Yvette Yitong Wang⁵ & Richard Smith⁶

School of Education, Learning and Communication Sciences (SELCS)
University of Warwick, UK

Correspondence: Yanyan.Li.1@warwick.ac.uk

ORCID: ¹[0009-0002-5301-3537](https://orcid.org/0009-0002-5301-3537); ²[0009-0000-0010-2654](https://orcid.org/0009-0000-0010-2654); ³[0000-0002-6647-5960](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6647-5960);
⁴[0000-0002-3391-7566](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3391-7566); ⁵[0000-0002-7446-5017](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7446-5017); ⁶[0000-0002-0636-4468](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0636-4468)

This article has been subject to an editorial review process.



Copyright notice: This article is issued under the terms of the **Creative Commons Attribution License**, which permits use and redistribution of the work provided that the original author and source are credited.

You must give appropriate credit (author attribution), provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use. You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits.

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Abstract

This article critically reflects on phase two (2025/26) of the University of Warwick Enhancing Research Culture project 'Countering Silos and Hierarchies through Peer-to-Peer Research-in-Progress Conversations'. Building on phase one's emphasis on developing inclusive research conversation spaces, it foregrounds interdisciplinarity: how to design activities that enable interdisciplinary conversations as a form of 'intercultural dialogue'. Drawing on participants' written reflections, discussion transcripts and evaluations, we examine how teamwork-oriented design enabled participants to reflect, via exposure to alternative perspectives, on the disciplinary and professional assumptions they made regarding research practice. We argue that fostering research collaboration requires a more nuanced approach than simply bringing people together and expecting meaningful research exchange to just happen.

Keywords: inclusive research culture; interdisciplinarity; intercultural dialogue; research conversations

Introduction

Developing research culture is increasingly viewed as an important mission for the UK higher education sector, a key strategy to maintaining its global reputation. Within UK universities, interdisciplinarity, collaboration, and inclusion have been increasingly positioned as strategic priorities in the promotion of an inclusive research ecosystem (**British Academy, 2016; Evis, 2022; REF, 2023**). Yet institutional discourse often frames these ambitions instrumentally, emphasising innovation and impact while overlooking the cultural, disciplinary and relational labour that underpins meaningful collaboration across disciplines and roles.

This paper examines how purposefully designed peer-to-peer conversational interventions can bring to the surface and reshape the cultural dynamics that underpin inclusive research practices. Drawing on a series of research conversationⁱ activities within small cross-role, cross-status and cross-departmental groups, it explores how interdisciplinary research conversations operate not simply as exchanges of expertise but as forms of intercultural dialogue capable of challenging exclusionary disciplinary voices and supporting a more inclusive research culture.

As researchers in the University of Warwick's School of Education, Learning and Communication Sciences (SELCS), we developed the project 'Countering Silos and Hierarchies through Peer-to-Peer Research-in-Progress Conversations' (**Smith et al., n.d.**), which was funded by the University of Warwick Enhancing Research Culture fund (2025–26). After an initial emphasis on developing inclusive research conversation spaces, the project's second phase revolved around interdisciplinarity. We developed three activities—a Q&A card game, guided peer dialogues and a scenario-based research task—deliberately designed to foster meaningful conversations across diverse disciplinary and professional roles, participants confronted differences that typically remain hidden in output-driven research cultures. Discussion among authors in response to participant feedback focused on three key areas: (1) *What do we mean by 'inclusive' research culture in a higher education institution?* (2) *How had participants engaged with one another?* and (3) *How did the research-conversation activities we designed contribute to the development of inclusive and interdisciplinary research culture?*

To address these overarching questions, this paper first contextualises and describes the activities we piloted before critically reflecting on their potential to foster an inclusive research culture enabling plurality, dialogue and connection across roles, disciplines and career stages. Four interrelated insights are foregrounded, relating to: (1) designing inclusive research culture; (2) activity design as a catalyst for research conversations; (3) interdisciplinarity as intercultural dialogue; and (4) the foundational role of

relational and affective dimensions. Taken together, these insights align with UK Research and Innovation's (UKRI's) advocacy of 'a culture that welcomes difference and supports constructive debate and challenge' (UKRI, 2024).

Project Activity Design

Updated group Q&A card game

Building on a Q&A card game originally designed for a departmental 'away day' (Alibaba et al., 2025), this activity aimed to promote discussion within small, cross-role and cross-status groups of students and staff. Postgraduate research (PGR) students, professional services staff, and teaching-focused, research-focused and research and teaching-focused staff were given a set of questions about institutional research experiences, expectations, and personal motivations.

Event 1, involving two meetings held two weeks apart, brought together participants from four previously distinct departments or centres (Applied Linguistics, Education Studies, Lifelong Learning and Teacher Education), which were in the process of amalgamating to form the School of Education, Learning and Communication Sciences (SELCS). In the first meeting, mixed cross-role / cross-status and cross-departmental groups of SELCS students and staff were formed to play the original card game (Alibaba et al., 2025). In the second meeting, we introduced five new follow-up question cardsⁱⁱ in response to insights that emerged from the first card game event and peer dialogue activities that had taken place in between (see 'Peer Dialogue' below). These additional questions invited participants to reflect on whether and how their views of research, their own research engagement, and others' roles in research had shifted because of participation in research conversations. They also prompted forward-looking reflection by asking what both the new school and participating individuals could do to sustain and facilitate further research conversations.

Event 2, also involving two meetings held two weeks apart, brought together staff and PGR students more broadly from across the Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS). For the first meeting, the card game was adapted in a different way, this time in order to intentionally embed an interdisciplinary perspective within the questions themselves. In addition to exploring personal experiences, emotions and research-related challenges, the refined twenty questionsⁱⁱⁱ explicitly addressed issues of collaboration across fields, learning from other disciplines, and navigating institutional research processes while encouraging participants to envision interdisciplinary research. This design aimed to facilitate open discussion of the affective, practical and structural dimensions of conducting

interdisciplinary research and provide space for participants from diverse professional and disciplinary backgrounds to identify shared concerns and complementary expertise within an interdisciplinary, dialogic setting.

These adapted versions of our original questions retained a playful, low-stakes and low-pressure format while serving as reflexive tools for modelling an inclusive, interdisciplinary research culture. Taking turns to ask and answer questions in the game ensured that everyone had an equal opportunity to share personal stories, fostering inclusivity and attentiveness within cross-role and cross-status groups. The design enabled participants from diverse disciplinary backgrounds and roles to reflect on and express their perspectives, while also encouraging spontaneous discussion about research.

Peer dialogue

In-person or online peer dialogues, scheduled by participants themselves between event meetings, involved relatively extended, structured research conversations among peers. During the first meeting of each event, participants were paired for peer dialogue with another member who had a different role or level of experience in another department. This approach encouraged participants to challenge silos and hierarchical dynamics during the dialogue (Alibaba et al., 2025). Participants conducted the dialogues within a mutually agreed space and timeframe, with guidelines provided (2025). Facilitating empathetic, non-hierarchical conversations (2025), the guidelines underscored active and attentive listening, respect, confidentiality, rapport, and post-conversation reflection.

Each conversation lasted approximately fifty minutes, with each participant taking an extended twenty-minute turn as speaker while the other listened attentively, followed by a ten-minute collaborative reflection on the dialogue experience. The prompt-questions provided participants with possible research engagement topics as starting points for the dialogue. However, participants were not restricted to the questions in the guidelines, and this format allowed unanticipated insights to emerge. As speaker, participants addressed three main questions regarding their engagement with research:

- 1) What does research mean to you in your current role?
- 2) What motivates your research involvement?
- 3) What are your aspirations for future research?

The listener's role was to focus on attentive and non-judgmental listening, using techniques such as paraphrasing, clarifying, and probing to support the speaker's reflection without interjecting personal experiences or

opinions. After each participant had their twenty-minute speaking turn, a ten-minute informal discussion encouraged immediate reflection on the dialogue experience.

Scenario-based research task: 'Dinosaur Park or Zoo?'

'Dinosaur Park or Zoo?' (also known as 'Dino')^{iv} is a collaborative, and playful research simulation we designed specifically for Event 2 in order to promote interdisciplinary thinking and teamwork. As with the Q&A card game and peer dialogue, it involves cross-role, cross-status, cross-department collaboration, with teams of four or five participants each formed to ensure as balanced a cross-disciplinary, inter-status and inter-role mix as possible. In the hypothetical scenario presented, teams advised a fictional billionaire on the research needed to fund a dinosaur park featuring resurrected dinosaurs or a zoo for endangered animals. Because the task was entirely hypothetical, participants could engage freely without the real-world pressures of making high-stakes decisions, being judged on outcomes, or producing research that would be professionally evaluated. This allowed them to pool their creativity and engage in interdisciplinary conversations. The exercise required participants to come up with research questions and methods, drawing on their professional or academic expertise to develop a joint proposal to guide the billionaire's decision-making.

The activity began with a brief icebreaker in which participants named different dinosaur species and endangered animals, fostering engagement and easing participants into the themed collaborative task. Following this, each participant spent five minutes reflecting individually on how they would approach the research task. Participants then shared their ideas in a clockwise sequence, asking questions and discussing the pros and cons of each suggestion. The team then combined ideas into a proposal, selected a representative to present their recommendations to the larger group, and pitched their proposal to the billionaire. After hearing all the group pitches, the billionaire chose a project to fund, providing participants with a simulated real-world consequence.

Unlike the previous two activities, which focused primarily on individual reflection and dialogue with peers, 'Dino' required participants to negotiate differing perspectives shaped by their disciplinary backgrounds and professional experiences, integrate diverse viewpoints and reach consensus on the final proposal. The hypothetical nature of the task allowed participants to experiment with research strategies, while also considering ethical issues, and the practical implications of decision-making. It also exposed participants to a range of priorities and perspectives from other disciplines, fostering awareness of how varying

expertise, assumptions, and approaches shape collaborative research proposals and decision-making.

Study Analysis

In this section, we bring together the reflections of the project-steering group with participant data to offer insights in four thematic areas. Participant feedback for Event 2 (the FSS event) was gathered under circumstances of informed consent for sharing and with ethical approval from the University of Warwick's Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, so excerpts from this event are used to illustrate the insights presented. These also apply to Event 1 (the SELCS event).

Research culture in UK universities is often framed in terms of excellence, competitiveness and innovation. Institutional strategies tend to emphasise outputs, funding, international reputation, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Yet, as the Royal Society highlights, research culture:

encompasses the behaviours, values, expectations, attitudes and norms of our research communities. It influences researchers' career paths and determines the way that research is conducted and communicated (Royal Society 2017: 3).

This broader definition invites us to move beyond metrics and consider how research is lived: who participates, whose knowledge is legitimised, and how relationships shape research practice.

Phase two of the 'Countering Silos and Hierarchies through Peer-to-Peer Research-in-Progress Conversations' project approached research culture as something enacted through everyday conversational practices. Rather than assuming that collaboration naturally follows proximity, we treated research conversations as an intervention site. The paragraphs that follow centre on four interrelated insights relating to: (1) designing inclusive research culture; (2) activity design as a catalyst for research conversations; (3) interdisciplinarity as intercultural dialogue; and (4) relational and affective dimensions of research culture.

Designing inclusive research culture

Our intervention treated research culture as enacted through conversational design. A central reflection from the first phase of the project (Alibaba et al., 2025) was that inclusive research culture does not arise accidentally or organically; it must be intentionally structured and continuously nurtured, especially in university environments characterised by hierarchies related to disciplinary prestige and competitive performance cultures. Without intentional intervention, there is a tendency for university staff and students to reproduce familiar

patterns of interaction: senior with senior, discipline with discipline, and so forth. As highlighted in a 2020 Wellcome report, such patterns of interaction themselves can result in 'poor research culture' leading to stress and anxiety in the workplace and even mental health problems, as well as having a detrimental impact on research itself (**Wellcome, 2020**).

The activities in phase two were therefore consciously designed to ensure awareness-raising towards a more positive and inclusive research culture while countering silos and hierarchies. As described above, participants were profiled in advance and grouped intentionally across disciplinary backgrounds and professional roles as a design choice that prioritised difference rather than comfort. Peer dialogue pairs were deliberately selected rather than self-chosen, ensuring that participants engaged with colleagues outside their immediate networks. This was not a neutral administrative decision; it was a cultural intervention that required facilitation and subtle organisation. This strategic choice challenged the implicit assumption that collaboration emerges naturally among members of universities. Instead, the project treated inclusive research culture as something that must be deliberately designed. Inclusion here meant not only representation but structured encounter-enabling conditions in which participants had to recognise the legitimacy of alternative research trajectories, roles, and forms of expertise.

Our purposeful design was validated through analysis of participants' written reflections and peer-dialogue reviews. Recurring themes included the value of working with and learning from others (including senior colleagues), and the value of involvement of usually unheard 'others' (emphasising the involvement of professional services staff, teaching-focussed staff, PGRs and GTAs in the research process, and developing a growing awareness of alternative perspectives). For example:

'I think I know others better, like knowing their research interest!'
(**Event 2, Meeting 1 written reflection**)

'[I could] recognise other perspectives on the same problem; enhancing one's own thinking by incorporating others.' (**Event 2, Meeting 2 written reflection**)

These reflections suggest that the intentional structuring of encounters across roles and hierarchies facilitated not merely interaction but recognition of previously peripheral or under-acknowledged forms of expertise.

These findings resonate with Tucker and Tilt (**2019**), who emphasise the significance of institutional relationships in shaping perceptions of collegial and organisational support within research culture. In our case, the deliberate design of mixed-role dialogues appeared to strengthen

participants' sense of institutional connectedness. Inclusion therefore operated not only at the level of representation but at the level of relational infrastructure: participants reported a heightened awareness of shared endeavour and mutual dependence within the research ecosystem.

Activity design as a catalyst for research conversations

A second key insight concerns how specific activity designs afford particular forms of research conversation. The card-based dialogue activity functioned as a structured yet open-ended mechanism for enabling dialogue in general. It enabled all group participants to articulate their research identities, motivations, and trajectories. It promoted interpersonal connection and recognition. Participants described becoming aware of shared experiences and differences in career paths. Analysis of participants' reflections following the workshop activities supported this insight. For example:

'I think voicing my experience and my insights out and being heard by others itself is very valuable.' (Event 2, Meeting 1 plenary discussion)

'We talked about one question on what inspired my research. It was quite interesting to hear that people's motivations are diverse. Some people started their research randomly, while some people started their research because they have life experiences in it.' (FSS Event 1, Meeting 1 plenary discussion)

This format primarily facilitated interpersonal connection and awareness of self. The activity afforded recognition and validation, which is particularly important for those who may feel marginalised within the dominant research environment.

In contrast, the 'Dino' game shifted the mode of engagement. Participants were tasked with collaboratively generating research ideas and designing a project. The activity required them to draw explicitly on their disciplinary backgrounds, knowledge bases, and professional skills. Crucially, it required negotiation. Differences in methodological assumptions, definitions of evidence, project timelines, and even what counts as a 'research question' surfaced organically through the task. The Dino game, therefore, did more than encourage collaboration; it made difference visible and consequential. Participants became aware of how their disciplinary training shaped the way they approached problem-framing, design, and evaluation. Rather than simply exchanging perspectives, participants had to reconcile them in order to complete the task. In this sense, activity design shaped not only the content of conversation but the depth and direction of reflexivity. This demonstrates that 'research conversations' do not serve a single aim of bringing people together.

Reflection-focused activities, rather, afford identity negotiation and interpersonal acknowledgement. Furthermore, task-oriented, collaborative designs provide the space for negotiation, perspective-taking, and reflexivity. According to the initial decisions and issues for further consultation statement for the next Research Excellence Framework (REF), this aims to 'recognise and reward a broader range of research outputs, activities and impacts, as well as reward those institutions that strive to create a positive research culture and nurture their research and research-enabling staff.' (REF, 2023: 2). Universities seeking to encourage inclusive research culture must therefore consider not just bringing people together but how the structure of engagement shapes what becomes possible. Task-based collaborative designs surface epistemic difference and prompt intercultural negotiation. A nuanced research culture strategy requires both.

Interdisciplinarity as intercultural dialogue

The most significant conceptual shift arising in project team members' minds from phase two was our reframing of interdisciplinarity as a form of intercultural dialogue. Within UK universities, interdisciplinarity is frequently presented as a long-standing strategic objective embedded in education and research agendas (British Academy, 2016; Evis, 2022), typically associated with collaboration, innovation, and impact. Yet this instrumental framing often overlooks the cultural adjustments required when individuals from different disciplinary and professional backgrounds attempt to collaborate. More importantly, it obscures the need to understand interdisciplinarity not only as a mode of knowledge production but as a cultural condition capable of challenging exclusionary disciplinary voices (Callard & Fitzgerald, 2015).

If disciplines and professional roles are understood as socially constructed communities, then interdisciplinary collaboration can be approached as a form of intercultural encounter. Hofstede (1994:5) defines culture as 'the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another'.^v Applied to research contexts, this suggests that the understandings and ways of looking at research, designing projects, drawing on knowledge, and collaborating will differ depending on disciplines and professional roles. Similarly, Matsumoto (1996: 16) describes culture as 'the set of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviours shared by a group of people, but different for each individual, communicated from one generation to the next'. From this perspective, disciplinary communities and the various roles in higher education embody particular norms, values, and expectations about what counts as legitimate research practice, while still allowing individual interpretation. Taken together, these conceptualisations support the

argument that interdisciplinary work is not merely technical coordination across expertise but engagement across culturally embedded ways of knowing and meaning making.

The 'Dino' game made these cultural differences visible. Participants did not simply combine expertise; they confronted divergent assumptions about problem definition, methodology, and knowledge production. Differences that often remain implicit within disciplinary silos became visible through the task, and negotiation was required. Participants reflected on their own encounter with disciplinary habits and recognised that alternative approaches were equally valid. For example:

'About myself – that I am oriented towards evidence-based research (starting with the data to inform the final output or decision in this case). From the activity in general – that people's research thought process can be very different.' (Event 2, Meeting 2 plenary discussion)

The game enabled participants to see that being aware of the differences, as well as finding points of connection that allow them to build common ground, was an integral part of the research conversations and the meaning-making process. This reframing positions interdisciplinarity as intercultural dialogue. Rather than seeking immediate synthesis, intercultural dialogue foregrounds reflexivity, perspective change, and mutual recognition, which is in line with the common ground required by interdisciplinarity for reconciliation of varied (and, at times, conflicting) disciplinary insights (Repko & Szostak, 2020), as demonstrated in this participant response:

I think it helps me see my default approach to research and action. I think there are general categories I could generate in terms of perspectives on research, e.g., practical/technical approach, normative/critical approach. They are not necessarily clear-cut, but different people have placed different focus and weight on things. It's also interesting to see different attitudes to the given and different understandings of power relationships. Do you challenge it? Do you listen to it? How do you negotiate? (Event 2, Meeting 2 plenary discussion)

The activity supported participants in engaging with difference productively rather than smoothing it over. This was substantiated through the themes that emerged in the reflective writing at the end of the intervention workshops, where participants highlighted 'learning from others' across roles and career stages:

'What I have learned is that it's really interesting to see how every group presents their own perspective on how they see and understand the same activity. Another interesting part of this activity is that we can

also see how other expertise could contribute on the dialogue and shape my own thinking.' (**Event 2, Meeting 2 plenary discussion**)

These responses suggest that interdisciplinary engagement prompted participants to reflect on their own disciplinary assumptions and recognise alternative ways of approaching research problems. Rather than simply combining expertise, participants engaged in a process of negotiating meaning across distinct research cultures.

Research Conversation events functioned as interventions within the institutional environment; by acknowledging disciplinary differences and recognising the importance of involving others in the research process, they helped establish intercultural dialogue. Creating such inclusive spaces is important for facilitating research conversations among staff and students at UK universities, as they visibly contributed to a more inclusive research culture in which plurality was legitimised and points of connection were established rather than hierarchies being reinforced.

Relational and affective dimensions of research culture

Finally, the reflections highlight the relational and affective underpinnings of research culture. Participants frequently referenced feelings of isolation, stress, and fragmentation in their research lives (**Tucker and Tilt, 2019**). The Research Conversation events recontextualised research relationships: colleagues became collaborators, listeners, and co-thinkers rather than 'the other' or distant colleagues.

Participants emphasised the importance of creating spaces where researchers could regularly meet, exchange ideas, and build relationships. Many respondents noted that sustained conversations depended on supportive environments, peer networks, and opportunities for informal interaction alongside structured dialogue:

I learned that even though our research topics are quite different, we face similar challenges, such as managing time effectively and maintaining motivation during the writing phase. I also gained insight into different strategies for structuring literature reviews and using conceptual frameworks. (**Written reflection on Event 2 peer dialogue**)

Listening to others that you are not the only one that sometimes feels disappointed or lonely. (**Event 2, Meeting 1 plenary discussion**)

These reflections highlight that a positive research culture needs to be sustained not only through institutional strategies but also through relational practices that enable trust, recognition and shared intellectual engagement. These interpersonal dimensions are not peripheral to research excellence; they are foundational. A positive research culture, as institutional discourse suggests, fosters innovation and collaboration while

ensuring members feel valued and supported (Nind, 2017). Our findings suggest that such validation emerges through structured conversational spaces that enable empathy, shared vulnerability, and recognition.

Importantly, these were not purely professional outcomes. Interpersonal connection supported epistemic openness. When participants felt respected and heard, they were more willing to question assumptions and engage across difference. Thus, relational trust and intercultural dialogue were mutually supported, creating the conditions in which diverse perspectives and forms of meaning-making could be voiced without fear of judgement. In this sense, the affective and relational dimensions of research culture were not an adjunct but the mechanism through which a more inclusive and balanced institutional research ecosystem was enacted.

Conclusion

In phase two, then, we have gone beyond our phase one intention to address departmental silos and hierarchies as horizontal and vertical barriers to effective research conversations. Through iterative development of existing activities (the card activity with new questions) as well as the development of new activities ('Dino'), we showed how intentional research conversations can effectively be deployed within wider groupings: for a new school coming together and then on a faculty basis. We have continued to carefully design and manage participation, for example through ensuring participants with different roles, status and disciplinary background work together in conversational groups and peer dialogues. Indeed, our critical reflections highlight the importance of conscious design, varied conversational affordances, recognition of interdisciplinarity as intercultural dialogue, and attention to the relational conditions that sustain research engagement as key elements of an inclusive research culture in a UK University. These four conditions align with UKRI's definition of an inclusive research culture as something which incorporates not only research practice and impact but also emphasises means of support and engagement of researchers.

One recommendation from these project activities is that discretely funded initiatives such as this can be usefully mainstreamed by institutions committed to creating inclusive research cultures. With so many differences across the institution between PGRs, staff of different contracts and career stages, we have highlighted the care and attention needed for genuine interdisciplinarity, collaboration, and inclusion to be developed. In particular, our framing of interdisciplinarity as intercultural dialogue draws attention to the role of disciplinary norms in the creation of atomised research cultures, which can, by their nature, exclude others and prevent the very interdisciplinary collaborations that institutions claim

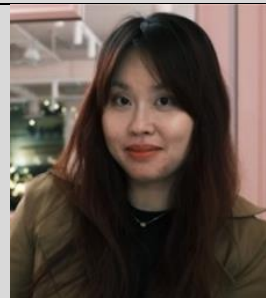
to value. For such multiple cultures to integrate into a wider research culture that supports excellence, creating a rationale for intentionally designed intercultural activities/spaces and impetus for others to participate remains vital.

By exploring how staff and students engage with one another around specific tasks, we have argued that carefully designed research conversations can contribute to an inclusive research culture in a UK university. Such a culture must intentionally integrate subcultures. Indeed, in the contemporary high-pressure HE environment, staff and students need incentives and carefully curated opportunities to engage with one another research-wise. Given the importance of research culture—encompassing the behaviours, values, expectations, attitudes and norms of our research communities and the influence on both researchers' career paths and the way that research is conducted and communicated—our project has shown that universities need to intentionally curate conversational spaces for inclusive research that promote critical self-reflection and intercultural exchange as well as interpersonal connections.

[Ayten Alibaba](#) is a Teaching Fellow in Global Sustainable Development and a Postgraduate Research Manager at the University of Warwick. Her interdisciplinary research sits at the intersection of intercultural communication, space and belonging, migration and identity and social sustainability. She is particularly interested in how lived experiences and cultural interactions shape understanding, connection, and belonging. She is committed to creating inclusive, engaging learning environments and supporting postgraduate researchers in their academic and professional development.



[Yanyan Li](#) is an Associate Fellow at the Institute of Advanced Study and a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (FHEA). She holds a PhD in Applied Linguistics and a Postgraduate Award in Interdisciplinary Teaching and Learning (Distinction) from the University of Warwick and completed an MA in Applied Linguistics (Distinction) from University College London. She is the Institutional Representative for the University of Warwick in the British Academy



Early-Career Researcher Network and co-chairs Warwick's Society & Culture Interdisciplinary Research Spotlight ECR Network. Her research interests span human-human and human-AI interaction; public, digital, and mental health; and research culture.

[Joana Almeida](#) is Assistant Professor of Intercultural Communication at the Centre for Applied Linguistics, School of Education, Learning and Communication Sciences, University of Warwick. Her interdisciplinary research focuses on higher education and its internationalisation, student mobility, and intercultural competence. She has contributed to twelve research projects in cross-cultural communication and international higher education and is the author of *Understanding Student Mobility in Europe* (Routledge, 2020).



[Gill Frigerio](#) is a Reader in Career Development at the Centre for Lifelong Learning, part of the University of Warwick's School of Education, Learning and Communication Sciences (SELCS). She leads professional development programmes for career professionals, and her research considers the idea of purpose in work, particularly among the marginalised. As Director of Scholarship for SELCS she supports teaching-focused staff to fully participate in the School's research culture. She is interested in practice-based research by both students and staff and engagement with professional communities.



[Yvette Yitong Wang](#) is a researcher and educator specializing in intercultural language pedagogy and teacher development. Her interdisciplinary conceptualisation of intercultural learning integrates perspectives from social semiotics, education psychology, hermeneutics, and cross-cultural psychology. She has designed and organised multiple interdisciplinary research events, including the University of Warwick's



first PGR Festival, a Research Development Workshop on interdisciplinarity funded by the British Association of Applied Linguistics, a WIHEA project on GTA intercultural training, and a research exhibition for the International Association of Languages and Intercultural Communication Conference.

[Richard Smith](#) is Professor of English Language Teaching & Applied Linguistics and co-Director of Research Culture for SELCS at the University of Warwick. He has research interests in the history of language teaching, specifically regarding the roots and development of English-language teaching for speakers of other languages. He also has a strong professional commitment to capacity-building with teachers and teacher-educators in Global South contexts, particularly via innovative approaches such as Exploratory Action Research, ‘enhancement’ means of developing appropriate methodology, and teacher-research mentoring, all in a frame of decentring ELT.



References

- Alibaba, A., et al., 2025. ‘Creating an Inclusive Space for Research Conversations: A critical reflection’. *Exchanges: The Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, 12(3), pp. 186–202. DOI: [10.31273/eirj.v12i3.1858](https://doi.org/10.31273/eirj.v12i3.1858) [Accessed: 12 March 2026].
- Almeida, J., 2020. *Understanding Student Mobility in Europe: An Interdisciplinary Approach*. London: Routledge.
- British Academy, 2016. ‘Crossing paths: Interdisciplinary Institutions, Careers, Education and Applications. Available at: <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/documents/213/crossing-paths.pdf> [Accessed: 12 March 2026].
- Callard, F., 2024. ‘Towards a critical-conceptual analysis of “research culture”’. *Area*, 56(2), e12905. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/area.12905> [Accessed: 20 August 2026].
- Callard, F. & Fitzgerald, D., 2015. *Rethinking Interdisciplinarity Across the Social Sciences and Neurosciences*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Evis, L. H., 2022. 'A critical appraisal of interdisciplinary research and education in British Higher Education Institutions: A path forward?' *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, 21(2), pp. 119–138. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/14740222211026251> [Accessed: 12 March 2026].

Hofstede, G., 1994. *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind*. London: Harper Collins Business.

Matsumoto, D., 1996. *Culture and Psychology*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Nind, M., 2017. 'The practical wisdom of inclusive research'. *Qualitative research*, 17(3), pp. 278–288. Available at: [10.1177/1468794117708123](https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794117708123) [Accessed: 12 March 2026].

Research Excellence Framework (REF), 2023. 'Research Excellence Framework 2028: initial decisions and issues for further consultation (REF 2028/23/01)'. Available at: <https://repository.jisc.ac.uk/9148/1/research-excellence-framework-2028-initial-decisions-report.pdf> [Accessed: 12 March 2026].

Repko, A. & Szostak, R., 2020. *Interdisciplinary Research: Process and Theory* (4th ed.). California: Sage Publications.

The Royal Society, 2017. 'Research culture: Embedding inclusive excellence. Insights on the future culture of research'. London: The Royal Society. Available at: <https://royalsociety.org/topics-policy/publications/2018/research-culture-embedding-inclusive-excellence/> [Accessed: 18 February 2026].

Smith, R. et al., n.d. 'Countering Silos and Hierarchies Through Peer-to-peer Research-in-progress Conversations'. Available at: <https://warwick.ac.uk/researchconversations> [Accessed: 31 March 2026].

Tucker, B. P. & Tilt, C. A., 2019. '“You know it when you see it”: In search of ‘the ideal’ research culture in university accounting faculties'. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 64, 102069. Available at: [10.1016/j.cpa.2019.01.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpa.2019.01.001) [Accessed: 12 March 2026].

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), 2024. 'Explainer: How UKRI is supporting research culture'. 18 January. UK Research and Innovation. Available at: <https://www.ukri.org/publications/explainer-research-culture/explainer-how-ukri-is-supporting-research-culture/#section-what-is-research-culture> [Accessed: 24 February 2026].

Wellcome and Shift Learning, 2020. *What Researchers Think about the Culture They Work in*. London: Wellcome. Available at: <https://wellcome.org/sites/default/files/what-researchers-think-about-the-culture-they-work-in.pdf> [Accessed: 18 February 2026].

To cite this article:

Alibaba, A., Li, Y., Almeida, J., Frigerio, G., Wang, Y.Y. & Smith, R., 2026. Rethinking Interdisciplinarity as Intercultural Dialogue: Peer-to-peer conversations and inclusive research culture'. *Exchanges: The Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, 13(3), 79–95. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.31273/eirj.v13i3.2256>.

Endnotes

ⁱ For the purposes of the project, we define research conversations as 'relatively casual conversations about or relating to research, occurring in informal settings'.

ⁱⁱ Event 1, Meeting 2 instructions and questions can be found here: https://warwick.ac.uk/research/research-culture-at-warwick/counteringsilos/18_march_research_conversations_project_cards.pdf.

(NB: The first meeting questions were as presented in **Alibaba et al., 2025**.)

ⁱⁱⁱ Event 2, Meeting 1 instructions and questions are available here:

<https://warwick.ac.uk/research/research-culture-at-warwick/counteringsilos/refined-group-qa-game-with-instructions.pdf>.

^{iv} Instructions can be found here: https://warwick.ac.uk/research/research-culture-at-warwick/counteringsilos/1606_pdf_dino_or_zoo.pdf

^v Although Hofstede's work focuses on national cultures, the idea that groups develop shared assumptions, norms and habitual ways of interpreting the world can be extended to disciplinary and professional communities.