Postdigital Science and Education

Tim Fawns
Gill Aitken
Derek Jones *Editors*

Online Postgraduate Education in a Postdigital World

Beyond Technology

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Postdigital Science and Education

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Series Editor's Preface

Twenty-odd years ago, as a student of Physics, I mustered the courage to send my first popular science article to a small independent cultural magazine. The editor invited me to his office, took his thick, ragged fountain pen, and tore my text into pieces. My beloved article looked like Humpty Dumpty seconds after the fall, and my attempts at implementing editor's comments connected poorly fitting remains like the bandages of Frankenstein's monster. After a while, the *n*th version of the article was finally accepted for publication.

For a couple of years after that fateful day, I spent every other Tuesday morning in a darkly lit editorial office in a ruined city-centre Austro-Hungarian building, chain smoking and drinking coffee with fellow writers and editors. Upon delivery of freshly printed papers dripping with lead-based ink, we would refill our dirty coffee cups with generous portions of cheap brandy and start reading. Waving our hands and leaving black fingerprints all over the office, we would argue about whose article reads better and discuss our ideas for the next issue.

Buzzed on caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol, with a Hemingwayan posture and a few copies of the magazine below my elbow, I would head home for lunch and a nap. In the evening, I would hit the pub and resume discussions. The magazine's circulation was far from big, but every other Tuesday evening, patrons of the next-door pub expected a good discussion. Most authors made sure not to disappoint—after all, the sense of pride with which people discussed our articles, and a few free drinks, were pretty much all we made from our writing. To my 20-something aspiring writer self, every sip of that free wine tasted like nectar. Today, it would probably cause heartburn in a blink of an eye.

This year or so spent at the fringes of the bizarre world of the early-2000s dying publishing industry has sparked a lifelong addiction. I embarked on an academic career, which seemed to be the last refuge where one could get paid for writing. Started writing in English. Published my first scholarly article, authored book, edited book—and then some. Founded *Postdigital Science and Education* journal and book series. Finally, I became one of those privileged people who make their living from working with texts.

Yet these days, the old authors' rush is no more. A pdf attachment in my Inbox does not come even close to fresh newspaper pages dripping with wet ink and leaving stained fingers. A Google Scholar citation does not feel nearly as good as a semi-drunken 'hey mate, what the hell was on your mind when you wrote that crap?' Passionate discussions have moved from editorial offices, cafes, and pubs to our inboxes and social networks. Coffee, cigarettes, brandy, and wine are now replaced by a warm cup of tea. The only thing that has remained permanent is also the only thing that we unanimously wanted to change: writers' payment was meagre then, and is still meagre today.

The third book in Postdigital Science and Education book series, *Online Postgraduate Education in a Postdigital World: Beyond Technology,* is brought into the unfortunate world of corporate publishing. Today's academic books are not waited upon in editorial offices and pubs. Upon receiving our 'Congratulations, your book has been published' emails, we merely spend a few moments collectively patting each other's backs on social networks while sitting at quality meetings as useful as an ashtray on a bicycle. Springer gets its pennies, editors and authors get their recognition, and I, book series editor, get a negligible fraction of both.

This editorial makes me more Ebenezer Scrooge than Ernest Hemingway, yet I still believe in the power of writing and discussion. The editors and authors of *Online Postgraduate Education in a Postdigital World: Beyond Technology* have shown genuine passion for advancing this hugely important area of teaching, learning, and research. It is only by developing new critical emancipatory praxis of online postgraduate education that we can raise the new postdigital generation of critical emancipatory practitioners and thinkers.

Scholars of today are too geographically and culturally scattered to wait together for freshly printed pages dripping with wet ink over coffee, cigarettes, and brandy. Pubs which serve free wine to next-door magazine freelance journalists are no more. Accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic, our world has rapidly become one of stone-cold pdfs, online meetings, and postdigital dialogues which try to breathe in a bit of soul into our techno-mediated communications (Jandrić et al. 2019; Jandrić 2020).

New postdigital knowledge ecologies (Peters et al. 2021) suffer from birth pangs including questions pertaining to collective knowledge creation (Peters et al. 2020), reconfigurations of truth and lies (MacKenzie et al. 2021), and many others. These birth pangs are inextricably linked to changes in human environment and socio-biological transformations of postdigital humans (Savin-Baden 2021). The future of humanity is unpredictable, yet Postdigital Science and Education community is determined to make sense of our present and direct it towards just and sustainable ways of being.

In this task, *Online Postgraduate Education in a Postdigital World: Beyond Technology* offers multiple contributions. Situated between the world that is no more and the world that is not yet, editors Tim Fawns, Gill Aitken, and Derek Jones masterfully negotiate tensions between being and becoming. The authors' genuine passion for knowledge, education, and humanity, together with their non-determinist and non-instrumentalist understandings of technology, shows the importance of

postdigital philosophy of educational praxis. In the eternal struggle for emancipation and social justice, *Online Postgraduate Education in a Postdigital World: Beyond Technology* provides an important milestone which invites us to sit back, examine our present, and reimagine our future.

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Foreword

Universities are institutions with a long history, about a thousand years. In some respects, the continuity of the activities we engage in is fascinating. Lectures, seminars, reading and writing for the purpose of learning, written and oral examinations and vivas are examples of activities that define university life. Many of the basic features of these communicative practices have survived over the centuries. The lecture, arguably the activity that most people associate with the concept of a university, has its roots in a communicative format that preceded book printing, and where a lecturer literally would read a text to the students sitting in the lecture hall of any of the few mediaeval universities that were around. The students who could afford a copy of the text in this manuscript culture would follow the lines of the text as the lecturers made their way through the text by reading aloud. Those who could not afford a physical text had to rely on their memory by carefully listening and memorising what was read, and since most of the communication was in Latin, this was a challenge. The role expectations of what lecturers and students were to contribute were clear, recitation preceded reception in line with the conduit metaphor of learning that guided the pedagogy.

Through the centuries, the world has changed and so has the university sector. This is obvious at many levels; universities have multiplied in numbers and the proportion of an age cohort that enrols in institutions of higher learning has grown to 50% or even more in many parts of the world. In what is sometimes referred to as knowledge societies, universities are at the centre of politics and policy making. This development testifies to the fact that science, research, and well-educated professionals play an increasingly important role in society. When societies change, institutions have to adapt in order to be perceived as relevant to new societal circumstances and new challenges. While coping with change, they have to retain their integrity; there are important elements of the practices that have evolved through history that are well worth defending and refining.

Through history there have been several occasions when university life has been challenged: the decision to use local languages rather than Latin as a vehicle of learning, the diversification of universities in terms of faculties, academic areas taught and types of institutions, and, in the post-war period, the quite dramatic

expansion of the numbers of students wanting to pursue an academic career. The contributions to this volume address one of the most interesting challenges that the university sector has been exposed to, the transition into a world where digital communication has infiltrated most of what we do in private life, at work and in education. As is argued in many of the chapters, this change cannot be reduced to issues of what learning platform to use or how to adapt assessment practices to a digital format. The more interesting features of these sociomaterial developments go 'beyond technology' as the subtitle indicates, and have to do with designing social environments that offer access to academic communities and contexts for engagement with knowledge that retain the quality of learning that makes university studies a worthwhile experience for students.

A second challenge that this volume takes on is grounded in the fact that university students are more diverse in their backgrounds and orientations than before. A substantive proportion of the students we meet study part-time and combine academic study and even research with other activities, such as a profession. The diversity of students in universities today is very interesting. It testifies to the fact that academic institutions have succeeded, at least to some extent, in responding to the needs for continued and lifelong learning in societies undergoing rapid change, and where the need and desire to learn will be there throughout the lifespan. This push towards learning should not be interpreted in an instrumental sense only. Changing conditions of life and work for many people contribute to an interest in learning and competence development, a genuine feeling that there is more to know. The diversity of students we teach and supervise, in turn, enriches our own practices, since our teaching encounters the questions and issues that arise in professional practices and personal experiences in all corners of society.

As the authors of the chapters in this volume remind us of, the challenges of adapting to these changes are much broader, and much more interesting, than promoting online learning or any other technical solution. Rather, they concern fundamental questions of how instructional practices and pedagogies may successfully combine important traditional values of the student experience with the affordances of all the resources that are available, from the lecture to the in-depth encounter with teachers and fellow students in communities operating across settings and communicative formats. How successful and innovative we are at addressing and solving these issues will define the extent to which universities will continue to stay relevant for societies and individuals in future.

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For all those dedicated and hardworking teachers who feel overlooked and undervalued. Putting your students at the centre of your efforts can be hard in a modern university, and we dedicate this book to you.

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Introduction: A Postdigital Position on Online Postgraduate Education

Why Online Postgraduate Education?

Online Postgraduate Education in a Postdigital World: Beyond Technology is an edited collection building on the premise that online learning is not separate from the social and material world, and is made up of embodied, socially meaningful experiences. It is founded on a 'postdigital' perspective, in which, much more than interactions with keyboards, computer screens, hardware or software, the learning that happens on online postgraduate programmes spills out into professional and informal settings, making connections with what comes before and after any formally scheduled tasks.

Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, online postgraduate taught (PGT) education[1] (e.g. Master's, and Postgraduate Certificates and Diplomas) was growing rapidly, as professionals around the world looked to build knowledge and skills that contribute to personal and collective development. As argued within a number of chapters of this book, online PGT education has been recognised within higher education as a key area for economic growth, yet it remains under-theorised, and the quality of these programmes often suffers from approaches that have been developed for on-campus and undergraduate education or, alternatively, simplistic models of e-learning where learning is seen as instrumental, and relatively independent of the practice and influence of educators. This book explores the ways in which online PGT programmes extend beyond digital spaces, and the implications for educational policy and practice. The book ties together a range of themes to create a rich picture of what happens on online postgraduate programmes, the factors behind successful practices, and how these can contribute to individual and collective change. It combines empirical and theoretical chapters, underpinned by critical perspectives that resist instrumental assumptions about technology.

[1] The term 'taught' is used to distinguish from postgraduate research programmes such as PhDs.

Unlike other books relating to online education, *Beyond Technology* combines a theoretical perspective, in which the digital, physical and social are all interconnected within complex educational ecologies, with a focus grounded in postgraduate practice. This focus has important implications for the kinds of students and learning that are explored in the chapters of the book. These students are, predominantly, studying part-time, while working as, potentially, senior professionals with significant practical responsibilities. They are diverse in terms of location, cultural backgrounds and settings, material infrastructures, age and life circumstance. They are often studying advanced concepts and developing capacities for critical appraisal, engaging with issues of social justice and ethics, and questioning the structures, policies and politics of their workplaces and disciplines. These characteristics influence the considerations of teaching, course design, evaluation, policy and governance, and faculty development, and it is these considerations that constitute the primary contribution of this book. Our aim is to provide a holistic picture of these various considerations and their combination, in relation to what is required to produce good quality, online postgraduate programmes.

Our focus on the postgraduate context differentiates our offering from other books, because of the important implications for the kinds of students (part-time, professional and potentially experts in their field, internationally dispersed, different life circumstances). It also caters for the needs of both those new to online education, more experienced practitioners who are looking to expand their repertoire of approaches, and those seeking more critical and theoretical perspectives.

Before giving an outline of the contents of the book, we look back at the commentary article (Fawns et al. 2019) with which we launched the call for chapters. First, we include the commentary as it was published in May 2019, and then consider what has changed, during a particularly unsettling year for online education due to the Covid-19 pandemic, in terms of our thinking and about the context of online postgraduate taught education. In doing so, we explain our own postdigital positionality that underpins our aspirations for the book, as well as our teaching. For us, this involves considering how our goals and philosophy relate not only to the complex needs of postgraduate students, but also to the wider community that online postgraduate programmes inhabit. From there, we set out the terrain that is covered in the subsequent chapters of the book.

Online Learning as Embodied, Socially Meaningful Experience[2]

> If there is no soul in computer-music then it's because nobody put it there. (Bjork 2019)

Two common views about online learning are that communication and relationships are inherently poorer online; and that online learning can be scaled up without significant additional cost. Online learning has been identified as a key growth area for

[2]This paper was originally published as Fawns et al. (2019).

the higher education sector, often without a realistic consideration of resource requirements, or an appreciation of the transformative value that online education can have for students.

In our context of taught postgraduate programmes, 'online' is a place where meaningful relationships, based on trust, can develop. Our students, through dialogue with an interdisciplinary and international online community, have developed critical and analytical ways of thinking that have extended their capacity to influence practice and policy in their local settings (Aitken et al. 2019). However, building an academic community takes time, and becomes increasingly difficult amidst a global, market-led, neoliberal drive for Universities to dramatically increase numbers of students (Jones 2019). This puts considerable pressure on teaching staff, and poses risks for the quality of education. In this commentary, we take a critical postdigital perspective (Fawns 2019), in which all forms of education must account for a complex integration of digital, social and material elements, to reject reductionist approaches to growth in online learning.

We challenge the perception that the experiences of online learners are limited by distance or technology. Rather, we argue, the limiting factors are time, policy, infrastructure and pedagogy. The blunt depiction of online learning as a unified concept, with inherent properties, can be seen in policies, advertisements, blog posts, social media comments, and even in educational research. Take this statement from Bergstrand and Savage on why, according to them, online tutors treat students with less respect: '…by separating students from teachers in space, online classes prevent the face-to-face interactions critical to the student-teacher relationship' (Bergstrand and Savage 2013: 303).

We are aware of many cases in our programme (the MSc Clinical Education), and others, where face-to-face interactions are absent, yet there are still strong and trusting student-teacher relationships. We have developed practices over time that make use of our technologies, and their accumulation of digital traces (email trails, online discussion postings, printed lists of student names, photos, occupations, locations, websites and search engines, etc.), to support social presence, communication, and understanding of our students.

On the other hand, the assumption that face-to-face is inherently social and supportive is easily refuted by cases where on-campus students have *not* managed to build meaningful relationships with their teachers. We suspect that everyone reading this can imagine many such cases. Of course, even the claim that there are no face-to-face interactions in online learning is problematic, since communication through videoconferencing, Skype, FaceTime, etc., could be described as face-to-face, even if the faces are not present in a shared physical space (Fawns 2019). Where then does the material boundary lie between meaningful and meaningless interactions? We suggest that there is no boundary.

We would *not* argue that teaching online is the same as teaching face-to-face. Published literature (Kebritchi et al. 2017; Ryan et al. 2005), and our own interviews with staff new to teaching online (Aitken and Loads 2019), shows that there is a significant adjustment and learning curve involved. However, the differences are often oversimplified. The primary challenge is in adapting principles and practices

of teaching to encompass new and multiple contexts, rather than because online is a separate domain, or because it is inherently more socially-impoverished, isolating, or flexible than face-to-face teaching. For us, the instrumental views highlighted above signal a need for the development of a wider repertoire of approaches and practices, and a more critical conception of teaching. We see teaching, not in terms of crudely categorised approaches such as 'traditional', 'problem-based learning' or 'online learning', but as a potentially unbounded mix of diverse, subversive, and unpredictable, digital and non-digital interactions. This is as true for a face-to-face, lecture-based, 'traditional' course as it is for a 'fully-online' course (Fawns 2019).

Just as our online teaching is not temporally or spatially bounded, 'online learning' is not a separate domain, because learning does not really happen *online*. True, some of our students may sit alone at a desk with a computer in a room that is thousands of kilometres from the nearest physical campus of our institution, but their learning is still physical and embodied. Furthermore, our students do not do all of their learning at such desks. Learning carries on, away from the virtual learning environments of the programme (Fawns and O'Shea 2019). It filters into the physical settings of home, cafes, and workplaces, and in transit between them. For example, it is not unusual for some of our students to engage with materials whilst on call in an emergency department, or during family dinner time.

The material aspects of education are easily forgotten (Fenwick 2015; Hetherington and Wegerif 2018), even in face-to-face classrooms, and so it is not surprising that online learning is often discussed as if it is a disembodied experience that happens in a separate reality. Yet material objects and environments make significant contributions to online learning. There are, for example, many subtle acts of material configuration that play an important role in how students learn. In our video tutorials, we can see some of the ways in which students do this: positioning a fan nearby to cool the air, the pre-tutorial ritual of making a cup of tea, the closing of doors to mute the sounds of children or pets, the moving from one device to another to work around technological constraints. Others can see and react to these material elements, even if the view of them is limited (e.g. by two-dimensional video, photos or, in some cases, textual descriptions). These experiences make it clear that online learning happens in physical spaces (Bayne et al. 2014), and understanding the contribution of both social and material elements of online learning will help our students get the most out of their programme (e.g. by engaging in discussion with peers, learning to configure their technologies, etc.).

The assumption that online learning can be unproblematically scaled up without significant additional cost or increased pressure on staff is implicit (or, sometimes, explicit) in a number of policies and initiatives in higher education (Selwyn 2007, 2010). In our experience, such instrumental conceptions of teaching do not fit many of the practices that happen in online learning. Whilst the same applies to face-to-face teaching, policies relating to workload, 'contact time', or appraisal, often based on a traditional, lecture-based timetable, can significantly misrepresent online teaching activity (Tynan et al. 2015). Whilst online courses are likely to feature a timetable, teaching is often not structured in such formal, scheduled terms; as either *happening* or *not happening* at a particular time. Online teaching is *potentially*

always happening, in the sense that teachers can dip in and out of fora, respond to emails, and post guidance or prompts that can be engaged with at any point in time.

The astute observer might argue that this has always been the case; teachers have always had to communicate with students about some aspect of their studying outside of scheduled teaching hours and formal communication channels. Perhaps this is just part of the job, for which teachers do not get much credit. Indeed, the thinking that we have to do as we develop online spaces prompts us to reconsider issues that have, in fact, always been there, surfacing largely hidden practices of teaching. Perhaps most importantly, this includes foregrounding the extent to which teaching involves activities of preparation and pre-configuration before scheduled activities (*design*), and of reaction, reconfiguration and subversion during them (*orchestration*) (Fawns 2019). However, pedagogical approaches that have developed alongside the evolution of technology in education shift the balance of the formal and informal (McWilliam 2008) such that elements that do not fit neatly into the official record may actually constitute the majority of an academic's teaching activity.

If the current success of our programme is to be maintained, our teaching must respond as much to the contexts of our students as to the online spaces in which our interactions take place. We must give them opportunities, and appropriate support, to adapt their learning practices to suit the constraints of their settings (e.g. internet bandwidth, working environments, job demands, time zones). Elements of infrastructure can help or hinder, by changing teachers' and students' capacity to act effectively with the social and material resources available to them. As such, inflexible systems and tools, and standardised policies that do not account for the different needs of a diverse range of part-time, mature, professional or international students, compromise our ability to develop meaningful relationships and communities.

In our view, successful online programmes are the result of students, teachers and administrators learning to work effectively within and around the constraints of infrastructure and policy. It follows that these collaborators should be supported to develop practices that work for them, both individually and collectively. The effective running of programmes requires a range of complementary expertise, and so the support and development of staff, along with the time requirement for that development, needs to be taken seriously. As such, evaluations of teaching, or of courses or programmes, should not only include, but foreground, developmental aspects (Fawns et al. 2020a). Further, evaluation should not just be focused on individuals and their particular performances, but also on how different people, technologies, resources, environments and structures come together in social, material and digital activity. On our programme, we work hard to engage in regular, ongoing dialogue to reflect on emerging ideas, discuss approaches and practices, support each team member's development, and develop a shared vision and values. All of this takes considerable time and expertise.

In online learning, just as in any other context, shared histories of practice foster emotive interdependence (Sutton 2018). Through a rich constellation of past encounters, a learning community is established in which embodied, emotive experiences take place and teachers transcend the mode of delivery, becoming 'authentic' (Kreber et al. 2007) through meaningful dialogue with students. This kind of

online learning cannot be scaled up without significant additional cost because, while, technology can replicate resources and provide rich (or poor) possibilities for communication, it cannot solve the fundamental requirement of skilled staff spending time on, and with, each student.

Taking a view of all education as consisting of experiences in which material and digital activity combines in social and embodied encounters (Fawns 2019), we can guard against attempts to position online learning as a 'cash cow' (Feenberg 2019), where technology is seen as the solution to problems of scalability (Selwyn 2007), and where human meaning is incompatible with the logic of efficiency (Feenberg 1999). A critical postdigital perspective helps us to make judgements, not about 'online learning' in general, but about the particular combinations and configurations of diverse elements that make up an online learning programme. By understanding how these configurations create rich or impoverished communication and relationships, we can see how increasing student numbers might change the parameters of design and influence our capacity to respond to the situated practices of students.

What's New?

The above commentary reflected on our collective experience of running a large, well-established, online postgraduate programme in health professions education: the MSc Clinical Education at the University of Edinburgh. The commentary received a warm reception from the higher education community, with thousands of downloads in the first few weeks and plenty of attention on social media. This was pleasing to see, because we felt at the time that our approach to online learning was radically at odds with the dominant narratives we read and heard from colleagues, within and beyond our University. Postgraduate online learning was poorly understood and seen as something that existed in a separate reality from traditional and on campus education, even though it was obvious to us that digital technology had already permeated the physical classrooms and study environments of all forms of higher education. Our postdigital perspective (see Fawns 2019 for an in-depth discussion) made accounting for such entanglements relatively straightforward.

Fast forward to 2021, and online learning has become mainstream, perhaps even the dominant form of higher education at this moment of writing. Suddenly, formerly fringe online postgraduate educationalists like us have become sought-after experts, as lecturers frantically look for advice on how to teach online because of the Covid-19 pandemic. The reception to our earlier commentary and a number of other publications and blog posts has demonstrated a rise in visibility of online learning specialists—the newly-discovered experts who had been hiding in plain sight all along. Yet there is an important reason that online education specialists like us had been largely ignored by the majority of teachers up to that point: some of what we have to say is uncomfortable and inconvenient. Challenging, not just to

teachers, but to University leaders in our questioning of current academic practices and regulations.

Perhaps it seemed strange to those lecturers who sought our help as they adjusted to a new model of education, to hear us say that 'a "course" cannot be moved online, because it is not a simple static, portable, thing' (Fawns et al. 2020b: 2). Those who were primarily seeking technical insights might have been frustrated by our explanations that they should not attempt to use technology to re-create the kind of teaching in which they were experienced, and that their approach should not focus on what they, the teachers, would do but on what the students would do. They might have been alarmed to hear us say that teachers have very little control over what students do, and that the teacher's role is primarily to configure environments that are conducive to community and relationship building, and that allow students agency in determining what and how they learn. It might have been even more unsettling as we gently tried to persuade them that much of this had also been true for their on campus teaching all along, and that tradition and culture had made these principles invisible. The novelty of designing for online education simply shines a light on some assumptions and fundamental principles that apply to all teaching, whether online or not.

As challenging as this change in mindset is, it should also be liberating. As we also explained, whenever we got the chance: online teaching can be used primarily as a springboard from which students can depart the virtual learning environment and learn in physical settings, with physical as well as digital materials. The reverse is also true for on campus teaching—it is a catalyst for learning as students depart the classroom and learn in dispersed locations, often with diverse technological devices and software. For us, separating the digital from the material (by thinking that the learning in online programmes happens in a computer, or that the learning in on campus programmes happens in the classroom) constrains the possibilities of what teaching can be, and neglects how it can set students up for flexible and idiosyncratic ways of learning that fit with their lives, preferences, learned habits and preferred social groupings. The assumption that what happens while the teacher is present is the most important part of any given course is, for us, the great mistake of much higher education, whether on campus or online. This insight is particularly important in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, as the ability of students to connect at specific times in particular ways (e.g., high-bandwidth, on camera, at specific times) is even more constrained than usual. Using contact time as a means of providing signposts and clarification to students makes much more sense to us than attempting to deliver content that can easily be pre-recorded.

The embodied and social aspects of online education are more important and pronounced than ever, and the pandemic has demonstrated the need to interrogate our assumptions about students. The chapters of this book do just that, considering a range of important and interrelated facets of online postgraduate education, teasing out themes that can help us to understand how quality is constituted and enacted in this domain.

What's in the Book?

In chapter "Moving Beyond 'You Said, We Did': Extending an Ethic of Hospitality to the Student Feedback Process", Charles Marley, Arfang Faye, Jeremy Moeller, Angi Pinkerton and Elizabeth Hurst give us insights into the diverse conditions and challenges of online postgraduate education from the student perspective. They show the impossibility of predicting which students will show up or what they will need, and the relevance of an ethic of hospitality (Derrida 2000; Ruitenberg 2011), where programmes do not just cater to different needs but actively make space for each student to make contributions to the course on the basis of the differences they bring. It is through such a position that diversity becomes a positive principle, not a deficit to be overcome (see also chapter "Improving Student Retention and Success Within the Context of Complex Lives and Diverse Circumstances" by Stone, Dyment and Downing).

In chapter "Taking Time to Get Messy Outside the Online Classroom", Sharon Boyd considers examples of place-based pedagogy and forms of assessment focused on each student's location in order to reclaim the embodied and materially situated aspect of online postgraduate education. Boyd's consideration of how the land and ecosystems to which students are connected can positively contribute to courses based elsewhere, and how they might help teachers and peers attune to the local conditions and elements of others. For us, there is a broader lesson in Boyd's work that is relevant to the book more generally, which is that online learning happens in material settings, and those settings matter emotionally, socially, materially and pedagogically.

In chapter "Feedback in Postgraduate Online Learning: Perspectives and Practices", Dai Hounsell takes up the considerable challenge of marshalling some key studies from the disparate field of feedback and formative assessment in online postgraduate education. Beyond the direct contribution of pulling together these dispersed yet valuable studies, Hounsell synthesises and draws out valuable lessons and considerations for online postgraduate study, and highlights ways in which these differ from on campus and undergraduate, in terms of practices and goals.

In chapter "Embracing Authenticity and Vulnerability in Online PhD Studies: The Self and a Community", Kyungmee Lee presents her own autoethnographic narrative as teacher of a module on an online Doctoral programme, to convey her emotional journey, and how it relates to those made by her students as they develop authentic ways of being in a shared online space. She highlights the value of mutual vulnerability, in promoting trust and community in online, professional programmes.

In chapter "Towards Ecological Evaluation of Online Courses: Aiming for Thick Description", Tim Fawns and Christine Sinclair discuss the limitations of standardised evaluation practices that focus on student satisfaction surveys and outcome measures. Arguing for an ecological perspective in which all aspects of education (e.g., technologies, methods, resources, systems, policies) are entangled, and responsibility is distributed between teachers, students, and the institution and its infrastructures and environments, they propose developing thick descriptions of

practice and purpose. These descriptions convey not only the details of what happens on a course, but embedded ways of interpreting those details that relate to the purpose and context of the course.

In chapter "Inclusivity in Online Postgraduate Teaching", Sonia Bussey considers the ways in which online teachers can be marginalised, particularly those with caring responsibilities, health conditions and disabilities. As Sonia notes, 'online teachers are still acting in physical, embodied ways, even when they conduct their work outside of the university classroom' (PAGE). Thus, teachers deserve the same attention in relation to diversity and disability as do students, yet this is often neglected in online education. In the online postgraduate context, teaching often takes place outside of normal work hours in order to fit with the busy lives of working postgraduate students.

In chapter "Networked Professional Learning in the Postdigital Age: Asking Critical Questions of Postgraduate Education", Rachel Buchanan uses postdigital theory to highlight some ways in which Twitter use in education is entangled in economics, politics, and other contextual elements. Buchanan critically examines her own practice of using social media within her teaching, raising a number of concerns in relation to the perpetuation of problematic practices. She concludes that such technology should not be used uncritically within education, but that it can also not be ignored, particularly in an online learning context, and particularly at postgraduate level where engagement with technology and digital media are increasingly part of professional development.

In chapter "Online Postgraduate Teaching: Re-Discovering Human Agency", Gill Aitken and Sarah Hayes review policy and strategy documents relating to online postgraduate education to highlight a marginalisation, within the discourses of online and digital education, of the value and labour of teachers. They argue that beyond demotivating and devaluing teachers, such rhetoric impedes faculty and pedagogical development, and leads to an administrative emphasis on solutionism and investment in the procurement of technological systems at the expense of investment in programme staff. They conclude that re-finding the teacher in institutional and wider discourse is necessary to preserving and improving the quality at course, programmes and institutional level.

In chapter "Improving Student Retention and Success Within the Context of Complex Lives and Diverse Circumstances", Cathy Stone, Jill Downing and Janet Dyment reflect on issues of diversity within online education. They argue that online postgraduate education must take account of, and adjust in relation to, the busy and complex contexts of the lives of the cohorts of students on those programmes. Arguing for a whole-of-institution approach in which practitioners at all levels understand the diverse needs of online postgraduate students, and attune their practices accordingly, Stone and colleagues offer useful recommendations for those involved in teaching, design, administration, student support, infrastructure, and policymaking.

In chapter "Postgraduate Education in a Postcurriculum Context", Derek Jones argues that we are now in a 'postcurriculum context', in which multiple, competing conceptions of the purpose and structure of education co-exist. The absence of a

consensus around what a curriculum is or how it should be organised, allows educators space for interpretation and negotiation of the complex interrelations and overlap between different ideas about education and its outcomes. At the same time, Jones proposes that acknowledging this ambiguity is crucial to understanding the implications of the different approaches. At a programme level, thinking about the tension between those approaches helps us to see the options we have for responding.

In chapter "Institutional Contexts in Supporting Quality Online Postgraduate Education: Lessons Learned from Two Initiatives at The University of Edinburgh", Tim Fawns, Michael Gallagher and Siân Bayne examine what would be necessary for a whole-of-institution approach to improving the quality of online postgraduate education. Analysing two different initiatives at the University of Edinburgh aimed at developing digital education at an institutional level, they ask 'who is the institution?' By articulating decision-making and policy-making structures in terms of the negotiation of centralised and localised practices, they argue that coherent approaches to improving postgraduate education must involve both policy and culture that aligns central and local aims and values, while retaining sufficient ambiguity to allow appropriate, but not free-range, discretion of programme-level educators.

As a whole, the book conveys valuable theoretical and practical insights into how various stakeholders of online postgraduate education might develop practices that contribute—directly or indirectly—to better quality experiences for students. We editors—Tim Fawns, Gill Aitken and Derek Jones—ourselves teachers and leaders of an online MSc in Clinical Education, have found that our postdigital position has both shaped and been shaped by the chapters of this book, and our work with the chapter authors has been valuable to us in several ways that we return to in the concluding chapter. In addition, the staff and students of two online PGT programmes, in particular, have had a significant influence on the book and on a number of the authors. The MSc Digital Education, on which a number of authors have taught (Bayne, Fawns, Gallagher, Hounsell, Sinclair), is recognised worldwide for its quality of design, community and the critical perspective of its educators. The MSc Clinical Education, on which all editors currently teach, serves as a case study and inspiration for much of the content of this book. The planning and teaching of this programme has significantly shaped the development of the positionality we share here. For us, good online postgraduate education is a collaborative activity, and while we hope that the ongoing development of our practice does benefit our students and colleagues, we must also acknowledge the benefit that they have on our practice.

During the production of this book, our colleagues from the Centre for Research in Digital Education at the University of Edinburgh released their book of *The Manifesto for Teaching Online* (Bayne et al. 2020). As the authors of that book note in the opening pages, '[i]t is relatively rare for large teaching teams to come together to define and agree on a shared political and pedagogical stance on the act of teaching' (xiii). What counts as a large team is debatable, but, as a team, we have developed (and, indeed, must continue to develop and renegotiate) a shared philosophy and a 'shared political and pedagogical stance'. We can attest to the value this has in driving our practice forward on our own online PGT programme, in ways that we believe are of benefit to our students and to the wider networks of which they are a

part. However, as the chapters of this book show, we must not simply impose our own ideals, aims and intended outcomes upon our students and colleagues, but also allow our practices, courses and, indeed, our political and pedagogical positions, to be influenced by their voices. In what follows, a range of valuable examples are presented that attend in different ways to the complex considerations of online postgraduate students, teachers, administrators, learning technologists, managers, and institutions, all of whom contribute in crucial ways to this diverse form of education.

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Contents

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Angi Pinkerton returned to education as a mature student and has successfully achieved a BSc in Psychology (Hons) at Glasgow Caledonian University and an MSc in Children and Young People's Mental Health and Psychological Practice, with distinction, at the University of Edinburgh. She has experience working within fields of adult mental health, primary education, asset-based community development, and children and families services. In her existing role within Barnardo's Scotland, she is the Child Sexual Exploitation Ambassador for South West Scotland, the Children's Rights Representative for Ayrshire, and one of the Digital Champions for the Connecting Scotland project. Her main area of interest is children and families' mental health and well-being, with a focus on social inequalities and trauma.

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Moving Beyond 'You Said, We Did': Extending an Ethic of Hospitality to the Student Feedback Process

Charles Marley, Arfang D. Faye, Elizabeth Hurst, Jeremy Moeller, and Angi Pinkerton

1 Introduction

In our chapter, we challenge the typically narrow structures that govern 'student feedback' on courses (e.g., standardised surveys like the UK's National Student Survey), by adopting an open approach, where students provide an account of their experience of postgraduate, online learning without pre-set parameters or boundaries on what can be said. Arguably, the most common ethical frameworks that guide educational practice, like the approach to feedback just mentioned, are underpinned by modernist conceptions of the autonomous, rational, virtuous and caring subject. As Ruitenberg (2011) outlines, none of these frameworks address the tension between contemporary critiques of subjectivity and its embodiment in the conception of the decentred subject. For Ruitenberg, these modernist conceptions shape educational practice in ways that reproduce the ideal of autonomous, rational, self-aware subject, who will make good decisions based on objective knowledge, and whom will be guided by their own dispositions without the need for support and guidance from others. The tension here is that, according to many contemporary philosophical critiques, the subject is not as autonomous, rational and self-aware as is assumed, with these characteristics considered to be fundamentally dependent on who and what lies outside of the subject (Ruitenberg 2011).

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The ethic of hospitality offers a radical alternative to ethical frameworks for guiding educational practice informed by the modernist conception of the subject. Drawing on Derrida (1999, 2001), Ruitenberg highlights hospitality as an unconditional gift given by a host to their guest, which departs from conceptions of hospitality based on reciprocity or exchange, in which the guest incurs a debt by accepting hospitality. In Ruitenberg's account, it is the arrival of the guest that enables the hospitality of the host—it is about giving place to the guest, without knowing which guest will arrive; hospitality is thus a demand for openness to something and someone not possible to foresee (Ruitenberg 2011). In educational practice, hospitality is underpinned by the impossibility of predicting the students that will arrive or what they will need and demands that we do not just cater to different needs, but actively make space for each student to make contributions on the basis of the differences they bring. It is through this that diversity becomes a positive principle, a guiding light, not a deficit to be overcome (see also Bussey 2021; Stone et al. 2021, this book).

2 Extending an Ethic of Hospitality to the Feedback Process

Clearly, adopting an ethic of hospitality will challenge us as educators: if we do not know which students will arrive and what they will need, how can we know the space that we should leave for them (Ruitenberg 2011)? This extends into all areas of our educational practice: what should our content and curriculum look like, what should our assessments look like, what should our teaching spaces look like, what should our teaching staff look like, and so on (see also Jones 2021, this book). However, as elaborated by Derrida, an ethic of hospitality is not about typical social conventions of welcoming, but about allowing ourselves to be confronted by the absolute otherness of who arrives and responding to this otherness in that moment. Thus, as Ruitenberg outlines, the only questions we are required to ask are: does what I do leave a possibility for my assumptions about knowledge, teaching, and learning to be upset by a new arrival, and does it close down a space for future questioning or questioners?

Whilst the educational practices of the programmes we are involved in are guided by these questions, they are fundamentally at odds with the student feedback processes that have been imposed upon the programmes. Through standardised surveys, the process is reduced to a 'loop': it is gathered through an approach that quantifies into measurable outcomes (Fielding 2004), which inform minor changes, with this fed back in a 'You said, we did' approach (Young and Jerome 2020). Rather than engaging with students in a truly transformative way, the process is considered to maintain the status quo in teaching whilst allowing institutions to market themselves according to metrics of consumer satisfaction and an apparent willingness to engage students in the quality assurance and enhancement process (Ball 2017; Fawns and Sinclair 2021).

The MSc programmes on which this chapter is based are offered by the University of Edinburgh, one from the School of Health in Social Science and focused on child

mental health, and the other from the Medical School and focused on clinical education, with both being offered fully online to health and social care professionals already working in their fields of expertise. On both programmes, hospitality is enacted through a willingness to be flexible and create the space for students to engage as much on their terms as is possible, and a willingness to challenge the systems and structures that reduce the potential diversity of engagement. We are not always successful in challenging these systems and structures, but we interpret an ethic of hospitality as requiring us to stand alongside our students and to continually asks questions about the version of students at the heart of these systems and structures.

It is this requirement that underpins this chapter: we want to extend an ethic of hospitality to the student feedback process as it relates to our evaluation of courses and programmes. To do this, we are stepping outside the narrow procedures that standardise diversity of experience by inviting my co-authors to provide *their* accounts of *their* experiences without the imposition of parameters or boundaries. The approach is about giving space, without knowing what will be offered in response; it is an offer of openness to something not possible to foresee in advance (Ruitenberg 2011). The procedure was simple: my co-authors were asked to provide a narrative account, the style and content for them to decide. The following prompts were offered as a guide, but it was for them to decide whether they were relevant or useful to them.

- Who you are, where you are based, your jobs, and your motivations for undertaking study?
- Your studying conditions and their relation to direct and indirect ways of learning.
- What was it like to be a student on your programme and also a professional?
- What kind of important things did you learn and what was important in learning them?
- Any insights you have about what makes good and poor quality online postgraduate education.

The narratives were engaged with by the first author through a descriptive analytical reading across my co-authors' accounts. I then drafted a thematised account of the combined narratives. This account formed the basis of the full first draft of this chapter, which was returned to my co-authors for co-editing and writing. We continued this process until a final draft was agreed between us.

3 Student Narrative Accounts

3.1 Angi Pinkerton (MSc Mental Health in Children and Young People: Psychological Approaches)

As a working-class female, raised in the 1980s, living in South-West Scotland, my aspirations for attending tertiary education were low. However, due to trauma experienced during my adolescent years, I developed an interest in psychology. It was

not until my mid-30s, however, that my circumstances allowed for a return to education, to successfully achieve a BSc Psychology (Hons). Monetary constraints were always a mediating influence on my educational journey and as I did not have the financial means to begin my postgraduate education, I fortunately managed to secure a full-time job working within community mental health. After much research and careful consideration, I applied for the MSc in Children and Young People's Mental Health and Psychological Practice at the University of Edinburgh.

My first couple of months as an online student made me miss my time in a campus-based environment. I was struggling with the various platforms; I was worried I wasn't engaging enough, and I was allowing imposter syndrome to flourish. Furthermore, working full-time, studying full-time and raising a family, with very little restorative sleep, was challenging, leaving little time for family and friends. Moreover, the moment I heard my son tell his Nan that his 'Mummy doesn't have time to play with me today because she is so busy being a brilliant psychologist' nearly saw me terminate my academic journey. However, through much sacrifice, compartmentalising and the use of effective timetabling skills, and I mean actual timetables pinned to my 'office' walls, I successfully continued my online journey, alongside my other personal and professional commitments. However, if I'm entirely honest, my 'sacrifices' were helped enormously by the fact that not only did I enjoy every minute of my studies but I also began to notice a bi-directional benefit from what I was learning on the programme and what was required of my role, working with children and families. Although the course was not an applied training, the material was taught in a manner that would be beneficial within applied settings, such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

Online learning brought its challenges and collaborative working was one of the most difficult. Time zones and work commitments were two of the major barriers and group cohesiveness was difficult to maintain. As many assignments were group-based, this caused much distress as although most were happy to work collaboratively, there were many whose contribution was sub-optimal. However, I have realised that the benefits of working within an international, inter-disciplinary online community has improved my role as a children and families practitioner, who can better understand the many implications of practice, policy and theory, across disciplines and nations. Likewise, it improved my critical and analytical thinking style, taught me the true value of practising under equality, diversity and inclusion principles, and has perhaps made me more confident at voicing my opinion in a group setting.

Furthermore, common perceptions of online learning often include lone working, and a lack of educational identity plagued my initial learning experience. However, through utilising the online discussion boards, emails, video calls and social media platforms, I managed to connect with peers and lecturers while developing a sense of community and identity as a postgraduate student. Furthermore, I would argue that Bergstrand and Savage's (2013) claim that student-teacher relationships can only be formed in a face-to-face environment is inaccurate. During my undergraduate years, I was fortunate enough to have many lecturers that had an open-door policy; however, I also had many that required a 2-month advance email

request with a doctor's line attached. Likewise, I have experienced lecturers through my online course that offer the same availability to students alongside those that are not as accessible. Consequently, I do not believe that online learning limits relationships simply because of the nature of the learning, but that those individual, interpersonal differences of the teacher/student depend on any successful relationships forming.

Unfortunately, the second year of my study was dominated by Coronavirus which saw the world go into international lockdown. I was now working and studying from home and was finding it hard to keep those tidy little compartments that I had worked so hard to create. I now only had one space to live, study, and work, and the closures of schools meant I was no longer just a parent, but a teacher also. Moreover, tutorials were dominated with discussions of Covid-19; and everyone on the course was experiencing some level of distress from lockdown. I was very aware of how my colleagues were struggling with the virtual worlds we had been sent to, and I realised that I had, in effect, been living in a digital world for the past year which meant I was able to help them with their concerns.

I most enjoyed the campus-based structure[1] to the course. Many alternative courses I had researched offered much more flexibility in their timetables, however, due to my other commitments, I valued the structure and enjoyed the tutorial groups. Nevertheless, I would argue that my peers and I gained more value from those tutorials that created sub-groups for discussion as it gave all members of the group an opportunity to engage equally. Apposite to those students who do not contribute to group-based assignments as meaningfully as others, I believe having a system that utilises both individual marking schemes as well as group markings would be of benefit and encourage accountability for the autonomy that online learning can offer. In my opinion, this would also serve to reduce outdated attitudes towards the efficacy of online learning and reduce the idea that campus-based learning is superior.

As a regular sufferer of imposter syndrome, I value my education and the reassurance it offers me. I live in Scotland where we focus on bridging the attainment gap and offer free education to all regardless of class, gender or location. Whether you adopt a functionalist perspective such as Talcott Parsons (1959) who argued that education is based on meritocracy and those who do well will flourish, or if you agree with Pierre Bourdieu's (1974, 1976) assessment that the educational system is designed to prevent social mobility, it cannot be denied that a postgraduate education is expensive. I am disheartened that my educational journey has to end due to financial reasons, rather than apropos my own ability, however I am extremely grateful that online learning allowed me to complete my studies. I would not have been able to complete this course on campus, due to financial and geographical reasons, and believe more universities should offer access through distance learning.

[1] This term refers to the use of live online tutorials to support asynchronous learning activities.

3.2 Arfang Faye (MSc Clinical Education)

I am a Registered Nurse and Midwife, trained and practising in The Gambia. I graduated as a midwife in January 2008; for 7 years after graduation, I taught nursing and midwifery in one of the nurse and midwifery training schools while working as a senior clinical midwife in one of the major hospitals in The Gambia.

My journey to acquiring an MSc in Clinical Education began in January 2015 when I became a student in the Advanced Obstetric Training Programme in The Gambia. Following successful completion of my training, I became a junior trainer on the programme, and it was during this period that the Lead Trainer encouraged me to undertake a Master's degree in clinical education. Healthcare professionals' education in The Gambia faces many challenges, one of the most important of which is that often, as in my own case, healthcare educators have little or no training in clinical education. For all the years I taught nursing and midwifery, I had never had any formal training in the science and theory of clinical education, as was the case with all my colleagues.

It had been my professional ambition to acquire a formal qualification in Clinical Education, and a Master's degree was my preference. It was my strong belief and conviction that acquiring a Master's degree in clinical education would greatly improve my ability to conduct educational activities, to participate more meaningfully in the development of educational policy for nurses and midwives, and thus enable me to better contribute to the development of nurse and midwifery education and practice in my country. More generally, acquiring a Master's degree would significantly improve my own academic and intellectual skills, and also grant me better access to better paid jobs and promotion.

I found the online MSc in Clinical Education Programme offered by the University of Edinburgh Medical School best suited for me. The reasons for this included the much lower cost compared to travelling to the UK for a full-time course, the opportunity for scholarships, and flexibility of the course. I applied and gained admission in September 2017. However, before commencing the programme, it was a requirement that I must pass the TOEFL examination to prove that I was proficient enough in English to undertake study of this nature, as English is not my first language. This was despite the fact that The Gambia is a former British colony with English as its official language, and I had done all my education in English in The Gambia.

Undertaking the MSc in Clinical Education entirely online presented a number of challenges, in part due to living and working in one of the least developed countries in the world. Getting the right tools for distance learning such as a laptop and tablet was initially hard as I could not afford to buy them, but with help from my former trainers in the Advanced Obstetric Training Programme, I was able to gradually get these valuable pieces of equipment. Nonetheless, access to good quality Internet services, which is vital for effective online distance learning, remained a major problem throughout the duration of the programme. This is not only because Internet services are generally very poor in The Gambia, but also that as a typical

civil servant with poor salaries I could neither afford to procure the equipment nor pay for better Internet services. As a consequence, attending and participating during online tutorials was a huge challenge, as was downloading relevant teaching and learning materials.

One of the most successful strategies I used to overcome the challenges of Internet access was visiting the offices of friends where broadband Internet was available and downloading the teaching and learning materials at the beginning of each module. I also used social media and emails for much of my communication with tutors when I needed further information or clarification on any topic or subject. Another major challenge I had to contend with was combining active work and study. Because of the need to earn enough to support myself and my family, I had to continue both my regular job with the Ministry of Health of The Gambia, while also doing a private job, with the effect that I worked 12 h every day except at the weekend. In addition to this, being married with children meant that I had major social and parenting responsibilities, which also demanded time and energy.

Due to the above, having enough time to work on my studies was difficult. However, I was able to use my prior experience in formal nurse and midwifery education to develop and refine useful learning techniques, which greatly improved both the time available for study and also the quality of my learning. In addition to developing a checklist of tasks that I should perform for each learning activity, I also tried to use every opportunity available during my spare time to perform learning tasks; importantly I devoted at least one day of each week, typically during weekends, to studying and performing learning tasks, like assignments. Furthermore, I began planning and working iteratively on assignments as soon as the details were available, to ensure that I was never under pressure to submit an assignment. This strategy played a major role in my successful completion of the MSc in Clinical Education Programme.

By its nature, online learning maybe perceived and described mainly in terms of the technology through which teaching is delivered, rather than people and relationships, which are important in education. Additionally, there is a tendency to think that online learning is less than optimal for effective learning because it is not face to face. However, my experience shows this not to be true. Up to the time before I began my studies, most of my formal education had been through face-to-face learning, and I had no experience with online education. Therefore, being physically disconnected from my tutors and fellow students seemed to make the teaching and learning experience incomplete at the beginning. However, as I became more experienced in the unique nature, demands and skills required of online learning, I came to appreciate and engage with the programme as much as any face-to-face learning I have had in the past.

What I found particularly helpful was that the programme was flexible and highly organized. Personal tutors provided opportunities for one-to-one learning and tutors could be contacted both formally and informally. The support services for students such as communication and information services were excellent, and the way teaching and learning activities were planned, presented, and implemented was very conducive. Tutors were also supportive, understanding the limitations imposed

by my setting and context and did everything possible to enable me to fully and meaningfully participate in all relevant educational activities. As the programme progressed, I became more confident about my ability to meet the demands of online learning and also increasingly became personally and emotionally connected to both the programme and its staff and my fellow students, in the process developing a strong sense of belonging to the institution.

The online MSc in Clinical Education programme has been an important and positive lifetime experience. Firstly, undertaking and completing this programme has given me important new knowledge and academic and social skills, which have developed me both professionally and intellectually. These include independent and directed self-learning, collaborative learning and communication skills especially online, which are essential for learning in this modern age. Additionally, I believe that I am much more prepared to meet the challenges of clinical education in low resource settings, such as The Gambia, and I have greater confidence in my ability to effectively and successfully plan, design, facilitate, and lead educational activities, while being in a much better position to participate and contribute meaningfully to the development of nurse and midwifery education policy.

3.3 Jeremy Moeller (MSc Clinical Education)

I am a clinical neurologist and Associate Professor of Neurology at Yale School of Medicine. I am currently the Associate Vice Chair for Education in our department, and the residency program directory. I support all aspects of education in our department, from 'preclinical' medical student training to continuing medical education and faculty development. I spend the greatest bulk of my administrative and educational time supporting graduate medical education. I chose to pursue the MSc in Clinical Education because I wanted to ensure that my educational practice was informed by the best evidence and scholarly resources, much in the same way as I have done for my clinical practice of neurology. Through medical school and residency, I was aware that medical education scholarship and research existed, and I did get some introduction to best practices in teaching and evaluation, but I didn't really understand how to develop or evaluate an educational program on a sophisticated level. I wanted to be able to speak and understand the 'language' of medical education, so that I could optimally perform my job as an educator and administrator.

I chose distance learning because of its flexibility. I have a busy clinical and administrative job, and it is difficult for me to travel, or to attend densely scheduled lectures or workshops. The format of the Edinburgh MSc Clinical Education programme was appealing to me because there was a mixture of interactive and self-directed components, and a strong emphasis on research and scholarship, with a mandatory dissertation. It was helpful that the programme was spread out over 3 years, which was much more achievable for me than a more compressed programme. I also chose a programme in the United Kingdom because I wanted to gain

a different perspective on medical education, having trained in Canada, and worked as a faculty member in the United States. I also appreciated that students in the programme came from all over the world, and that not all of the students were physicians, but also nurses, dentists, physiotherapists and other health professionals.

I completed the programme in 2016, but I reflect on it often. Some of the benefits of the programme were only apparent to me years later. When I first started, I was very comfortable with the assigned readings, the regular assignments, the rigorous assessment process, and the overall organisation of each unit. However, I was not comfortable at all with the weekly discussion sessions, at least at first. While these sessions did have general objectives, and were supported by preassigned readings and recorded lectures, they felt slightly loose and unstructured to me. I remember sitting in my office at work, looking at an array of faces arranged in tiles on the screen, and listening to long periods of silence after questions were asked or ideas were posed. Some students appeared more comfortable writing things in a text box, while I rarely heard from others at all. The facilitators appeared generally comfortable with this silence, and I suspect they thought that it was a necessary component of these types of discussions. It took several sessions for us to warm up and understand how we were going to learn as a group. Leaders emerged among the students, and eventually we started taking more responsibility for the discussions. This was a valuable experience: we initially existed in a space that was uncomfortable for me, but this was a necessary liminal stage in our development as online adult learners.

The approach to lectures was extremely well-suited to my personal learning style.[2] The lectures were pre-recorded, generally quite short, and often included references or links to important readings or resources. By engaging with these recorded lectures on my own time, I was able to follow all of these links, peeking into different aspects of the topic before returning to the central overview. Because of this approach, it would often take me 2 or 3 h to review a 45-min lecture. I suspect that if I was in a lecture hall, or even if the lecture was delivered 'live' through an Internet connection, I would have spent less time thinking about the topics. When someone else is structuring the allocation of educational time, I assume that if they provide a 45-min block for learning, that's how much time is needed. When I am responsible for my own learning, and a lecture is framed as just one of many possible resources, then I will take the time I need to achieve the objectives. Since then, I have taken a similar approach with my trainees, providing them with both asynchronous and synchronous learning resources and allowing them to decide how to use the resources. Anecdotally, I have seen a lot of growth in their ability to be self-directed learners as a result. Interestingly, much like I was at the start of the MSc programme, my trainees are initially uncomfortable, and it takes time for them to figure out their own learning processes.

[2] The author has used 'learning styles' throughout the section, which is a contested construct within the educational literature. Rather than change the author's words, we have provide further reading on the debate. For detail, please see: Riener and Willingham (2010), Cuevas (2015), Kirschner (2017), Papadatou-Pastou et al. (2020).

The most structured part of the program was the assignments, which occurred in 6-week intervals, aligned with each unit. I enjoyed these immensely, and they allowed me to cultivate good habits which have served me well subsequently. The expectations for these assignments were generally quite high, and the assessment criteria were explicit and rigorous. I'm sure it's a reflection of my own learning style that I approached each assignment strategically, choosing something within my academic practice that needed doing, and using part of that task as the granule of an idea for an assignment. I still go back to these assignments to look for key references and important concepts. Those six papers are among the most useful pieces of writing I have produced throughout my formal education.

Even more than the assignments, I truly thrived while researching and writing my dissertation. I specifically chose to do qualitative research focused on a relatively difficult concept in education. My calculation was that choosing to do something so different from anything else I have done would provide the maximal opportunity for personal and professional growth. In the process of working on this dissertation, I learned much about learning theory, study design, qualitative analysis, and many other aspects of educational research. But perhaps more importantly, I learned much about mentorship and developing a professional relationship with someone I have still never physically met. My thesis advisor was dedicated, thoughtful and fully committed to ensuring that I got the most from the experience. He achieved the right balance of providing input when needed while ensuring that I was making the important decisions and taking responsibility for the work. We developed a nice rapport through video conference technology, and key elements to this were regularly scheduled meetings, clear expectations, an explicit written research plan, and timely communication between meetings. Since then, I have applied many of these practices in my own mentorship of other trainees and junior faculty members, and it has been the key to several fruitful collaborations (e.g., Moeller and Fawns 2018; Moeller et al. 2017, 2020).

The programme was transformative for me. I was exposed to ideas and perspectives that I may never have otherwise encountered and developed lasting attitudes and habits that have served me extremely well in my career. I have still never set foot in Scotland and have never physically met any of the faculty or fellow students, but thoughtful application of technology allowed me to make some of the most meaningful connections of my career.

3.4 Elizabeth Hurst (MSc Mental Health in Children and Young People: Psychological Approaches)

I awake at 7 am ensuring that I charged my MacBook Laptop and Apple iPhone overnight. I text six client-reminders for a 24-h notification for tomorrow's therapy appointments, make lunches, feed pets, annotate a digital work calendar for my employees and add the day's commitment reminders to the family Google schedule (mostly for my husband), I then drive small humans to school and head to Fox

Chase Cancer Center in Philadelphia for a non-alcoholic cocktail of chemotherapy. While at traffic lights during the 45-min drive, I check my blood counts on the patient portal as well as my Edinburgh University and work-related emails. In the lobby of the hospital, I make sure the Skype link is working on the iPad for my tutorial session later that afternoon. Once hooked up to the chemotherapy IV drip, I listen to a recorded lecture in Trauma and Resilience just in time for that class's tutorial. As ever, I make further use of my mandatory 'down' time during the 5-h infusion by checking in with YouTube on how to teach myself voice narration for the impending MSc course group power point presentation. Fellow cancer patients and nurses laugh out loud as they hear me saying over and over (trying on different voices), 'the protective factors for the wellbeing of looked after children include …'. Smiles and giggles abound in this usually grim room. A productive Monday for this online Master's degree student!

Firstly, TECH matters! When I started my first course, I presumed I could familiarize myself with the online learning platforms without too much trouble. Wrong. I could navigate the basics easily enough, but the layers, links and various platforms all took much more savviness and time than I had anticipated. Note to self: engage in this as early as possible. Do not assume the platforms will be the same with each course and tutor. Allotment of advance time for familiarization of the tech is essential. It would have been genius to have a live tech tutorial, guided by the actual teaching assistant for *each course* prior to the start of teaching. How will MS teams, Zoom or Skype utilised in the context of this particular course? Will this cohort use Wiki or Blackboard, Learn or Canvas, post readings on Wiki or use the Uni Library Resource link? All relevant questions.

My next *First Thing* is scheduling. As the clinical director of my own psychotherapy practice, my entire life functions on schedules. Please professors, confirm the live tutorial sessions as well as synchronous and asynchronous lectures as soon as possible. Heads turned in my house when I exclaimed, Shxx! I found out one of my live tutorials was at 7 am on a day that I had six regular clients. Students want to know as early as possible when they might have to: ask a boss for a longer lunch, take a weekly half day off, get a weekly babysitter, arrange for Wi-Fi or shift clients around in order to be present for the live component tutorial. The course catalog often has an indication of these tutorial schedules; I have found they are inaccurate and change. Clients often do not transition well to change; it was imperative for me to adapt to the obligations of my course but also have empathy for my clients. Additionally, let us not ignore that in our 2020 global community (in both personal and professional arenas) communication and feedback expectations are 24/7. Everyone's clients, bosses, partners and children expect immediate responses. It would be supportive to know that professors truly understand this. I had a professor email me dumping her frustration, 'I should not have to chase you for an answer', she wrote. This irritating statement caused me to wonder what she was doing while I was hooked up to a life-saving machine simultaneously conducting a Zoom therapy session with a suicidal teen. Ever the empath, I countered this thought with the experience of countless caring, professional and supportive emails from other professors and tutors. She must have been having a worse day than me. We all are

trying to do our best. Speaking of doing our best, please tutors lean into your student's life experience if possible. One never knows what is happening behind the scenes, behind the face, behind the voice and from all corners of the world.

We are all psychologists in a manner of speaking, non-verbal cues matter, visual touch points and connectedness count. I found that once I reached out to a few other students with personal and course-related questions, I received immediate engagement from many on WhatsApp. This furthered and benefitted not only my actual work, but my sense (and theirs) of connectedness on the online course. I found I was supporting and mentoring the younger ones and established a camaraderie with *elders* like me.

During this journey in advanced Master's level learning, a recurrent theme was the need for more guidance on assessments. In group forums online there was very little dialogue amongst students regarding assessments. My sense is that including one live tutorial for assessment guidance and dialogue would go further than two sample submissions on Learn[3] and a call for 'questions' by email or group discussion posts. We should remember there are varied ages, maturity levels and life experiences in each cohort—and then there is an inevitable ego component to assessments. Particularly when asked to submit questions and concerns in a group public forum.

Now let us look at theory in an online learning context. Although I enjoyed the various theories explored, 'meeting students where they are at' makes curriculum and pedagogy adaptation as a springboard to theory imperative. I found that there was not enough customized direct application of theory in the teaching models. As advanced learners and professionals, one would assume that the intellectual transfer of theory to context is possible. However, especially for my younger peers with less life experience, it was significantly challenging for them access the broader contextual understanding. I sensed this, but the inkling was confirmed in feedback from a student who communicated with me outside of class. For instance, the British cost and delivery of both the national health system and university education system are dramatically different from those in the USA. Cultural context is important. It felt a stretch (for me and my peer working with at-risk youth in Africa) to connect a systemic, corrupt African government led by powerful tribal leaders to cultures led primarily by wealthy white men in bureaucratic Western countries. Curriculum and content flexibility (both spontaneous and planned), is needed for students to truly access a tangible understanding and 'real time' application of theory. Interestingly, this aspect of learning may be more innate to educators during in-person learning. Attending to these nuances—meeting students where they are at (context and culture) would further a sense of connectedness and positively impact learning outcomes.

Inevitably, near the end of term, *final performance* anxiety looms for most students. Although I've had many years of writing professionally, presentations, Individual Education Plans, client notes and various reports, I was surprised to find that, at this level of study, I had to recuse myself from real life in the final days of

[3] Blackboard Learn is a virtual learning environment.

write up for final assessments. In order to get the mental and academic continuity desired, I had to escape to a friend's house, to a hotel room or to a borrowed Poconos cabin for several days. These locations all provided an absence of distraction and a lack of personal responsibility that facilitated my writing.

The opportunity to learn and meet new people from various walks of life in an online forum is a privilege. A privilege that comes at practical, financial, emotional and intellectual cost. The typical in-person course length and financial burden prevented me from pursuing a Master's degree for many years. The online learning platform opened up not only the structure for this achievement but a more affordable avenue. International online postgraduate learning affords us a world view that can be less dark and egocentric than what we may experience within our own communities, our work and in the news. I have been offered kindness and an excellent university infrastructure for submission extensions when I have been ill. Time has a different construct for me than most. Because of and despite this, it will continue to be my honor to study with Edinburgh University on the MSc in Children and Young People's Mental Health. My clients and colleagues have already benefited from my learning and I look forward to continuing the application of learning outcomes to my personal and professional world in its ever-changing landscape.

4 Discussion

The accounts of experiences offered by my co-authors highlight that online postgraduate students face unique pressures. All of my co-authors are professionals, and all committed to undertaking their studies in order in improve their skills and knowledge in their respective fields. But, with this choice, came pressures, such as the impact on finances, on family and social lives, and on professional lives. For each student, study was important, but was one of many competing important elements in their lives which required balancing. This is not unknown, with much research on the multiple identities and roles of online learners (Ragusa and Crampton 2018; Stone et al. 2019). However, something less visible in the literature, but visible in the accounts in this chapter is the online learner's responsibility to others. This is particularly visible with regards to completing their studies and gaining the skills and knowledge, with students expressing responsibility towards families because of the impact of undertaking the studies, colleagues and students whom they will go on to support post-education, or the wider community in which the student lived and worked. But there is also responsibility to themselves; by undertaking study, students are investing heavily in their future, which places a responsibility on them to complete their studies and for the qualification and knowledge to benefit them professionally in the longer term.

The students also offered insights into their unique study conditions and how they engage with learning, including specifically allocated spaces at home and at work, which appear to function as an extension of the university campus (Bayne et al. 2014), but also friends' offices, Internet cafes, hospital wards, and even in the

midst of treatment for cancer, emphasising that 'online' learning is inextricably linked to the material spaces and places we inhabit day to day (Bayne and Jandrić 2017). The requirement to engage from these unique spaces and places speaks to the responsibilities mentioned above, but also reveals the unique barriers to engagement that online students have to overcome, including personal workloads, family demands, ill-health, financial pressures, poor technology and Internet resources, etc. Because of these unique factors, each of the accounts describes engagement as having to be figured out in real time, so not only are students learning content, but they are also learning *how they will learn*, working out the methods of engagement that work best for them with regards to their unique parameters and conditions that impact on their learning (Goodyear and Dimitriadis 2013; Fawns 2019; Fawns and O'Shea 2019).

Several important and useful practical factors for learning how to learn were visible across the various accounts. Across the four accounts, it was clear that knowing what is expected of students at the outset of each course, including content and learning tasks, mode of engagement, assignments, and tutorial timetabling, is hugely important. This particular factor enables students to plan their learning in accordance with the other demands in their lives. Additionally, it allows for flexible working, with students able to test out whether the tech adopted for the teaching allows them to engage, or whether they required workarounds. Being able to test this out in a timely manner is particularly important, especially in courses with a relatively short completion time; working out what works and what does not work, and what workarounds are required, takes time and thus can look like non-engagement with teaching, especially in courses where 'engagement' is quantified by an 'at a glance' approach informed by a narrow learning analytics understanding of student engagement (Schwendimann et al. 2017).

The accounts point to several design features that assist with engagement in the context of competing demands and technology resource limitations, including short asynchronous lectures and multiple formats of learning material. This appears to be underpinned by several factors, including the self-directed approach to learning of the adult professional learner, but also their willingness to delve further into content in order to benefit their learning experience and enhance their knowledge as working professionals. Additionally, multiple formats, and short pre-recorded lectures, allow engagement from a variety of spaces and places as well as for circumventing technological and resource limitations by allowing engagement offline as well as online.

Knowing the assignment in detail—including type, criteria, and deadline—in advance is seen as important for being able to develop workarounds to whatever technology was adopted (Fawns and O'Shea 2019), but also for managing the competing demands of life. The accounts speak of assignments as being demanding, not only as an intellectual endeavour, but also in terms of fit with life. The strategies outlined for completing assignments included a slow, iterative process, of engagement with assignments in small periods of time over the entirety of the course, but also the opposite of this, where one is shut off from family and life for a short period of time in order to complete without interruption. Both approaches, to be effective,

require all elements of the assignment to be clearly communicated in advance to allow the many other competing demands of working professionals and adult learners to be negotiated. There is an obvious tension here with our aspiration to an ethic of hospitality, since the provision of detailed assignment information for students, but also, in many cases, to meet the accreditation requirements of various professional bodies, runs contrary to making space for the unknown and the unexpected. We argue that this does not preclude an approach underpinned by an ethic of hospitality, but instead challenges us as educators to work out how to be hospitable within the parameters placed upon us, and thus on our students.

The accounts also highlight some areas of difficulty, but which are, overall, seen as important features for learning online. The first was peer group work, which can be difficult due to the technological and resource limitations, but also because of a requirement to engage with peers in different time zones, whom were also potentially experiencing barriers to their engagement. These particular factors, when working to deadlines and managing multiple competing life factors, can create frustration positioning group collaborative experiences as stressful (Capdeferro and Romero 2012). However, this experience appeared to be outweighed by the benefits of engaging with an international, inter-disciplinary, online learning community. Amongst the reasons for undertaking their studies online offered in the accounts was the ability to engage with peers from all over the world and to be able learn about knowledge and practice from different cultural and professional contexts, with group working seen as an important feature for enabling this to occur.

Alongside formal learning tasks, such as peer group working, being able to connect with peers informally was also seen as an important feature for enabling an international, inter-disciplinary, online learning community. This particular feature reinforces the point by Aitken et al. (2019: 572) who argue that postgraduate education should function as sites of nurture and mutual support, which would be facilitated by pedagogies that foster a collaborative culture and which actively work towards 'lasting, useful relationships'. This requirement also reveals another area difficulty, but which, again, is viewed as important overall—the inclusion of multiple channels for engaging with courses, including content and peers. The difficulty relates to the time taken to learn how one will engage with learning, with differing technologies requiring time to learn how to use. This impact here is obvious when considered against the multiple competing demands highlighted earlier, but the benefit of being able to engage with peers and content in multiple ways provides options for students working within technological and resource limitations. It also supports the ability to engage from the variety of spaces and places in which online learning occurs (Bayne et al. 2014; Fawns and O'Shea 2019).

A final overarching feature visible in each of the accounts was a requirement for flexibility and understanding from online teaching staff. As the accounts indicated, the pressures and circumstances of online learning as a working professional presents unique challenges which could viewed as non-engagement by inexperienced online teachers. The accounts highlight that this requires teaching staff to be able to support students in their attempts to overcome these challenges, which, in itself, requires a clear understanding from teaching staff of the unique nature of their

student's contexts, the influence this exerts on their online learning experience, and the impact this could have on a shared sense of belonging to the study community (Koole 2014; Lapadat 2007).

More than just practical advice, a requirement for flexibility and understanding can be considered through the lens of an ethic of hospitality; as outlined, adopting this as an ethos for online teaching requires openness to something and someone not possible to foresee, which places responsibility on the host—the teacher—to be able to leave room for what may arrive. To do so effectively, arguably, one must understand that online learning is challenging for students, and that part of our role is to make this less challenging by making ourselves available to work with students to find solutions to the way their unique circumstances interact with design and orchestration of our teaching. To do so requires the development of connections with our student cohort—to be available, for our students to feel we are available, and for this to be based on authentic interest and concern for their experience as an online learner on our courses and programmes (Kreber et al. 2007; Fawns et al. 2019; Palmer 1998). Whether this relates to providing additional content to a single student who cannot access pre-recorded lectures because of Internet connectivity, or a willingness to accept critical comments about the technology adopted for particular learning tasks, or to have our teaching focus and content challenged for being inadequate within particular cultural contexts, the requirement is the same: to be open to having our assumptions challenged and being vigilant for where these could close down future questioning or questioners.

5 Concluding Comments

To students and academics alike, the inclusion of 'student feedback' as evaluation metric is represented as integral to quality assurance and enhancement of teaching and learning in higher education. However, critics argue that, mainstream approaches to student feedback—'You said, we did' approaches—are fundamentally flawed as they exclude those who are traditionally marginalised in higher education (McLeod 2011); standardise the reality of diversity of experience through narrow questioning (Bennett and Kane 2014) and thin descriptions (Fawns and Sinclair 2021, this book); and, as such, reconfigure experience as a technology of neoliberal economic discourse through instrumentalization in metrics of consumer satisfaction and higher education league tables (Young and Jerome 2020). In this chapter, we have attempted to step outside of this narrow approach by extending an ethic of hospitality to the course and programme feedback process—through an invitation for current and previous students to talk about their experience without limits or boundaries on what can be said, and with a specific request for an account of what constitutes both good and poor quality online postgraduate education.

The accounts offer an insight into the multiple identities and demands faced by adult online students, reinforcing the findings of existing research in this area (e.g., Ragusa and Crampton 2018; Stone et al. 2019). However, they also highlight a felt

burden of responsibility to a variety of individuals and goups by online adult learners by virtue of undertaking studies later in life. The accounts offer useful practical advice and tips for improving teaching online, including provision of teaching and assessment content well in advance, options for multiple channels for engagement, a variety of teaching tasks, multi-modal content, and opporuntity for asynchronous and synchronous engagement with peers and teaching staff. However, what stands out clearly from across the accounts is a requirement for an ethos that encourages a collaborative culture, one where both peers and teaching staff understand the unique pressures and circumstances experienced by students and which exert considerable influence on their ability to engage with their studies. It is by understanding this constellation of experiences and their impact, and by making oneself available for dialogue that is supportive, nurturing, and displays a genuine interest and concern for the experience of the students on our programmes, that the online learning experience is transformed from an isolated and technology-driven experience, to a connected and socially meaningful experience (Kreber et al. 2007; Fawns et al. 2019; Palmer 1998). And it is this—online learning as a connected and socially meaningful experience—that will challenge the myth that online learning is a poor imitation of face-to-face learning.

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Taking Time to Get Messy Outside the Online Classroom

Sharon Boyd

1 Introduction

> What is messy is not defective but simply that which we have to learn to live in and think with (Stengers and Muecke 2018).

The learning network extends beyond the classroom, whether the classroom is situated online, on-campus or elsewhere. The specific locations of students and staff, their 'places', are part of that learning network. This place-centred awareness of the network connects with all beings in these locations. With this in mind, I argue that there is a benefit to explicitly acknowledging our physical locations in learning, teaching and research. In an increasingly uncertain and messy world, we need to develop skills to deal with risk that is appropriate and applicable to our place in the world (Garcia et al. 2017). This chapter proposes a way of developing those key graduate skills for online learners and teachers. Drawing on elements of place-based learning traditionally employed in outdoor, face-to-face teaching, this chapter will consider how incorporating place-based approaches in online postgraduate learning may have the potential to frame a more holistic learning experience, connecting our diverse locations, learning from and sharing local place-knowledge.

In considering a holistic view, I am drawing on one of the aims of this book, in recognising that learning 'spills out' from online classrooms, formed of the entangled connections with our world (Fawns 2019; Fawns and Sinclair 2021). My goal is to challenge the divide between online and on-campus, between outside and inside, divisions that may falsely suggest it is possible to separate learning from living. The process of adapting teaching to include place is one that takes time, an element often limited in education (Stengers and Muecke 2018). Students and staff are time-poor; often online postgraduate students are balancing work and home

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commitments in addition to studying part-time, as explained in more detail in the chapter of this book by Stone et al. (2021). I encourage you to think with me about the process of engaging with our places in an embedded way, rather than as an add-on task to our already busy schedules. I will use an example to illustrate how that might work in practice.

I chose the word 'messy' in the title for a number of reasons. Messiness suggests that the approach is not perfect, but it also suggests a degree of playfulness. It acknowledges the multiple connections that are different for everyone involved in the teaching process. Beyond this, lies the concept of super-complex problems, termed 'messy' or 'wicked' (Hensley 2017). These wicked problems may not yet have a solution. The problems can include issues such as the climate crisis that may promote a sense of being overwhelmed when thinking how to address, or indeed, how to begin to teach the topic. The key lies in admitting uncertainty, so students can see that staff members are also unsure of the answer. It shows that learning to puzzle out the answer together, to embrace uncertainty, 'not-knowing', and 'not-yetness' is acceptable (Sinclair and Macleod 2015; Collier and Ross 2017). The skills needed to 'cherish, tolerate and reduce' risk and uncertainty, termed 'uncertainty competences' (Tauritz 2016) are even more important in these changing times (Anderson and McCune 2013).

Place-based approaches such as class field trips are traditionally associated with outdoor education (Greenwood 2013). This chapter does not focus on transferring outdoor education activities online, the challenges of which Smith et al. (2016) addressed. My aim here is also not to prioritise outdoors over indoors, though I recognise that much of the research and examples include time spent outdoors. Instead, my aim is to propose approaches that may help develop an awareness of our part in our local ecosystems, and which could be applied to a range of contexts and disciplines. It is important to acknowledge that simply *having* access to the outdoors is not enough in and of itself without context and support for students to ensure the inclusion of place does not promote hidden inequalities (Collier and Ross 2017). In the context of this chapter, I am taking the definition that 'place' is a location that has meaning for the individual, a definition which encapsulates that process of identifying and choosing a location. For this reason, in the example I provide later, students were invited to choose a location to focus on. Some students chose a local place that they visited in person. Other students chose a location they 'visited' virtually by exploring resources via the Internet. The choice resided with the student and was influenced by a range of reasons, including personal interest and the research approach they were most comfortable with.

At the time of writing, many of us are in lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Venturing outside is perceived as riskier, if not impossible, but that observation fails to acknowledge that venturing outside was risky for some before the pandemic (Kudryavtsev et al. 2012), and staying home is not risk-free (Bradbury-Jones and Isham 2020). Staff now working from home are also experiencing issues faced by many students in terms of secure and stable access to the Internet, adequate technology, and balancing work and caring commitments that limit time to think,

process, and focus (Bussey 2021). Some students and staff may be in locations that they would not otherwise have chosen, may be isolating or shielding to protect their own health or that of their families. All of these factors will limit the outdoor places that we can access, in some cases restricting us to the view from the window or to virtual field trips such as those described by Klippel et al. (2019). These virtual field trips can range from a selection of online audio and video files depicting a location, through to immersive simulations using virtual reality and haptic (sensory) feedback. It is easy to see how interest in virtual trips may increase given the limitations imposed by the pandemic.

With this in mind, in this chapter, I will consider how we can acknowledge the presence of places in online postgraduate education. I will start with an introduction to some of the key concepts with reference to place-based approaches to teaching and learning, followed by an example. Next, I present a brief overview on place in an online context, or the embodied nature of online education, including some methods to incorporate place-based learning. I will also reflect on some of the benefits and challenges of explicitly including student location in online postgraduate learning. I am aware that these place-based approaches may be of particular interest to specific disciplines, e.g. biology and geosciences. I propose that the approaches also have a broader application across many disciplines in providing space for diverse cultural perspectives and discussion.

The next section is a brief outline of some place-based approaches to teaching and learning, including key literature that may be of interest to those who want to explore this further.

2 Place-Based Approaches to Teaching and Learning

Place-based pedagogies, such as field trips or longer outdoor journeys, take a holistic, whole-system view, integrating intellectual, theoretical knowledge (eidos) with practical (praxis) and intuitive (ethos) knowledge (Sterling 2001). Cameron (2014) coined the phrase ‘place-responsive’ which incorporates a more reflexive approach, with time spent building a relationship with a place—being or becoming *in and with* a place. This approach includes reflecting *after* any place-based activity, such as a field trip, considering what could be learned from experiences of being immersed in the place. Wattchow and Brown (2011) extended this relational idea of becoming-with-place as one of their steps, or sign-posts, to a place-responsive pedagogy. These include: being in and with a place, acknowledging the power of place-based stories, apprenticing ourselves to places, and the representation of our place experiences. Of particular interest here is being ‘apprenticed’ to a place, seeing the place as the master that has lessons to teach the apprentice. This concept of place apprenticeship is encapsulated in an eco-hermeneutical approach to the curriculum. In the quote below, Kulnieks et al. refer to their research on this theoretical concept of ecological or ‘eco-’ hermeneutics.

> In academic settings, it has been our experience that most of the interaction between student and instructor has involved interactions between text and mind. While this is an important part of the educational process, it is our hope that this research may inspire educators to think about moving beyond text by engaging students in a deeper understanding of and connection to the places that they live. (Kulnieks et al. 2010: 18)

An eco-hermeneutical curriculum acknowledges that students may draw on feedback and teaching from their surroundings. Places have agency as teachers; students may experience this teaching directly by spending time with and in a place, reflecting on their experiences and observations. In addition, they can learn about the stories embedded in those places from teachers who may be human or non-human beings. An eco-hermeneutical curriculum recognises places as complex learning environments, and these activities as making space for feedback opportunities in place (Fawns and Sinclair 2021; Hounsell 2021, both in this book). This form of place learning is associated with an Indigenous cultural perspective (Wilson 2008), and much of the research that I will draw on with regards to the importance of places in learning is by Indigenous researchers. Place learning is important for many cultures, including those perceived as having Western, Global North perspectives. As an Irish person, I agree with Ray's (2012) assertion that the Irish have been traditionally drawn to communicating with place. It may well be that call of place and storytelling from my Irish ancestors that has resulted in me writing this chapter.

As Payne and Wattchow (2009) describe it, being in a place requires slowing down, and use of slow pedagogical practices such as reflective writing. All too often, they report, outdoor activities like field trips are constrained by bureaucracy and timetabling, or overburdened with the goal of being 'challenging' or 'innovative'. Instead, the simpler act of spending time, being present in and with a known and safe place can help students to connect and learn (Styres 2019). A slow pedagogy involves challenging and working against the institutional fast-time ethos, a task that is best achieved when students and staff work together to foster a community culture (Berg and Seeber 2016).

With that community in mind, what is highlighted here is the value of learning from each other, from the ecosystems that we are part of and the beings that surround us, rather than solely those who have the stated role of teacher. A place-based and responsive approach to teaching makes use of narrative to 'story' the world and experiences we have (Wattchow and Brown 2011; Sinclair and Macleod 2015). Through this process of learning in place, of 'dwelling', Ross and Mannion (2012) propose that the curriculum becomes a 'lived story' that is flexible to adapt to individual contexts. This adaptable approach to learning may provide opportunities for input from the non-human and human beings in students' living-learning places, for example through inviting input from local communities (Sepie 2017) and from reflecting on what is seen and heard in the wider learning network (Lynch and Mannion 2016). In the vignettes that Lynch and Mannion present in their work, they demonstrate how teaching plans—and research interviews—can be diverted with the appearance of other local non-human residents. A session on plants heads off on a frog tangent, or a tree identification lesson adjusts to incorporate badger prints. In the examples Lynch and Mannion share, the ability of the teachers to adapt to the

'chance encounters' is central. This could be viewed as 'messy', or a failure, as the session did not proceed as planned. Instead, success lay in adapting to the situations as they presented themselves, and modelling that adaptability for the students—Ross and Mannion's 'lived story' curriculum. These abilities to observe, reflect, react and respond are key skills for uncertain times (Tauritz 2016).

The examples discussed so far relate to situations where staff and students are co-located in one place. Earlier, I referred to the use of virtual field trips, and the choice of some students to discover their chosen places through an Internet journey. Kudryavtsev et al. (2012) outline the contrasting arguments as to whether it is or is not possible to develop a connection with places without visiting them. I agree with their proposal that it *is* possible to develop a connection, though the qualities of that connection may differ from that achieved by being directly present in the place. Kudryavtsev et al. propose two ways this connection can be achieved: by first-hand experience, and through 'written, oral, and other sources, including communication with other people' (2012: 237). From my perspective, the process of coming to know a place through a virtual medium is linked to this second route. It emphasises the importance of drawing on multiple sources, and developing information searching skills to locate these resources. This process of 'storying' a place resonates with the work of Kulnieks et al. (2010), Wattchow and Brown (2011), Cameron (2014), and Styres (2019). The stories form the local layers of the 'translocal' network that extends beyond the online classroom (Sheail 2018), which views the University not as situated in a fixed location, but instead formed of the connected student and staff 'local' places.

I will return to these ideas of 'translocal' and 'storying' later in the chapter when discussing the benefits and challenges of incorporating place-based activities. Before I do so, the next section presents an example of simple activities incorporated into two online Masters programmes where the students were invited to share stories from their places.

3 Case Example: Developing Place-Responsiveness

> To what degree is your place-based education linking participants' local, fluid lives with those of global others? (Beames 2015: 30)

The case example involves two postgraduate online Masters programmes designed and run by the same teaching team. The programmes address different aspects of conservation management and ecosystem health. While there are some shared courses between the two programmes, the four courses discussed here are structured in a similar way, but run separately.

This case example is taken from my doctoral research theorising place-responsive higher education at a distance. In this research, staff and students from a range of disciplines participated in semi-structured interviews to discuss how and where place-based learning was or could be incorporated into their programmes. One semi-structured interview with a staff member presented a simple example of

how online teaching might develop place responsiveness. In other words, activities that might enhance online students' sense of responsibility for, and relationship with, their places. The interview inspired me to design a short survey (three free-text questions) to gain students' initial perspective on whether they felt the activities in these courses increased their connection to their chosen places, and influenced their interest in conservation. My goal was to construct a case example to demonstrate online place-responsive learning in practice. Ethical approval was obtained and participants provided written consent. The rich and reflective responses from the 16 student participants indicates there is the potential for simple tasks to develop a degree of place-responsive awareness (responsibility and relationality). Quotes from the survey and interview are presented below to illustrate the case example.

My goal in including this example is to illustrate some key factors in incorporating place-based activities into online courses. Text in italics indicates a direct link to the recommendations I have provided as a summary at the end of this chapter. This example demonstrates how it is possible to *start small*, integrating elements of place-based teaching into courses in *simple* ways. The activities described here were not designed from a place-responsive theoretical stance, though the teaching team have a professional and personal interest in the ecosystem, and the role of human beings as part of that system. The teaching team designed formative (*voluntary*) activities for two courses in each programme, outlined below. All activities were facilitated via the online asynchronous discussion board and wiki tool in the virtual learning environment, as the teaching team recognised that not all students would have access to a reliable Internet connection.

Both programmes started Semester 1 with 10-week compulsory courses to introduce students to the core topics. One aim of the activities in these introductory courses was to help new students connect with each other and with the teaching team, and to highlight where the student cohort were globally located. As appropriate to the topic, students provided a brief description of a place local to them including details such as location, species, plus any local knowledge or stories they wished to share. That local knowledge could be personal or sourced from others in their area, encouraging students to consider connecting with local communities. While the discussion board and wiki entries were primarily text-based, some students included photographs. Students chose the place they wish to share, and in some cases, focused on areas at a distance from where they were living at the time of completing the courses. This was usually a place that they had not visited, but had a particular interest in, perhaps related to their reasons for studying on the programme, e.g. an area of particular conservation interest, inspired by the *invitation to students* in one of the activities to consider their motivation for taking the course and studying that particular field.

While these activities could be viewed as an individual undertaking, they resulted in a group output, as students and staff reflected and responded to the posts shared. The overall goal was to produce what is described in the course as 'a collection of ecosystems that reflect your individual interests and experiences' and to 'provide… a feel of the experienced local diversity of the students in this course, across the

globe'. These goals are transferable to other disciplines. Recognising 'local diversity' can help build the online course community, and the sense of connection between students and staff through shared stories. The reference to 'ecosystems' could refer to the fact that all are part of a biological ecosystem. It could also refer to a professional 'ecosystem'; for example, activities situated within the workplace and research community. Whatever view is taken, these activities may provide an opportunity for students to recognise how their studies are embedded in their local community and environment, and invite them to draw on local resources in the application of their subject knowledge. In his chapter of this book, Hounsell (2021) discusses the pressures on students of coming to terms with new systems and approaches to learning. Having time to reflect on how their subject is related to the places and communities they are familiar with may support students as they become part of their online postgraduate community.

In Semester 2, the second compulsory course on both programmes included an activity where the students returned to their chosen location, this time thinking about what conservation actions they would recommend. This was a useful reminder of the work that students carried out in the first course, and helped them to ground the theoretical knowledge from the course in a practical context. In addition, by returning to activities over two courses, the programme team were able to incorporate valuable *time and space* for reflection. On the surface, the formal University timetable suggested that 'Course 1' ended on a specific date. Student perception may also be that each course is separate; once the assessments are submitted, it is time to move on to the next topic. The team thought beyond the timetable, and reminded students of their previous work, encouraged them to reflect back on the work they had done before—'Building on last year's activity where you described a local ecosystem…'. While the courses were only a semester apart, the first was in the autumn, and the second in the spring of the following year. As a result, the reminder of 'last year's activity' is important in emphasising time from two perspectives.

Firstly, the team reminded students that ecosystems are not static and can change over time. Within the activity, there was reflection on the differences observed because of visiting at a different time of year, both in terms of what was visible in a new season and what may have changed. Students were encouraged to consider this process of change and factor time into their conservation plan. Secondly, students could get a sense of how they had progressed in their grasp of the theory. They could determine their increased understanding of how the various conservation methods could be applied in the context of the location they had selected to visit and work with. This demonstrates the theoretical perspective of students 'apprenticing' themselves to their place (Wattchow and Brown 2011), in that they are applying what they have learned by spending time in the place and reflecting on their observations.

As reported by the staff participant:

> [Students are] building up from a, something they've done in a previous part of the programme and adding further, great, further depth to it really as they develop, because also as it gets them outside and gets them to see what goes on in their local environment in a different way.

These simple formative activities are an example of how to incorporate a place-based approach into online postgraduate courses. There is flexibility and support from the teaching team in the process of choosing a site to visit. The advice to students was to focus on areas that they felt comfortable visiting or were more broadly interested in, rather than requiring them to travel. Students selected a range of locations to visit in person, including dog parks, regular walking trails, or workplaces. Some used the prompt of the activity to visit a new location in their area. A small number preferred to work with online materials to learn about a location at a distance from them.

> Before that activity, though the place is near I had never visited it… it gave me an opportunity to explore a local ecosystem and appreciated that this small and 'insignificant' rock has a role to play in maintaining global ecosystem balance.

> I didn't actually visit the location. The location chosen for the activity is already a place I felt a connection to… Some of the group activities will render actual physical visitation to certain locations difficult as many of us are based half way around the world from one another. Such is the nature of online learning.

These activities appeared to foster a deeper sense of place-responsiveness for the students, as they described new understanding of their responsibilities as a result of spending time with and in the place. Students reported feeling more connected to the location, with a clearer understanding of their part in the ecosystem.

> an understanding of the location, what contributes to it's [sic] existence, and ongoing conservation efforts has deepened my relationship with the place and my appreciation of the landscape and species that inhabit it

> It brought more awareness to various ecological problems in the area, beyond what was already known. It also deepened my feelings towards preserving wild spaces.

When asked if similar activities should be included in other courses, students highlighted the importance of sharing locations in building connections to their local communities and ecosystems, as well as within the online student group. This could also be perceived as an aspect of place-responsive awareness.

> Such innovative activities could help scholars connect deeper with the environment and the communities in which they study.

The staff participant described the aim when designing the activities:

> [the joint course activity] has two… purposes, it partly provides a local context for people who are international [to] learn more about the differences across… cultures in particular, but also across geographical sort of boundaries, but it also provides a sort of practical aspects because they are focusing on something very local, something very real, rather than being theoretical

This brings us full circle to the quote by Beames (2015: 30) regarding learning that links 'participants' local, fluid lives with those of global others' that opened this section. Delahunty et al. (2014) discuss the differences between task-oriented or relationship-oriented interactions in online distance learning, and between compulsory and voluntary participation. This example demonstrates how simple, well-constructed activities can bridge the gap between task- and relationship-oriented approaches, such that engagement is strong even for voluntary activities. The

process of engaging with student *and* place, and of recognising the student as the source of knowledge about their particular location is encapsulated in Wattchow and Brown's (2011) place-responsive pedagogy. *The student takes on the role of teacher* through sharing their knowledge about their chosen place in the world. In these activities, students are introducing places that they know, or have come to know, better than their peers. They are encouraged in the activity outline to speak from the position of the qualified professional they are becoming—'I would like you to imagine you were involved in the conservation of this ecosystem'. All other participants in the course, *staff and students*, learn more about the places through the perspectives and stories of their peers (Styres 2019).

These courses have been running for over 5 years, and these activities have led to other related activities. This includes new resources and guidance to support students in developing their reflective practice, such as reflective journaling activities as preparation for activities and assessments. Students were encouraged to spend time in a quiet and peaceful place, where they felt a sense of being 'grounded', before beginning to reflect on the work completed that week. *Staff also shared their experiences and the place where they felt most at home*, where they felt grounded. This, in turn, created a space where students felt more comfortable sharing their own experiences, and has helped to build a strong community of practice.

In the next section, I discuss the presence of place in an online context. I also consider what the benefits and challenges are of working from a place-based perspective when teaching online.

4 Discussion: Presence of Place in Online Postgraduate Education

In the previous section, I outlined an approach to integrating place into an online postgraduate course. In the following sections, I discuss key elements related to the broader appreciation of place online, and the benefits and challenges of a place-based approach in online teaching. Some of these elements were demonstrated in the example, while others are provided as routes for reflection when considering what role the presence of place could play for other programmes, courses and topics.

4.1 Recognising Embodiment in Online Learning

Online learning can be perceived as taking place in an abstract, potentially isolating, virtual space (Delahunty et al. 2014; Sinclair and Macleod 2015). Research has challenged the view of disembodiment in online learning (Sheail and Ross 2014). Learning is not limited to the online learning environment, and draws on the support and resources of the student's physical location. Sheail (2018) discusses the idea of

'translocal', the layers of many different 'locals' in our online experiences, and how it is possible to feel connected to different locations or places, whether we have visited them in person or otherwise. And yet even with this developing awareness of the importance of learner 'locals', specific places may still remain as a silent, almost invisible, presence in the learning experience. An online student may be invited to share their location as part of an introductory activity, or share their local experiences in a discussion with globally-distributed peers (Sheail and Ross 2014), but that may be the limit of the acknowledgement of their physical location. Teaching and assessment may focus on a particular worldview, with data from a specific location that the student has no interest in. These practices centre learning on a location selected by the institution, and may give the impression that the locations selected are more educationally valuable than the students' places (Marley et al. 2021). It also separates the student from their location, their place of learning. It is recognised that the student *is* embodied, while not necessarily considering the importance of *where* they are embodied, and the influence and impact that place and place-knowledge may have on their learning (Marker 2019).

Achieving any form of place-based learning a distance can be challenging (Smith et al. 2016). It can be messy in that the activities have to be flexible and adaptable to meet each student's needs. Staff need to be flexible to adapt to those changing circumstances, and clear about why place is included to ensure that the activity has purpose for all students. In the next section, I will consider the challenges and benefits of incorporating aspects of place-based learning. I will also outline some elements of place-based approaches.

4.2 Benefits and Challenges of Connecting with Place

The first benefit of connecting with place is that it is good for human mental and physical health (Bussey 2021). Even a view of plants is sufficient to increase feelings of wellbeing (Myers 2020). The process of developing 'nature-connectedness' involves more than simply being in a place or location we perceive as meaningful for us. It requires time and a structured activity that encourages reflection on the emotion, meaning, and compassion related to *being* in and with that place (Lumber et al. 2017). This is what it means to be place-responsive (Cameron 2014), to build a relationship with the place.

The first challenge is teacher and student co-presence. For outdoor activities where students and staff are co-located, it is usual for staff members to complete risk assessments in advance (Mannion et al. 2013). This is more difficult when the student is studying online and potentially at a distance. In their review of teachers' preparation for outdoor excursions, Mannion et al. discuss the importance of the *educator* 'being apprenticed to place', drawing on the work of Wattchow and Brown (2011), as a result of spending time in a location to prepare in advance of the activity with students. From the perspective of this chapter, our aim should be to think about

the *students* as being apprenticed to place, sharing their understandings and insights with the rest of the online group, staff members included.

Another impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has been the inclusion of risk assessments in my institution to ensure students are able to work outdoors safely, and this may become the norm. A simple approach may be to co-create a set of good outdoor practice expectations with students prior to undertaking any activity. This could start with students discussing any risks they perceive in their location. There could also be some general safety recommendations, e.g. to notify someone if going solo to a location. These criteria depend on the places that students elect to study in-and-with, and the goals and types of activity being structured.

The second challenge is time. Staff and students are time-pressured (Delahunty et al. 2014). There are what Sheail (2018) terms the 'transtemporal' issues of time inequality, the assumptions made by University time juxtaposed with student time and staff time. In other words, the University has an academic timetable and may have a guide as to how much time a particular activity can or should take. Student and staff time may have different priorities and pressures that cannot be anticipated. Keeping this in mind, students might need more time than teachers expect. Finding space in the timetable can be difficult, and the example provided in this chapter shows one way in which a slow pedagogical approach can be incorporated through activities that return students to information they previously collected. The timetable remains the same, but the students have more time to connect with their place, time to return and build on earlier experiences. It also presents an opportunity to reflect on the passing of seasons and the development of skills in working with place.

These pedagogical approaches can encourage students to build, and build on, their own place-data, which is another form of place-story. These approaches can potentially develop a sense of care in students for the places within which they learn, which can lead to actions to benefit the places. This represents a switch from a 'place-based' to 'place-responsive' pedagogy (Beames 2015), where the student sees the potential of their work to benefit their locality and seeks to take action on behalf of their place (Hensley 2017). This is not an easy process—it is 'messy' in that it may challenge the concept of standardised consistent educational experience for all students (Collier and Ross 2017), a topic covered in other chapters in this book (e.g. Fawns and Sinclair 2021; Marley et al. 2021; Jones 2021). It also requires students and staff to take risks in adapting to varied learning opportunities as and when they present themselves (Jones 2021, this book). These unexpected 'teachable moments' echo those seen when students are present in a practical setting (Bowling 1993) and online (Sinclair and Macleod 2015).

The third challenge relates to the concept of decolonising the curriculum. I do not suggest that the inclusion of place-based activities will result in a decolonised curriculum. However, it may provide an opportunity to have open discussion about colonisation (Liyanage 2020). In this chapter, I have written about the importance of listening to place stories and this may foreground the knowledge of those whose lands were and are colonised. This process of learning and discovery through shared stories can be challenging as some students and staff in the group may hear that they

are the colonisers, the settlers. By contrast, there will be students and staff who had to migrate for personal and political reasons, and are coming to know a new 'local' which may not be their chosen place. All of this can raise difficult emotions, which may be addressed by creating space for discussion, listening and reflection in a spirit of trust (Tuck and McKenzie 2015). To assist in this process, Hensley's (2017) Social, Historical, Ecological, Economic, Ethical, Political and Scientific (SHEEEPS) framework may be helpful, though this was not used in developing the activities in the example provided. This encourages consideration of the SHEEEPS perspectives of a topic, and the location within which learning and learner are embedded.

As shown in my earlier example, student co-creation is central to the process. This may develop student autonomy in considering how their study and the topic is related to their local area. Students choose a location where they feel safe to spend time, which may be their backyard, their workplace, or a view from their window. This process of choice recognises student preference and cultural diversity (Stone et al. 2021, this book). It is not wise to assume, based on a student's location, that they may be more interested in place-based learning for cultural reasons. As stated by Tuck and McKenzie (2015), that is as much of a cultural mis-step as any other culture-based assumption, whether in relation to place-based learning or any other activity.

The next section will outline methods of connecting to place, building on Wattchow and Brown's (2011) place-responsive pedagogical sign-posts: being in and with a place, acknowledging the power of place-based stories, apprenticing ourselves to places, and the representation of our place experiences. These methods are valuable for all subjects, including those that are not directly focused on place or environment, because they may help to facilitate an appreciation of diversity, embodiment and connection.

4.3 Methods to Connect with Place

The simplest method is to encourage students to share an image, a statement, a brief description, a story, and/or a sound from their chosen place. As mentioned earlier, this is often one of the first activities for a new cohort of students in the form of a 'getting to know you' icebreaker (Sheail and Ross 2014). Choice is important here, as the students may not want to share their current location for a range of reasons, which may include privacy concerns or uncertainty about whether their location would be interesting for their peers. Students may also have a particular interest in and wish to find out more about another place. The option to choose a location acknowledges the student's preference, setting an expectation that the online learning space is one where active participation and student perspective is welcome.

Irrespective of the discipline, providing opportunities for students to share their experiences is important. Often, postgraduate students are returning to extend their current knowledge in a specific area; providing activities that encourage them to share their personal and professional experiences can highlight differences at a local, regional, national and global level. By explicitly acknowledging these differences,

the teacher can make a clear statement from the start of the course that diversity is welcome, so that students build their confidence in sharing their knowledge.

A concern with any work reflecting on the intersection of place and online learning is that students and staff may feel pressure to increase their use of technology, e.g. to bring devices to 'capture' experiences. This may highlight inequalities between those who have or do not have particular devices. It also separates those who have direct experience in their location from those who have come to know their location at a distance. These pressures may discourage participation. Simpler ways to connect, such as pen and paper, followed by asynchronous discussions might be a good way to start. Again, this can be discussed with students.

Thinking of the benefits of connecting with all beings in the local ecosystem, inviting participants to unplug headsets in small group or one-to-one online meetings can share the local soundscape (Gallagher et al. 2016). As anyone who has been on a live session where pets and family members make unexpected cameos, this can inspire a range of discussions and unexpected segues. This is similar to the influence of the non-human participants in Lynch and Mannion's (2016) vignettes, where the presence of badgers and frogs altered the experience of the human beings present. This process of interruption can lead to a learning tangent, where students and/or staff identify a new topic for discussion.

Beyond this, students can work on activities directly in their places. The case example provided in this chapter gave an overview of how this process may work. These activities follow on from the earlier introductory activities, and this again supports the sense that the student's local, place-based experiences and knowledge are valued as part of the learning experience of the class or cohort. Core here is the act of 'paying attention' (Sepie 2017), of learning the skills of slowing down, and finding space to incorporate place-based resources and experiences into course activities (Kulnieks et al. 2010).

It is also important for teaching staff to consider how to share where they are located, or their chosen places. As discussed in the chapter by Stone et al. (2021), responding to students personally is a key factor that can be enhanced by inviting students to share their place, and by staff members sharing their places in turn. In so doing, the students get a sense of the lived environment of staff members, and the process of respect and reciprocity demonstrated by co-sharing may help build a deeper sense of student-staff connection (Wilson 2008). By reflecting on their connection to their own places, teachers can support students as they connect to theirs.

In the next section, I will provide a brief list of recommendations to consider if you wish to invite places into your online teaching.

5 Recommendations

I drew the following recommendations from the example above and the research that informed it, to help you consider how you might include places in online teaching. I invite you to reflect on these recommendations in the context of your course, programme, discipline and student cohort, and what benefit your layered local places might bring to the learning experience.

When starting out on a place-based teaching journey:

- Consider, what are *your* places teaching you? Is there a place to which you are connected? If not, is there a location that you are interested in learning more about? What inspiration do you draw from spending time in your place? How do you engage with your disciplinary knowledge in that place?
- Start small and keep it simple. It is not necessary to redesign a course to start to play with place; start with one activity, e.g. a discussion topic inspired by how you worked through a problem while out walking.
- Invite students to propose topics that interest them based on their place in the world. To develop skills to deal with a complex world, encourage students to question, reflect, and explore the course materials as appropriate to their particular contexts. In addition to supporting a transition from theory to practice, students may identify place-based differences that you had not considered, e.g. cultural perspectives or legislative constraints.
- Make activities voluntary rather than compulsory: an engaging activity will encourage participation—particularly if you participate too, sharing your local place-observations in a spirit of reciprocity.
- Take it slow. Investigate if there are ways to make a little time and space in the teaching timetable. Is there a way to extend time on activities outside the timetable, as shown in the example in this chapter where activities ran across courses?
- Accept that it might get messy, with activities not progressing as you planned. Embrace the uncertainty and invite students to experiment with you in developing a living curriculum.

6 Conclusions

In this chapter, I outlined potential benefits and challenges to explicitly acknowledging our places in learning, teaching and research. Through that process, my aim was to demonstrate how our learning network extends beyond the formal learning environment, into the specific locations of students and staff, our 'places'. An example and some recommendations may help you to start thinking about what this could look like in the context of your teaching.

By including opportunities to learn from our places, we may start to develop a holistic, place-centred awareness of the ecosystems that we are entangled in, including our connections and relationships with all beings. This increased awareness is an essential skill to help us slow down, connect and respond as a community to the challenges of uncertain times and a messy world.

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Feedback in Postgraduate Online Learning: Perspectives and Practices

Dai Hounsell

1 Introduction

Across higher education, the last two decades have witnessed a remarkable transformation in how feedback in higher education is conceptualised and practised. The wellsprings of this quiet and still unfolding revolution are multiple and closely interwoven: evidence of student discontent globally with the timeliness and quality of feedback on their progress and performance (very probably exacerbated by much larger and more diverse student cohorts); developments in communications and learning technology which have opened up new pathways to communicating, accessing and tracking feedback; and a readiness to think afresh about the nature of feedback and its powerful role in advancing students' learning.

And it is the latter in particular which has been the most pervasive in its influence—first, in underpinning efforts to address students' concerns by reconfiguring what, when and how feedback is to be communicated; and second, in suggesting where in the muddy terrain of feedback the emerging technologies might be put to best use.

One compelling feature of this reconceptualization mirrors a wider attention-shift from the intentions and actions of the teacher, on the one hand, to, on the other, learning and the part which students play in coming-to-know (see for example Biggs and Tang 2011; Entwistle 2018; Henderson et al. 2019b; Winstone and Carless 2020). From this transformed standpoint, feedback is defined as 'a process in which learners make sense of information about their performance and use it to enhance the quality of their work or learning strategies' (Henderson et al. 2018: 2). Other contemporary definitions view feedback more widely as not only about a performance, but also about a student's understanding (Hattie and Timperley 2007)

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or progress at a particular point in time, while Scott et al. (2014), outlining postgraduate students' experiences of feedback, characterise it as 'the means by which a student is able to gauge at each stage of the course how he or she is going in terms of the knowledge, understanding, and skills that will determine his or her result in the course'. And looking more widely at the interconnectedness between academic learning and professional development in clinical education, helpful feedback is depicted as 'a supportive conversation that clarifies the trainee's awareness of their developing competencies, enhances their self-efficacy for making progress, challenges them to set objectives for improvement and facilitates their development of strategies to enable that improvement to occur' (Lefroy et al. 2015: 297). This latter observation is also a valuable reminder that for many online postgraduate students, study and work are contemporaneous rather than very clearly demarcated.

Alongside the foregrounding of student agency and proactive engagement with feedback (Winstone et al. 2017), the rethinking that is underway has also brought acknowledgement that the teacher need not be the sole contributor to the feedback process. It is now increasingly accepted that valuable feedback can arise informally as well as formally, and from a student's peers; from non-university professionals, when students are on placements, internships or attachments; and even—in the case of projects, practicums or fieldwork, for instance—from members of the public in the role of patients, clients, customers or end-users (Sambell et al. 2012; Winstone and Carless 2020). These alternative sources are not teacher surrogates, but rather have a complementary role in enlarging and enriching the pool of feedback on which students can draw, reflect upon and put to good use.

A third notable focus of reappraisal has been the communicability of feedback. What the psycholinguist Rommetveit (1979) termed 'the subtle interplay between what is said and what is taken for granted' has long been underappreciated in the generation of feedback, with the consequence that the gap between a university teacher's understanding of academic conventions and expectations and that of their students may go unbridged (Hounsell 1987, 2007). Thus, when a university teacher makes a comment on a student's assessed work, it springs from an internalised and often tacit set of ground-rules that govern what counts as work of an acceptable quality in the subject or profession at that level of study. In consequence, if students are to engage meaningfully with feedback comments, as Sadler (1989, 2010) has influentially argued, both teacher and learners need to have come to a shared appreciation of quality in that particular context. Put another way, if it is to be adequately grasped and engaged with, even well-crafted feedback comments need to sit within a wider structure of scaffolding that facilitates and supports students on their postgraduate learning journeys.

This chapter explores further how feedback is being rethought against the backcloth of the overall theme of the book. It looks at feedback through the lens of postgraduate-level study before going on to explore three closely interrelated clusters of strategies for optimising feedback in postgraduate online learning. Throughout what follows, the strategies surveyed are linked to documented instances of changing practices in a wide range of postgraduate programmes. Where appropriate, fuller descriptions of particular practices take the form of numbered *Examples*.

2 Postgraduate Habits of Mind and Feedback

Any consideration of feedback design should concern itself with the core focus of feedback in online PG programmes—in other words, how feedback might be directed towards the more challenging elements of study at postgraduate level, the commonest form of which is the Master's degree. Master's degrees have a 'polymorphous character', taking an assortment of guises, performing a variety of functions and addressing a diversity of interests and needs (Davies 2009; Sin 2012). In this respect at least, there has been little change since a U.S. Committee observed over 80 years ago:

> The Master's degree is variously described as a research degree, a professional degree, a teacher's degree, and a cultural degree. The work included in the requirements for the degree is regarded as preparation for further graduate work, as preparation for the practice of some profession including teaching, as an extension of the cultural objectives ascribed to the Bachelor's degree, or as a period of advanced study. … [T]he work for the Master's degree may justly serve any or all of these objectives. (Committee on the Master's Degree 1936)

What has changed in the intervening years, of course, has been the scale of take-up and the advent of online provision, but there have also been national and international efforts to achieve greater consistency and equivalence across universities, subject areas and programme types. These have surfaced some important commonalities. In comparison to undergraduate qualifications, there is a greater emphasis at Master's level not just on greater specialisation and a familiarity with recent advances in the field, but also on nurturing postgraduates' capacity to engage critically and analytically, to synthesise and integrate, to formulate judgements on information that may be less than complete, and to communicate what they know and understand to specialist and lay audiences (Bologna Working Group 2005; Australian Qualifications Framework Council 2013; US Department of Education 2008; Quality Assurance Agency UK 2020). Also typical at postgraduate level is an expectation of considerable autonomy and self-direction, in academic and professional settings. Yet this can be seen as ostensibly contradictory, or 'Janus-faced':

> While one of the faces is that students learn to communicate and argue in ways accepted by the discipline, the other face has to do with developing intellectual autonomy, creativity and critical thinking. For feedback to be productive, it must go beyond helping students to learn academic genre conventions, and develop [...] the student's identity as an independent critical thinker and writer in the discipline. (Dysthe et al. 2010: 254)

Given the polymorphism of Master's degrees, how (and to what extent) such higher-order capabilities can be translated into any given postgraduate programme will inescapably vary, but nonetheless they provide a valuable navigational benchmark for our concern here with what might be called postgraduate 'habits of mind'. They also have affinities with what, in research at the upper levels of undergraduate study, has been called 'ways of thinking and practising' in a subject:

> These ways of thinking and practising were not confined to knowledge and understanding, but could also take in subject-specific skills and know-how, an evolving familiarity with the

> values and conventions governing scholarly communication within the relevant disciplinary and professional community, and even a nascent meta-understanding of how new knowledge within the field was generated. (Hounsell and Anderson 2008: 72)

Like the latter, postgraduate habits of mind are not generic or universal features of study at that level but are rather, ways of thinking and practising characteristic of, and particular to, a given subject and/or professional domain, and encompass programme-specific concerns such as, in medicine, clinical reasoning (Ajjawi and Higgs 2008; Sandhu 2018); the ability to discuss how theory can inform professional practice, in medicine (Aitken et al. 2019) and in education (Turner and Simon 2013); critique as a 'way of knowing' in design (Gray 2019); integrating policy, practice, theory and research in social work (Schneller and Brocato 2011); ethical decision-making (Magalhães-Sant'Ana 2014) in veterinary practice; critical thinking in education (Rattray 2017; Mirador 2018); or context-sensitive communication and messaging of scientific knowledge in coastal management (Treby and Shah 2005).

What is also necessary to note, for our purposes here, is that the evolution of postgraduate habits of mind typically represents, for the students concerned, a metamorphosis—a step-change in learning demands from those encountered in undergraduate studies. The 'challenging negotiations' this transition can call for (Tobbell et al. 2010) have been highlighted in various studies (Heussi 2012; West 2012; Mirador 2018; Bamber et al. 2019; Coneyworth et al. 2020), running counter to the pervasive assumption that the transition to postgraduate study will be unproblematic. Indeed, examining the challenges feedback presents, Scott et al. (2014: 134) observed:

> [W]hen students started making transitions into Master's-level assessment and writing, for some, transitional processes stalled because these assessment processes constituted a disruption to their sense of identity. Students [...] discussed coming onto programmes with established schema of how to write and understandings of what constituted good practice and found it hard to go beyond practices that had proved successful for them in the past but needed modifying in the new learning settings.

Within the body of work on postgraduate transitions, a particular focus of concern, across a range of subject and professional areas, has been the educational experiences of international Master's students (Rienties et al. 2014; Kaufhold 2015; Zhao et al. 2017; Gemmell and Harrison 2017; Harmes and Harmes 2018; Macleod et al. 2019), and particularly those studying in Western countries. For international postgraduates, study in an unfamiliar university system may entail getting to grips with a novel set of teaching-learning conventions, which can contrast quite markedly between cultures (see e.g. Welikala and Watkins 2008; Davidson et al. 2011; Harrison et al. 2018). And for some of these students, their prior experiences of feedback at university had been summative and cursory. Feedback was therefore not only a part of a new academic culture to which they were gradually acclimatising, but also 'an important means of communicating its expectations' to them as postgraduates (Tian and Lowe 2013; see also Warner and Miller 2015; Harwood and Petric 2019; Hey-Cunningham et al. 2020; Zhang et al. 2020), as *Example One* illustrates. Similarly, a study by McPherson et al. (2017) concluded that teaching

staff may need to move away from working with the assumption that Masters students know what is expected of them, and schedule feedback opportunities much earlier in the first semester.

Example One
International students' experiences in 1-year Master's programmes in business, finance and management were investigated in a small-scale study by Ridley (2004), with a particular focus on the literacy and learning challenges that written assignments pose for these students. In discussing her findings, she highlights the powerful role of feedback and other 'moments for conversation' around written assignments in communicating the underpinning epistemologies of a discipline, and thereby 'enabling access for newcomers to the current conventions in a particular academic discourse community'.

A further consideration about transitional challenges applies to all students, whether home or international. Some postgraduate programmes recruit students who have purposefully chosen to venture into a subject or professional pathway that differs from their first degree; some programmes entail becoming acquainted with interdisciplinary perspectives and modes of inquiry (Noble et al. 2016; Kaufhold 2017); and others attract students moving from a broad and academically oriented subject area into a linked but much more specialised vocational trajectory (McEwen et al. 2009; Nyaribo et al. 2012). In these instances, too, there are new academic or professional discourses to come to terms with, and perhaps also concomitant seachanges in what counts as work of high quality. In other words, neophyte postgraduate learners face the challenge of 're-norming' their understanding of what learning is and what it requires of themselves.

Given these challenges, feedback has an indispensable role to play in nurturing postgraduate habits of mind and supporting students in calibrating learning demands and institutional and professional expectations, as *Example Two* illustrates.

Example Two
An innovative postgraduate pediatric programme at Johns Hopkins All Children's Hospital in Florida has been designed to foreground individualized learning plans and achieve a more equitable balance between clinical commitments and the educational needs of learners (Hernandez et al. 2018; see also Kuzma et al. 2016). 'Learning communities' bring together a group of postgraduate residents and faculty mentors to support residents in pursuing and refining their learning plans, with the aid of peer and faculty feedback. Working over time in small, stable groups, it is argued, with designated mentors, offers a learning environment which supports learners by nurturing reflection and assisting them to integrate the key elements of the curriculum into their learning.

3 Strategies for Optimising Postgraduate Feedback

The section which follows discusses three strategies for optimizing feedback to online postgraduate students: comment-making that generates high-quality learning; a feedback cycle in which, by design, action to put the feedback to constructive use is integral; and expanding feedback across and between student peers through activities that foster dialogue, interaction and collaboration. As will become evident, all three strategies intersect in various ways. Each benefits too from developments in communication and learning technologies in the new millennium that facilitate the management, communication and take-up of feedback (see e.g. Dawson et al. 2018; Munshi and Deneen 2018).

3.1 Generative Feedback

Feedback can be communicated online by various modes, including text, audio or video (see e.g. Orlando 2016; Hawkins et al. 2012). There is some evidence that audio feedback is valued by work-based postgraduates for its clarity and personability (Hayman 2018), and that video is particularly beneficial when the focus of feedback is a performance or set of actions (e.g. Hunukumbure et al. 2017); but ultimately, which mode is chosen will be a function of economy, accessibility and effectiveness (from the perspectives both of teachers and of learners) in any given programme.

No less important in postgraduate online learning is the substance and shaping of feedback—in other words, what goes into making feedback comments that are most likely to generate high-quality of learning?

A prime concern in feedback is the alignment between comments communicated and the criteria used to evaluate and grade the quality of students' learning, whether the latter is demonstrated through written work, an oral or multimedia presentation, or performance on a case or task in an actual or simulated professional setting. Typically, alignment is sought through the use of a rubric or checklist that is tailor-made (i.e. appropriate to the subject area, level of study and nature of the assigned task) and sets out the key criteria to be deployed; most or all of the comments made are then explicitly linked to these. The approach has obvious merits: signposting to students the salience of each comment made; providing an aide-memoire to comment-givers of the need to seek a balance between depth and breadth of focus (to ensure most or all of the criteria-bases are covered); and helping to achieve consistency across those making feedback comments.

But it does present challenges. First, not all criteria are of equal weight (in terms of what is valued most in arriving at an overall judgment of quality) nor necessarily present the same degree of difficulty to postgraduate students. Thus, crafting feedback comments about quintessential features of academic and professional discourse such as use of evidence or clarity of reasoning typically calls for fuller attention than those which are concerned with presentation or language (Basturkmen

et al. 2014). Such higher-order comments may also call for a greater degree of elucidation if they are to be fully apprehended (Henderson et al. 2019a), so that students can 'unpack the various ways of thinking and practising in their discipline' (Anderson 2014; Esterhazy 2018). In other words, it can be crucial not simply to pinpoint a shortcoming or acknowledge something well-achieved, but to buttress it with an explanation, exemplification, or rationale (Vardi 2009; Nicol 2010).

Second, since modular structures tend to focus attention on immediate assessment requirements rather than more broadly (Reimann et al. 2019), even at postgraduate level (Hughes et al. 2015), it is important to ensure that evaluative criteria reflect learning outcomes programme-wide as well as within a given course unit, and that there is an appropriate degree of continuity and congruence across units. This fundamental whole-parts relationship is echoed in Royce Sadler's contention (2010) that in encounters with feedback, students need a sound understanding not only of each of the salient criteria but also of what constitutes overall quality, i.e. that take account of the degree to which a work comes together as an integrated whole to achieve its intended purpose. Thus the 'telling' function of feedback comments may, by itself, be insufficient to enable students to grasp what counts as excellent work in a given setting. Over and above the provision of feedback comments, complementary efforts are required to nourish students' capacity to make complex evaluative judgments through activities such as engagement with exemplars and peer review (more fully discussed in the section which follows).

A further goal in crafting what Kim (2018) characterises as *graduate feedback* is how to transform comment-generation from communication that is predominantly one-way and instructional in intent into comments that invite reflection, interchange, and debate, and in so doing prompt higher-order learning. A way forward lies in what has been called suggestive or questioning feedback, involving comments that probe more deeply (Hounsell 2015a); seek clarification or canvass alternatives (van der Schaaf 2013); or invite exploration, expansion or improvement of an idea, as in *Example Three*.

Example Three

This initiative explored the impact of feedback on the quality of students' revision processes during a collaborative writing assignment by three successive cohorts of students (most of whom were practising professionals in education and business) following an online Master's course in e-learning at the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (Alvarez et al. 2012). Both the teacher's feedback comments and the quality of each group's written argumentation were categorised, prior to communication of feedback and following within-group discussions and revision. It was found that while the students had taken note of feedback comments which were corrective or which expressed the teacher's opinion, commenting which went further by raising questions about what the students had written, prompting further exploration of ideas, or suggesting where or how improvements might be sought, was much more productive—whether of interchange and debate amongst the groups or of improvement in the quality of the arguments presented.

Question-raising and requests for clarification are 'an invitation to dialogue' (Hughes et al. 2015; see also Ellegaard et al. 2018). This more interactive and dialogical perspective on feedback is even more evident in face-to-face verbal commenting on, for instance, clinical skills, where near-peers are advised to begin with a question that invites reflection ('How do you think things went?') and to round off by asking 'As a result of our discussion, tell me one or two things you plan to do differently the next time you see a patient' (Blatt et al. 2008). Similarly, Ladyshewsky and Sanderson (2020) advise peers that when coaching on challenging work situations in placements, putting a premium on asking questions—rather than on making evaluative comments about what is 'good' or 'bad'—is crucial in building trust and in prompting the reframing of existing knowledge.

In principle, all feedback commenting should be personalised, in the sense of tailored to each postgraduate student individually. Yet while this is often seen as constrained by cohort size and resources, there are many documented instances of its feasibility:

- where feedback is 'in-the-moment', as in *Example Four*;
- where it feeds forward on work-in-progress, focusing comments on what would be most beneficial to the student at that point in time (Hounsell 2015b; Dunworth and Sanchez 2016);
- where postgraduates are invited to specify what feedback comments they would find most helpful (as in *Example Six*);
- where integrative seminars provide feedback opportunities for students doing fieldwork through sharing reflections and ideas as well as mutual support (Fortune et al. 2018; see also Binyamin 2018);
- where feedback is linked to individualised learning plans (as in *Example Two*) or tracked against professional dispositions and attributes (Algeo et al. 2018);
- where feedback on professional practice is communicated verbally rather than in written form (Johnson et al. 2016).

An equally interesting option is the use of a protocol that structures the feedback encounter around a set of key phases, as in feedforward interviews (Kluger and van Dijk 2010), or the reflective model in *Example Five*. What's crucial to note in this kind of feedback encounter—often called 'debriefing' (Bearman et al. 2019)—is how the main role of the feedback initiator is less to 'provide information' (which is how the role of the comment-giver has commonly been conceived of) than to pose questions which prompt, through reflection and dialogue, a significant degree of self-direction on the part of the person who is the intended beneficiary.

Example Four
R2C2 is a reflective model developed and extensively field-tested in Canada, the Netherlands and the USA to guide productive feedback interchanges led by postgraduate supervisors in a range of clinical specialisms (Sargeant et al. 2018; Lockyer et al. 2019). It aims to be a facilitative, learner-centred approach, stimulating reflection and underpinning self-assessment. The model comprises four question-led phases:

1. *relationship*-building, to engage the resident and build a positive relationship (e.g. opening with the supervisor enquiring 'How are you doing and how are you enjoying it?')
2. exploring *reactions* of the trainee to their assessment report (e.g. by asking 'Was there anything in the feedback that surprised you?')
3. exploring *content* of the report and identifying gaps or areas to focus on (e.g. by asking 'What are some areas where you see you might improve?')
4. *coaching* for performance *change*, to support the development of a learning change plan (e.g. 'What could get in the way of you being able to do it?')

Personalised feedback is also more readily achievable in the supervision of Master's dissertations, where there can be more scope to build a degree of mutual understanding and track progress over time. An adaptive approach can therefore be taken to supervision (de Kleijn et al. 2016), moulding the substance of feedback to fit with a learner's intentions and needs at a given stage in the ongoing process (MacFadyen et al. 2019; Aitken et al. 2020).

3.2 Actionability and Feedforward

A striking feature of 'in-the-moment' feedback represented in the R2C2 model is that there is little or no gap between the instance of professional practice being observed and the feedback encounter, nor between the feedback encounter and plans to take action in response. This close interweaving is also characteristic of other examples of feedback cycles such as 'clicker' use in peer instruction (Mazur 1997) and flipped classrooms (Deslauriers et al. 2011), two-stage tests and exams (Rieger and Heiner 2014), and even—albeit with more elongated time intervals between submission, comment-giving and action—of dissertation and thesis supervision. It is also in marked contrast to past practice in undergraduate and postgraduate coursework assignments where assignments have typically 'bunched' towards the end of semesters, and feedback has been fundamentally after-the-fact, in the sense of a lack of opportunity to remedy any shortcomings or misconceptions it has brought to light. Indeed by the time this end-loaded (and to all intents and purposes summative) feedback process becomes meaningful for the student, the course unit has frequently come to an end (Hounsell et al. 2008; Ajjawi et al. 2013; Winstone

et al. 2017), with the consequence that students find it hard to see the feedback comments 'as bridges to future writing assignments', to quote from a Harvard University study (Sommers 2006: 254).

Not surprisingly, then, a major focus of global student discontent with feedback in recent years has been its promptness. Initially, this was (mis)construed in many universities as calling for action to speed up turnaround times (the interval between assignment submission and receipt of feedback comments and a mark or grade), but closer investigations have pinpointed the issue as one of actionability (Henderson et al. 2019c) as well as promptness. In other words, not only is the feedback communicated in a timely manner, but there is an intrinsic expectation of, and a clear opportunity for, action to be taken to put the feedback to direct and constructive use within the course unit concerned. This represents a shift from post-hoc feedback to prospective feedforward (Hounsell 2015b), where the goal is to interconnect performances (Boud and Molloy 2013).

Actionable feedforward of this kind can be achieved through reconfiguring assessable tasks so that constructive feedback comments are primarily given on work-in-progress—in other words, there is an inbuilt opportunity for students to engage with the comments made by using them to amend and develop the emergent work and thus enhance its overall quality (Hounsell 2015b; Vardi 2013)—a process which has of course become much less labour-intensive with the almost universal access to digital technologies. Furthermore, there is nothing remarkable about the shift to a more formative mode of feedback; indeed it already exists in the staged supervision of Master's dissertations and capstone projects as well as doctoral theses, and mirrors the processes of refereeing, redrafting and resubmission that characterise scholarly and scientific publication. Yet while it is not yet as well-established in pre-dissertation postgraduate assignments, an array of well-documented possibilities can be identified for embedding it more widely. Assignments, for instance, can be reconfigured so that they follow a draft/revise/resubmit format, as in *Example Five*, where the main effort of comment-giving is invested in the draft and focuses on confirming strengths while indicating where (and, as appropriate, how) improvements could be made (Schneller and Brocato 2011; Evans 2013; Hill and West 2020).

Example Five

In an online Master's course in assessment for digital learning (O'Shea and Fawns 2014), students work in groups on a wiki assignment. Midway through the process, tutors provide feedforward in the form of a 7- to 10-min audio discussion for each group, along with more generalised written commentary highlighting themes and issues across the wikis submitted. Every student is also encouraged to feed in comments as a critical friend to another wiki group. All the MP3 audio-recordings and wikis for each group are freely accessible to all the course participants. This approach is mirrored in the course as a whole (O'Shea 2018). All work—from initial planning to drafts and feedforward —is done as much as possible in open, accessible ways so that students can both learn from and offer support to one another. Ideas around feedback (self, peer, informal and feedforward) and creating and situating shared concepts of 'good work' and 'good working practices' are part of a meta-commentary between tutors and students as the course progresses.

In similar vein, assignments can be interlinked in a series (Dysthe 2011; Thumser et al. 2020), especially where students are required to indicate how feedback on their last assignment was utilised in the following one, as in *Example Six*.

Example Six
Feedback has been comprehensively reconfigured in an online postgraduate programme in medical education at the University of Dundee. To enhance feedback use, assignments were blueprinted against learning outcomes and reviewed to promote better sequencing. For each assignment, students now complete a cover page evaluating their work qualitatively against the assignment's criteria, requesting specific feedback, and identifying how previous feedback informed the current work. Tutors also provide feedback and respond to students' self-evaluations, thus establishing dialogue. Students then upload their marked assignments into their personal journals and answer questions about their engagement with the feedback. The new approach has been welcomed by tutors and students for the opportunities it affords for clarification and dialogue (Barton et al. 2016).

A much-cited review of the potency of feedback observes that a problem with feedback at the task level 'is that it often does not generalise to other tasks' (Hattie and Timperley 2007). Indeed, even at Master's level, there is evidence that the majority of comments analysed have focused on the immediate task rather than feeding forward into the postgraduate students' wider learning journey (Robson et al. 2013). As Hughes et al. (2015: 1083) have argued, in single-discipline Master's programmes:

> A key programme-level aim and outcome is to develop participants' capacity for disciplinary thinking; to 'think like a historian', to 'define problems like an engineer' or 'to apply educational theory to professional practice'. Therefore, feed forward might usefully focus on those practices or approaches which are characteristic to the discipline.

This concern to stretch the horizons of feedforward has been gathering support. Walker (2013) has suggested that a holistic, department-level approach is needed to provide feedforward across a whole programme of study as well as in individual assignments, while Reimann et al. (2019) widen the lens further by distinguishing between three conceptions of feedforward: within a specific module, and building towards a concluding summative assessment; across modules, where the feedforward could be put to use in a subsequent module or year of study; and beyond the programme of study, where the feedforward could offer benefits to day-to-day professional practices when there is significant scope for 'simultaneous immersion' (Brooks and Roberts 2016) in study and work. The latter variant of feedforward was felt by Reimann and colleagues to be relatively scarce, yet there are compelling arguments for giving it a much higher prominence in postgraduate programmes (as in *Example Seven*) aimed at mid-career professionals, where there is much to be

learned from how feedforward is evolving in continuing professional development (see e.g. Kluger and van Dijk 2010 and *Example Four*).

Example Seven
Online postgraduate programmes in technology management at the UK Open University attract mature professionals seeking to build on their practical experience and often with no prior experience of studies in the discipline. Formative assessment incorporates practice-related tasks that enable students to customise their learning to their own professional contexts, and a feedforward design to each module in which an initial, lower-stakes coursework assignment lays the groundwork for an extended mini-project 'requiring students to apply theoretical models, concepts, and techniques to self-chosen real-life organisational situations, typically related to their employed role' (Bettley and Horrocks 2018).

3.3 Feedback Between Peers

In the rethinking that has been underway, feedback is conceptualised as interlocutory—a dialogue geared towards what Björkman (2018) has called 'collaborative sense-making'. From this perspective, feedback has been defined as 'a matter of interaction between teachers and students about their observations, interpretations, evaluations, and expectations about how students can improve' (van der Schaaf et al. 2013). Similarly, for Carless (2013: 90), dialogic feedback is conceived of as 'interactive exchanges in which interpretations are shared, meanings negotiated and expectations clarified'.

As both of these definitions imply, the dialogue does not pivot solely around the understanding of any set of feedback comments, but what sits beneath them in terms of norms and yardsticks for the quality of academic and/or professional discourse. And as we have already seen, strategies for generative feedback and for actionability and feedforward can have a valuable role to play in fostering feedback dialogues of that rich kind. But there is another cluster of strategies, broadly represented by the term peer learning, through which those goals can also be pursued, and their distinguishing feature is the interchange of feedback *between* students.

In fact, peer learning is widely used to generate feedback in online postgraduate education and takes many forms, including peer coaching in business studies and health sciences (Ladyshewsky 2006; Ladyshewsky and Sanderson 2020), multimodal peer critique in design education (Gray 2019), and peer-generated test questions in psychology (McKenzie and Roodenburg 2017). It can also be found, less directly but nonetheless substantively, in collaborative activities such as paired presentations, team projects, and ensemble performances. These serve as a kind of

proxy feedback, since students learn from others' perspectives, insights and ways of tackling tasks (Hounsell 2007), as in *Example Eight*.

Example Eight
At Yale University, the Integrated Graduate Program in Physical and Engineering Biology aims to lay the groundwork for cutting-edge research at the interface of the three disciplines that underpin it. It is therefore crucial to prepare the students 'not only to approach scientific problems as experts but also be able to view problems from multiple perspectives and to contribute meaningfully to projects as members of an interdisciplinary team' (Noble et al. 2016). They also need to develop strong communication skills across disciplines and with non-scientists. These aims are pursued through co-teaching by faculty with different specializations; peer learning, to engage students in communicating across disciplines and learning from one another; and teamwork, requiring students to develop strategies to work productively with others. A key component of the programme design comprises 'integrated workshop modules', in which pairs of students work together on hands-on research modules requiring a blend of knowledge, skills and experience. An important wider institutional outcome of the programme is to have created 'a robust and extensive network of researchers that crosses the prior boundaries of departments and schools'.

But the most common form of feedback interchange between students is *peer review* (Nicol 2014), where students give feedback comments on one another's written work, project presentations, contributions to groupwork, or performance in a professional or quasi-professional setting. Examples of postgraduate peer review are found in a wide variety of subject areas including public health (Borton and Anderson 2018); forensic psychology (Dickson et al. 2019); engineering (Han and Xu 2020); economics (Chew et al. 2016); language teaching (Dressler et al. 2019); teacher education (Gikandi and Morrow 2016; Wang et al. 2020); university teaching (Cundell and Sheepy 2018); and climate change, as in *Example Nine*.

Example Nine
In a Master's course in climate change at the University of Western Australia, peer review of group reports was introduced, accompanied by detailed guidance, to enhance higher-order learning outcomes and reflect contemporary workplace practices (Simpson and Clifton 2016). Groups were of 4–5 students, but peer feedback on the drafts of group reports was individually generated and anonymised, with the lecturer screening out inappropriate comments and awarding marks for the quality of students' feedback. Groups could also discuss feedback with the lecturer before embarking on revision. Survey data and textual analyses showed widespread student acknowledgment of the benefits of peer review, improved standards of reports between draft and final submission, and indications of students' critical engagement with the assessment criteria.

Using either purpose-built software tools or social network platforms such as Facebook (Dawson et al. 2018: 25–27), peer review is being used not only to deepen postgraduate students' understanding and enhance their capacity to generate and utilise feedback, but also to mirror the collegial interaction typical in many professional work-environments. And there are important outcomes for providers as well as recipients:

> In providing peer feedback, students interact with subject content, process, think, compare, take different perspectives, and create new knowledge. When giving an explanation, students monitor, evaluate, and rehearse their own understanding. [...] Adding an explanation to feedback shows a higher level of reflective thinking. The explanation can be justified by adding reference to ones' own knowledge. At an even higher level of reflective thinking, a student provides reference to relevant theoretical concepts to support the explanation. In the final step of the process, students write one or more peer feedback fragments and send these to their peers. The students can use their new insights to improve their own product. (van Popta et al. 2017)

If it is to work well, peer review calls for careful groundwork, including briefing students on its formative purposes, consultation on ground-rules, and the use of a criteria-focused rubric (see e.g. Boud 2013; Nicol 2014). Collaborative discussion of exemplars—i.e. anonymised examples of past coursework by postgraduates representative of different levels of quality (Sadler 2010)—has also proved fruitful in introducing students to evaluative judgment-making (Tai et al. 2018) in the subject or professional domain at that level. Some postgraduates may initially be sceptical about their peers' capacity to make judgements of quality (see Brill 2016; Dressler et al. 2019), especially where their past experiences of assessment have been overwhelmingly summative and individualistic, but one study in postgraduate engineering found more positive reactions when the peer critiquing took place less formally, in online discussion forums (Joiner et al. 2020). Indeed, across the 'landscape of graduate feedback' (Kim 2018), there is undoubtedly scope for greater encouragement to students to seek feedback more informally from their peers and others, as in *Example Ten.*

Example Ten
At Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, self-initiated peer feedback was explored among a small group of postgraduates enrolled in 2- and 3-year Master's programmes in translation studies (Man et al. 2018). The students were felt to be strongly motivated to develop good research writing and this had led them to seek feedback, on their own initiative, from their peers and other sources on work-in-progress such as drafts of reports and research proposals. The findings indicate that peer feedback 'helped these students develop critical thinking, understand research standards, reflect on their own work, enhance audience awareness and make revisions', and therefore develop their academic literacy. Autonomous peer feedback, it was found, can facilitate the formation of new academic communities and help introduce graduate students to the established academic community in an emerging discipline.

Evidence from elsewhere underscores the value to students of informal feedback, and the potential for peer support networks to be more explicitly fostered in programme design (Sambell et al. 2012; Evans et al. 2018; Zhang et al. 2020). Indeed, the role of informal peer critiques as a complement to teacher-led feedback, which is a signal feature of the studio-based learning in art and design subjects (see for example Gray 2013; McClean and Hourigan 2013; Oh et al. 2013), deserves to be more widely emulated, especially at postgraduate level.

4 Concluding Comments

Good feedback is indispensable in postgraduate education, where it functions as 'interactional scaffolding' (Verenikina et al. 2017), facilitating and boosting the quality of students' learning. This is particularly necessary in Master's programmes, where the level of challenge is higher than at undergraduate level and the nature of the terrain can be much-altered, yet the timescale in which to engage with it is much more truncated. Optimising feedback at this level calls too for a deliberative centring of focus on the nurture of postgraduate 'habits of mind'—the archetypal modes of reflection, analysis, application and validation of the particular subject area or professional domain around which a given postgraduate programme is marshalled.

As we have also seen, there has been a thoroughgoing transformation in recent years in how feedback is conceptualised and practised. For postgraduate teachers and their students, this 'paradigm shift' (Winstone and Carless 2020) has opened up an enticing array of opportunities to design feedback-rich learning-teaching environments—in other words, postgraduate programmes characterised by generative, actionable feedback, communicated via multiple modes and sources, and tailored to students' needs and aspirations. And as is evident from the many examples of postgraduate feedback practices presented in the chapter, from a variety of disciplinary and professional groundings and from a range of countries, online programmes are not at a disadvantage compared to their on-campus counterparts. On the contrary, they can capitalise on a fresh wellspring of possibilities afforded by developments in digital technologies.

At the heart of the ongoing transformation has been a premium on students' agency in the interchange of feedback, and while this empowerment of students as active seekers, recipients and users of feedback has found expression in many productive ways, much greater stress on agency seems likely to continue to reshape the contours of postgraduate learning. One feature of the present landscape which has already begun to be remoulded is the initiation of feedback, where as has been noted there is a growing acknowledgement of the value of informal student-led networks as complements to and extensions of more formal teacher-governed sources. Networks of this kind can look beyond students' direct classmates as feedback sources, as Dingyloudi and Strijbos (2018: 109) have observed:

> Educators and community facilitators should take into consideration the multiplex nature of peer feedback and acknowledge and foster students' engagement in peer feedback as an inherent element of any social learning situation, within which students can be friends, classmates, locals or foreigners, members of the same presentation group, or simply social interactants in an interpersonal communication situation.

Similarly, in a discussion of the ways in which assessment can make a longer-term impact on students' lives beyond graduation, Boud and Falchikov (2006: 404) have argued for the value of informal experiences in students' learning at university, and warn against the error of attributing all the benefits of higher education 'to those aspects under the direct control of teachers'.

The softening of established boundaries which student-sourced feedback represents will doubtless grow, particularly at postgraduate level, because it enhances opportunities for students to ground feedback within their personal learning trajectories—and thus to optimise its salience. Indeed, at postgraduate level, we perhaps need to remind ourselves, personal learning trajectories merit greater attention in curricular as well as feedback design, because individuals' decisions to pursue postgraduate study characteristically sit within a wider vocational journey that those studies are intended to help fashion and redirect. In terms of the evolution of feedback, this may mean fuller and more direct encouragement to postgraduates to bring their professional and life experiences—and indeed dilemmas of practice—into everyday, within-course learning transactions of the kind that have traditionally been a focus of feedback provision.

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Embracing Authenticity and Vulnerability in Online PhD Studies: The Self and a Community

Kyungmee Lee

1 Introduction

This chapter presents an online tutor's autoethnography, a qualitative research methodology using autobiographic writing as a medium of inquiry, offering useful insights into how postgraduate students learn and interact with each other in a specific online learning environment. Autoethnography serves this chapter both as a research methodology and as a pedagogical methodology. Firstly, my autoethnography investigates the challenging nature of building open and honest relationships in online postgraduate courses. Drawn *from* my autobiographic story, this chapter illustrates how a sense of insecurity and uncertainty among online doctoral students may lead them to interact with each other in particular ways that hinder authentic learning experiences. Secondly, *within* my autobiographic story, I show how online doctoral students engaged with carefully designed social learning activities, and were guided to conduct their own autoethnographic inquiries. In the process of understanding and doing autoethnography, my doctoral students overcame their sense of insecurity and uncertainty and successfully grew into a safe online learning community that embraced vulnerability.

My story is set in the first module of an online PhD programme in education. Each year, the programme welcomes an international cohort of 30 doctoral students who are working educational professionals from different cultural contexts. I am a lead tutor teaching the module on qualitative research methodology, which runs through the first 6 months of the programme. It is a challenging period for online doctoral students who encounter new knowledge, practices, and relationships in an unfamiliar learning environment. These part-time students often struggle to adjust to the distance learning environment and relationships and (re-)establish a

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work-life-study balance (Lee 2020b). In this context, the tutor's effort to develop a supportive online learning community among the distance cohort can be particularly important. However, the tutor's effort to build an authentic sense of community often faces each doctoral student's (perhaps unintentional) counter-efforts and impression management, consequently presenting a less authentic self to their peers and tutor.

In my story, to address these conflicts, I utilise autoethnography as a pedagogical tool to engage doctoral students in an authentic learning and researching process (Lee 2020a). In addition, to make sense of the challenging nature of building a supportive online learning community in an online PhD programme, I carry out my own autoethnography as a research project on my teaching experiences. This chapter can be read alongside the other chapters included in the present book: Marley's writing with four students (past and present), also provides rich illustrations of the lived experiences of online postgraduate students (Marley et al. 2021). The pedagogical approach proposed by this chapter is in line with the disruptive attempt introduced by Jones (2021). Two chapters regarding the growing diversity in online postgraduate programmes (staff in Bussey 2021; students in Stone et al. 2021) also offer another critical layer to the complexity of student experiences described in this chapter. In the following section, I will briefly introduce autoethnography, further clarifying its roles in the chapter.

2 Introducing Autoethnography

Autoethnography is a form of qualitative research that foregrounds a researcher's personal experiences and emotions and investigates the researcher's sense-making process of these experiences and emotions (Chang 2008). Autoethnographers offer insider knowledge of a particular cultural phenomenon of their interest by researching and writing lived moments of the self. They employ reflexivity as a tool to increase their critical awareness of the influence of their social identities and relationships on their sense-making processes. In doing so, they reveal and critique taken-for-granted cultural assumptions and norms with an intention to liberate themselves and others in similar situations. Thus, autoethnographers are critical, not only about the outside world, but also about their insider knowledge.

The autobiographic story in this chapter is my own—written from an online tutor's perspective on online doctoral students' social learning and research experiences. Autoethnography is not an easy and straightforward research approach, and it needs careful planning and execution. Autoethnographers are often criticised for 'being narcissists'. Campbell (2017) effectively captures such criticism in her autoethnographic writing of her experience of Twitter trolling:

> One Twitter user noted that autoethnography was the 'selfie' of academia. Along the same lines another—and my personal favorite—said that autoethnography was akin to 'diddling

> your pet hamster.' These tweets neatly sum up the principal criticism of autoethnography: self-indulgence. (Campbell 2017: 10)

Therefore, it is essential to have multiple perspectives and voices in autobiographic writing—even though it is a subjective format of reflection of autoethnographers. By utilising different data sources, autoethnographers continue to be critical about their own understandings and assumptions as well. I utilise four sets of qualitative data including (a) my teaching records and observational notes on student learning in my module, (b) students' learning artefacts created by their engagement with learning activities in my module (i.e., discussion threads, reflective posts), (c) 13 semi-structured interview transcripts with online doctoral students in the programme, and (d) colleagues' observations and evaluations of my teaching. Ethical approval for collecting and using the data has been obtained by Lancaster University's Research Ethics Committee.

At times, I directly present student voices collected from the module's learning environment and the semi-structured interviews. Other student voices are represented within my own voice. I have also invited three students and two colleagues to read the draft of this chapter and give their critical thoughts, which have been integrated into the present version. Thus, despite the personal tone, my narrative is not monologic but dialogic and intertextual, since it is interwoven together with multiple different voices of online doctoral students, tutors, and researchers.

Autoethnographers seek reciprocal responses from audiences by sharing their autobiographic story and its connections to broader society in an accessible and aesthetic format, seeing research as a political and dialogical endeavour (Adams et al. 2015). To some readers, this chapter my may come across as rather casual and unconventional and, therefore, less reliable and convincing; however, the intention behind my choice of writing style is not to construct a single, valid and generalisable story, but to

> transform lived experiences into a textual expression of its essence—in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful: a notion by which a reader is powerfully animated in his or her own lived experiences. (van Manen 2016: 36)

I hope that my story can re-live with readers, helping them not only to cognitively understand (knowing) but emotionally experience (feeling) the lived moments of online doctoral studies, in line with a fundamental principle of autoethnography (Ellis and Bochner 2006). Here, I employ Bakhtin's notion of dialogue as 'ideological becoming', which is an authentic process of being through experiencing the world with others (Rule 2011). Bakhtin (1981: 293) believes that 'a person enters into dialogues as an integral voice' and develops a unique ideological understanding of the self, the others, and the world through the process of selecting, assimilating, and agreeing or disagreeing with other's words, which exist in 'other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions' (294). Through the dialogue, people develop their 'internally persuasive discourses' (345). For me, my autoethnography is that dialogue—a process of developing my internally

persuasive discourses of my students and their learning experiences in my module, by interacting with others' discourses.

The ultimate purpose of writing this chapter is, therefore, to invite readers into the dialogue. In this sense, my autoethnography may be read as a mixture of personal reflections, research findings, and academic discussions, which all contribute to readers' re-living of the complexity of being an online PhD student—embracing authenticity and vulnerability in online PhD studies. I will next briefly introduce some of the related literature to the subject of my autoethnography.

3 Situating the Autoethnography in Published Literature

A relatively small number of researchers have investigated online doctoral students' learning experiences. Doctoral students who choose to pursue their doctorate online, as part-time students, tend to have multiple professional and social responsibilities (Kung 2017). Thus, they value the accessible and convenient nature of online doctoral studies (Lee 2020b). Nevertheless, it is often challenging for distance students to maintain their motivation and positive emotions throughout their learning process (Ames et al. 2018; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. 2016). Many online doctoral students experience a sense of isolation caused by a lack of face-to-face interactions, which may further lead to drop-outs (Terrell et al. 2012). Bolliger and Halupa (2012) report that online doctoral students experience a high level of anxiety for similar reasons—some students retain the anxiety and negative emotions throughout the programme. Kennedy and Gray (2016) also suggest community interactions as one of the key success factors in online doctoral study.

The relevant notion of social presence has been used to discuss the quality of learner experiences in online learning environments (Richardson et al. 2017). Social presence is the ability to project oneself and perceive others as a real person in a telecommunication situation through adequate uses of social cues, affective expressions, and open conversations (Garrison et al. 2001). A lack of social presence among online learners is one of the significant factors that can impede meaningful social interactions in online learning environments (Rovai 2002; Richardson and Swan 2003). Therefore, researchers have focused on increasing a sense of social presence using different pedagogical approaches and tools, such as small group discussions (Akcaoglu and Lee 2016), asynchronous video (Borup et al. 2012), social networking sites (Brady et al. 2010), and ice-breaking activities (Salmon 2013).

There has also been a growing attempt to develop effective pedagogical strategies that foster a sense of social presence among online doctoral students (Denman et al. 2018; Effken 2008; Gibbons-Kunka 2017). Many online doctoral programmes adopt the cohort system (i.e., a group of students enter and progress through the programme together in the same order) with paced learning activities. Doctoral students also appreciate the social aspect of such structured online learning opportunities (Lee 2018). Kozar and Lum (2015) demonstrate the effectiveness of online writing groups for doctoral students' retention and motivation. Berry (2017)

highlights the usefulness of building small communities within a large online doctoral programme to help online doctoral students feel safe and close to each other. Nevertheless, offering social learning opportunities does not automatically create a sense of community among online students. On the contrary, some learner behaviours in online discussions have been reported as contributing to a weakening of students' sense of community (Phirangee 2016). Some topics of online discussion, involving different perspectives and conflicting ideas, can also cause negative emotions among learners in an online context (Lee and Brett 2015).

Koole's (2014) observation on how Master's students interact with each other in an online learning environment is particularly relevant to this present autoethnographic writing. Informed by Goffman's (1978) dramaturgical theory from his well-recognised book *The presentation of self in everyday life,* Koole theorises students' online interactions as theatrical performances and impression management activities. In online learning space, students present themselves in a particular way that, they believe, is appropriated and appreciated by others, rather than presenting the true self (see also Ross 2011, 2014). When they face cognitive dissonance, due to their strategies of performing specific identities inducing unexpected reactions from the audience, they employ different strategies in order to re-establish cognitive consonance (Koole 2014). All in all, previous studies suggest both the importance and the challenge of developing a strong community among online learners. It is necessary for online tutors, therefore, to help students to be able to share and express honest emotions and authentic selves.

4 Situating the Autoethnography in Pedagogical Context

I have received my PhD from the University of Toronto in Canada and joined Lancaster University in the UK in September 2015. Since then, I have taught the first module of an online doctoral programme in Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) for the past 5 years. The module supports first-year doctoral students' social learning and independent research experiences. Students in small groups first explore different research methodologies. They each plan and conduct an empirical study on the topic of their choice and write a research report as a module assignment. Before sharing the autobiographic story of my current teaching practice in 2020, it may be useful to briefly describe how the module was taught in 2016 (my first association with it) to provide readers with some comparison points.

In 2016, I taught the module in the way I inherited from the previous tutors. Two tutors co-led the module before me, and anecdotally, it was said that teaching the first module could be quite challenging and demanding since tutors needed to offer a significant amount of pastoral care and additional, often emotional, support to brand-new students. The module covered five different research methodologies commonly used in TEL: (a) case study, (b) ethnography, (c) grounded-theory, (d) action research, and (e) design-based research. Each was taught by a different tutor from the programme team who has expertise in the particular research approach,

while I, as a lead tutor, coordinated the co-teaching process and provided a general methodological overview at the beginning. In the first part of the module, students chose one methodology of interest (on a first-come-first-served basis) and learned about it with the expert tutor in a small group of six.

In the second part, students individually developed and carried out their research project with support from myself as lead-tutor (who was perceived as a generalist). I provided personalised feedback on each student's proposal, draft assignment, and final assignment. Despite the learning arrangements in the first part of the module, there was no particular expectation set about students' methodological choice for their assignment project. Many students employed a methodology other than the ones introduced and discussed in the module. There was no clear sense of connection between their learning and research in the module. Thirty doctoral students used more than ten different methodologies with varying degree of quality for their assignments. As the methodological specialists were no longer involved, much of the interaction in the second part was one-on-one (between myself and individual students).

The module design, with its structured division of learning content and tutor labour, made it particularly challenging to develop a strong sense of community. Although there was an apparent sense of being in the same cohort, I observed several critical issues, such as misleading impressions about each other and an exaggerated sense of social presence, which caused a heightened feeling of consistent competition and comparison. These issues prevented the cohort from developing open and honest relationships with one another (this will be illustrated in greater detail in the next section). Subsequently, at the end of the module, the cohort seemed to be split into several small groups of 'like-minded' people—often those with some physical and cultural proximity—and a few lone learners. From the lead tutor's perception as well, it was challenging to supervise 30 very different projects without being able to utilise effective peer-to-peer support mechanisms. The following autobiographic excerpt illustrates my lived experience of the challenges leading up to the development of the current version of the module.

In January 2016, it all started well. I felt confident and enthusiastic. As a brand-new PhD, I thought I knew exactly what it is like to be a doctoral student, and I was also excited to share what I had learned from my PhD experience with others. However, it did not go well. Following several incidents, I gradually lost my initial confidence and realised that students saw and treated me as a novice with a lack of experience and expertise. Two incidents particularly shook me. Firstly, when I gave feedback on students' research proposals, a couple of students sent me somewhat defensive (and aggressive) emails and claimed that my comments were contradictory to the expert tutors' comments who taught them their chosen methodology. One student said that he/she wished for me to change my 'negative opinions' on his/her plan since it had already been discussed and approved by the other tutor earlier in the module. Secondly, I also found out that some students 'double-checked' my feedback with the expert tutors just 'to make sure' that they fully understood what I meant (or to seek out alternative opinions). I remember thinking 'isn't it ME who knows best what I meant?'. However, as a new member of the team, I decided to let it go, since I did not want to create any trouble with the students (or the other tutors).

I felt extremely embarrassed and hoped no one noticed that I failed to earn respect from my students. Some of the other incidents were rather subtle or meant to be supportive. After giving a feedback session, where I faced a couple of confrontational (rather rude) students, one student kindly wrote to me: 'Kyungmee, be confident! You are the one with a PhD. You are far ahead of us!' I thanked the student; however, the message did not make me feel confident. Instead, I realised that everyone had noticed my failure! Despite the great enthusiasm and passion I had for this new role, feelings of insecurity and self-doubt continuously crept into my interactions with students and made me hesitant and nervous. Everyone else (all students and tutors except for me) in the module seemed to be highly confident and full of experiences and expertise. I was totally intimidated! Without figuring out how to deal with these issues, I just worked extremely hard and put lots of hours into giving feedback and supporting students' work. I was totally exhausted. Beyond the heavy workload and physical fatigue, I also struggled with all sorts of negative emotions. At least, most students appreciated my effort and mentioned that I was helpful in the module evaluation.

In the following year, in 2017, I was desperate to gain more respect from students. I took a different approach to interact with students: I tried not to be hesitant or compromising but more firm (and authoritarian, which did not work well, in retrospect). I also decided to 'teach' one of the five methodologies to become an expert tutor rather than a coordinator. I gave loads of feedback and support to students (especially those who chose my methodology). Despite the increased workload, I felt more respected and connected to students and their learning. Nevertheless, I could not avoid those difficult situations where students challenged and questioned the legitimacy of my comments in the latter part of the module. Some students still sought other tutors' advice and confirmation on the validity of my comments. I felt that I was in the never-ending competition with other tutors for student respect. I did not back down this time—they had to revise their draft, following my advice no matter whether they trusted it or not. Well… it all seemed to be working fine. However, the module evaluation results included a few fiercely and painfully negative comments: 'If you are not interested in what the tutor is forcing you to do, this module is completely a waste of your time!' I was disappointed and confused again.

In 2018, I felt compelled to scrap the module and re-write it. I decided to teach the entire module alone. Given that students need a lot more pastoral support and guidance during the first module, which is also one of the two longer modules in the programme, giving up the tutor team support was a difficult decision. However, I could not continue the lone battles against the other expert tutors (without them even noticed) all the time. I also decided to introduce a single methodology, autoethnography, with the hope that this radically subjective research approach would pose a shared pedagogical challenge that the cohort could equally experience and collaboratively address. I also believed that the reflective and open nature of autoethnography would help students (and myself) to learn about each other. I will now jump into 2020 and present my autobiographic story about the third attempt to employ autoethnography in my module (read Lee 2019, for a detailed description of the first attempt in 2018).

5 Autoethnography in Online Doctoral Studies

This section presents my autobiographic story of observing, supporting, and making sense of online doctoral students' social learning experiences in my module, in which I have employed autoethnography as a pedagogical subject and tool. In order to support readers' engagement with the dialogue, I divide each section into two parts: one, reflective narratives illustrating the phenomenon as a tutor and two, academic discussions making sense of the narratives and drawing conclusions relevant to online doctoral education. When empirically untested assumptions and opinions are presented as part of my autoethnographic narratives, I *italicise* the statements to signpost that those are subjective insights rather than objective facts.

5.1 Managing Impressions

Tutor's Autobiography

Each January, I meet 30 new students all excited about their new journey on the PhD programme. The students are all professionals working across diverse educational settings in different countries, and most of them have family and other social responsibilities. In December 2019, I am busy updating the module handbook and reading list and setting up a new Moodle site reflecting feedback from the previous cohort. With that all set, just before starting the big run of 6 months, I also do feel excited and nervous. And then, it goes like this…

The first week's activity: 'post a visual self-introduction that briefly introduces yourself, your professional background, and research interest with a couple of images representing yourself'. Here, I see a lot of confident-looking professionals in posh suits (some photos are obviously too polished, looking like stock photos from a marketing agency). The intended message seems like: 'I am a successful professional. I am good at what I am doing'. Other photos feature advanced technology (usually, hardware such as a virtual reality headset), exotic buildings (representative images of their institutions or home countries), or smiling students (or clients when they work in corporate settings). Some photos of travellers, dog-walkers, book-readers, and parents also appear, somehow telling me that 'Despite my professional success, I also enjoy my personal life as well'. This seems like another important message in their introductory posts—I think 'So far, so good. We are all confident professionals with a perfect work-life balance!' To me, even though they are obviously very different from each other, *these introductory posts sound all the same.*

When it comes to the research interest pitch, it is often even more sophisticated and refined. I can see each of them trying hard to tell each other 'I know enough': frequently, by deploying research jargon and listing specific theories and methodologies that they have previously used or are planning to use. These carefully drafted

sentences are usually embellished with their great passion for the chosen topics for their PhD study (e.g., technological tools, teaching methods, learner groups). All research interests are tightly related to their professional practices. *I can hear the rather technology-deterministic narratives of problem-fixers or trouble-shooters*—their intended PhDs will figure out how to better use technology to enhance different aspects of educational practice. These kinds of narratives also tell me that *their research belief is fundamentally bounded by a positivist epistemology, which will create real tension later when they are asked to embrace autoethnography as a legitimate form of research* (as discussed in the section on 'Encountering Discomfort', below).

At the end of the post, many add *relatively plain statements:* 'I want to learn more and develop my understanding further' *and friendly collegial remarks such as* 'I look forward to learning from and with all of you.' These posts quickly establish a welcoming atmosphere as they meet and greet each other, expressing their mutual excitement to be part of this international cohort of successful professionals. I genuinely feel it is such a privilege to meet all these experienced professionals, enthusiastic researchers, and motivated students from all around the world, just at my desk (more precisely, in my Moodle site). However, underneath it all, *I smell a nervous, heavy but fast-spreading air of competition and intimidation*. How do I sense this? Well… how can I not?… That was exactly how I felt in January 2016 (see above). At that time, reading those posts, even as a tutor (with a PhD), I felt I was the least experienced educator in my own module. I was secretly worried about what would happen if I was not good enough to teach these confident students and what if they noticed I did not know this and that, etc. I was busy hiding those worries.

I do not feel the same way in January 2020; however, I believe many of my students do feel that way. Interview data validated my understanding (read more in Lee 2020b). For example, Joseph, a doctoral student said he felt insecure:

> I think we all had this sense of insecurity about whether we'd be able to get to grips with what… you know, I'm a lawyer so this is an entirely new discipline, and whether we'd be able to reach the standard. And so I think really the main feeling, the negative feeling was the feeling of insecurity… that's the major question on our mind: 'would I be able to complete the assignment to a satisfactory standard?'

Making Sense of the Story

As noted, online doctoral students' long-established professional identities become a strong foundation for how they enter the new, unfamiliar, learning space and interact with each other. Through their selected photos and well-formed narratives, doctoral students tend to present themselves as confident and experienced professionals rather than new students and novice researchers. By reading those polished posts, students tend to create a somewhat misleading impression of others as all being confident and knowledgeable, and in turn, a sense of intimidation and insecurity in self grows. Thus, I would argue that the function of social presence (or perceived

sense of others as real people) is multifaceted and complex in my module. While online courses are often accused of lacking social presence, the problem in my module is, ironically, an overwhelming sense of the presence of others and their carefully managed impressions (Goffman 1978). The more serious issue here is the negative impact of the misleading impression on the cohort as a community (e.g., a sense of competition). It may be more challenging to break the misleading impression than breaking the ice.

5.2 Encountering Discomfort

Tutor's Autobiography

Students move onto the main part of the module. Here they come up against a set of difficult readings about research philosophy and methodology. Sarah, a student from the 2019 cohort, reflected, 'I was a little "freaked out" at the start with all the readings and the feeling that I was alone in all of this'. To break the misleading impressions about each other in the cohort, I ask them to discuss what they do not know, instead of what they know. Each student, in a smaller group of ten, selects the most difficult paragraph from the assigned readings and discusses what they cannot understand. Usually, a few paragraphs repeatedly appear as the most challenging ones, and so students become emboldened to confess their lack of philosophical foundation and research knowledge.

After this initial 'freaking out' experience, *they gradually realise that it is completely acceptable to say 'I don't know' in this module and it is not necessary to pretend to know something they do not know*. The titles of student posts effectively reflect that: 'Hang on, let me read that again!', 'Terminology Overload!', 'Postmodern Vertigo?'. Of course, some know more and some less. I can see this from the ways that they write their posts about difficult paragraphs. *In addition, there are still several students who put effort into crafting the posts in such a way as to highlight what they know*. The knowledge gap among 30 students clearly exists; however, the nature of activity makes that gap stand out less. The fact that the chosen readings are not necessarily accessible, in terms of content and style of writing, helps *the heavy air of competition blow over a little*.

And then, here comes autoethnography! Unlike other, more commonly used, methodologies, autoethnography is usually unknown to all students (two students in the 2020 cohort said that they had heard about it before, but none of them had learned about it or used it before). I first share my own autoethnographic writing (Lee 2019) on teaching the present module in 2017, which is discussed earlier in the chapter. The reading includes a detailed description of my emotional reactions to students' disrespectful and aggressive comments—surprise and disappointment to start with, sadness and anger in a later stage, lasting a year or so, and subsequently, a lost sense of confidence and security. The article further explains how I decided to

adopt autoethnography as a pedagogical approach to enable both students and tutor to learn about each other.

Students then read a few chapters from the book *Autoethnography* by Adams et al. (2015). From the tutor's perspective, it is almost touching to see *their effort to grip the idea of autoethnography, which at this point is seemingly incomprehensible and further unlikable to many, as the following quotations from forum posts illustrate:*

> I am also struggling to see how auto-ethnographic research is empirical. I've searched the [research methodology] book several times and while empiricism does pivot around experience and the senses rather than reasoning [autoethnography] doesn't seem to conform to the verifiable/repeatable requirement. Auto-ethnography does seem to be highly subjective which is in contrast to what I understand empirical research to be—the reduction of subjectivity. (Christina)
>
> The authors alluded to the idea that the final product is a form of art. This turned 'upside-down' my notion of what research is. In my post-positivist mind if research is on one end of the spectrum (objective), art (subjective) is on the other. I teach genre-based writing and I felt that research writing especially should be clear and be written to inform the audience of results in a way that does not leave much opportunity to interpret. (John)

Despite their hesitation to say they are 'positivist' after the first readings with clear qualitative orientation, *many seem to feel rather uncomfortable and sceptical about 'radically' subjectivist research approach like autoethnography.*

Making Sense of the Story

Through engaging with a set of difficult readings, complex ideas, and new perspectives, online doctoral students are guided to break their misleading impressions of each other and nurture a culture of openness. Students are encouraged to articulate their feelings of uncertainty and insecurity and share their honest opinions on autoethnography—a radically subjectivist research methodology, which frequently provokes intensive debates among academics as well (see Campbell 2017). Although there has been a growing popularity of qualitative methodologies in educational research (Denzin and Lincoln 2008; Merriam 1988), most of my students seem to be inclined to positivist ideas. Even those students with some qualitative research experiences find radical ideas in autoethnography rather overwhelming. Of course, their previous choice of doing a qualitative study may have been made by their 'statistics anxiety' (Onwuegbuzie 2004) or 'mathematics anxiety' (Zeidner 1991) rather than a genuine appreciation of interpretivism.

This tension in doctoral students is more likely grounded in the general disposition of academia and the dominant social value of 'fact' (Moore 2004). The locus of 'the self' in a long tradition of scientific research, underpinned by the positivist paradigm, has been rigidly placed in the third space outside the research context, process, and findings (Smith 1983). Researchers' own perceptions, insights, and emotions are perceived as a source of harmful bias that pollutes research outcomes, and must be removed from one's inquiry (Hara 1995). Consequently, as the above

excerpts demonstrate, students tend to draw a clear separation between the researcher and the researched—feeling particularly nervous about using 'I' words in their academic writing. Thus, reading autoethnography in a personal and informal writing style (like this present chapter) makes many of them confused and uncomfortable. Such a shared sense of confusion and discomfort, however, turns the regular online discussion into an open dialogue with lots of emotions and opinions expressed—one critical step to create a community.

5.3 Discussing Vulnerability

Tutor's Autobiography

Now we are in March 2020. It took a full month for students to make sense of autoethnography as a legitimate research methodology. Whether they agree or not with the fundamental principles promoted by autoethnographers, they now know that there are people called autoethnographers in academia. While most students, such as Christina and John above, express their appreciation of my openness to share the personal and emotional journey of bringing autoethnography into this module, *they now worry and feel nervous about the idea of doing the same themselves. At the beginning of the module, no one seemed to be shy about sharing their professional self and research interests in their visual self-introduction post. However, interestingly enough, as soon as they are asked to think and share about difficult aspects of their own professional and educational experiences, many suddenly recall that they are 'a very private person'*. The discussion topic for the week is:

> Let's start brainstorming now! What are we going to do about this module's autoethnography project? ... We can start by thinking about your own personal experiences and emotions. Tell us one of your stories (related to your professional or educational experiences in a very broad sense) that currently make you feel uncomfortable, difficult … Please briefly describe your personal experiences that you want to understand more fully, deeply, and meaningfully by researching them and yourself.

Here, the notion of 'vulnerability' emerges. For example, Joe starts his post by saying:

> As a naturally shy and private person, I suddenly got the fear of having to write personal information about myself for others to read? … if I write about my job and something that I don't like, or that I want to improve, am I leaving [myself] vulnerable, will the reader think that I can't do it, or I am doing it wrong? … when [autoethnographers] put on paper what they are thinking and feeling about a person or a situation, it could affect the relationships or their jobs!

Margaret also has mixed feelings:

> On the one hand, I love learning more about myself, why I do things and how I react to certain situations. This is right up my street, so I am fascinated to see what I can come up with! On the other hand, I am an intensely private person. My work life and my home life are often completely separate, and I like to keep it this way… I am an introvert by nature so

> I expect [to] find the process very daunting and uncomfortable. I guess it'll be about finding the balance!

Even though these part-time students originally entered the module as full-time professionals, as Joe and Margaret's reflections hint, *they suddenly want to separate their study from their work*. It is clear to me that students have a very selective sense of how to construct, manage, and present their professional identity in the online learning space: *it should be not too personal, nor breaking into their 'home life'*. Even when their research interests are closely linked to their professional practice, if I take a close look at their chosen research subject, it is always about others. *That is, students are rather eager to study something problematic and unsatisfactory about 'others'*—most frequently students or other stakeholders of their practice. For example, 'why are students not using technology?' Even when they want to study their own teaching practice, they create an impersonalised teacher group and ask 'how can teachers use technology more effectively?'

When they (are asked to) discuss the potential topic for their autoethnography assignment, there is a strong urge to set up the right balance between being personal and being objective in their posts. I can hear *some students shout out at me, 'FINE…! I will share just a little but not too much', but I can also see they subsequently are unsure about how much is 'not too much'*. When facing the vulnerability of autoethnography, *some students are desperate to find somewhere safe. Unfortunately, the cohort is not yet perceived as a safe space to bring much of their honest (or unmanaged presentation of) self at this moment.* The positive side of this is, however, that I can now see the initial ambience of competition among students has almost gone away as they have a common enemy and worry. They mingle better, chatting about the new challenge they face. They openly and honestly share their concerns and discomfort over the vulnerability of the self in autoethnography.

To relieve the increasing tension, I write an announcement post: 'I know some of the autoethnographies shared in the module have scared you. However, your autoethnography does not have to be that dramatic.' I add: 'ordinary people's common stories and everyday experiences can be a great source of autoethnographic inquiry to establish a greater understanding of society and social relationships'. It is important to reassure students that they can share as much as they feel comfortable and appropriate. I also stress that no one will have access to their autoethnographies other than us (and a module moderator)—'What happens in Module 1, stays in Module 1!'

Making Sense of the Story

Online doctoral students tend to choose to conduct their thesis study on the topic closely connected to their professional practice; often within an institution that they are working at as an insider researcher (Unluer 2012). Thus, there seems no clear disconnection between the self, as a researcher, and the researched in this context. Nevertheless, striving for the perceived imperative of 'scientific' research and

'objective' researcher (Cohen et al. 2018), students tend to put significant effort into separating themselves from the researched. In this context, when embarking their autoethnography, in which the self becomes a subject of their research, doctoral students face a huge dilemma—they are intrigued by the idea of researching their own experiences, on the one hand, being nervous about revealing their own emotions, on the other. It is primarily the 'emotion' part that bothers students. Ironically, however, such a dilemma becomes a useful ground for students to open up themselves to each other. As the above excerpts demonstrate, doctoral students already start to write about 'fear' of writing autoethnography and 'worries' about being judged—another critical step to developing a trusting relationship. Therefore, the ethical issues posed by adopting autoethnography, not only on research practice but on teaching practice, are not minimal (see Doloriert and Sambrook 2009). It is important to stress the tutor's role in helping students to overcome their fears and engender a feeling of security, by setting up the principle of confidentiality of the 'cohort' conversation.

5.4 Embracing Vulnerability

Tutor's Autobiography

In the midst of the vulnerability and privacy panic, here they come! Several students have quickly adjusted to this radical subjectivism, enjoying the newly found freedom of projecting their voices in their research thinking and writing. These students become key helpers in creating a vulnerability-tolerant culture in the module. They take a big risk and 'bravely' open up themselves. These student-autoethnographers, who are genuinely interested in autobiographic writing (or writing about their personal experiences and deeper emotions) re-direct the flow of conversation by laying down their deep frustrations with professional and personal life. Their stories include being laid-off or bullied at work, having disabilities or difficult childhoods, experiencing challenges in parenthood, and so on. Some of them are born to be storytellers, naturally good at personalised and emotional writing. Their stories, and their voices, come across very powerfully—enough to enable others to have a break from the conversations on the danger of autoethnography.

The central theme running through most of those stories is, ironically, a lack of confidence and a sense of being undervalued. There is a strong feeling of dissatisfaction with their current professional life (more precisely, their institutional position and status). Many learning designers or educational technologists, for example, experience their voices and contributions being undervalued by their colleagues or academics. Academics and tutors, employed at a university on a casual contract, keep failing to get a permanent position. This is often attributed to not having a PhD, so it is hoped that becoming a doctor will bring them to a desired but currently unreachable place. These stories provide a very different narrative about their motivation to pursue a PhD from the ones in their earlier introductions (i.e., the

improvement of their practice and a genuine interest in research). *Those stories powerfully reveal secrets about online PhD students: their true feelings of insecurity that were initially hidden underneath the polished images and crafted sentences in their self-introduction posts.* That is a moment of realisation that triggers strong emotional reactions, not only from writers but also readers.

The more surprising part, therefore, comes slightly later when others start to reply to these stories and interact with the authors. There is an enormous sense of acknowledgement, agreement, and appreciation in the whole cohort now. Those shy and private peers also begin to share similar emotions and stories. As in 2018 and 2019, the term 'imposter syndrome' creeps into the discussion forum, and suddenly, almost everyone admits that they suffer from it and several want to look into that in their autoethnography assignment. It is an epiphany that disrupts and transforms their long-established perceptions and understanding about the self, and their social relationships with others. I can, metaphorically, see my students walking into dialogue in a Bakhtinian sense—a process of ideological becoming (Bakhtin 1981)—as an authentic self.

The epiphany is quickly shared across the cohort and there is a shared sense of relief. I remember my own such moments, too! In 2018, the year that I first introduced this methodology in this module, I had two epiphanies that have permanently changed my pedagogical beliefs about teaching PhD students on the programme. It was when I read a couple of students' brave posts of the kinds described above. The first realisation was that many students, who intimidated me with their posh professional images, were suffering from imposter syndrome. The second was that so was I! I was deeply hurt by those harsh comments from the previous cohort; and then, underneath all of the emotions, there was always a strong sense of self-doubt: 'I have just finished my PhD. Students must have noticed that I am not good enough to teach them'. It was a big relief to know that students felt the same way about themselves. I still have moments of self-doubt here and there in my teaching, but I do not try to hide it anymore. Instead, I share those moments with students to create a culture of acknowledging and supporting each other's vulnerability.

Making Sense of the Story

As soon as some members of the cohort abandon their carefully constructed images and share their genuine feelings and thoughts, the cohort quickly develops into a supportive community with a better sense of each other (i.e., a balanced level of social presence). The great pedagogical potential that autoethnography has for facilitating online students' authentic learning is realised when the individual members of the cohort community decide to embrace vulnerability in their learning and research. By engaging with autoethnography, the cohort experiences shared epiphanies—the realisation of weaknesses, both in the self and in others—and this opens up possibilities for individuals to become authentic beings in their online learning space. A task of facilitating authentic learning in adult education contexts is often approached as a cognitive matter such that learning tasks are designed to resemble

real-life problems, and learning outcomes (new knowledge) is intended to be applicable to adult learners' everyday practice (Lee 2020a). However, authentic learning is also ontological and social, which involves a dynamic process of experiencing disorienting dilemmas, engaging with open-ended dialogue, and transforming perspectives. As illustrated above, the process does not automatically occur. In particular, when it comes to online doctoral study, students' strong professional identities and effective presentations of the self make it even more challenging to become authentic. Thus, radical pedagogical interventions such as autoethnography, supported by well-designed learning activities, have the potential to facilitate authenticity in online learning communities.

5.5 Becoming a Community

Tutor's Autobiography

It is now June. I am again surprised how fast time goes! Despite the initial struggle to engage with ideas of researching and revealing the self, each student has successfully conducted their autoethnography. For the past 6 months, the cohort has experienced multiple epiphanies together and grown into a strong community. I now enjoy reading their final assignments—I feel privileged to read such open and in-depth accounts of their experiences and emotions. Fred, a colleague who has moderated my module also comments:

> Thanks for the chance to read these assignments—I became so fascinated by them…! You have drawn out some really good work from these students and they have shared experiences so very openly with you through this medium, which is both excellent and inspiring. Many of them have done really well for a first assignment, by integrating different data collection and analysis techniques into their studies. Well done!

At the end of the module, students briefly reflect on their experiences of conducting autoethnography. Students' experiences with, and views on, autoethnography are varied. To some, 'autoethnography is a stroke of genius!' (Linda). They have genuinely enjoyed the process of becoming an authentic self in their own research and sharing their findings with others. Robert reflects:

> A whole new world has been opened to me… the fact that we had to write an autoethnography was really smart on Kyungmee's side as she showed us that everyone has something to say. I think a lot or most of us doubted that we have anything to say at this point, but by writing an autoethnography we learned that our voices do count too and that we have indeed something to say even if it is 'only' about our own experience. Also, using qualitative data helped to validate that feeling.

Of course, however, doing autoethnography is not a happy story for everyone (some more happy stories are featured in my earlier writings in Lee 2019, 2020a). Not all students have been fully convinced about the legitimacy of autoethnography and the idea of researching the self. Here are Chloe and Peter reflecting on their learning at the end of the module:

> Coming from a quantitative background … I like the idea of the mixed methods approach. I think autoethnography is an interesting method, one which I may not use again, but I can see the value of having it on the first module. (Chloe)
>
> I haven't really enjoyed it; autoethnography is too self-indulgent for me … I can't imagine why anyone would be interested in what I have to say about myself and my experiences, and I'm not sure that I really want to tell people either … I've found it difficult to marry serious research with a personal subject and my research has felt superficial. (Peter)

Nevertheless, to me, the more important parts of their reflections are where they speak about their cohort community and each other, rather than about their perspectives on autoethnography:

> I was quite intimidated initially due to the skills and expertise of everyone else in the cohort. But as I moved through the module this became an excellent help and resource for me to tap into. I am happy to move forward with such a helpful and engaging bunch! (Chloe)
>
> [The module has been] enjoyable on the whole, especially in forming a supportive network of peers. Thank you everyone! [it has been] pleasing because I feel that we are part of the university community, that we can have our say, and that, as a cohort, we can influence the experience that we have. (Peter)

Regardless of the personal disposition toward autoethnography as a research methodology and the satisfaction with their module experiences, it is clear that there is now a strong sense of togetherness and emotional connection among the cohort community. It is surprising to see how open and honest students are in their final reflection posts. For example, Mina wrote about the disruptive changes in her perceptions during the module period as 'writing the autoethnography has not been easy and has forced me to come to the conclusion that I don't actually like my job very much'. Tom also reflected that 'writing the research paper made me unbearably sad for many days though. As I chose the topic, I suppose that is my own fault.' Given the lack of anonymity in their posts on the Moodle site, such level of emotional honesty was rare to see before I employed autoethnography. I was feeling a little unsure what and how to respond to these posts, and then other cohort members quickly started to reply with heartfelt sympathy, warm encouragement, and emotional support.

Making Sense of the Narratives

The quality of individual students' autoethnographies as learning and research outcomes varies across the cohort. Nevertheless, the pedagogical merit of employing autoethnography as a tool to support students' authentic learning experiences is clearly demonstrated in the openness of their autoethnographic narratives in the module assignments. Students have deeply engaged with their inner thoughts and emotions and social identities and relationships, which are often obscure and hidden, by doing autoethnography. The autoethnographic inquiry has helped them to construct a much more sophisticated understanding of who they are as a human, teacher, student, partner, parent, and researcher. Such an ontological understanding of the self may become a firm base for them to become independent and competent

doctoral researchers. Furthermore, the cohort has walked through the module and the 'first' doctoral challenge together as a community. Since the initial shock about the incomprehensibility of the first reading assignment and the subsequent discomfort caused by the radically subjective ideals of autoethnography, the cohort has been given multiple opportunities to encounter and overcome the fear of being real and vulnerable to each other. The meaningfulness of their social learning experiences is well-recorded in how the cohort share and discuss their module experiences with each other.

6 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a unique account of how doctoral students learn and interact with each other in a specific online learning environment. Each learner comes into an online learning environment with their long-held perspectives, professional identities and social relationships shaped and influenced by their daily practices and habits. Who they are in their everyday life strongly influences how they participate in learning activities and interact with others in their online space (Fawns et al. 2019; Lee 2018). In this particular group of doctoral students who are working professionals, pursuing their doctorates part-time, the interconnection between their daily practice and doctoral study tends to be stronger.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to see a genuine connection between their early online presentation of the self, which is often too professional and polished, and their actual self in everyday life. In turn, I have argued, the impression management behaviours initially enacted by my online doctoral students prevent them from having meaningful dialogues with each other and developing into a community. That is, an unsophisticated and blind pursuit of peer-to-peer interactions in online doctoral studies can be rather harmful to the community—although participants may feel others as 'real' people and think that they, themselves are seen as 'real' people to others. Acting like a human, rather than a machine, by using appropriate social cues, expressions, and skills, does not mean that he or she is being authentic. A large volume of conversation records and discussion threads created by peer-to-peer interactions does not mean that they are a genuine community, which embraces mutual vulnerability.

I have developed and utilised a set of pedagogical strategies to foster a genuine sense of social presence, achieved by a deeper understanding of each other as authentic beings with unique struggles and weaknesses. As described earlier in this chapter, my students open up in my modules when they are challenged and guided to admit and share their intellectual, professional, and personal difficulties with other cohort members. An autoethnography project that begins with sharing a story of everyday struggles and an emotional moment of negativity enables each student to face and overcome a fear of being vulnerable. Reciprocal openness and mutual support subsequently strengthen their bond and deepen their appreciation of each other. Consequently, the cohort develops into a safe community that embraces

vulnerability of its members who, in turn, remain authentic to the self and the community.

It is important to stress that the story introduced in this chapter is just one of many possible scenarios for how online doctoral studies can be facilitated and supported. As suggested, even within the same programme or module, students' learning experiences can be varied according to their personalities and tutors' pedagogical approaches. Given that online doctoral education is not a single, homogeneous, practice, any of the arguments made by this chapter need to be taken up with full consideration of contextual surroundings. I hope that my narrative provides enough details for readers to make sense of authentic aspects of the pedagogical situations that I have been striving to nurture.

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Towards Ecological Evaluation of Online Courses: Aiming for Thick Description

Tim Fawns and Christine Sinclair

1 Introduction: Evaluation in a Postdigital Context

In their paper on 'ecological teaching evaluation', Fawns et al. (2020) argued that 'datafied' market-driven evaluation practices privilege summative judgements of quality over the formative development of teachers and teaching. In this chapter, we consider how online postgraduate educators might move towards those authors' ecological view, proposing 'thick descriptions' as a promising approach to understanding not only the quality of already-run courses, but also how to improve future educational designs and practices in relation to particular purposes and values. Our main focus in this chapter is on the evaluation of courses, although we recognise that in higher education (HE), online course evaluation is itself an aspect of programme, curriculum and institutional evaluation. Course evaluation also inextricably links with the evaluation of teaching, though contemporary evaluation often uses proxies for teaching (Fawns et al. 2020) and the teacher's actual work is likely to be invisible (Hayes 2019). Our aim is to counter this marginalisation of teaching, beginning with a question about why that marginalisation happens.

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1.1 Whose Purposes Are Prioritised in Evaluation?

Like assessment of students (see Hounsell 2021, this book), the evaluation of teaching and courses can be formative (for learning and development) or summative (for accreditation, ranking, continuation) or a mix of both. Beyond those broad purposes, there are potentially many others (see, for example, the 'evaluation utilisation terms' in Onyura 2020). Moreover, different interests in the quality of online postgraduate courses and teaching might be categorised as pedagogical, aspirational or commercial. Although varying evaluation techniques can support a wide range of purposes, it is important not to lose sight of whose interests are predominantly served by a particular method and what it is able to reveal (Biesta 2009). For us, this is crucial to the focus of this book in situating online postgraduate education within its wider context.

Those who have the power to commission evaluations are likely to prioritise their own purposes and needs, which may not be the same as other stakeholders. Stakeholders in HE include, among others: university management and administration, governments, funding bodies, employers, commercial organisations, parents and partners. Our concern is that the interests of two key stakeholders in the evaluation of postgraduate online courses—teachers and students—are not currently prioritised. Rather than involving them in evaluation that empowers and improves teaching and learning (Fetterman et al. 2010), other more powerful stakeholders prioritise economic, informational and accountability needs.

For example, 'accountability' has been a watchword in higher education since the 1980s, considered by many writers as evidence of loss of trust in the sector and a move towards management control. Whereas few would deny the importance of accountability in its vernacular sense of being responsible, what we have been seeing is its more technical use: 'the duty to present verifiable accounts' (Lorenz 2012: 617). Harvey and Williams (2010) have pointed out that accountability does not tend to lead to improvement; indeed, a quarter of a century ago, Trow (1996) showed how accountability can lead to what we would now call 'gaming' the system. We have lost the sense of to whom we might be accountable and why. Accountability may simply be shaped by and restricted to the needs of the commissioning stakeholder. There is now a dearth of important pedagogical insights in the HE evaluation data available to us. Instead, we see the prioritisation of other values such as retention rates, showing a disproportionate emphasis on the needs of stakeholders other than students and their teachers.

Formal course evaluation data are generally collected centrally by HE institutions. Recently, the main sources of evaluative information about teaching have been standardised satisfaction surveys and output measures, such as grades, retention and future salary (Biesta 2009; Fawns et al. 2020). This approach suits aspirational and commercial interests, highlighting supposedly 'excellent' components of education. These discrete elements become aggregated for league tables—ranked lists of groups, individuals and institutions—which are now influential in all aspects of society (Esposito and Stark 2019). They are also often used in comparison studies

of educational methods, technologies, or student demographics. Herein, they are employed to make claims about the 'effectiveness' of courses, as well as to further market institutions and programmes. Although it can be gratifying and even useful to know that a league table positions one's university in the top 100 globally, that does not say much about *why* the course one is teaching is regarded so highly. Perhaps the only clue is a number: an averaged percentage of 'satisfaction' awarded to the course by students. Such claims are 'thin' descriptions of practice that lack the detail or nuance that is critical for course development and support for teaching.

Our chapter calls for the interests of teachers and students not to be subordinated to those of other stakeholders. This entails producing evaluative information about our postgraduate online courses beyond the measurement of discrete components and reductive compiling of the results. It centralises the pedagogical and formative value of evaluation in a culture of trust. Later, we will propose thick description as a move towards an 'ecological' perspective on teaching evaluation (Fawns et al. 2020) that counteracts the tendency to view educational variables in isolation as items to be used in creating ranked lists of 'excellence' or pitting one educational approach against another.

1.2 How Has Datafication Affected Course Evaluation?

The university sector's adoption of digital technology to support not only teaching but also its evaluation has offered access to hitherto unimaginable data, enthusiastically deployed by university administration and management. Yet that potential coincides with a period when evaluation in higher education has apparently been increasingly driven by both market positioning (Gourlay and Stevenson 2017) and compliance with university and national governance (Erickson et al. 2020). 'Datafied' approaches serve these concerns well, opening up evaluation to the interest of powerful and wealthy commercial organisations aiming to sell applications that will shape our understanding of teaching and learning (Williamson 2017). Williamson's exploration of the emergence of the new discipline of education data science brings out its underpinning assumptions:

> This psycho-informatic approach treats mental life and learning as if they could be known mathematically and computationally, and, having been made measurable, as if they could then be enhanced or optimized. (Williamson 2017: 106)

Simple numeric measures may lend the sheen of science to evaluation processes (Hanson 1993), particularly when bolstered by seemingly objective and systematic uses of technology to perform complex, opaque mathematics on proxies of quality. Yet they reduce our appreciation of the interplay between educational elements, thus diminishing our ability to apply results to new contexts (Biesta and van Braak 2020). They may obscure not only the educational practices involved, but also the context and theoretical understandings underpinning those practices (McLaughlin and Mitra 2001). These complex points can be illustrated through an example,

where the appeal of simple numbers has tempted people to seek clear, quantifiable conclusions about online learning.

> In an article written in March 2020, Jonathan Zimmerman made a plea to use the sudden shift to online teaching brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic, supported by masses of available online data, as a 'Great Online-Learning Experiment' that could settle a contested debate once and for all:
>
> > at institutions that have moved to online-only for the rest of the semester, *we should be able to measure how much students learn* in that medium compared to the face-to-face instruction they received earlier. (Zimmerman 2020, emphasis added)

We believe that this example reflects a view of education that leads to unwarranted expectations of what data can tell us. At least five questionable assumptions underpin Zimmerman's request:

1. The modality for delivering education is responsible for the educational outcomes of learners.
2. The modality can be isolated as a variable for scientific study.
3. The pandemic provides an ideal setting for a controlled experiment on the virtues of classroom vs. online learning.
4. The indicator of merit in the evaluation (the 'evaluand') is a summative outcome of how much is learned.
5. It is possible to measure this evaluand.

In March 2020, when Zimmerman wrote this piece, buildings in schools and universities were closing in many countries and 'solutions' had to be found to this crisis caused by the pandemic. Potential solutions (e.g. a particular software system or platform) may have been brought in without sufficient understanding of how that technology shapes and is shaped by the setting in which it is introduced (Enriquez 2009; Fawns 2019). The technology should not itself be seen as fully responsible for any outcomes, positive or otherwise, though it will certainly have some influence.

There have already been many comparison studies between online and on-campus learning, in the main concluding that there is no significant difference, with various implications erroneously drawn (Lockee et al. 2001). Importantly, a lack of significant difference between outcome measures should not be interpreted as *'there is no difference'* between the two categories being compared. Rather, it is an inconclusive result derived from an invalid assumption: that a modality can be isolated as a 'variable' for scientific study, with learning seen as a dependent variable. This fails to take into account other variables that together affect teaching and learning, which would include student characteristics and circumstances, pedagogic activities and many other factors. Zimmerman is repeating this error from the now widely-discredited media comparison studies.

In the particular context that Zimmerman wanted to exploit, there were even more variables than usual affecting what is happening in classrooms and online. Williamson wrote, in a blog post critiquing Zimmerman's idea:

> Treating a pandemic as an experiment in online learning reduces human suffering, fear and uncertainty to mere 'noise' to be controlled in the laboratory, as if there is a statistical method for controlling for such exceptional contextual variables. (Williamson 2020)

Related to this, the pandemic has also brought many forms of inequality to light which cannot now be ignored (Czerniewicz et al. 2020). At a simple illustrative level, 'online learning' will be experienced differently by students with laptops and students having to share a single mobile phone with parents and siblings—and some do not even have access to that.

It is also important to consider what would be evaluated here. Broadly, it is 'online learning' vs. classroom learning, but Zimmerman's specific focus is on 'what is learned'. Soon after Zimmerman's article appeared, Hodges et al. (2020) suggested that the approaches that emerged in the Covid-19 pandemic should be named 'emergency remote teaching' rather than online learning, and evaluated accordingly with a focus on the context, input and process as well as the product (following Stufflebeam and Zhang 2017). We also suggest that 'products' might include potential harms alongside potential benefits, and these harms would not show up in quantified measurements of learning (see Stone et al. 2021, this book; Bussey 2021, this book, for powerful examples of such potential harms).

The final assumption we have identified from 'Zimmerman's experiment' is that this evaluand—the summative learning from two different modalities—can actually be measured. This view of learning is particularly associated with a cognitivist paradigm of education, focused on memory and retrieval (see Baker et al. 2019 for an overview of contemporary paradigms of education). This paradigm puts a strong emphasis on testing, and results of tests are likely to be regarded as a proxy for learning. Thus, in our judgement, Zimmerman's proposal for an experiment is to test what students can remember during a period of education in a crisis, and to attribute to technology any differences from the quantity of things they could previously remember. The resulting data would show whether classroom or online learning is 'better'. We disagree with this suggestion and the assumptions on which it is based, but our inquiry has encouraged us to further explore the notion of proxies for learning and teaching.

1.3 What Counts as Learning and Teaching in Contemporary Course Evaluation?

Counting or measuring learning is far from straightforward. We might be able to count retention of basic facts, and ignore the myriad purposes and values of education. We could use grades from in-course assessments, assuming that these assessments (which are part of the courses being evaluated) will generate 'accurate'

measures of learning. The late philosopher Gilbert Ryle critiqued preoccupation with retention as a 'very thin and partial notion of teaching and learning', involving 'the forcible insertion into the pupil's memory of strings of officially approved propositions.' (Ryle 2009a: 467). Measurement is further complicated by different understandings of the concept of learning (Hodkinson et al. 2008). As other chapters of this book show, there are many different forms of learning (Boyd 2021; Hounsell 2021; Lee 2021; Jones 2021; Marley et al. 2021), and many factors that influence learning beyond the methods or modality of a course. Indeed, the purposes and challenges of education can be obscured by the very emphasis on learning. Biesta has argued that 'learning' is a term that 'denotes processes and activities but is open—if not empty—with regard to content and direction' (Biesta 2009: 39).

Measuring the quality of teaching is equally problematic. Institutions tend to adopt similar approaches to evaluating teaching or courses, regardless of the context. For example, in online postgraduate taught (PGT) education, context, needs, methods and outcomes are importantly different from other forms of education (Aitken 2020), yet very similar approaches are taken to evaluation. Governments, in particular, are keen to standardise measurement of teaching quality. In the UK, for instance, the demand for accountability gave rise to Teaching Quality Assessment (TQA) in the 1990s, followed by several other organisations and initiatives, most recently the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) in 2017. Many scholars have critiqued these initiatives (Gourlay and Stevenson 2017) highlighting problems with evaluating only what is easily measurable, and contesting the implicit notions of 'excellence' and underpinning ideologies. Our own main concern is that this might reduce important qualities of teaching to meaningless or questionable claims. Statements such as 'This is excellent teaching' or 'students learn more with online learning' are thin and empty without accompanying details about contexts, contents, roles, and mechanisms.

A complex situation such as student learning affected by a change of approach during a pandemic is certainly worth evaluating. Rather than trying to discount, simplify or control the complexity, it would be better to incorporate it into our thinking about 'developmental evaluation' (Patton 2010). We offer a perspective that recognises this.

2 An Ecological Perspective on Higher Education

Fawns et al. (2020) propose that an ecological perspective would help to capture the complexity of the activity and contextual factors that make up educational programmes. An ecological perspective is a way of understanding how students are connected to all of the various elements contributing to their learning: tasks, ideas, tools, objects, environments, people—as well as their own previous and current experiences. We should explore how this assemblage functions in concert, rather than attempting to simplify it to suit available but limited measurement processes. A more holistic approach to evaluation will avoid the problems described above of

standardised, fragmented education, thin and partial descriptions, and inappropriate proxies for learning and/or teaching. The ecological perspective provides a way of seeing past the instrumental views that still beset accounts of learning environments, particularly in relation to the use of technology in education (Damşa et al. 2019).

This alternative perspective helps us see that it is not methods (e.g. lectures vs. problem-based learning) nor modality (e.g. online, hybrid, or on-campus) that are the main determinants of quality, nor even of outcomes (see also Onyura et al. 2016). Quality is determined by the situated activity, and interaction and interrelation of teachers and students, within the context and infrastructure of the institution. It emerges from the particular designs, scaffolds and supports that help students make use of available methods, resources and affordances; it can be found in spaces where students couple their cultural and academic backgrounds with the conventions and culture of the course. The quality of any particular element is then understood as part of a context-dependent set of relationships with the others. This view is radically at odds with the claims that technology is either a neutral tool for achieving particular pedagogic goals (instrumentalism), or the main determinant of what will happen (determinism) (Hamilton and Friesen 2013). It also steers us away from those competitive but inappropriate comparisons between online and on-campus classrooms.

2.1 Developing Quality and Evaluation in an Ecological Way

To adopt an ecological perspective, we need approaches to evaluation that allow shared understanding and purpose, both of the course itself and the evaluation of it. We need to know the context of the evaluation, and underlying assumptions—pedagogic, institutional, disciplinary and social—affecting working practices and material conditions in that context. The manifestation of quality (the evaluand) emerging from the activities, interactions and relationships within the context is likely to depend on a number of factors, which we attempt to tease out below, starting with evaluative approaches we can see in other chapters of this book.

A key issue is that students' experiences of their courses can change over time. Boyd (2021, this book) gives the example of an activity done in one course, that students return to and build on in the following year. The value of each activity looks different when considered across both courses. Lee's (2021) chapter of this book shows how students do not always become aware of their underlying motivation to learn until they have had certain transformative experiences. Both of these chapters show the importance of taking development into account: there will be different results from the same evaluand at different times. Additional complexity arises when courses are viewed in the light of a full programme and beyond. In Marley et al. (2021, this book), Jeremy Moeller, an online PGT graduate, describes the value of his programme manifesting over a number of years.

> 'I completed the programme in 2016, but I reflect on it often. Some of the benefits of the programme were only apparent to me years later.' ([PAGE])

Moeller explains that familiarising himself with online methods, environments, forms of interaction, and the programme culture, took time. Early evaluations ('I was not comfortable at all with the weekly discussion sessions… they felt slightly loose and unstructured to me') gave way to later ones, where he had come to appreciate the different approach taken and how it related to his online context. Later still, he came to understand how certain educational principles could have value across modalities, and he began to emulate aspects of the approach taken by his online programme in his own on-campus teaching.

These examples indicate that the timing of an evaluation will affect the information it gives us. What can seem like a negative 'outcome'—discomfort with discussions—may simply indicate a stage of development. The information can still be useful in considering any steps that need to be taken to support a student, scaffold an activity, or signpost what is happening. But the (informed) judgement may be that no remediation is necessary at all at this stage. There are several implications from this situation: teachers need to be able to tolerate negative responses as part of their own development as well as their students'; teachers need some autonomy in deciding when to take remediating action; the timing of an evaluation should be appropriate to the purpose of the evaluation, which is also likely to be relevant to the purpose of the course. And we particularly want to highlight how these examples show that evaluation can be *useful* in different ways, especially for development. For detailed analysis of usefulness, see Onyura (2020) on evaluation utilisation and Patton (2010) on developmental evaluation.

The student view in the above examples is therefore crucial, but must be seen in the light of timing, context and purpose. Before starting a course or programme, students may not be in a position to predict, or even conceive of, the potential benefits that they will derive by the end (Aitken et al. 2019). Konnerup et al. (2019) argue for designing in opportunities for 'springboards for development', where students and teachers jointly develop new ways of doing things. This approach gives intention to something that happens anyway: students inevitably contribute to the design of a course, even when it is prescriptive. Students 'complete' designs by reinterpreting them, and by co-configuring their learning environments (Goodyear and Carvalho 2019; Fawns et al. forthcoming).

Teachers and universities are not in control of the student's ecology: each student has their own, although there are clear areas of overlap and interdependence. Peters and Romero (2019) looked at the strategies online HE students use to configure their own learning ecologies across a formal/informal learning continuum. The result is a balance of control, wrought through design, policy, practice and subversion. Students subverting the teacher's intentions, and the course's expected learning outcomes, may not be a problem. Students are not always compliant, for a number of reasons, including many good ones. This is recognised as an inevitable aspect of design for learning, and the associated need for teachers to redesign as they go (Goodyear and Dimitriadis 2013). Indeed, if students did not learn things

other than prescribed learning outcomes, then the attainment of graduate attributes or professional values would be impossible (Boud and Soler 2016). Evaluation that allows for expression of such elements is likely to entail reflection and dialogue and less likely to contain only 'measurable' features.

It is clear, then, that ecological evaluation cannot be entirely reduced to numbers, and may require qualitative and dialogic approaches to achieve its purposes. This is a significant challenge, since evaluation often aims to convey information about educational quality simply and concisely to a range of stakeholders, to facilitate easy comparison across courses, teachers, or institutions. Even if we do not wish to rank and compare, we often still need to convey the results of evaluation clearly and concisely. An ecological perspective implies that effective evaluation needs appropriately 'thick' descriptions of what has been going on, while still taking into account the practicalities of existing systems and practices.

3 The Case for Thick Descriptions in Evaluations of Postgraduate Online Education

Standardised questionnaires and measurements of outputs generate descriptions that are useful for ranking and marketing but are too 'thin' for developing teaching practice. While teachers need to be aware of any findings of such measures, they also need a sense of the context and other variables to avoid misinterpreting, overemphasising, or misattributing results to discrete elements of teaching such as modality. Crucially, educators need to be able to see how to make improvements, not only to a particular aspect of teaching or course design but to the whole system that embeds it, and to be able to contribute to dialogues about such systems.

3.1 Thin and Thick Descriptions

We refer again to the work of philosopher Gilbert Ryle to propose thick descriptions as a way of supporting shared meaning. They provide a more contextualised explanation of a given indicator in terms of both intention and cultural practice:

> …thick description is a many-layered sandwich, of which only the bottom slice is catered for by that thinnest description. (Ryle 2009b: 497)

Thickness is not just about adding layers of data, however; such layers may make the description richer, while not fully accounting for what is actually going on. The layers of thick description must also convey something of intention, prior knowledge, and conventions within a culture. As Freeman notes:

> thick description designates both the discrete data available for interpretation and a strategy to interpret and represent that data. (Freeman 2014: 828)

Thus, thick description must help us understand quality in relation to the lens through which it is viewed. A key feature of thick descriptions is that they have:

> success-versus-failure conditions additional to and quite different from… [their thin counterparts] (Ryle 2009b: 498)

In explaining differences between thin and thick description, Ryle contrasts two boys: one has an involuntary twitch; the other is winking conspiratorially. The thinnest description is that each boy is contracting an eyelid. Yet, as Ryle points out, there is a huge difference—the twitch has no intentional meaning, but there are many layers of possible meaning behind the wink (e.g. the boy could be parodying another boy's clumsy attempt to wink; he might be rehearsing such a parody). Only with sufficient information *and* its interpretation can we appropriately understand the wink in relation to its purpose, and the situation where it is enacted, to get behind the surface meaning of an ambiguous indicator.

Thick descriptions have been employed in a research context, most notably by Clifford Geertz, an anthropologist who borrowed the term from Ryle and applied it to culture and ethnography (Geertz 1973). In research, thick descriptions help us to make sense of complex phenomena and dynamic contexts by providing a framework for interpreting the researcher's understanding. In education, thick descriptions might be recognised as a form of evaluative argument (Ory 2000) involving pre-interpreted, theorised explanations of the purpose, rationale, situated activity and success (or otherwise) of the activity relating to a course.

The notion of thin and thick description might help unpack the ostensibly objective kind of evaluation prized by endeavours like the UK Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). In a stringent critique of the use of the TEF, Tomlinson and colleagues noted that:

> Qualities that do not align to the logic of the competitive market ordering of HE or that cannot be expressed in quantities disappear[,] are marginalised and become devalued. (Tomlinson et al. 2018: 10)

The results are then ordered in a way that ranks universities for quality—entailing a thin and, in this case, very biased view of what quality means for universities. By further labelling the results of ranking as indicators of 'teaching excellence', the creators of the TEF elide thicker descriptions of what the quality of education actually manifests. The thinner the description, the more likelihood there is of such misrepresentation (or, at best, ambiguity). Tomlinson et al. (2018) do not use the language of thick description, but refer to the Bourdieusian term 'symbolic violence' to indicate the sleight of hand that our use of the thin/thick distinction also uncovers. Ranking universities in order of teaching excellence creates a thin, market-driven description that obscures many different and competing understandings of what teaching is actually about. To counteract this, teachers and course designers may wish to undertake their own evaluation to supplement standardised, institution-wide processes.

3.2 Examples of Thick Descriptions in Educational Literature

In the three examples below, we have found evidence of attention to meaning, interpretation, culture and context in evaluation. They show how theory and values can be used to interpret and even elicit shared understandings. These examples are from published papers, and though the term 'thick description' is not used, each incorporates it—that is, they indicate what teachers and students were actually doing or attempting to do within a specific context and how its success or failure might be interpreted. The examples cover online and campus-based work as well as undergraduate and postgraduate. They have been selected for specific points we want to make for the postgraduate online context, which we draw together in the following section.

Example 1: Applying a Theoretical Lens to Interpret One's Own Practice (On-Campus Masters)

We have argued that most common forms of formal course evaluation do not provide a sufficiently full picture to inform future teaching in specific contexts. For this, teachers need to create their own descriptions, reconciling new information with the emerging overall picture through the application of a theoretical or praxis-based lens. Consider this extract from a largely negative account of his own teaching on embodied cognitive science by John van der Kamp, published with colleagues:

> One of us (John) coordinates and teaches a course that addresses motor skill learning… As the teacher, John defines (or confirms) the intended learning outcomes, chooses course content, teaching and learning activities, and assessment methods… John uses a compendium of classical and current scientific papers and book chapters, the contents of which are assessed in a written exam. The course is organized in lectures and tutorials… by and large, John does the talking, the students listen and make notes (hopefully)… During the tutorials, students are meant to do the talking and thinking, but John often finds himself interrupting discussions to correct—in his view—misapprehensions of theory and methods or to further explicate. In short, despite good intentions, John's teaching is largely prescriptive… As a teacher, John makes all the choices without consulting prospective students, though he does consider the suggestions made by students in the previous year's course evaluations. By and large, students have no say in course content, it is enforced upon them and they have to adapt to it (cf. Freire 2008). This being said, students… show up in high numbers, except when exams are approaching. Also, students do value the course and teaching highly, giving ratings of quality of course content, lectures, and tutorial of approximately 4.5 on a 5-point scale. (van der Kamp et al. 2019: 3)

Despite positive ratings, John does not simply accept the results of his course surveys. Instead, he worries that they may reflect the implicit adoption, by John and his students, of a transmission model of education. More precisely, he uses Freire's (2008) concept of 'banking education' in which teachers 'deposit' knowledge into the students. The authors recognise a tension between the way John teaches and his beliefs—informed by his area of expertise—about how people learn:

> …the assumptions underlying John's teaching—as presumably that of many colleagues—deeply conflict with the assumptions underpinning his science. Even though he emphatically tries to show students that radical embodied cognitive science deserves careful consideration, John does so by regulating the way in which they encounter it. John merely deposits it upon the students. (van der Kamp et al. 2019: 3–4)

As negative as this account of John's teaching is, the purpose is to help John and others think through the relationship between his philosophy of teaching and learning and his teaching practice. Further, John criticises not only his own practice but also the structures where it sits. He brings together several sources of information, including standardised evaluation forms, but considers them through the critical lens of his own philosophy, which he has developed through thinking, talking, reading and writing about embodied cognition and related ideas. This is an important point—it is not feasible to construct an ecological evaluation without being clear on what one believes education to be and what is important within that. Armed with this clarity, teachers can then analyse their own practice through that theoretical lens, as John has done. They can compare their beliefs with their actions, and with the structures that support and constrain educational practices. John's example shows that values and philosophy are important in underpinning thick descriptions that can run counter to available data and surface conceptions. It is interesting to note the tension between this thick description and the thin description of the student ratings. This also highlights a limitation of this thick description, from an ecological point of view: student voices are not considered, beyond student surveys which are largely dismissed, though they do emerge later when the authors describe John's practice following this evaluation. John's discomfort with the mismatch between his values and his practice has led him to make changes in a way that highlights the developmental benefits of a holistic approach to evaluation.

Example 2: Attention to Timing, Context and Student Perspectives (3rd Year Undergraduate Online)

Muir et al. (2019) set out to counter limitations of traditional end of semester questionnaires by combining weekly surveys and repeated interviews (eight for each student participant) across a semester. Their longitudinal approach to evaluation elicits 'rich' descriptions of the complexity of student engagement over time in relation to the practices of their teachers and the conditions in which they learn. They show that engagement with a course is not fixed or stable, as suggested by satisfaction ratings, but fluctuates over time, in relation not only to the instruction within the course, but also to factors outside it (e.g. personal circumstances).

The authors provide a detailed account of one participant, Angela, highlighting the depth of information and insight that this process generated. The account contains thick as well as rich description; it embodies the contextual approach we have

endorsed, including the intention of meaningful interpretation. Further, their description shows that Angela's impression of different elements of the programme was related not just to what kind of element it was, but also to its particular qualities. For example:

> Engagement was boosted by 'catchy, interactive' and practical learning activities, while heavy, theory-based reading was 'hard'. (Muir et al. 2019: 270)

One particular week, readings were a key theme:

> 'long, laborious readings' dominated her study schedule but were disengaging, particularly if written in technical 'jargon'. Obversely, one assigned reading that helped her see 'the big picture' was 'fantastic', prompting interactivity with the text- book itself: she described 'highlights [. . .] and Post-It notes everywhere because it just really consolidated what I knew.'. (Muir et al. 2019: 271)

This shows the problem with assigning fixed characteristics to a particular technology, resource, method or modality—as many writers do, including Zimmerman (2020) in calling for the 'Great Online-Learning Experiment'. Angela's experience shows the interrelation of factors: the timing of her encounter with materials, the way they are presented, their relevance to set learning tasks, and the interactions with teachers and peers that support her engagement with that resource.

The context around this example of thick description is important. We learn about Angela's combination of part-time study and part-time work and her adult children who live at home, as well as how she identifies her approach to learning. Angela is not representative of all students, and her account alone is insufficient. However, she is an important 'local voice' whose insights can help us understand some of the design parameters and teaching considerations in online and, indeed, all kinds of education. Where each tick on a standard questionnaire is supposed to be representative of a student in such a complex set of circumstances, a thick description can tell us something about what that student is trying to do in their context. Example 2 does this by heavily featuring a particular student voice and context, and examining engagement over the duration of a course. However, it lacks the clear theoretical lens of example 1, and is primarily focused on workload, with limited interrogation of the concept of engagement or of the educational purposes in play. Thus, teachers can use this description to think about the balance of tasks and student workload, but may need additional information to inform the ways in which their designs and practices can support students to engage with and complete those tasks.

Example 3: Combining Academic and Professional Meaning-Making (Postgraduate Online)

Turning our attention now to the even more complex world of the part-time professional online postgraduate student, we feature a paper by Aitken (2020) that has been influenced by the ideas of ecological and holistic evaluation (Fawns et al.

2020). As noted by Fawns and colleagues, teachers on Aitken's programme—an online MSc in Clinical Education—were already aware that their programme was satisfactory to students: they had scored 100% for overall student satisfaction in a Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey. This was reassuring but incomplete:

> The PTES score does little to help us understand the extent to which satisfaction is derived from overcoming such challenges, or from meeting less demanding expectations (Fawns et al. 2020: 5)

Aitken (2020) uses dialogues with students and staff to evaluate the perceived impact of postgraduate online education. She considers students' actions and interactions through technology and through their material contexts, extending to both academic and clinical settings. Aitken makes her theoretical influences and methods explicit, and provides considerable detail through her use of activity theory as a framework for analysis. This allows her to generate thick descriptions through focusing on what people are doing in a specific context—with its own conventions, forms of mediation, and division of labour. In the context of part-time online professional postgraduates, the division of labour is very different from that of full-time, campus-based undergraduate school-leavers. An excerpt from the paper shows how the author takes pains to bring the professional and academic elements together:

> There was a clear focus on helping students' professional development, not merely delivering academic knowledge, with a sense of encouraging students to think creatively and question more. Consideration was shown by staff in choosing mediating artefacts that would more clearly encourage criticality in students. In this way, an outcome in the programme system has the potential to become a tool or object in the student's professional system… (Aitken 2020: 7)

Aitken identifies rich themes in the students' experiences of learning and the associated implications for teaching and course design. Her thick description also considers the goals and study conditions of a particular online postgraduate context. Aitken's themes indicate the dynamic relationship between study and clinical practice, influences that go beyond online exchanges, effects on professional identity, and individual practices, to the expansion of their networks. This then gives Aitken a valuable focal point for development.

These three examples have provided insights into how these particular courses were *enacted*: through teaching according to espoused or actual principles, through learning over a period of time in complex conditions, and through careful course design in relation to a professional curriculum. Remillard (2005) used the notion of the 'enacted curriculum' in a review of mathematical curricula to not only differentiate the intended curriculum from what actually happens, but also to highlight the agency of teachers (and others) in realising curricular intentions. Like the notion of thick description, the short expression *enacting the curriculum* points to the context, purpose and interpretation of the activities and interactions involved, helping us understand how we might determine the success or failure conditions.

4 Features of Thick Descriptions in Evaluation

We are proposing thick description as a way of articulating the complexity underlying the manifestation of quality in educational courses. Adopting thick descriptions for course evaluation facilitates integrated understanding of how individual beliefs, course structure, purposes, intentions, activities, resources, and agents interact to influence course quality. The three examples above show that each thick description is context-dependent, so we cannot be prescriptive about how to 'enact the curriculum', nor should we be. However, we recommend that thick descriptions for course evaluation include the following features:

1. *Explicit articulation of how the curriculum is being enacted.* This will include action and interaction by teachers, students or other agents. It should also articulate any findings concerning what the enactment of the curriculum means to these agents.
2. *Examination of the value of both the planned curriculum and its enactment.* This could show how the human agents interact with curriculum materials previously prepared, and any potential differences between intentions and enactment.
3. *Exploration of potential value for future development of teachers and courses.* For example, the evaluation might support taking forward something that worked, dropping or adapting something that didn't, or exploiting an unanticipated outcome.
4. *Meaningful involvement of students in the evaluation process*. Student voices might be heard partly through evaluation surveys. However, conversations with students about their experiences and understandings of them are bound to yield richer insights.
5. *Accounts of the physical and/or virtual environments and social structure of a course*. This might include a rationale for these aspects of design (Goodyear and Carvalho 2014). Additionally, there can/should be evaluative inquiry into how agents interact with these structural elements. There may be instances where there was little or no intentional design, but that still warrants reflection: what is part of the design, what is emergent, and what can that tell us?

Our own examples of thick descriptions have been drawn from research literature, for practical and ethical reasons. However, we believe such descriptions can be developed for scholarly teaching, if they are not indeed already present through dialogues and informal feedback. Our five suggestions above indicate that teachers attempting to 'thicken' their available evaluation might explicitly consider the significance of any evaluative information and their interpretations of it. Significance and interpretation are more important than adding layers of description (Freeman 2014). In other words, we need a contextualised interpretation of our data and how different elements relate to each other, translating this holistic idea into language that is meaningful to others (Geertz 1973). Using a theoretical lens is one way of doing this. Another is to articulate a set of values (i.e. what is important to you in your teaching and why), and then use this to consider the data.

This latter point might help us approach a considerable obstacle to ecological evaluation: the limited extent to which educators feel able to give open and honest accounts, especially in a risk-averse, market-driven economy. The availability of values-driven thick descriptions can be useful where it is necessary to explain the context behind unsatisfactory metrics, or where a clear plan for informed change is called for. As Onyura (2020) points out, there can be tension between the use of evaluation to justify prior actions and argue for resources, and to generate new knowledge (about a course, one's students, one's teaching).

A related consideration is the extent to which it matters whether the values and rationales espoused in our thick descriptions are true accounts of prior intentions, or post-hoc rationalisations. Discrepancies between what was designed and what transpired highlights the limited extent to which one can design the actions or outcomes of students or, indeed, teachers. Indeed, example three brings into question the desirability of such control, particularly in the context of online postgraduate education, where significant value is found in emergent connections between disciplines, settings and cultures (see also the chapter by Marley et al. 2021, this book). Such understandings would be of value to many teachers, managers and students. Thus, thick descriptions within evaluation can have a formative aspect, not only to the evaluator, but also to those who have access to these descriptions, creating additional opportunities for reflection on practice.

Onyura notes that learning from evaluation is aided by 'explicit clarification and examination of the theoretical underpinnings' (2020: 4). This knowledge need not be restricted to the teachers on a course: it can be distributed across teaching networks through dialogue and dissemination, thus contributing to the quality of teaching beyond the evaluated programme. We might even argue that teachers should receive credit not only for how well their teaching went, but also for how well they have evaluated that teaching, including generating rich understandings of how to improve practice in the future. In such a system, honesty, even about one's failings as a teacher, emerges as a positive attribute, as we saw in Example 1. Clearly, this will work best within a framework of trust between educators and managers, and between students and teachers. Still, by giving evaluation a formative focus, local stakeholders and their trusted colleagues can benefit from evaluation information even where it is not 'politically acceptable or actionable' (Onyura 2020: 4). Indeed, we argue that without a culture that allows such openness, the development of teachers will be stunted. We propose that even modest moves towards ecological evaluation, enacted through the generation and sharing of thick descriptions, can be a starting point for repairing the damage to trust that a focus on accountability to market forces has done to the university sector.

5 Conclusion

Thin descriptions of higher education teaching, supported by datafied approaches, are important to governments, administrators, managers and marketing specialists, and those who aim to promote the excellence of competing universities. University

teachers and their students, however, need thicker descriptions of practice to enable them to understand and develop their joint endeavour to achieve pedagogical intentions in an atmosphere of trust. They can thicken existing thin descriptions by interpreting them in relation to reflections on practice and pedagogical theory, dialogues and interpretations that take account of all the components involved, along with the purposes and intentions of the evaluation itself. An ecological perspective on evaluation of postgraduate online teaching can take into consideration the interrelations between the different topics covered in this book, including practices and labour of teaching (Aitken and Hayes 2021) and assessment and feedback (Hounsell 2021), and the diverse contexts of students (Boyd 2021; Lee 2021; Marley et al. 2021; Stone et al. 2021), institutions (Fawns et al. 2021), and teachers (Bussey 2021; Buchanan 2021). Academic educators and researchers will need time and a conducive atmosphere to put these ideas into practice.

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Inclusivity in Online Postgraduate Teaching

Sonia Bussey

1 The Onerous Labour of Online Teaching

Technology, the Internet and electronic consumerism are an integral part of day-to-day life, with new products frequently promoted as making life easier, bringing immediacy and a degree of automation to users (Oblinger and Hawkins 2005). One of the benefits of an online postgraduate programme, in contrast to more traditional on-campus education, that is often cited, is the flexibility it affords students to fit study into otherwise busy lives (Oblinger and Hawkins 2005). This is often true from the student perspective, as synchronous activities are limited, and the prevailing asynchronous discussion boards and other activities limit rigid adherence to the group timetable inherent with face-to-face sessions. Students are largely able to study where and when they choose and are not constrained by the office hours of the university.

This 24-h study culture means that students may well require out of hours support if they have a problem. While *frequently asked questions* documents and *how to* guides have some utility, students having problems can be tempted to bypass these resources in favour of contacting the course team directly. With students in different time zones, and who are more likely to work and have caring responsibilities (Stone et al. 2021 this book), out of hours support is particularly important for online programmes. There is a clear need to manage student expectations and clarify the expected way that they will engage with the university before enrolment on online learning programmes so that they have a clear idea what to expect (Quinsee and Hurst 2005).

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Students taking online courses have been reported as having increased expectations of their teaching staff in relation to responsiveness to messages and learning activities that extend beyond normal working hours (Aitken and O'Carroll 2020; Redmond 2011). Students may also expect more individual support than traditional on-campus models as they work through tasks, discussions and make forum posts, which can lead to the teacher spending many hours of time on online learning support that may have been designated in their job plan for other activities, such as research (Islam et al. 2015; Littlejohn and Higgison 2003). Maintaining appropriate work/life boundaries is clearly complex for online teachers, but essential to safeguard their own sense of wellbeing.

Students online can be more likely to seek *just in time* support as they perceive teachers as being more available. This can become self-fulfilling prophecy as teachers can face complaints if they are thought slow to respond (Bennett and Lockyer 2004). This may be a sign that online learning is held to higher account than an on-campus equivalent. Blurring of boundaries does not only occur between a teacher's home and work lives. There can also be a blurring of role boundaries between staff and students (where staff expect students to read widely to propose answers to questions as independent postgraduate learners, and students expect that information to be provided as part of the online learning materials) and between academic, administrative and support staff roles (Quinsee and Hurst 2005).

There is an implicit obligation on teachers to respond to questions in shared online spaces, or moderate potentially inappropriate student comments as soon as possible, as these issues (which can be felt to reflect on that teacher) remain visible to all until resolved (Gustafson and Gibbs 2000). Consequently, the teacher can feel that they are never quite 'off-duty' with moderation and email responsibilities during the evening, at weekends and even during annual leave and holiday periods. This is further intensified with the use of smart phone apps and email push notifications which, although ostensibly there to make life easier for the teacher, can prove invasive. This is particularly relevant within the postgraduate medical teaching setting, where students may be combining their studies with a 24-h clinical rota or working in different time zones. In contrast to undergraduate students, whose lectures are usually conducted during regular office hours, postgraduate teaching sessions may also be scheduled in the evenings or early mornings to take into account international time differences or offer flexibility for students to attend at a time to best suit them. This can mean that postgraduate students have increased expectations of teaching staff to respond to queries during those times (without necessarily realising that staff may only be paid for standard office hours, or may work adjusted hours to take into account those additional out-of-hours teaching sessions).

Online teaching can never exist exclusively within the digital domain, it always involves a combination of digital, biological, material and social elements (Jandrić et al. 2018). From a workload perspective, it is broadly accepted that developing an online course is more time intensive than developing an equivalent face-to-face course, certainly in the initial stages (Chiasson et al. 2015; Kenny and Fluck 2017). Furthermore, the development of accessible materials (such as additional production of specific materials for students with visual limitations) is more time

consuming and expensive than the equivalent, single-format material (Björk et al. 2008). There are additional elements of teaching that become more visible in online programmes. The teaching role contains multiple dimensions that require considerable headspace and can feel more intensive. Specifically:

- Student-teacher interactions are more likely to occur during the whole week rather than a scheduled session, which can lead to a fragmented and psychologically demanding workload for teachers (Bennett and Lockyer 2004).
- There are an increased number of channels by which students expect and seek support, including discussion boards, emails, telephone, messages via administrative colleagues, text and video conference (Quinsee and Hurst 2005).

Tensions exist for online teachers when trying to establish boundaries to their working hours. While it may be desirable to work flexibly within the approximate boundaries of the usual working day, online teachers may find that this does not work in practice and feel that they are 'always on', causing stress and exhaustion (Cross and Polk 2018). The nature of the online environment means that there is always a perceived online teacher presence in discussion forums. International time differences impact on working hours and the times when the teacher may be considered on duty by students. This is becoming compounded by the increasingly global focus of educational programmes (Masters and Ellaway 2008). In the next section, I discuss the difficulties of balancing timely online student support with enough downtime for teachers emotional and mental health, along with the risk of resultant burnout if this is not managed appropriately (Tate 2020).

2 Visibility

Online learning offers many possibilities for flexibility that can help both teachers and students overcome barriers to education. Asynchronous communication and the ability to access a range of resources from the same physical space (e.g. sitting at a home computer), reduce the requirement to travel to and around the University campus and allow more possibilities in terms of scheduling of learning activities. Online resources are also often highly-configurable, providing a choice of resource format options to suit the learner.

In contrast to face-to-face interactions, online learning also makes it easier for both students and teachers to become invisible. Disabled teachers, for example, may not make their disability known, and may not request specialised forms of support (Roberts et al. 2011). Even the language around disability *disclosure* (as opposed to *declaration*) may present a barrier. Disclosure is suggestive of something someone is ashamed of, that they have kept secret and have to confess (Brown and Leigh 2018). Similarly, those with health conditions or caring responsibilities may not wish to make those public or known to their employer. The flexibility of online spaces can make it easier for students and teachers to edit their online persona (see also Lee 2021, this book), and present only selected aspects of their physical and social characteristics to others within those spaces.

While the potential for anonymity afforded by online teaching may be considered a benefit by some teachers, carefully curated e-personas can serve to limit access to potential support, adaptation or training (Kent 2015). At the very least, it transfers the onus onto individuals to make their own arrangements. After all, if an employer is not aware of a specific support need, they cannot be expected to ensure that they have made adequate provisions for it. This presents an interesting philosophical question: is managing to work effectively without others realising that one has an impairment, chronic health problem or caring responsibility a form of achieving equity or, in fact, the opposite, since the need to mask additional needs signifies inequity? The answer to this question may be different between individual people, or for the same person at different points in their life, highlighting the complexity of this area and the inadequacy of a one-size-fits all approach (Nalavany et al. 2018). In any case, teachers should be able to declare their needs at the time of their choosing, but be able to work comfortably and effectively until then.

There are also wider considerations beyond the individual teacher which should be considered. Jaeger (2012) stressed the need for visibility of all marginalised staff and students during the design and implementation of online programmes, with an explicit focus on inclusion in order that they do not become further side-lined. Paradoxically, in programmes that have successfully integrated their staff, those individuals may essentially become invisible. Visibility serves to elevate individual teachers to the status of role models, who could positively influence students to share their own challenges with the teacher, their peers and the educational establishment (Marshall et al. 2020). In the next section, three groups of teachers who are at particular risk of marginalisation are considered, alongside the particular factors to respect in supporting them to not only survive, but to meaningfully contribute to the online postgraduate education community.

3 Disability and Ableism

The concept of ableism has been theorised in many different ways (Campbell 2001; Wolbring 2008), but fundamentally describes the practices and dominant societal attitudes which devalue disabled people and undermine their potential. The most pernicious element of ableism is the acceptance, without critique, of the perfect, species-typical norm against which disability is assumed to be an inferior state of being (Dirth and Branscombe 2019). Unfortunately, ableism in academia is endemic (Brown and Leigh 2018). In relation to their colleagues, non-disabled teachers are generally viewed in relation to what they can do, while disabled teachers are often considered in terms of what they cannot do. The attitude of faculty towards people with disabilities has been shown to influence the success or failure of those individuals (Sachs and Schreuer 2011). This is characteristic of a kind of stereotype threat, where a member of a stigmatised group feels the pressure (leading, potentially, to poorer performance) of being judged by or confirming a negative stereotype (Kit et al. 2008). Ableism assumes a lack of economic contribution of people with chronic health issues or impairment, which can become a self-fulfilling

prophecy when they are marginalised within the labour market (Barnes and Mercer 2005). This suggests that there are good economic reasons to ensure that each member of staff is able to contribute without fear of stigmatisation.

In the demanding academic environment, ableism can become internalised, normalised and ingrained to such an extent that teachers feel they need to be *more than able* (Brown and Leigh 2018). As academia becomes increasingly focussed on measurable metrics of standard attainment, student feedback, league table positions, awards and productivity, teachers are under increasing pressure to excel, and then improve again the next year. According to Goodley (2014), transhumanist, hypernormative enhancement is becoming a valuable tool to overcome personal difficulties, where advances in wearable, implantable and genetic technology are imagined to enhance human ability beyond the capabilities of biological evolution. This world view mirrors the medical model of disability, via an emerging, neo-medical model of cyber optimism, with the assumption there is no biological difficulty that cannot be overcome with the judicious use of technological solutions. From this view, disability may be seen, to all intents and purpose, as a non-issue. However, what this model retains is a focus on the individual as the source of the problem in need of fixing through their own 'heroic individualism' and the assumption of responsibility for their own destiny (Bleakley et al. 2011). Of course, this perspective does not reflect the reality for many disabled people who rely on more pragmatic accessibility measures, an accepting culture, and supportive environment to facilitate their full involvement in an academic role.

In a general survey of American workers who identified as having impairments, almost a quarter of respondents who declared their impairment to their employer experienced long-term negative repercussions such as lowered expectations from their manager, isolation from colleagues and increased likelihood of losing their job (von Schrader et al. 2014). Academic staff facing additional challenges as teachers in higher education are unlikely to declare an impairment, particularly if it relates to a specific cognitive impairment or their mental health (Marshall et al. 2020; Singleton 1999). Inequality is not experienced equally by all marginalised groups. There is evidence to suggest that those with a cognitive impairment, psychological or emotional condition (either alone or in combination with a physical impairment) may be significantly more at risk of discrimination, lack of acceptance or ill-treatment in the workplace in comparison to those with an exclusively physical impairment (Fevre et al. 2013). Although teachers working online may have a degree of freedom to not make their disability visible to students (and vice versa), this is not the case between the teacher and their employer, who has privileged access to the personal information of employees.

3.1 Health Difficulties

According to Brown and Leigh (2018), despite declaring the underlying philosophy of equity for all, there are subtle yet important differences in ontological and epistemological perceptions and legal protection between chronic health conditions,

neurodiversity and disability in academia. Disability may be interpreted via either the medical or the social model; the medical model focuses on the biological and functional aspects of a condition, while the social model asserts that it is the social and cultural impact of those medical issues that is disabling. Chronic illness is a contentious issue in relation to the social model, with some saying it has been given insufficient attention by the physically impaired originators of the model (Shakespeare and Watson 2001). In individual terms, whether the biological factors are classed as a disability or not, the result of a chronic illness and a disabling condition may be experienced in the same way. That is, a divergence from the norm, which an academic must work around in order to compete on equal terms in the metrics of modern education.

The physical stresses of teaching online may cause similar difficulties for people with chronic illnesses as for those with physical or sensory impairment, for example, the need to move around or change working position on a frequent basis or requiring the use of speech-to-text software to avoid extended periods of typing. Accordingly, they share similar needs in terms of support and may benefit equally from accessible design and flexible employment practices, such as being able to work at home or in a quiet room to make the use of these technologies easier (and potentially less disruptive than in a shared office). However, these requirements may vary over the course of a day, or from day to day. A chronic condition may not manifest in visible signs, which may cause further problems in terms of the teacher's needs being seen as legitimate. Those with chronic conditions can also differ in their legal rights, compared with teachers with a disability, to request (and receive) specific adaptations. They may, therefore, have to rely on an employer's goodwill—meaning that any declaration decision in relation to a health condition requires a risk assessment on behalf of the teacher.

3.2 Caring Responsibilities

According to the Care Act 2014, a carer is defined as 'an adult who provides or intends to provide care for another adult (an "adult needing care")' (Department of Health 2014: 10). Carers represent an increasing sector within employment, yet many have not declared this to their employer's human resources department, and/or their line manager (Griesbach 2018). Where they have, the response is often reported as being unsupportive, and many (women more than men) feel that their professional identities as academics could be threatened by their status as carers (Griesbach 2018; Moreau and Robertson 2019). Thus, indirect discrimination of some protected groups may occur, such as where caring responsibilities in the home are unbalanced in relation to sex (with women taking most of these responsibilities).

The Society for Research into Higher Education conducted an investigation into the experiences of senior academic staff who were also carers (Moreau and Robertson 2019). Prior to this study, there had been comparatively little research

examining the combination of academic and caring roles, and this report highlighted some important (if uncomfortable) truths. White, middle-class, heterosexual academics were less likely than those from marginalised groups to experience the tensions of combining caring and academic roles, and more likely to describe caring responsibilities as a small part of their lives. The more senior the academic role, the less compatible it was with an adjunctive caring role. In short, caring roles compound inequality in already marginalised groups, and can impact significantly on the progression of an academic career. Unfortunately, the study also highlighted that although academic staff with caring responsibilities were theoretically in favour of institutional support for carers, these same staff did not use the support available to them in practice, preferring to rely on individualised solutions which did not draw attention to themselves.

3.3 Equality, Equity, Declaration and Discrimination

Equity and equality are sometimes misused as interchangeable terms within educational settings, which may explain why attempts to challenge, restructure and reform university policies are often unsuccessful (Grant 2018). However, these terms are distinctly different in terms of ethos and action. Equality is where all people are treated the same, regardless of their individual needs. In contrast, equity is achieved by assessing each person as an individual and providing tailored and differentiated adjustments to facilitate their achievement of a particular task. If we are looking to ensure fairness and parity, we are actually seeking equity rather than equality. Educational institutions have a key role here—not just in policy, but in practice.

However, in order to fulfil that role, institutions need to be aware of the need for it. While teachers may wish to share the specific nature of their needs with their employer, this can be prevented if they believe that the employer views those needs as an intrinsic deficit (Marshall et al. 2020). Academia has an inherent culture of overwork which has become normalised. Job insecurity and lack of professional esteem in early career academics has been shown to reduce the likelihood of teachers with disabilities declaring those impairments to their employers (Brown and Leigh 2018). Becker's (1963) *labelling theory* suggests that many teachers may be afraid to declare their disability, in case it negatively affects their work relationships and career prospects. Holidays and sick leave are sometimes minimised by teachers who are employed in often insecure short-term contracts for the early part of their career in order that they appear keen and capable, making it difficult to highlight any factor that may be perceived as a deficit. There is a lack of recognition of how onerous online teaching can be, and a lack of institutional willingness to resource it properly, not to mention the general undervaluing of teaching compared to research activity (see chapters by Aitken and Hayes 2021, and Fawns et al. 2021, this book).

In order to overcome these barriers, a culture of both declaration and employer support should be present. Ultimately, the declaration decision is one taken by individual teachers, based on their own needs and beliefs, as an act of self-preservation.

While it may eventually be beneficial on a cultural or macro level, the dilemma of *'should I, or shouldn't I tell them about my needs?'* is a further barrier which can add to an individual's personal challenge.

4 Institutional Preparation and Support for Online Teachers

There is a persistent notion that face-to-face teaching is the optimal model that online learning may eventually aspire to, but never surpass (Fawns 2019). This belief is further reinforced by the often messy reality of technology related practice with no *one size fits all* solution (Selwyn 2010). Traditional learning is not dichotomous with online learning however, as the Internet and technology have also become integrated with face-to-face programmes and changed the notion of 'classroom only' (Fawns 2019). Although online learning is no longer a new phenomenon (Kentnor 2015), even the most established universities have had challenges in creating their staff development offer for online teachers (Fawns et al. 2021, this book). Despite this often insufficient training in relation to technological developments or pedagogy (Aitken and Loads 2019) and a lack of clarity over their role (Aitken and O'Carroll 2020), teachers are still willing to participate in online learning due to the intrinsic value that they place on teaching and learning.

4.1 Training and Development for Online Teachers

A review of the literature regarding the training of online teachers highlighted numerous criticisms of common provision, including too little training, inadequate training, training that does not match the particular preferences of individual teachers and lack of integration of practical skills or pedagogy (Islam et al. 2015). While these problems may represent barriers to any teacher, they are, arguably, compounded for those teachers with additional challenges. The 'Exploring the UK's Digital Divide' report (Office for National Statistics 2019), for example, described specific factors which can impact on an individual's digital engagement (e.g. ethnicity, economic status, disability, sex and age), and therefore, must be considered in any training plan in relation to additional forms of support that may be needed.

Although the focus of training of teachers for online teaching is often focussed on the practical, technological aspects of the role, this is just one form of faculty development. Teachers do not only need instruction regarding the deployment and use of technology, but also guidance about how teaching pedagogy is expressed in a technologized context. Further, all technologies are transitional. As the Internet continues to evolve, so does the technology and software we use to interact with it. This ongoing transformation means that from a technological perspective, faculty development for online teachers cannot be considered a one-time event, but an ongoing process that is never complete (Aitken and Loads 2019; Masters and

Ellaway 2008). Online learning is not a stable, unified approach or thing, its methods are as diverse as the group that teaches online. This creates significant challenges for faculty development that cannot be addressed by isolated training sessions, but instead needs to consider the complex relationship between online learning and postgraduate pedagogy, and to explore ways of creating networks and formal mentorship schemes within the teaching community to allow a dynamic sharing of experience and ideas.

For example, a teacher may value a humanistic approach to their subject, using in-depth discussion with students as a means of helping them to understand the nuance of a particular topic. Training them to narrate and upload a video of themselves presenting a slide show is not the development activity they need. Instead, a conversation with a more experienced teacher mentor who has experience of conducting discussions using different formats and gaining student input regarding the practicalities of their scheduling constraints, may be more useful.

In postgraduate medical education, the priority for learners is the application of ideas and strategies to their specific, personal or professional context, rather than to the classroom setting itself. Here, flexibility is often prioritised over technological sophistication. The most appropriate knowledge and use of technology in this context often relates to minimising any intrusion on each learning activity, avoiding harm to students or teachers (by further marginalising those with bandwidth or scheduling issues, or adding unnecessary work for already busy individuals) and facilitating meaningful and timely communication.

4.2 Institutional Support for Teachers

Online learning can provide flexibility, not only to teachers, but also to educational institutions and students. The adaptable nature of online learning can be particularly appealing to learners attempting to balance caring responsibilities and employment with an educational programme, while universities are able to accommodate greater student applications in an estate with otherwise insufficient physical teaching space (Oblinger and Hawkins 2005). However, good quality online teaching requires sufficient university resourcing and support, just as on-campus education does. Both types of teachers and learners require adequate physical space in terms of buildings, desks and chairs, and suitable rooms for teaching. The way in which these resources are arranged and accessed are not necessarily the same, though, and some institutional processes are needlessly inflexible for online teaching (Sheail 2018). For example, we might ask whether online teaching sessions really need to be scheduled 1 year in advance, or could they be negotiated with students and staff later, given that there are fewer room booking implications.

One way in which institutions can demonstrably offer support for online teachers is by evaluating existing staff roles and ensuring that the workload of any online programme is distributed properly across academic and administrative staff, with adequate collective resourcing of both (Quinsee and Hurst 2005). In order to be

effective, this redistribution needs to consider the more labour intensive nature of online teaching in comparison with face-to-face teaching (Sun and Chen 2016). Accordingly, online teachers should have a comparatively reduced teaching load or access to additional support staff to respond during possible pressure points for teachers (Crawford-Ferre and Wiest 2012). One example of this, in my experience of online postgraduate teaching, is the high volume of individual student queries submitted via email around assignment submission time. To support online teachers, universities must develop flexibility in their work allocation, coupled with adequate faculty development in relation to online pedagogy. To support online teachers, universities must develop flexibility in their work allocation, coupled with adequate faculty development in relation to online pedagogy, to generate a wider pool of expertise to draw on when the need arises.

Kent (2015) described three useful dimensions to consider when encouraging student engagement in higher education—disclosure, accessibility and flexibility. None of these dimensions can be addressed by a rigid framework or set of rules, they are representative of an overarching philosophy where everyone is responsible for their integration (Kent 2015). Traditional academic structures may no longer be fit for purpose where competitive advantage and responses to student feedback are dependent on being able to make responsive programme adjustments. There is a risk that overly complex hierarchies and centralised decision making processes can allow unnecessarily restrictive practices to remain unchallenged, and make it difficult for individual teachers to negotiate change (Appelbaum et al. 2017). In contrast, we should be aspiring to a supportive culture, in which programmes and courses accept and encourage different ways of thinking about online teaching. Such a culture extends beyond offering extra support and recognises the value of a diverse teaching population (and of individual teachers' diversity) to the quality of online education.

4.3 Team Dynamics and Peer Relationships

There is evidence to suggest that teachers with additional support needs may experience stigma from their peers, where 'invisible, less known or contested conditions are dismissed as a fabrication, malingering and an act of a fundamentally lazy or overwhelmed worker seeking validation' (Brown and Leigh 2018: 987). These perceptions may be unintentionally reinforced when institutions have not developed effective strategies to afford the online teacher the support and recognition offered to on campus teachers. Performance factors such as contact hours, academic recognition and advancement can act against online teaching by not considering online encounters as the embodied, socially meaningful experiences that they can be when led skilfully (Ellaway and Masters 2008; Fawns et al. 2019).

Educators who have negative attitudes towards teachers with impairments or caring responsibilities are unlikely to implement strategies that support them. A lack of anticipation, knowledge and skill in relation to accessible online learning can lead

to it causing more work (for those staff who have to step in) than it might have done with appropriate planning. Teachers without impairments or caring responsibilities may react to this potential threat to their workload by adopting distancing behaviours in relation to disability or peer support by deferring that part of their role to a specialist unit. This, in turn, can lead to an insider-outsider distinction towards those teachers from marginalised groups and make it more difficult to develop a cohesive teaching team (van Jaarsveldt and Ntomboxolo Ndeya-Ndereya 2015).

Team cohesion is particularly important in online learning, where staff need to deal with unfamiliar and dynamic contexts, as well as specialised, technology-related challenges. Accessibility is a key example of a challenging aspect of online teaching that requires staff with different expertise to work together. The development of accessible materials is an important aspect of inclusivity in online education, but it can be very time consuming (Björk et al. 2008) and require specialist knowledge. Although all teachers should have at least a basic understanding of their responsibilities in relation to accessibility, sometimes they may not have the advanced skills necessary for a particular task. For example, most online browsers contain integrated accessibility tools to allow users to create the optimum display for themselves (e.g. colours, font size and contrast are all able to be individually tailored). However, some systems (including virtual learning environments) are incompatible with end-user configuration (Gilbert 2019), and teachers need to be aware of the challenges that students may face, their own responsibilities in relation to those challenges, and who can support them when they need to access additional expertise. Further, accessibility should not only be concerned with obeying rules or adhering rigidly to standards and guidelines, as this can serve to overly constrain practice. It is more important to meet diverse and changing needs, and to have the freedom to integrate new approaches in a dynamic way (Seale 2006).

The considerable burden on teachers when dealing with the complex challenges of online learning, such as accessibility, might be eased by sharing responsibility with other kinds of staff. While online learning specialists can play an important role, this should be to support and work with all teachers to address accessibility needs in a more equitable way across the university. A benefit of this approach is the facilitation of two-way communication, where teachers learn principles from support staff and those staff, in turn, gain a better understanding of the rationales that underpin teaching (Seale 2006). The same is true of working with learning technologists more generally. Their role should be to help teachers understand what is important, and to help them understand how they can make their online teaching more inclusive and accessible, rather than just doing the technological work for them and, thereby, reinforcing the policy and technological constraints that privilege able, normative teaching by removing the teachers' responsibility for addressing (and having an awareness of) accessibility issues themselves. Challenging issues such as accessibility highlight that online teaching requires staff with different expertise to work together. It is, therefore, particularly problematic to allow teachers such as those with disabilities, health conditions or caring responsibilities, to be marginalised or isolated.

5 Considerations for Improving Inclusivity in Online Postgraduate Teaching

Online teaching presents opportunities to engage with principles of equity in a way that is both creative and practical, but it cannot be considered a universal panacea, affording accessibility to all. Online teachers need their employers to understand the nature of their teaching role in relation to their specific student group, and to offer equitable support measures to all teachers (regardless of personal circumstances) without making an ableist assumption at the outset.

There are no quick wins here, no checklist, no prescribed path. I simply offer a series of consideration points drawn from the chapter, with the aim of provoking further thought, reading and (hopefully!) discussion within educational organisations and teams.

5.1 Principles for Consideration

- What is the organisational culture regarding adaptation of practices and job roles to accommodate the needs of individual employees (whether due to disability or some other personal requirement)? Consider not only the policies and procedures that are applied, but also the reactions of colleagues and yourself to those accommodations. Policies and laws are just the first step in ensuring equality. They are low impact without a supportive culture.
- Consider the language and procedures around the process of 'disability disclosure' (hint—if the word used is disclosure rather than declaration, that may be something to be modified). Does the process reflect acceptance? How are employees/potential employees supported when considering whether to tick that box?
- Integration of people from minority groups (e.g. those with disabilities, health conditions or caring responsibilities) is good, but forced invisibility is not. However, it should not be the responsibility of members of these groups in your organisation to take on the role of crusaders for their own rights and needs (Kattari et al. 2018). Supporting the capacity for a diverse range of people to participate in teaching is valuable because it brings in a diversity of views, experiences and practices that contribute meaningfully to what is seen as possible within a course, programme or institution
- There is no such thing as an effective, universal, one-time training package. Are people in your organisation able and supported to tailor their development activities to their own needs in a flexible way? Do you consider the training available for online teachers to be meaningful and accessible?
- Do you consider it part of your job to consider accessibility issues? If not, why not?

- If flexible working options are already in place at your university, do they apply to all staff, or only those with a *special characteristic*? Offering these options to all staff has an additional benefit of allowing a greater degree of flexibility to all employees, which can lesson any perceived differential treatment.

6 Conclusion

Teaching on online programmes is becoming a more visible and accepted part of a general postgraduate teaching role. As the working lives of postgraduate students become more demanding and complex, online learning offers the flexibility to access education that fits in with their employment and home lives, and is accessible at the workplace, their home, or on the move. Done well, online teaching provides a showcase for highlighting the contribution made by all teachers, irrespective of their additional needs, and in turn, normalising the culture of accessibility that universities seek to promote. However, to get to that point, teachers need to feel safe and supported to make those needs visible, to colleagues, the university, and the students. As professionals, we all have the individual responsibility to educate ourselves about these issues and play our role as allies in that process.

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Networked Professional Learning in the Postdigital Age: Asking Critical Questions of Postgraduate Education

Rachel Buchanan

1 Introduction

In the education systems of highly technological societies, the shift in relationship between human and technology now means that it is no longer meaningful to divide education into digital and analogue practices. For example, even where a teacher gives a lesson that does not involve students using computers, phones or tablets; the resources, lesson planning, recording, and assessment of that lesson, as well as attendance and behavioural records and teacher accountability mechanisms are all highly digital practices involving the use of and generation of data (Buchanan and McPherson 2019). The education system itself is postdigital, regardless of the digital content of individual lessons (Fawns 2019).

This chapter uses my experience teaching in postgraduate teacher education courses as a jumping off point for a postdigital analysis of the use of social media for networked professional learning. In teacher education, professional learning is understood as being a ceaseless process. Teachers must continually update not only their knowledge of their students and be equipped to deal with constantly changing syllabi and curricula reform, but they need to formally demonstrate engagement with ongoing professional learning (Buchanan and Imig 2021). Like the concept of the postdigital which illuminates our almost seamless relationship with digital technologies (Taffel 2016), the concept of lifelong learning conceptualises education as a continuous process of upskilling, both for those working within the education industry and those accessing it for training and development (Lauder et al. 2006). In Australia, as elsewhere, not only are teachers to be lifelong learners but to meet their accreditation requirements, they must demonstrate that they have undertaken professional learning each year.

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I, like many of my colleagues, encourage my students (who are themselves schoolteachers) to cultivate their own professional learning networks as a means of helping them to take charge of their ongoing professional development. I use my online courses to provide my students with an entrée to the use of Twitter for networked professional learning. For several years, I have embedded a Twitter feed into my course's Learning Management System (LMS) and supplemented the 'official' curriculum materials with commentary and links shared on Twitter. This is pedagogical in purpose; it was to model networked professional learning and to 'nudge' students to incorporate the use of social networking sites into their professional development (Holmes et al. 2013). This encouragement of casual use of Twitter served to show students that professional learning need not be formal (such as the qualifications that they were gaining by their enrolment in a Master's degree) but could take place through informal channels.

Through engagement with postdigital theorising (Arndt et al. 2019) I realise that the use of Twitter as a teaching tool provides a rich opportunity for reflection and critique of the relationship between education and social media. This chapter explores the public pedagogical implications of the use of social media sites for networked professional learning. 'Public pedagogy' refers to learning that occurs outside of the bounds of mainstream educational spaces such as the classroom and lecture theatre. Public pedagogy domains, comprised of both virtual and geographic material spaces, are sites of co-constructed learning and practice (Chun 2018). Giroux (2004) makes clear that within developed societies, larger forces (such as television, advertising, media, video games and popular press) compete with formal educational institutions as sites of learning. Since 2008 (with the convergence of smartphones and mobile app versions of social networking sites) such forces have incorporated viral forms of social media. Chun argues that 'we need to examine the everyday spaces of social media and discourses circulating throughout society for their pedagogical implications and impact on all learning' (2018: 282). Drawing on feminist theorising and postdigital conceptualisations of education, this chapter asks critical questions about the promotion of the use of social networking sites and reflects on the implications of those questions for postgraduate teacher education.

The chapter is arranged as follows: firstly, I define postdigital and its implications for education. Currently, more attention is being paid to human–technology associations, and the term 'postdigital' 'may be a useful guiding concept for this phase of theorising, particularly in education' (Knox 2019: 358). I then provide contextual details about postgraduate education for teachers in Australia. This is followed by an overview of my teaching practice for networked professional learning. The following section provides the crux of the argument. This section details the digital, non-digital, material, and social relations that are facilitated by Twitter. This is followed by an explanation of the problematic aspects of using Twitter for networked professional learning, including: the unpaid labour and free data that is provided serving platform capitalism (Srnicek 2016); the homophily processes by which people can be caught in 'filter bubbles' (Pariser 2011); the amplification of particular voices; and the surveillance and performativity that can occur with

teachers' use of Twitter. The chapter concludes by asking whether, within a critical postdigital education, we want to educate in ways that reproduce the status quo, or whether we want to develop ways of providing a transformative education. Given that for many critical educators the latter is the likely response, I use the foregoing discussion to examine what a transformative education might look like regarding networked professional learning in online postgraduate education.

2 The Utility of Postdigital Theory for Education

In wealthy technological societies, digital technologies and the Internet are not separated from, or other to, the 'natural' world (Jandrić et al. 2018) and, as such, postdigital theory offers a means of analysing our relationship with technology. In 1998, Negroponte declared that the digital revolution was over; this declaration marks the origins of 'postdigital' theorising. According to Cramer, 'postdigital' describes 'an approach to digital media that no longer seeks technical innovation or improvement but considers digitization something that already happened and can be played with' (2013: Para 1). While this term originated in digital media, it is now being used in education, the arts, humanities, sciences and social sciences and in interdisciplinary work (Jandrić et al. 2018). While the 'post' suffix carries some theoretical baggage, Cramer explains that:

> The prefix 'post' should not be understood here in the same sense as postmodernism and post-*histoire*, but rather in the sense of post-punk (a continuation of punk culture in ways which are somehow still punk, yet also beyond punk); post-communism (as the ongoing social-political reality in former Eastern Bloc countries); post-feminism (as a critically revised continuation of feminism, with blurry boundaries with 'traditional', unprefixed feminism) (Cramer 2015: 14).

Postdigital theory maintains a focus on what has previously been termed 'digital' but in ways that provide a critical continuation of existing forms of theoretical analysis, marking 'digital' education and edtech (educational technology) as appropriate subjects of postdigital analysis. Given the degree to which education systems are underpinned by digital technologies (for record keeping; data collection, storage and analysis; assessment; curriculum development and enactment; educational administration; etc.) (Buchanan and McPherson 2019) it is no longer meaningful to divide education into digital or non-digital by virtue of its mode of delivery, whether that be face-to-face; distance/online education; or blended learning. As Fawns makes clear, learning 'is neither online nor offline but distributed between learner, teacher and social, material and digital world. Learning spills out beyond the classroom and the computer, blending face-to-face and online, asynchronous and synchronous, bodily and cognitive forms' (2019: 134).

A postdigital analysis of education allows for a nuanced exploration of the myriad effects of processes that include technology, rather than a continued myopic focus on the relationship between technology and learning (Selwyn 2010).

The prevailing focus on learning 'make[s] us overlook that contemporary student practices with technology are complex entanglements between physical and digital technologies, spaces, activities, and time' (Jandrić et al. 2018: 896). Postdigital perspectives are useful, as a

> postdigital perspective in which all education—even that which is considered to lie outside of digital education—takes account of the digital and non-digital, material and social, both in terms of the design of educational activities and in the practices that unfold in the doing of those activities (Fawns 2019: 132).

Postdigital theory provides a useful, multidimensional lens for looking at teaching, one that goes beyond looking at the effectiveness of specific teaching and learning practices. Such a reflection helps us to think beyond the 'learnification' of education (Biesta 2010, 2015) and to explore the other dynamics and processes at play. It is this utility of postdigital theory that makes it useful to bring to bear on contemporary educational practices that sit outside the narrow nexus of assessment scores and learning outcomes usually used to evaluate educational practice (see Fawns and Sinclair 2021, this volume). Before I provide a postdigital reflection on my use of Twitter in a postgraduate course in educational leadership, I now sketch out the context of this teaching by providing some detail about the state of postgraduate education for Australian teachers.

3 Postgraduate Education for Australian Teachers

Like teachers in many countries globally, schoolteachers in Australia are expected and required to pursue professional development in their own time in order to maintain their accreditation and teacher registration. In my state of New South Wales, for example, schoolteachers are required to undertake 100 hours of professional development activities per 5 years of teaching. The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership in the 'Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders' (the Charter) describes professional learning as:

> the formal or informal learning experiences undertaken by teachers and school leaders that improve their individual professional practice, and a school's collective effectiveness, as measured by improved student learning, engagement with learning and wellbeing. At its most effective, professional learning develops individual and collective capacity across the teaching profession to address current and future challenges (AITSL 2012/2018: 2).

In this chapter, professional learning is used to refer to experiences of learning that lead schoolteachers to 'expand, refine and change their practice' (Mockler 2013: 36). Professional learning is considered an important aspect of schoolteachers' work as international research suggests that it can be an effective tool for improving teacher performance and subsequently, student achievement (Timperley 2008). Professional learning can incorporate a range of activities such as engagement in observations and research and professional reading and dialogue. While the

terms professional learning and professional development are often used interchangeably, professional development refers to courses, programmes or training sessions run by external providers, whereas professional learning can refer to activities that teachers themselves direct for their own learning. Professional learning is most effective if it is sustained over time, focused on content that is important to schoolteachers and the work that they do, and when it is embedded in supportive professional learning communities or professional learning networks that facilitate ongoing improvement in teachers' practice (Buchanan and Imig 2021).

According to Netolicky (2020), effective professional learning in teachers leads to better outcomes for students through the following pathway:

- Teacher knowledge and skills are increased.
- This leads to changes in teacher attitudes and beliefs.
- The teacher consequently changes their classroom instruction and practice.
- This results in improvements in student learning.

Netolicky (2020) and Mockler (2013) agree that the most effective forms of professional learning and development are those that develop agency and identity. Priestly et al. (2015) explain that teacher agency is complex and dependent on the social, political and material conditions within which schoolteachers work. That is, for schoolteachers, agency is more than individual capacity and is best fostered in schools where they are able to productively collaborate. Priestly, Biesta, and Robinson's (2015) work shows that teacher agency includes teachers' understanding of their histories and beliefs, their ability to visualise alternative futures for their practice and their navigation of present contexts for action. Where agency is facilitated, schoolteachers are able to think beyond the processes of getting through each day but are able to engage with the inherent purposes and values of the educational process. Complementing this sophisticated understanding of agency is work on teacher identity. The most effective forms of professional learning are those which further a teacher's identity, that is, those that tap into teachers' individual and collective stories about who they are and why they do what they do (Mockler 2013).

In this context, postgraduate education is a growing source of professional development for teachers. Teachers can choose from a wide array of speciality postgraduate courses that help them both with their present development needs and their future career trajectory. 51 institutions in Australia offer postgraduate teacher training—the majority of these in online mode (Australian Trade and Investment Commission 2021). Online postgraduate education is seen as being a flexible option that allows schoolteachers to invest in their education whilst being able to maintain their existing employment and familial commitments. Completion of a postgraduate education course 'counts' towards the hours of professional development that Australian schoolteachers are required to undertake. Informal professional development activities may not always 'count' but may nonetheless be effective at improving a teacher's practice (Netolicky 2020).

4 Networked Professional Learning

Teacher agency can be developed and expressed by teachers taking a self-directed approach to their professional learning and development. As Netolicky (2020) makes clear, a do-it-yourself approach is increasingly popular. A self-directed approach allows schoolteachers to find learning activities that are meaningful to their specific context and their current learning needs. Often, these professional learning needs come from students; for example, a teacher may have a student with a hearing impairment and may need more information about pedagogical strategies to support this student. Alternatively, a primary classroom may have a high ratio of boys to girls and so a teacher may seek out the latest research on boys' education. Technological change has enabled newer forms of communication, collaboration and professional learning through channels and platforms such as blogs, podcasts, open online courses and social media. Many teachers utilise these readily available platforms and modes of learning to develop their educational practice in a variety of self-directed ways (Buchanan and Imig 2021). Schoolteachers can use social media for professional development and can also participate in and organise meetups and conferences as a way to develop their networks.

Networked professional learning refers to professional development that has been facilitated through involvement in online social networks. Social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook allow teachers to create groups in which resources are shared, advice is sought, ideas and tips are swapped. While some teachers shun social networks (or view them a personal space that is not connected to their professional identity), others find their online social networks to be a rich source of professional learning.

Twitter is a space where many teachers have found a community of like-minded educators (Holmes et al. 2013). Twitter can act as a conduit for accessing new and relevant educational resources on the Internet and as a valuable means of social support via networked communities of fellow-educators. The accessibility and apparently cost-free nature of the microblogging platform ensures that it can act as a medium for sustained professional development, while leaving the individual participants to control and take ownership of their learning. Twitter can be used in a variety of ways as a vehicle for professional development (Prestridge 2019). First, lesson ideas and resource swapping between teachers can occur via Twitter. Second, teachers can follow educational experts. They can ask questions of the leaders in their fields. Third, teachers can participate in Twitter chats. These are organised discussions around specific topics and questions that are scheduled to take place at pre-arranged times. As Holmes et al. explain:

> Any teacher signing up to Twitter and following the leading educators is potentially exposed to a rich, interconnected network of other like-minded educators and is directed to a wide variety of up-to-date and relevant educational material. Unlike a stand-alone professional development session, Twitter has the advantage that it can be tapped into on any day at any time, leaving open the possibility that it may lead to learning over a sustained period of

> time, which can be accessed at the most optimal time for each user. The medium also allows for each participant to focus on the particular educational issues that concern them at the time. In this way the Twitter medium does afford the individual user with total control over the level of interaction and the nature of the learning that occurs as a result (Holmes et al. 2013: 63).

5 Using Twitter as a Pedagogical Tool in a Postgraduate Teacher Education Course

For the reasons outlined above, I consider Twitter to be a useful tool for teachers' networked professional learning. My postgraduate students are predominantly schoolteachers who are studying an online Master's degree. In previous iterations of my postgraduate units, I would embed a Twitter widget in the subject's landing page of the LMS. (I have recently stopped doing this because Twitter no longer supports such widgets). This would display any tweets that utilised the course code as a hashtag. This hashtag could be followed by my students either on Twitter itself or in the learning management system. Regarding the latter, students did not have to have a Twitter account to see the tweets or to click any links that were in the tweets. In my teaching materials, I would provide students with a list of Twitter handles of academics working in educational leadership.

A Twitter user myself, as I browsed my timeline I would hashtag and share links of media articles that connected to the units I was currently teaching. I would also quote tweet and hashtag Twitter conversations that were pertinent to the unit's subject matter. (In Twitter speak, 'hashtag' has become a verb, describing the act of adding a hashtag to a tweet. To add a hashtag to the front of a word makes the word searchable. It is a way of connecting related tweets. By using the unit code as a hashtag, i.e. #EDUC6352, all tweets that include this can be found. To 'quote tweet' is to link to another tweet by adding your own brief commentary to a new tweet which incorporates the original tweet).

My purpose in embedding Twitter into my online teaching environments was to demonstrate the currency of the issues being covered in the units that I taught. The subjects covered educational policy and politics, and leading and managing educational change. In 'edutwitter' (a portmanteau of 'education' and 'Twitter') such topics are perennial, and articles about educational politics and policy are constantly in the media, so a Twitter feed for these subjects was relatively easy to maintain. I hoped that my inclusion of Twitter in the LMS would expand my online teaching beyond the institutional confines and into the more casual public space of Twitter.

Online education can incorporate casual, informal practices, and Twitter has been found to be an effective learning tool (Malik et al. 2019). Holmes et al. (2013) have shown the utility of Twitter as a source of networked professional learning for school teachers, but it is unknown whether this utility extends to the online postgraduate education. Given that my students were engaging in formal professional

development by being enrolled in either a Master of Education or a Master of Educational Leadership and Management, I also hoped to engage in them in a form of ongoing networked professional learning that would continue beyond their enrolment in their coursework. Feedback from students about this practice ranged from positive to indifferent.

While most of my students made no comment about having Twitter embedded in the LMS, some offered praise in the qualitative feedback collected by the university at the end of each semester. My analysis (based on Twitter interaction with students, and student feedback) is that those who were already using Twitter were happy to see its inclusion in their courses, whereas for non-Twitter users it was something that they could ignore. My use of Twitter reflects my approach to my academic work, where rather than work-life balance, I have porous boundaries between my 'work' and 'non-work' time. My use of Twitter is simultaneously a professional and a social activity. Examination of my unit-related tweets showed that engagement was from existing Twitter users, rather than new users. The students who engaged with Twitter while studying were already on Twitter prior to taking the units I taught. My students who embraced using Twitter in their studies (by retweeting my tweets and replying to my posts) were expanding their Twitter use to include me, rather than being persuaded to use Twitter for networked professional learning. They were either already doing this or it was not something that interested them, regardless of my modelling this type of learning.

6 A Postdigital Perspective on Twitter as a Pedagogical Tool

Social media can act as a pervasive public pedagogy, schooling users in particular forms of communication and practice (Chun 2018). For Giroux (2004: 74), 'public pedagogy has become an all-encompassing cultural horizon for producing market identities, values and practices' which exists to teach people to consume. Once it is understood how much is learnt through public pedagogy, Giroux insists that this makes what is learnt through formal education all the more important, as education can counter the influence of corporate public pedagogy. Formal education 'must provide citizens with those critical capacities, modes of literacies, knowledge and skills that enable them to both read the world critically and participate in shaping and governing it' (Giroux 2004: 77). Once the notion of public pedagogy is considered in regarding teaching with and through social media, it can be seen that for critical education to be enacted, the lessons engendered through public pedagogy need to be identified, unpacked and critiqued. Postdigital theory offers a critical lens for provision of education about and through Twitter. In the following section, I draw upon pre-existing feminist and critical digital sociological scholarship to generate a postdigital analysis that highlights the digital, non-digital, material and social implications of the use of Twitter as a pedagogical tool.

6.1 Examining the Architecture of Digital Technologies

In encouraging my students to use Twitter, I was (inadvertently) encouraging them to participate in what Srnicek (2016) has termed 'platform capitalism'. Twitter is a platform where users get free access such that their participation creates data which is used to generate profit. Code has become the architecture shaping online space. Through the use of code, algorithms have been developed that can 'automatically and continuously' surveil users and shape what they see in their timeline and what advertisements they are presented with through 'pre-configured but also reflexive programmed logic' (Cheney-Lippold 2011: 166). The code and algorithms that underpin online digital platforms have their origins in the algorithms developed by marketers to target Internet users, in real time, with niche 'personalized' advertising as they browse the web (Williamson 2017).

As Cheney-Lippold explains, the use of algorithms allows marketers to better target content and advertisements. These algorithms have been designed to infer a consumer's identity and to shape their behaviour. An individual's behaviour is subject to 'nudges' that are designed to modify their behaviour. This is achieved by comparison of their Internet usage patterns with a dataset derived from a large population and offering choices (i.e. nudges) that have been shown to produce desired outcomes with people who have a similar user engagement patterns to the individual. Such technologies first emerged on online gambling sites and were refined and developed by advertisers using the data scraped from social media networks (Lanier 2018).

Emejulu and McGregor argue that digital technologies, such as Twitter, are 'operating as disciplining devices compelling individuals and groups to adopt particular skills and ways of being in order to successfully exist in this newly and constantly disrupted world of work and leisure' (2016: 133). The algorithms driving Twitter are designed to keep users engaging with Twitter, which is a 'relentless, robotic, ultimately meaningless behavioural modification in the service of unseen manipulators and uncaring algorithms' according to Lanier (2018: 23).

6.2 Taking into Account the Non-Digital

Feminist critiques of emergent labour practices in the digital economy provide a fruitful entry point for further critical reflection upon using social media as a teaching tool. Digital spaces rely on 'immaterial labour', that is, culturally productive activities usually not regarded as 'work' but which further cultural consumption (Terranova 2000). Terranova provided an analysis of the (then fledgling) digital economy, describing it as 'an important area of experimentation' (2000: 38) in the broader social trends towards the reorganization of labour and value around unpaid/voluntary, and/or communicative/affective practices. Since her ground-breaking analysis, the trends she described have intensified and social media and the

immaterial labour that sustain it have grown to be a fundamental part of the digital economy.

Terranova's (2000) notion of immaterial labour can be used to understand the various ways Internet users' online activities, such as providing content, social organization, community policing, and generating user data, 'are integral to capitalist valorization in various digital media industries' (Jarrett 2014: 17). Social media largely depends on this unpaid immaterial labour; which has (like 'women's work') a reproductive function which normalises particular social relationships and modes of production (Jarrett), through the 'liking' and sharing of content, the creation of and participation in collective networks, promotion of brands, sharing of news stories and generation of data which is sold to advertisers. In Foucauldian terms, social media functions as a disciplining regime whereby the user is 'organised / interpellated / shaped / seduced into that sense of freedom and free expression that aligns with the dictates of contemporary capitalism' (Jarrett 2014: 23).

Terranova describes the way immaterial labour functions to benefit corporations, as such practices have 'given ideological and material support to contemporary trends toward increased flexibility of the workforce, continuous reskilling, freelance work, and the diffusion of practices such as 'supplementing' (bringing supplementary work home from the conventional office)' (2000: 34). Not only does online participation generate productive activities that are exploited in the digital economy, such activities have undermined working conditions and created economic uncertainties which lead to people giving away their labour in exchange for exposure or experience. For schoolteachers, Twitter can be experienced as a performative space where teachers discuss educational policy and practice, share resources and performatively demonstrate that they are engaging in works at all hours. Using Twitter for professional purposes makes the already porous boundary between personal and professional life even leakier. (This is something that I can attest to with my own use of Twitter).

6.3 Digital Spaces Are Not Immaterial

Beyond the affective labour that is provided for free and that perpetuates the digital economy, the digital exists not in some putative 'cloud'; but in the 'real world' and is dependent upon the poorly remunerated labour of workers around the world. There exist social relations of technology and these have 'very real material consequences in our social world' (Emejulu and McGregor 2016: 133). The global system of labour that it takes to mine, build, transport, and sell the digital technologies upon which the digital economy depends is well documented (Qiu 2016: 13). Materials are dug from the ground in various locations across Africa. Digital devices are put together in Special Economic Zones, with their low tax rates shipped across oceans and sold by low paid retail workers in chain stores situated in affluent economies the world over.

While terms like 'cyber space', 'the cloud', 'the Internet', and 'digital culture' conjure images of an immaterial zone that exists beyond time and place, the devices that provide access to these imagined spaces are material and are created under exploitative conditions. The 'digital requires bodies, and specifically labouring bodies, in order to bring about the kind of advantages often assumed in the contemporary datafied society. In other words, efficiency in one context is dependent on manual labour in another' (Knox 2019: 366). Discourses that position digital technologies as immaterial misunderstand 'digital technology's everyday violence of resource extraction and labour exploitation' (Emejulu and McGregor 2016: 134). Consideration of the materiality that underpins digital spaces shows that the use of such digital spaces as pedagogical tools is not neutral, but an act of privilege far removed from the visceral realities of how such spaces are created and sustained.

6.4 The Changing Social Relations of Online Spaces

Social media platforms such as Twitter function as a public pedagogy, 'schooling' teachers by normalising particular modes of communication and social relations and revising notions of privacy. The choice to use social media for the creation of an online presence perpetuates the neoliberal expansion of the marketplace and the commodification of life. 'All aspects of life that had previously been outside the bounds of market exchange have become increasingly commodified, including our bodies, looks, dress, feelings and of course, knowledge' (Lauder et al. 2006: 25). In creating a professional online presence (such as a 'teacher Twitter' account), it can be argued that we are commodifying ourselves—putting thoughts, image, preferences, professional knowledge, and digital selves on display.

A further aspect for reflection is the complexity around online privacy—various approaches in business ethics and legislation have not yet resolved the emerging issues (Martin 2016). People often claim to want online privacy and a separation of professional and private selves, yet freely disclose information (Hargittai and Marwick 2016). This changing landscape in terms of privacy has 'left many scholars to express concern about the impact that social media is having on the increasingly blurring lines of career professionals' professional and personal lives' (Sampson and Makela 2014: 143). The paradox of those who want privacy and a demarcation between their professional and private selves, and the amount of data they give away, suggests that much needs to be done to educate people about the implications of their online behaviour, rather than just encouraging people to put themselves online. The need for education about the privacy paradox and the other dilemmas outlined above provides an agenda for educative and critical social work around social media; this potential is explored in the following section.

7 Towards a Transformative Postdigital Education

A postdigital analysis highlights multiple dynamics that are usually concealed by the 'learnification' of education (Biesta 2010) or a lifelong learning focus. However, with critical perspectives it is not enough to highlight aspects that can be considered problematic. Critical work needs to be undertaken to go beyond this starting point and to consider how things could be done differently and how existing practices and technologies can be utilised for critical purposes and action (Apple 2010). In traditional renderings of digital spaces, giving students access to these and the knowledge and skills to successfully traverse such spaces is considered a means of achieving digital equity (Dolan 2016). While this position may reduce some of the inequities of a specific digital space, by giving those previously excluded the digital capital to successfully negotiate such spaces it also serves to reinscribe status to these kinds of spaces and the social practices that maintain and are maintained by them. Ultimately, this serves as a form of social reproduction, even when students have been given access to the 'rules of the game' that allow them to succeed in such digital spaces.

A critical postdigital education would go beyond this social reproductive approach. It would, as a minimum, give students guidance (the knowledge and skills) to successfully negotiate socially stratified digital spaces. Beyond this, it would make plain the way inequalities are reproduced in digital spaces. Social networked sites, far from being a utopia free of the hierarchies of non-digital space (gender, class, sexuality and identity, geographical location, able-bodiedness, etc.) serve to amplify such hierarchies (Boyd 2014). A transformative postdigital education would allow students to analyse the digital, non-digital, material and social aspects of the digital technologies being used. Within teacher education, such an education would allow postgraduate students (who are themselves teachers) to critically analyse the continued push for the use for the use of digital technologies in schools (Buchanan 2011) and the implications of the particular technologies being invested in.

Globally, an entanglement of policy and edtech can be readily detected. In the USA, for example, venture capitalists, philanthropists, lobbyists, and the US Department of Education all proffer personalized learning via the right (digital) tools to increase the efficacy and equity of the education system (Roberts-Mahoney et al. 2016). China currently has the world's largest market for digital learners (Zhang 2019) and the Premier Li Kequiag has announced a policy to improve the delivery of education across China using edtech solutions (Geromel 2019). Similarly, the UK government has launched a £10 million package with the aim of reducing teacher workload and improving student results through partnerships with leading technology companies (Trueman 2019).

Beyond allowing schoolteachers to critically consider the (global) push for more technology in schools, a transformative postdigital education would also allow students to question discourses of lifelong learning that position them as never

complete, as always having more to learn. (In Foucauldian terms, they become ideal neoliberal subjects in an unending quest for self-improvement that makes them ever more productive). The mechanisms for teacher professional learning could also be critiqued as much teacher professional development does not result in better outcomes for learners nor teachers themselves (Netolicky 2020).

Twitter as a tool for networked professional learning could be examined. In addition to the criticisms noted above of Twitter itself being served by unpaid labour, and the unequal labour relations and resource exploitation involved in the generations of the technologies upon which Twitter depends, Twitter has several limitations as tool for networked professional learning. The algorithmically generated timelines amplify particular voices and create conditions of homophily (Šćepanović et al. 2017) that reinforce participants' pre-existing worldviews (Peters 2017). With the algorithmic logic that generates timelines aiming to maximise engagement, Twitter users are deliberately exposed to stories and opinions that they are likely to find polarising rather than useful for the basis of learning and productive discussion. In education, this process has led to 'edutwitter wars' between the so-called 'progs' (progressive educators) and 'trads' (advocates of traditional teaching methods and zero tolerance behaviour policies) (Thomson and Riddle 2019). Rather than being a public space useful for professional learning, schoolteachers can experience Twitter as an ideological battleground (See Lanier 2018 for an explanation of how such wars are a feature rather than a bug in the system).

A way forward for using Twitter would be to involve my students in the decision to use it, rather than then just setting it up by default. A collective decision about the use of Twitter could involve critical discussion about the teaching profession and the need for specific forms of professional learning (networked or not). The increasingly bureaucratic demands of teacher accreditation invite discussion about who has control of the profession (Connell 2009), and whether or not teachers' agency is being diminished by mandatory professional learning and the particular notions of professionalisation being generated through current accreditation practices.

Involving students with a postdigital analysis of Twitter would lead to reflection upon the technologisation of schools. Many schoolteachers are so busy trying to respond to the demand for the use of technology in their teaching, that they have little opportunity to consider that education is already postdigital (Fawns 2019). Analysis of the schooling system as postdigital provides schoolteachers with analytic tools to unpack the digital, nondigital, social and material aspects of their own practice. Giving schoolteachers the ability to critique contemporary schooling practices is potentially transformative. Additionally, discussion of the mechanics of social media (the algorithmically determined timelines, the immaterial labour involved, the public pedagogical dimensions) not only builds schoolteacher awareness of the biases of social media but allows them to play an informed role in countering the influence of public pedagogy in their work with their students.

8 Conclusion

This analysis has shown that there are multiple problematic aspects in the use of Twitter as a pedagogical tool in an online postgraduate education setting. Many of these issues are not unique to Twitter and apply to other digital tools inherent in online postgraduate education. Rather than abandoning Twitter as a source of networked professional learning for postgraduate education students, a critical postdigital reflection demonstrates that an analysis of Twitter can instead serve as pedagogical exercise that opens up discussion and critique of the discourses and practices of teacher professional learning. Analysis such as this could equally apply to other tools of postgraduate education such as: learning management systems; plagiarism detection software; learning analytics and personalised learning tools; attendance apps that track students via geolocation and other forms of data surveillance that postgraduate students are subject to.

This chapter has demonstrated the utility of postdigital theorising as a reflective tool. Here I have used postdigital theory to explore the more subtle implications of a pedagogical strategy that I had employed for a number of years without taking into account the digital, non-digital, material and social implications. Reflexive practice such as this raises questions about what a postdigital postgraduate education might need to encompass if it were to be both critical and transformative. The conclusions here are not meant to be definitive but rather to demonstrate the utility of postdigital theory and model its use as a reflective tool when applied to postgraduate education.

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Online Postgraduate Teaching: Re-Discovering Human Agency

Gill Aitken and Sarah Hayes

1 Introduction

Concerns have been expressed that online learning can be seen as a way of academic expansionism (Fawns 2019), but such simplistic views can risk obscuring the considerable human effort involved in designing and teaching successful and engaging online programmes. In this chapter we firstly raise the problem that, following a rapid increase in online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic, related institutional policy documents may now not be fit for purpose. We proceed to argue that high quality online postgraduate education is built on establishing learning communities; is provided by experienced and inventive educators; requires careful design, based on interaction; and goes far beyond traditional conceptions of teaching. We urge universities to be more explicit about this in their communications and policy documents, and to more carefully acknowledge the human endeavour required to manage learning and teaching online.

Growth within this area appears to be expected within academic institutions, often with no clear institutional strategy of how this might practically be attained. Furthermore, university policies are often developed in isolation from each other. This can mean that important policy overlaps, tensions and disconnects for individuals, related to their positionality in this context, may be overlooked (Hayes 2021). By positionality, we refer to the social and political context that contributes to a person's identity, e.g., background, race, class, gender, sexuality, ability status.

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Positionality also describes how each person's identity influences, or potentially biases, their understanding of, and outlook on, the world. It is now necessary to explore, for example, 'the complex and dialectical human-technological relations that are currently missing from university inclusivity frameworks' and 'how these intersect with each individual's levels of digital skills' (Hayes 2021). If policies across these areas do not articulate with each other, or acknowledge the diversity in the student and staff bodies, then this can lead to profound marginalisation, rather than empowerment to enter and succeed, in education and the workplace.

As such, we recommend a stronger focus, within policy and discourse, on the 'postdigital positionality' (Hayes 2021) of online students and educators. This will help to increase their visibility, and more clearly foreground postgraduate education as a means of developing new knowledge and insights, and eroding traditional boundaries between academic and professional spheres. A postdigital perspective captures the notion that technologies now permeate and intersect all that humans do. Through positionality, the contested nature of online and offline spaces is acknowledged too, understanding that inequalities exist amongst individuals, and experiences are varied and diverse. We therefore recommend that, just as institutions frequently call for teaching to be reshaped, related policy documents are reviewed, to clearly state the human agency required for successful online teaching and learning. Successful online teaching is about much more than the effective use of technology, and support for staff should address pedagogical and positional concerns, as well as draw on existing expertise to further promote the possibilities for meaningful engagement and professional learning offered by online postgraduate education.

2 Policy Critique

At a time when the Covid-19 pandemic has caused universities to rely heavily on online learning, with many educators having to develop their programmes for online teaching, it is worth examining just how fit for purpose education-related institutional policy documents are. In our experience, there has been a persistent tendency in recent years for university policy discourse to emphasise the agency of strategies, technologies, frameworks and other textual constructions, rather than to explicitly state the human capacity and effort required to run successful online programmes (Hayes and Jandrić 2014; Hayes 2015, 2019; Hayes and Bartholomew 2015). Yet, curiously, this dehumanising discourse contrasts starkly with policy frameworks that have been developed for inclusivity and diversity. In policies for inclusive practices, there is a foregrounding of human-to-human relations, but the inclusion of digital technologies is often neglected or entirely omitted (Hayes 2021). These patterns in policy texts can lead to a fragmentation in how lived experiences are understood. There can be a failure to appreciate how inequalities and disadvantage get compounded in individual contexts through human and technological actors alike (Hayes 2021).

For example, in a recent report seeking to eliminate attainment gaps (UUK and NUS 2019), there was no mention of the role that technological developments now play in these situations. Nor was digital technology referred to in relation to equality and diversity objectives in the strategy for the Office for Students (Office for Students 2018-2022). If the postdigital nature of online learners and teachers is overlooked, such policies will remain focused only on ingrained inequalities, bias and disadvantage at human-to-human levels (Hayes 2021). There is also a danger that well-meant interventions may lead to unintended harm. For example, to simply issue laptops to students who may not have their own, in an effort to be inclusive, could lead to a greater marginalisation later through a lack of Wi-Fi, data poverty (an inability to access sufficient data for one's needs), or a deficit in skills.

Even before the pandemic led to a dramatic shift towards running taught programmes through online platforms, many universities' educational policy documents indicated a desire for digital expansion. For example, in its 2030 Strategy (published in 2019), the University of Edinburgh states:

> In reshaping our teaching for the future, we expect to expand interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary, postgraduate and digital education. (University of Edinburgh 2019: 25)

The intention to expand is clearly stated here; however, when it comes to the detail of how this will be supported, the text becomes somewhat vague:

> Multidisciplinary postgraduate education pathways will support flexible whole-life learning. (University of Edinburgh 2019: 31)

Whilst in a high-level document, the specifics of how this expansion will occur might be expected to be less clear, neither of the above aspirations mentions the staff who will be required in order to successfully provide this education. Instead, emphasis is placed on the activities of 'multidisciplinary postgraduate education pathways' that are expected to support 'flexible whole life learning'. Elsewhere, on the University website, a similar pattern can be observed:

> A variety of platforms are used to deliver content and enable you to collaborate with other students and academic staff. (University of Edinburgh 2021)

So, whilst students learn that they can collaborate with other students and staff, the course content appears to be delivered by platforms, not people. Similar statements are made concerning undergraduate arrangements:

> The undergraduate curriculum will support breadth and choice, preparing students, graduates and alumni to make a difference in whatever they do, wherever they do it. (University of Edinburgh 2019: 29)

In the above text, 'the undergraduate curriculum' (rather than academic and professional staff) is attributed with a wide-ranging ability to support and prepare students, graduates and alumni. In an example from University of Brighton, again similar patterns emerge:

> Postgraduate provision will develop new flexible specialist and continuing professional development opportunities responsive to changing workforce needs. (University of Brighton 2017-2021: 8)

Here, the considerable work undertaken by programme teams is simply attributed to 'postgraduate provision', which we understand will develop what sounds like extensive 'professional development opportunities'. Then, below, it is interesting to learn just how hard working a 'student guidance framework' can be:

> [We will] Further develop our personal tutor and student guidance framework to ensure it delivers inclusive, well-informed and consistent high-level academic support and pastoral care across all of our provision. (University of Brighton 2017-2021: 11)

Clearly, there would be a group of academic and professional staff involved in designing such a framework and in providing the care and support described above, but none of these people are mentioned and, instead, it is a framework alone that 'delivers' this. The issues we raise concerning the linguistic structuring of these statements and the tendency to omit references to human agency have been examined in detail elsewhere (Hayes 2019). As can be seen in the examples below from University of Glasgow (2013–2020), it is a pattern that is repeated across policies from many different universities. In the following case, it is 'the strategy' that 'sets out a vision' and that 'outlines' how 'e-learning' (rather than educators) can support the University's vision:

> The Strategy outlined in this document sets out a vision for the future learning environment at the University of Glasgow and a pathway to follow to achieve this vision. (University of Glasgow 2013–2020)

The Strategy outlines how e-learning can support this vision, and identifies specific priorities for the coming years and the enablers that will allow the delivery of these priorities.

Given the current drive to expand digital education, we argue that there is now a pressing need to identify more explicitly which people are involved in the complex design, teaching, assessment and support of online programmes, and to detail the breadth of activities that they will be undertaking. This is particularly urgent when many universities will be assessing the economic implications from the Covid-19 pandemic and making accounting decisions based on who does what. If some staff are less visible than others in policy referring to their taught programmes, there is a risk of inequitable decisions being made on their roles.

3 Institutional Concerns

While students may be largely unaffected by many wider academic policy issues, the same cannot be said for teaching staff—institutional drivers and policies have a profound effect on those planning and delivering academic programmes (Aitken et al. 2019a). Those postgraduate students paying to study online are rightly demanding, and expect, a return on their investment. Postgraduate students who are also working professionals are also likely to be time-poor, perhaps requiring consideration for extensions to periods of study and taking longer to complete their studies than undergraduate students. Thus, they may come into contact with academic

regulations more regularly than undergraduate students. Teaching and administrative staff are responsible for enacting academic regulations and policy, and thus may be considered the visible manifestation, to students, of university policies, whether this relates to fee structures or processes for seeking extensions to study. Similarly, any dissatisfaction, for example, around expectations of technology or support relating to fee payment, will be dealt with directly by academic or professional services staff, not those setting out the policies. Indeed, postgraduate taught (PGT) students report greater affiliation at programme rather than institutional level (Vilkinas and Ladyshewsky 2012). Yet staff have reported not having sufficient autonomy to make the decisions they felt necessary (Hatcher et al. 2017).

Macleod et al. (2019) have discussed the importance of staff availability and flexibility, and the resultant positive influence on students' experiences in their postgraduate studies. Even if some students are attracted to institutions because of their research reputation (Universities UK 2016), they are likely to stay because of the relationships built with staff (both academic and administrative) and the relevance and quality of the academic offering. In our opinion, there needs to be wider recognition of this factor, and the importance that individual staff agency has to students' experiences and the consequent effect on word of mouth and programme reputation. Staff efforts within a course play an important role in student recruitment and in recognition of the value of online postgraduate education. Considerable staff effort is entailed, and there is often little support for staff in very visible, student-facing roles, who are juggling many more roles and responsibilities than just those apparent to students.

A more sophisticated analysis of academic roles, as called for by Fanghanel (2007), would not only acknowledge the impact of staff in shaping the experiences of their students, but also help prevent further disempowerment of online educators. Institutional structures, policies and systems need to provide the necessary flexibility for staff to undertake this work effectively. These are challenging times for all academic institutions; mechanisms that allow staff to share good practice and innovations should be put in place to help avoid duplication of effort and ensure that bottom-up practices can be recognised and shared, along with acknowledgment of the staff effort involved. Conversely, corporate organisational structures that attempt centralised control of entities such as 'student experience', perhaps through roles or policies dedicated to improving it, often overlook the day-in, day-out efforts of those staff who work with students. This then largely misses the vital impact of programme staff on the diverse experience of each and every student they come into contact with.

There is currently too great a disconnect between those who develop and write academic policies and those who have to implement them. The current inflexibility and commercial drivers to standardisation have moved too far from the increasingly diverse needs of postgraduate students. Institutional discourse that positions students as consumers enhances pressures on educators, as they are increasingly seen as providing a contractual service rather than education (Aitken 2021). Academic institutions are increasingly moving to more corporate cultures where commercial drivers and values can clash with pedagogical approaches, adopted by many

involved in postgraduate teaching, based on discussion and community building. Such organisational cultures site decision-making well away from classrooms, in committees of senior managers (van der Velden 2012). Those involved in online postgraduate education need to consider how best to influence such groups to offer a more balanced view of the benefits of online postgraduate study. Teaching and support staff with expertise in designing, supporting and teaching these programmes should have a clearer role in developing policies, rather than always having policy imposed on them in a top-down manner, which is likely to stifle academic creativity and demotivate and disengage them (see the chapter by Fawns et al. 2021, for further consideration of how this may happen in practice).

4 Online PGT as a Growing, But Under-Explored Area

Online postgraduate taught programmes operate in a competitive and dynamic worldwide marketplace. Students are not constrained in programme choice by reason of geography and can choose programmes of study anywhere in the world that best meet their perceived needs and, admittedly, their ability to pay the necessary fees. Competitors include not only other academic institutions but also large tech companies who are increasingly offering bite-size learning and development programmes. Academic institutions need to think carefully about what it is that marks them as different to remain competitive in an increasingly congested market—which, undoubtedly, is the purpose of the various strategy documents included above. A greater focus on teaching at institutional and local level, rather than the current focus on rhetoric, would help clarify these differences. The fundamental problem is that the current focus on reductionist institutional language fails to capture the variety and diversity of online postgraduate students and programmes, as well as the importance of teachers exercising their discretion on how to situate their programmes best within their individual contexts.

Often delivered on a part-time basis, such online programmes open up the possibilities of online study to working professionals, who can combine study with work without the need for taking a career break. While this is undeniably a challenging undertaking, degree inflation now sees postgraduate degrees as essential in many job descriptions. Taking health professions education as an example, there is a suggestion that postgraduate qualifications are seen as a way of supporting the transition from competent clinician to academic leader (Tekian and Harris 2012). With regulatory bodies such as the General Medical Council and General Dental Council now requiring evidence of educational training, it is unsurprising that the numbers of such programmes have grown from a handful to several hundred worldwide (Tekian and Harris 2012). Along with those relating to education, PGT programmes associated with healthcare are experiencing disproportionate growth compared to the wider sector (Universities UK 2018). Graduates of such programmes report their studies as impacting on their clinical practice (Aitken et al. 2019b; Sethi et al. 2016), and developing self-efficacy, critical thinking and an

expanded worldview associated with a sense of belonging to a wider academic community. This development of learners sees the impact of academic staff spread far beyond the confines of the academic institution that employs them.

Postgraduate programmes can operate in a degree of isolation, often removed from the large teaching organisations that service undergraduate programme. Postgraduate programmes are frequently reliant on a small number of core staff bolstered by a number of external contributors. Since students can be based anywhere in the world, synchronous teaching regularly happens out of traditional office hours to accommodate different time zones. Programme teams are often thinly stretched and increasing student numbers have the potential to overwhelm teams that are not adequately resourced and supported. The efforts of individual staff are obscured, not only in policy documents, but also in practice. Online PGT staff are particularly at risk of marginalisation. The Higher Education Commission noted that postgraduate teaching is 'a forgotten part of the sector' (Higher Education Commission 2012: 17), and those teaching postgraduate students online echo this feeling of being overlooked, with their efforts perceived as invisible and unappreciated (Aitken and O'Carroll 2020).

While there is rightly considerable effort expended by academic institutions to better understand the experiences of their students, we argue that less effort is spent in understanding the experiences of educators. The perceived demand for postgraduate programmes means universities and other educational providers have been quick to appreciate the income generating potential of such programmes, in particular those delivered online, with the common misapprehension that unlimited student numbers can be accommodated (Fawns et al. 2019). The neoliberal drive currently dominant in higher education that sees institutions competing in a global marketplace can be illustrated by the proliferation and marketisation of online postgraduate programmes. Their growth potential means such programmes are at particular risk of commercialisation (Aitken and O'Carroll 2020). As programmes expand, more staff become involved in their delivery, staff whose work is unlikely to fit neatly into traditional conceptions of academic endeavour (a theme discussed further in the chapter of this book by Jones 2021).

The resultant commercial and academic pressures can lead to conflicting priorities for staff, often leaving them between a 'rock and a hard place' (Macleod et al. 2019: 493). Staff may not have traditional academic backgrounds, often coming late to academia as a second career, and often with a professional background in the area they now teach in (Aitken and O'Carroll 2020). While this experience allows good insight into the learning needs of a particular professional group and enhances an individual's teaching credibility, it can make it difficult for educators to navigate the new and unfamiliar academic terrain. For those whose primary focus is on teaching, they often lack the forms of capital valued and influential in many higher education institutions, such as a research profile, which compounds the problems relating to lack of visibility in policy and strategy documents.

While taught postgraduate degrees now account for over 25% of all degrees awarded by UK institutions (Universities UK 2018), the quantity of students' fees that goes back to support the delivery of this teaching is less clear. A recent review

of the views of UK PGT Programme Directors and administrators by the UK Council for Graduate Education (2018) suggests that teaching is still considered very much the poor relation of research in most institutions, with teaching income routinely used to support research activity.

5 The Importance of Teaching

Clearly, there is likely to be much variation between institutions in how online postgraduate teaching is organised, but we offer this description of how a large online postgraduate degree in health professions education is planned and taught as a case study to prompt discussion. The approach taken by the University of Edinburgh team in its Clinical Education programme has been described in the introductory chapter of this book (Fawns et al. 2021) and elsewhere (Aitken et al. 2019b; Aitken 2021). Their pedagogical approach is based on hospitality (Ruitenberg 2011), advocacy and collegiality, and accepts that learning occurs as students move recursively between clinical and academic environments. This approach challenges the view that learning only occurs online when a student is working on their computer, and recognises that online teaching requires time, effort and expertise from teachers (Fawns et al. 2019). The teaching philosophy adopted by the Edinburgh team is considered further in the chapter by Marley et al. (2021). This approach resonates with other experienced online educators (Jones et al. 2000).

Teaching relationships in online PGT programmes are likely to be more horizontal in nature, because staff and students tend to interact as fellow professionals (Leung and Kember 2005). The flattened hierarchy in some online programmes, such as Edinburgh's Clinical Education one, is well suited to postgraduate education, democratising the student and educator roles (McShane 2004). The part-time nature of study, in particular where studies extend over a period of many years, can allow more intimate relationships to develop (Conceicao 2006) challenging the commonly held view of the socially impoverished nature of online learning (Fawns et al. 2019).

Teaching online takes time and effort: time to design and produce content; time to support students in their learning and development; and time to review, plan and evaluate teaching. While this is the case for all teaching, the time commitment required to teach online can be particularly onerous, relating to the need for meticulous planning (Doube 2000), including such factors as preparing contingency activities in case of technological failure and extra time for student support often required in diverse postgraduate cohorts. As discussed in the chapter by Bussey (2021), considerable organisation and management is required to ensure the visible educator presence in online programmes that is essential to their success. Teaching presence has been found to have a positive impact on students' satisfaction, perceived learning and sense of community (Gorsky and Blau 2009), and is associated with the reasonable expectations by students that they will have regular contact with the academic staff on the programme they enrol on. There is a similar recognition

amongst those involved in online teaching that interaction is a key determinant in the degree of satisfaction learners may express with their learning (Wanstreet 2006).

As the demand for online learning and student numbers grows (Hoskins 2011), one would hope that a similar growth in staff supporting such programmes would be apparent. Recruitment would preferably be managed in such a way that staff are in place before increases in student numbers, in order to prevent the constant catch-up played by staff where growth in staffing comes after growth in student numbers. While online teachers have described contact with students as the most enjoyable aspect of their work (Aitken and O'Carroll 2020), this can become stressful and burdensome if programmes are not resourced and staffed adequately. The lack of recognition of staff time and effort perpetuates the myth that online teaching can be easily expanded, a myth that is compounded by carelessly-worded policy documents that obscure human endeavour.

6 Student Support

The additional time required to support postgraduate students should not be surprising, with the varied nature of the group likely to contribute to diverse support needs. Some students will be very self-directed while others may be anxious if it has been some time since they were last in a formal academic programme. Different professional backgrounds, with differing conventions, coupled with differing cultural approaches to learning will all impact on the divergent levels of support required. As with many aspects of online teaching, this time requirement is difficult to predict and quantify, and must be managed to some extent by individual educators as they see fit. The transition to postgraduate study can be difficult and one cannot assume that the attainment of an undergraduate degree in some way produces expert students equipped for postgraduate study (Tobbell et al. 2010). Key here is good planning and active management by educators of the transformation to postgraduate learner. Preferably at the outset of the degree programme, it is important to make expectations explicit, and sign-post and provide access to support (Bamber et al. 2017), as well as ensuring that feedback is provided early in the first term (McPherson et al. 2017).

Additional support may be required to help individual students navigate various university systems, not limited to the virtual learning environments. Systems for processes such as admissions, matriculation or finance can also be challenging for the uninitiated and often require staff time to help facilitate their navigation. Staff often adopt an advocacy role between students and university as regulations and systems are frequently problematic for this group (Aitken and O'Carroll 2020), developed as they often are with a strongly undergraduate focus (Aitken et al. 2019b). As argued in the chapter by Stone et al. (2021), if we accept that online postgraduate students are a different and more diverse group than traditional undergraduate students, then we are better able to appreciate some of the challenges educators face when teaching and supporting this group of students. Recognition that it

takes time and effort to successfully support online postgraduate students would help wider understanding of the workload implication of running online postgraduate programmes.

7 Online Postgraduate Education as a Bridge Between Academic and Professional Settings

Online postgraduate education can be conceptualised as spanning the boundaries of academic and professional work. Working here can be challenging and uncertain, with staff at risk of role strain (Churchman 2006), and conflicting demands and influences that can be particularly problematic if they contradict their own values as an educator. Examples might include centralisation of decision-making regarding timetabling, centrally imposed increases in programme fees, or marketing strategies attempting to cover the whole offering of one institution in a few pithy sentences. Academic staff may feel deeply uncomfortable in seeing their efforts being commodified in this way (Kauppinen 2013).

Staff delivering postgraduate programmes work in an in-between (Solomon et al. 2006) or third space (Guitierrez 2008), at the boundaries of academic and professional arenas, but requiring expertise and knowledge of both areas. Institutional conceptions of academic work in the teaching:research dualism can be seen as obscuring the complexity of the work undertaken by online educators in the postgraduate setting. While the advantages to students of learning at boundaries can be profound (Akkerman and Bakker 2011), offering opportunities to share and learn from new contacts, it requires experienced and credible academic staff to design, deliver, curate and manage this, and who understand the market within which their programmes operate. This is a challenging and difficult undertaking. Online programmes may be marketed as a package but, in reality, they are in a constant state of evolution, with those leading programmes describing the need to continually scan the horizon for new developments to ensure their programmes remain competitive and up to date (Aitken and O'Carroll 2020). This adds commercial pressures to the more traditional academic concerns of Programme Directors.

Managed well, online postgraduate programmes offer working professionals the opportunity to come together and learn with, and from, a diverse group thus building their individual professional networks, but also sharing expertise. Considering temporal aspects of learning, as individuals move through the different spheres that they inhabit, allows us to see the learning potential of making links between settings. In this way, the expansive nature of online postgraduate education can be seen, with students acting as brokers (Roxa et al. 2011), who can share new insights between settings. With an improved understanding of what online postgraduate students and educators do, and the complexity of their interactions, we are better placed to explore underpinning pedagogical approaches, and consider why some techniques are more successful than others. Suppressing the value and labour of teachers in online educational discourse is damaging to this development.

8 Positionality Reveals the Diverse Postdigital Roles of Online Students and Educators

The consumerist positioning of students and educators in policy discourse, described above, has detracted from the idea of an inclusive educational community. For example, Apperley cautions against an

> [i]ncreased emphasis on the student experience, signalled in part by the rhetoric of student-centred education, but also by the forced emphasis on universities as 'learning institutions' as opposed to teaching institutions. The idea that universities might be *educational* institutions involving *both* learning and teaching has increasingly been suppressed by these rhetorical strategies. (Apperley 2014: 732)

Whilst it is understandable that a focus would be placed on how students are experiencing their education, statements in university policy tend to lump together aspects of individual identity under the generalised banner of phrases like 'the student experience' which then overrides individual 'postdigital positionalities' (Hayes 2021). In policy documents it is, therefore, not unusual to find 'the student experience' treated rather like a product the university is able to 'deliver':

> The purpose of this Student Experience Strategy is to deliver the student experience ambitions of Edinburgh Napier University as set out in Strategy 2020. (Edinburgh Napier University 2020: 3)

The first problem we find with such statements as this one is that experience is a deeply personal and individual perception for students and staff members. It should not be discussed as something singular or relating only to the ambitions of a university (if, indeed, a university can have ambitions, when it is the people within each institution who would hold such aspirations). Secondly, many universities have detailed inclusivity frameworks through which they acknowledge the diversity of their students and staff. Suggesting that everyone's experiences can be described as a singular event dismisses this diversity and, therefore, there is now a need for such inclusivity policies to be in much closer dialogue with strategies written for online learning (Hayes 2021). As Bussey (2021) argues in her chapter, in order to be meaningful, it is necessary to promote a workplace culture that promotes individualised ways of working for all workers, regardless of any disability. Elsewhere in this book, Buchanan (2021) points out that existing inequalities are often reproduced or amplified in digital spaces. These are far from being a utopia, free of the hierarchies of non-digital space (e.g. those relating to gender, class, sexuality, identity, geographical location, disability, etc.). With such arguments in mind, we suggest that universities need to address a dangerous disconnect between the policies they write for education, that emphasise only technological enhancements, and those that focus mostly on human-to-human interactions, in relation to inclusivity and diversity (Hayes 2021).

The many personal narratives that have emerged from students and educators during the Covid-19 pandemic (Jandrić and Hayes 2020; Jandrić et al. 2020; Peters et al. 2020) have revealed their unique individual positionalities as online learners

and teachers. Furthermore, these accounts have provided a window into the lives of individuals who are seeking to balance home, family, work and study, in spaces and circumstances that can vary enormously from person to person (Watermeyer et al. 2020).

9 Online Teaching Is Complex and Messy: One Size Does Not Fit All

Many have tried to capture the varied competencies associated with online teaching—see, for example, Goodyear et al. (2001), who acknowledge the inherent problem in taking such an overly reductionist approach when attempting to capture complex human interactions in this manner. Online programmes that have adopted social constructivist approaches require the academic input of individuals who are able to explicitly role model their problem-solving process as a basis for learning. The Cognitive Apprenticeship Model (Collins 2006; Ghefaili 2003) is one such framework that attempts to expose the cognitive process involved in learning, describing content, method, sequencing and sociology as the four dimensions that should be considered in establishing a successful learning environment. Boling et al. (2014) looked specifically at the method component in a study designed to better understand educators' experiences in an online course, describing activities as scaffolding, modelling, coaching, articulation, reflection and exploration (Collins et al. 1987), perhaps more neatly captured as orchestration by Fawns (2019, citing Goodyear and Dimitriadis 2013).

What is clear is that the staff who work at the boundaries of academic and professional fields have to be agile and forward-looking, undertaking diverse and challenging work that is in a constant state of evolution. Staff with such experience need to be more prepared to speak up and be heard, challenging the top-down, *one size fits all* approaches that many academic institutions adopt when discussing learning and teaching. While there is an onus on individual members of staff, institutions also need to consider the processes to best allow these challenges to be heard (see also Fawns et al. 2021, this book).

As online learning grows, so do expectations on online teachers (Bezuidenhout 2015). These expectations come from students themselves, institutions that provide online learning, and wider society. Individual teachers may work hard to bridge any perceived distance between themselves and their students, but this can be challenging when institutional policies hinder this interaction (e.g. by introducing standardised processes that reduce educators' discretion). Similarly, as programmes grow, the roles undertaken by staff also seem to proliferate, some of which take up much time that might have been previously spent with students. The complexity and diversity of roles undertaken by those who lead such programmes have been conceptualised by Aitken and O'Carroll (2020) as akin to circus acts, from trapeze artist, to clairvoyant, contortionist and conjuror. The growth agenda apparent in most academic institutions adds to the complexity and demands of the role and the

pressures on staff. There is often no training or support for those in these roles, with many relying on more experienced colleagues for help (referred to in Aitken and O'Carroll as 'seasoned performers'). Review of policy and strategy documents that obscure teacher effort may offer insights into some of the reason for this lack of support and training.

Such continuous increases in work demands, often associated with a reduction in resources, is described by Hobfoll (1989) in the conservation of resources theory, and linked to increasing levels of burnout in staff. Academic staff are often the visible face of an institution as far as students are concerned (Quartermaine et al. 2012), and the pressure associated with the 'always on' perception of online learning is supportive of the findings of Watts and Robertson (2011) who report levels of psychological distress in UK academic staff as comparable to those working in the health professions.

10 Changing Nature of Academic Work

The changing nature of academic work requires careful consideration so that increasing demands on staff do not lead to a reduction in educational quality. The voice of the educator must be heard in this conversation, but research about how online teachers evolve their expertise and engage in addressing complex problems associated with online teaching remains limited.

The casualisation of the academic workforce is apparent in online teaching, with the unbundling (Macfarlane 2011) of academic work into smaller more specialised components. This has led to a growth in 'e-tutoring' roles, where staff are appointed to short-term, fixed hours contracts to support those on substantive posts with moderating discussion boards, marking assignments, etc. This development is problematic for several reasons. Firstly, it increases the pressure on those in more traditional academic roles who have to recruit, train and support *ad hoc* workers. Secondly, it diminishes the core expertise that is required to successfully manage the many conflicting demands on academic staff. Perhaps most importantly, it traps more junior staff in a succession of short-term, insecure contracts. The approaches to quality online PGT described above need core staff who can get to know students and develop relationships over time, and administrative staff who are embedded in programme teams and can also build similar relationships. It takes time to build such expertise, as well as confidence to speak out and challenge established orthodoxies or unhelpful academic regulations. Institutions can no longer rely on individual staff members working excessive hours to maintain the quality educational programmes, without adequate support and recognition (Dodo-Balu 2017).

Baran et al. (2013), in their case study investigation of six individuals identified as expert online teachers, stress the link between the individual's evolution as an online educator and changing conceptions of how they perceived themselves within the online environment (see also Aitken and Loads 2019 for similar findings). Through a process of learning to make themselves heard and known by their

students online, and considering best how to do this within their own particular setting, educators actively participated in the development of what Baran et al. (2013: 2) refer to as an 'online teaching persona'. This vital, but difficult to quantify and somewhat ephemeral; quality will be immediately obvious to all experienced online educators (and is similar to the process described by Lee 2021, in her development as a doctoral supervisor elsewhere in this book). It relates to the concept of 'social presence', referred to by Richardson and Swan (2019), that connects people through the disclosure of personality, empathy and caring. These attributes cannot be manufactured or delivered by machine or policy, but by educators driven by a sincere desire to teach in an authentic manner.

To date, the technical aspects of online teaching have been foregrounded at the expense of teacher agency (Rennert-Ariev 2008), with a need for better support for those new to online teaching that goes beyond how to use technology. Hiding the value of teachers' work in the rhetoric and discourse of online learning also hides the need for the kind of nuanced pedagogical support and faculty development necessary to facilitate this development. Staff development in this area is often still approached through traditional, front-loaded training programmes (Aitken and Loads 2019). Baran et al. (2013) have identified four areas within which online educators develop as they become more expert: increasing structure and planning in course design, increasingly organised course management, increasing teacher presence, and better-established student-teacher relationships. This development is rarely acknowledged, celebrated or drawn on, yet we argue that it should form the basis of online support for online educators.

It is important for online educators to seek out connections with others in similar positions to prevent isolation and develop supportive communities (Crawford-Ferre and Wiest 2012). Sharing expertise and experiences will add to the confidence of those planning and orchestrating online teaching, strengthening pedagogy and helping to resist the potential temptation to try to replicate on-campus approaches online (Natriello 2005). The pitfall of media comparison (Lockee et al. 2001), where the efficacy of an approach (or whether it 'works') is determined by merely comparing it to on-campus teaching, can be avoided if one considers how technology can support the type of teaching the educators judges best for their particular student group. For further consideration of this topic, please review the chapter in this book by Fawns and Sinclair (2021). Through discussion, staff can establish a clearer, shared appreciation about what they aspire to in their teaching. Coming out of disciplinary silos to discuss practice will establish shared academic understanding, leading to a more coherent educator voice and better organisational understanding of online postgraduate education.

Those identified as outstanding online teachers by their peers recognise the educational limitations in technology and contrive to find solutions (Baran et al. 2013), rather than using technology to try to copy how they would teach on campus. The agency of individual teachers is as important as the content and technology. Without sufficient teacher agency, online courses could become little more than a form of electronic textbook, or a marking machine, with no need for human involvement (Baran et al. 2013). We argue that it is this human agency that academic institutions

must celebrate and publicise in the online education they offer, and that this is one of the important ways to differentiate their programmes from commercial competitors.

We must start to describe what we mean by quality in online learning, and this chapter provides our views. The *Manifesto for Online Teaching* (Bayne et al. 2020) challenges the deficit model of online learning. However, to realise the possibilities of online approaches, educators need to contribute to ongoing debates and enhance their visibility. Online teaching does not stop once a course or programme is designed; considerable time is required to run programmes in such a way as to offer opportunities for international and interprofessional education, and to allow students to engage in valuable, ongoing dialogue with each other and their tutors (Aitken et al. 2019b). Considerable staff effort is required for careful and creative design and support that allows online PGT programmes to be a forum where individuals can: reflect and refine their practice; bring conundrums from the workplace to the academic setting for consideration; and take ideas back to the workplace. However, these possibilities require academic staff to have the space, expertise and confidence to create and design such learning opportunities.

11 In Conclusion

The effort of those who teach postgraduate students online is largely invisible. This is partly because there are no overflowing lecture theatres, or groups of undergraduates crowding corridors, that bear witness to the teaching that is occurring. This issue is compounded because teaching is often done outside of traditional office hours, and often from home. The impact and benefit of this teaching is seen most in settings far from the campus. If institutions are serious about scaling up their online postgraduate teaching, then they need to move on from the current 'out of sight, out of mind' (Stone 2017: 26) approach which is now apparent to both online students and educators. If they do not, then any inclusivity frameworks that universities design will only be inclusive of what can be 'seen'. Given the increasingly online activities of universities this is a risky position to take.

Online PGT education is undertheorized, and we need more critical investigations of this increasingly popular mode of teaching. The online educator's voice should be heard in a confident, not an apologetic, way. Online learning has advantages and disadvantages, but it can offer profound educational benefits to working professionals. We are concerned that, for institutions to remain competitive in this field, the current focus on online postgraduate education that sees students as consumers and a source of income, must evolve to one based on community and pedagogy. Academic institutions must recognise and reward the staff effort involved.

Academic institutions also need to urgently consider the wellbeing of their staff alongside their students, as considered in the chapter by Bussey (2021). Even before the Covid-19 crisis, there were calls for more attention to be paid to 'an epidemic' of poor mental health among higher education staff (Weale 2019). Staff, especially

those who teach are the very visible face of the university for their students. They are often the only representative of the institution that online students will come into direct contact with. If staff feel their efforts are not recognised or rewarded, they are likely to become disaffected. Similarly, if staff are over-worked and working under continual pressure, it will be difficult for institutions to rely on their healthy, energetic, and creative human capital to maintain advantage in the increasingly competitive higher education sector (Bezuidenhout 2015: 259).

Online education offers the possibilities of building global networks and communities, bringing people together in today's increasingly fragmented world. We need to recognise its importance as a source of human interaction. Whilst technology affords the possibility for interaction, it cannot by itself determine outcomes or engagement. At the same time, in university policy frameworks focused on inclusivity, there is a strong emphasis on people but often the influence of commercial digital platforms gets overlooked. In other university policies, the focus on digital technologies or strategies completely overshadows the activities of academics and students. It is, therefore, important that, just as institutions frequently call for teaching to be reshaped, policy documents are debated and re-written also, to clearly state the human agency required for online teaching and learning (Hayes 2019, 2021). Perhaps too, if online educators were not so overstretched, they would be able to contribute more meaningfully to this debate.

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Improving Student Retention and Success Within the Context of Complex Lives and Diverse Circumstances

Cathy Stone, Jill Downing, and Janet Dyment

1 Introduction

In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, Australian universities, as in many other countries, have been delivering more online education than ever before. The imperative to improve the quality of online education delivery has never been greater. Much of the research and student statistics discussed in this chapter pre-date the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent expansion in online education delivery. However, as will be demonstrated, the recommendations offered within this chapter remain relevant within the current context of the online postgraduate student cohort.

According to government statistics from the Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE 2019a), in 2019 there were around one million commencing and continuing domestic students enrolled at Australian universities, of which roughly a quarter were postgraduates. Approximately 34% of these postgraduate students—just over 80,000—were enrolled in an online mode of study. Online postgraduate programmes enable the participation of those who would not otherwise be able to enhance their university qualifications, including many older students who are studying alongside considerable work and family

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responsibilities. The same data cited above shows that, when comparing characteristics of online Australian postgraduate students with those who have chosen to study on campus, considerably higher proportions of online students were older (aged 30 and over) and were studying part-time. Women were also more highly represented. Table 1 below shows the comparative proportions.

Through its more flexible approach, online learning has been playing a significant role in widening participation within Australian higher education, particularly for those who are older and with other pressing responsibilities, including work and family, that would otherwise prevent them from university attendance (Stone 2017; Stone and O'Shea 2019b; Stone et al. 2016). It is also important to note that, within Australia, entry to university via recognition of prior learning (RPL) extends into the postgraduate space, with different universities taking varied approaches to how RPL is recognised (Pitman and Vidovich 2012). This has undoubtedly contributed to a further widening of participation and more equitable access to postgraduate education. It has meant that students from backgrounds and circumstances historically under-represented in higher education are entering online postgraduate programmes based on prior learning and work experiences, not necessarily previous university studies (Stone 2017). The online postgraduate student cohort therefore has increasingly included students who may have little to no experience of university expectations, let alone at postgraduate level.

While the equity benefits of this are clear in terms of opportunity for increased participation, there are inevitable challenges for this more diverse and predominantly older cohort of students as they strive to successfully add study to their other responsibilities and commitments. Table 2 below shows the percentages of Australian domestic postgraduate students, both online and on-campus, who completed their qualifications by June 2019, comparing those who commenced in 2015, 2013 and 2010 respectively (DESE 2019b).

It can be seen from the above table that a lower proportion of online students than on-campus students completed their qualifications by June 2019, for all commencement years. However, it is important to note that, at that time, there was a much higher proportion of part-time students within the online postgraduate cohort compared with those studying on-campus (82% vs. 48%). As Table 3 below demonstrates, part-time postgraduate students overall had significantly lower completion rates than those studying full-time, therefore the online completion rates were inevitably impacted by the high concentration of part-time students. As will be discussed in more detail later, part-time students tend to be particularly vulnerable, often

Table 1 Australian domestic postgraduate (PG) students 2019—comparative proportions of older, part-time and female students studying online and on-campus

PG student characteristics	Online	On-campus
Age 30+	70%	33%
Part-time	82%	48%
Female	64%	56%

Table 2 Percentage of PG students who completed their qualification by June 2019, by year of commencement and study mode

Year of commencement	Online	On-campus
2015 (completed within 4 years)	57.6%	66%
2013 (completed within 6 years)	67.3%	76.5%
2010 (completed within 9 years)	70%	78.1%

Table 3 Percentage of PG students who completed their qualification by June 2019, by year of commencement and study load

Year of commencement	Part-time	Full-time
2015 (completed within 4 years)	55.4%	74.6%
2013 (completed within 6 years)	66.4%	84.6%
2010 (completed within 9 years)	69.6%	86.7%

struggling to complete their studies within the expected time-frame as they juggle other complexities in their lives.

Tables 2 and 3 also show that a higher percentage of students completed their qualifications over 6 years compared with four, and an even higher percentage over 9 years. This is clear evidence that more students will complete if they have the option of spreading their studies out over a longer period of time, taking breaks and/or reducing study load when needed, rather than being restricted to, for example, 2–3 years full-time or 4–6 years part-time.

Within this chapter, we contend that the delivery of online postgraduate education cannot be separated from the contexts within which students are living and managing busy and complex lives. The following sections explore and expand further on this, discussing implications for both teaching and learning practices, support mechanisms and broader institutional considerations.

2 Online Student Experience

There is now a considerable body of research into the online student experience both in Australia and more widely. Overwhelmingly, this research points to the need for recognition by higher education institutions of the very different nature of this cohort, with its overrepresentation of older, part-time and female students, and the need for a more holistic, purpose-designed, whole-of-university approach to the development and delivery of online education (Devlin and McKay 2018; Dodo-Balu 2018; Kelly et al. 2016; Lewis 2017; Salmon 2014; Stone 2019). These students have busy, complex lives in which their student ‘identity’ has to take second,

third or even fourth place to other non-negotiable identities, such as those of parent, paid worker and/or family carer (Hewson 2018; Ragusa and Crampton 2018; Stone et al. 2019). While much of this research has focused on undergraduate (UG) online students, we believe that the findings are equally relevant for the postgraduate online cohort, if not more so, given that the postgraduate online cohort contains higher numbers of older students (82% PG vs. 70% UG aged 30+) and those studying part-time (70% PG vs. 52% UG). The gender balance is similar, with 64% being female in the postgraduate cohort, compared with 68% in the undergraduate cohort.

A number of factors that are key to improving online student experiences, retention and success have emerged from research over the past decade. Drawing on this research, both within Australia and internationally, these factors are outlined and discussed below.

3 Recognising the Multiple and Conflicting Identities of the Online Student

There is a strong argument for institutional understanding and recognition of the online cohort (at least, those who chose to study online prior to the Covid-19 pandemic) as being largely *different* from the on-campus cohort. Without acknowledgement of the 'important fundamental differences between on-campus and online learners' (Moore and Greenland 2017: 57) there are likely to be 'gaps between expectations and delivery' (Hewson 2018: 10) for both students and institutions.

As the data demonstrates, pre-pandemic, online students were more likely than those studying on-campus to be older, mature-age learners. As such, they were also more likely to be combining their studies with paid employment, either full or part-time, as well as with family/parenting responsibilities (Hewson 2018; Moore and Greenland 2017; Muir et al. 2019; Signor and Moore 2014; Stone and O'Shea 2019b). This has had inevitable implications for their identity as students. Results from longitudinal research (Hewson 2018) with online students at a large university in the United Kingdom (UK) found that 'a *dominant* [sic] student identity… is not realistic for online students' (11) who 'cannot prioritise their student identity over their work identity' (10); by necessity, these students 'prioritised family first, work second and study third' (4). It needs to be acknowledged that this may not be the case for *all* postgraduate online students, particularly now that the cohort has expanded post-pandemic.

There are now likely to be more students within the online postgraduate cohort who are not living with the other types of responsibilities that frequently conflict with or need to take priority over their studies. Nevertheless, these findings have been supported by longitudinal research with online students at a large Australian university (Dyment et al. 2020; Muir et al. 2019; Stone et al. 2019), which similarly found that the students' 'work/life commitments and events played a role in students' capacity to remain engaged with their studies' (Muir et al. 2019: 269). In the

lives of these students, 'family and work must come first… and study has to fit around these primary responsibilities' (Stone et al. 2019: 88).

4 Difference Does Not Equal Deficit

There is an equally strong argument that this *difference* should not be mistaken for *deficit.* Increasingly, research findings are recognising the positive value to institutions and classrooms that these older, online students bring, through their life and work experience, maturity and expertise at multi-tasking. These are students who can 'enrich online programmes [when] encouraged to utilise and share their knowledge and experiences with peers and educators' (Signor and Moore 2014: 312). Research findings stress the importance of 'recognising, understanding and valuing this cohort' (Stone and O'Shea 2019b: 66) for the strengths that they bring 'in terms of experience, commitment and resilience' (Stone 2017: 28). This is supported by research into improving outcomes amongst university students from diverse backgrounds more broadly (Devlin 2013; O'Shea et al. 2017), which similarly highlights the knowledge and experience that greater student diversity brings to the teaching and learning environment. However, it does need to be recognised that keeping these very busy, time-poor yet experience-rich students engaged in their online studies, presents significant challenges.

5 Engaging Online Students

Given the well-established connection between student engagement and retention (Kahu 2013; Kift et al. 2010; Kuh et al. 2008; Tinto 2006; Trowler and Trowler 2010), many researchers have emphasised the need to improve the quality of online education and its capacity to engage students more effectively. Research has revealed many challenges associated with online learning engagement, such as technology challenges which can be overwhelming for 'novice adult learners' (Yoo and Huang 2013: 160), or course material and delivery poorly designed for online (Devlin and McKay 2016), along with inadequate interaction with teachers and other students (Ilgaz and Gülbahar 2015; Stone and Springer 2019).

The need for a more interactive learning environment with strong 'teacher-presence' has been advocated by many (Boton and Gregory 2015; Canty et al. 2015; Delahunty et al. 2014; Kuiper et al. 2015; Oh and Kim 2016; Verenikina et al. 2017). Australian researchers Verenikina et al. (2017: 27) talk about the importance of 'lecturers' presence, expertise and commitment to ensuring quality learning takes place'. Connecting with online students through personal introductions, welcome activities, active facilitation of discussion closely related to learning outcomes, prompt feedback on students' contributions and tasks, are examples of ways in which students know that their teacher/lecturer is 'present', is interested in them,

and wants to support their learning (Dyment et al. 2019). One of the many challenges in building and maintaining this strong teacher-presence is that it is very time-consuming work, with at least some of this needing to happen outside of 'normal' campus hours, when the students are more likely to be online (Bussey 2021, this book).

However, relatively simple ways of improving both teacher-presence and interactivity are illustrated in a recent research project with postgraduate online students at a large, regional Australian university (Stone and Springer 2019). Aiming to improve student engagement and retention, the coordinator of an online Project Management course implemented a number of changes in his teaching approach from one semester to the next. These included developing more interactivity within course content, providing faster and more personal responses to student queries and emails, as well as getting in touch with students who appeared to be less engaged or having some difficulty. Evaluation of the changes revealed how much students appreciated the interactive environment and teacher contact, with comments such as 'lectures are very easy to get through without losing focus'; and 'despite the lack of physical lectures, questions were still very easy to ask, as [the lecturer] responds to email far more responsively [than] the majority of all… staff and services' (Stone and Springer 2019: 11–13).

Similar findings have emerged from another longitudinal research project (Dyment et al. 2020; Muir et al. 2019; Stone et al. 2019) in which nine teacher-education students studying online with a large regional Australian university were followed across the length of a full semester, with fortnightly interviews and weekly surveys monitoring their engagement with their studies over this time. Consistent with the general demographics of the online cohort, these students were all mature-aged, with family and paid work responsibilities. All but one were women, reflecting the higher numbers of women in both teacher-education and online studies. Findings showed that 'active and collaborative learning'; 'quality, timely feedback'; and 'multiple interactive activities' (Muir et al. 2019: 12) were all highly valued by the students. They reported being more engaged when a diversity of learning tasks and activities were offered, being 'appreciative of lecturers who used a variety of online pedagogies to facilitate learning opportunities' (Dyment et al. 2020: 10). Interaction with teachers was crucial to student engagement, while on the other hand, students were 'critical of the mandated social interactions' (Dyment et al. 2020: 9) that, while perhaps intended by their teachers to build student-to-student connections, were perceived by students as '"busy work" – tasks that kept them busy' without any real learning taking place. For example, some were particularly critical of the requirement that they make a certain number of posts to discussion boards each week, describing 'how the mandating of posts to prompt engagement felt "ridiculous" and "took a huge amount of time"' (Dyment et al. 2020: 7).

Certainly, for some of these students, it appeared to be 'the presence and behaviour of the lecturer, rather than peers, [that was] key to student engagement online' (Muir et al. 2019: 12). Others greatly valued interaction with peers also, such as a

comment by one student who talked about how she and another student had 'kind of helped clarify each other's expectations and what we were supposed to be doing. We were able to map it out together and that was a sense of community which was so nice' (student quote in Dyment et al. 2020: 10). Interestingly, such peer interactions were often outside the formal classroom situation, on social media channels that would not be measured as engagement via Learning Management System (LMS) analytics.

This same research project also found that online student engagement is likely to be enhanced and sustained when students are given the flexibility they need to manage their studies alongside the other complexities of their lives, as discussed in the section below.

6 Engaging Through a More Flexible Approach

All nine participants in this study noted the importance of flexibility (Stone et al. 2019). Similar to the UK students in Hewson's (2018: 5) longitudinal research who 'wanted all their learning materials to be available in advance', these Australian students wanted 'the flexibility to work ahead at one's own pace to fit study around other time-consuming commitments' (Stone et al. 2019: 84). They needed to be able to get as much done as they could ahead of time, to avoid falling behind when busy with work or family commitments. However, this was often impossible due to their courses being designed for delivery on a week-by-week basis. With their university offering the same degree programme for both on- and off-campus students, the same course material was being used for both, hence the online students were expected to work at the same pace as those on-campus.

The students in this research project had chosen to study online because of the promise of flexibility that they believed they had been given by their university. This was 'a significant influence in their decision-making about whether to enrol' (Stone et al. 2019: 89). Instead, they often found an 'office-hours' approach in which, for example, they were expected to have tasks completed by Friday, denying them the weekend to attend to study tasks, or they were required to attend compulsory synchronous webinars even though they were working or caring for children. Such expectations meant that the flexibility being offered was quite limited. As one student explained, 'we're doing a web conference tomorrow night, which is compulsory, at 7:30 to 9:00, which I thought, "Oh, if you had kids, if you were working…"' (student quote in Stone et al. 2019: 82).

Indeed, the inconsistencies between universities' promises of flexibility for online students and actual practice have been noted in other research (Hewson 2018; Ragusa and Crampton 2018), with Moore and Greenland (2017: 52) reporting that 'many online educators are using policies and protocols that are designed for traditional on-campus students without adequate adaptation for the online learner'. This lack of flexibility has been found to impact particularly severely on women, as the following section explores.

7 Flexibility and Gender

Women are more strongly represented in Australian online study than in on-campus study at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels (DESE 2019a). This is also the case at universities with substantial numbers of fully online students within New Zealand (New Zealand Ministry of Education 2018), the United Kingdom (The Open University 2014/15) and North America (Athabasca University 2019). The additional responsibilities of family and paid work that older online students tend to be carrying generally impact more on women (Stone and O'Shea 2019a). Data from the Australian Human Rights Commission (2018) show that Australian women carry a higher load of caregiving than do men, with women accounting for 70% of primary unpaid carers of children, 68% of primary carers of others and 58% of carers of the elderly and people with disability or long-term health conditions. With women so firmly entrenched in the caring role both within the family and the paid workforce, it is not surprising that this has resulted in their long-term disadvantage in higher education, reflected in the higher numbers of women as part-time students, the greater length of time taken to complete qualifications and the higher attrition rates amongst women aged 25 and over (Chesters and Watson 2014; Mallman and Lee 2016; Pocock et al. 2009; Stone and O'Shea 2013). It is, perhaps, also not surprising that higher numbers of women are choosing the flexibility of online study, hoping to manage study more successfully around their caring commitments (Stone and O'Shea 2019a).

Indeed, various studies have demonstrated the ways in which women perform this juggling act. For example, Hewson's study with online students revealed 'a lack of structure' in the women's study habits, mainly due to 'childcare and extra-curricular activities', with most studying 'in their homes' while multi-tasking, such as by listening to 'course-related audio recordings over their tablet or phone while cooking' (Hewson 2018: 88). Similarly, Stone et al. (2019: 88) describe how, for the participants in their research, 'most have children, and some are also caring for elderly parents', meaning that 'study has to fit around these primary responsibilities'. Students who are managing both paid work and caring responsibilities alongside their studies are doubly disadvantaged. While online study may provide more opportunity for women with family caring responsibilities to undertake university studies, it is certainly not an easy task; it requires good planning, time management, multitasking and negotiation skills. Insufficient flexibility in university policies and expectations simply adds another layer of complexity.

Such issues highlight more broadly the institutional barriers that impact negatively on students' experiences of online learning, further explored below.

8 Institutional Barriers

Research conducted prior to the Covid-19 pandemic showed that, amongst many academic and professional staff involved in online education at Australian universities, there was a perception that their universities viewed online delivery 'as being

less important, or of a lower priority, than on-campus education delivery', and as part of an '"out of sight, out of mind" phenomenon' (Stone 2017: 26). Some were concerned that the increase in online delivery was largely financially driven (Downing et al. 2019: 64) even though the cost of providing online education may be higher than institutions expect (Norton et al. 2013).

Research conducted with a wide range of staff, both academic and professional, at 15 Australian universities offering online undergraduate and postgraduate degrees (Stone 2017, 2019), indicated the need for a more holistic, university-wide approach to online education, in which online delivery would be recognised and understood as being of equal importance as on-campus delivery. This whole-of-institution approach needs to include: a clear and comprehensive understanding of the demographics and diversity of the online cohort; the development of and adherence to quality standards for online education; design and delivery that is interactive, promoting engagement and communication between teacher, students and peers; a flexible approach whereby students can make the most of their limited time; and the embedding of support, both academic and personal, within the curriculum.

One of the difficulties in achieving this seems to stem from the fact that, within Australia, all public universities that deliver online degrees, both postgraduate and undergraduate, are also delivering on-campus education. While some of the larger, regional universities have a slightly higher number of students studying remotely online than attending on-campus classes, there is no university that focusses primarily on delivering online education. It is this mix of on-campus and online delivery that seems to result in online education taking a back seat. Hewson (2018) talks of the challenges faced by lecturers and tutors responsible for teaching a mix of on-campus and online students, particularly when there is little if any recognition by their universities of the very different needs and considerations implicit in online teaching.

This lack of recognition can manifest itself in a lack of adequate resourcing, training and mentoring for online teaching staff, particularly sessional (casual) staff, leading to situations where committed teaching staff are working many unpaid hours to deliver a better learning experience for their students, with insufficient support and recognition (Dodo-Balu 2017; Downing et al. 2019). Many online teachers, aware of the 'positive correlation between teacher engagement and student retention', are willing 'to position their students' satisfaction and engagement above adherence to institutional work-load allocations' (Downing et al. 2019: 64). They do this because they know from experience how important it is for teachers to be regularly and clearly 'present' in the virtual classroom; to develop a learning community to which online students can feel they belong. Experienced online teachers understand the nature of the online cohort, recognising both their needs and their strengths. For example, in a study of 18 teachers within Education degrees across 19 different universities in Australia, the online student was described as being 'quite different to their traditional, on-campus, student' in that they were 'more mature, juggling multiple roles'. There was evidence that these students' strengths were recognised and appreciated, when 'descriptors such as "committed", "motivated", "focused", "engaged" were repeatedly used' (Downing et al. 2019: 66).

Evidence strongly indicates that without the presence, support and encouragement of these committed teachers, students are much less likely to persist and

succeed (Kahu et al. 2014; Redmond et al. 2018). However, despite the willingness of these and other teachers to support their online students, many face considerable institutional barriers to doing so through a lack of recognition of the importance of their work and the time taken to do it well (see also Aitken and Hayes 2021, this book). In the words of one lecturer, 'it's very time-consuming and tutors aren't paid for that amount of time; we're not supposed to spend a lot of time on it and you're always chasing your tail because there's just not enough time' (Stone 2017: 37).

9 Discussion

From the various research findings discussed within this chapter some key points consistently emerge. Firstly, pre-pandemic, Australian higher education student data (DESE 2019a) showed that there were certainly significant demographic differences between online and on-campus postgraduate students, with those online more likely to be older, part-time and with multiple other responsibilities including employment and family commitments. There was also a higher proportion of women within this cohort, likely to have more care-giving responsibilities than similarly aged male students. Postgraduate online students were also less likely than their on-campus counterparts to be familiar and experienced with university academic expectations, having either had a significant gap in their formal learning, or entered without previous university-level qualifications, or both. It was also more likely that online postgraduate students had significant professional workplace experience with many employed in fields directly related to the qualification for which they were studying.

Secondly and related to the above, the student cohort that is both older and more committed with multiple other life responsibilities, is more likely to be able to persist and succeed with their studies if a flexible approach is offered across the full range of their university experience. This includes flexible access to their course content and materials, to help them maximise their limited time most effectively by working ahead when they can and doing a bit less when other commitments need to take priority. It also includes a more flexible and less bureaucratic approach to dealing with requests for assessment extensions, recognising that rigid policies and procedures, designed with on-campus students in mind, are not likely to equitably meet the needs and circumstances of these older, online learners. 'Equal treatment for all students, no matter their different circumstances, is not likely to be equitable' (Stone et al. 2019: 89).

Thirdly, as explored in the chapter 'Online Postgraduate Teaching: Re-Discovering Human Agency' by Aitken and Hayes (2021, this book), the online teacher is of paramount importance in building and sustaining the engagement of online students. Online tutors have been described as 'the human interface between the university and its students' (Quartermaine et al. 2012: 66), whose presence, in the form of regular, supportive contact and interaction, helps to motivate students to persist with their studies, even when the going gets tough. Equally, a lack of contact and

interaction with online teachers, such as no replies or acknowledgment of student posts in discussion forums, is a disengaging experience for students, 'engendering a sense of loneliness' (O'Shea et al. 2015: 50) and impacting negatively on their motivation.

Teacher presence is also about teachers being willing to invest themselves and their personalities into the online space, creating a more interesting learning experience, in which students feel 'engaged by lecturers who showed personality or variety in their lectures: telling a story that personalised the material or themselves' (Muir et al. 2019: 10). The teacher's behaviour also has ramifications for peer interaction in the online space; 'if the tutor's very active and engaging with students, generally the students are more willing to engage with each other' (O'Shea et al. 2015: 49). Academics who teach online are equally aware of how much student persistence and retention is influenced by their presence; 'When there's no responses to emails and no responses to discussion forums … the attrition rate's higher and the students are really unhappy' (staff quote in Stone 2019: 6).

With so much riding on the teacher's interaction with students, it is unfortunate when the importance of this is not recognised at an institutional level, leaving online teachers, many of them casual staff, feeling isolated and unappreciated, with inadequate payment for the hours of work involved. Dodo-Balu's research with online tutors (2017) has revealed that 'tutors are donating significant amounts of their own time to achieve a quality experience for their students… [at] significant personal cost to the individual tutors' (11). She contends that while online students can 'flourish' (4) through supportive and engaging teaching, the same tutors providing this positive experience are often left to 'wither' (4).

Fourthly, courses that are designed specifically for the online environment are more likely to capture and maintain students' engagement with their learning. They must offer more than 'an electronic version of the on campus equivalent' (Downing et al. 2019: 67) and instead 'be designed for online first and foremost' to create 'an inclusive learning space for all students' (Stone 2017: 9). Given the time constraints that most online students are facing, ensuring that courses are well designed for online interactivity, engagement and support is crucial. Clear evidence from multiple sources indicates that online learning tasks and activities need to be 'relevant, authentic', using 'a diversity of approaches to learning in the online space' (Dyment et al. 2020: 10), to develop and maintain student engagement. With many online postgraduate students employed in workplaces directly related to their studies, there is an opportunity to build on this advantage through applied learning design, linking workplace experiences more explicitly with learning tasks and vice versa, hence building on students' expertise and strengths as well as increasing the direct relevance of the learning content (Dyment et al. 2019).

However, while they may have substantial work and other life experience, many students may have little experience of postgraduate academic expectations (see Hounsell 2021, this book). Course design therefore needs to include content and activities that develop academic skills and support their learning. There has been recognition for some time of the importance of embedding support within on-campus curricula, to ensure students have 'timely access to support' and to help

develop ‘a strong sense of belonging’ (Kift et al. 2010: 14). For online students this is even more crucial. Collaborating with other areas of the university can ensure appropriate embedded support within the course design, assisting students to understand and manage the academic expectations of the course.

The fifth point is about the need for collaboration across the institution more broadly, with academic and professional staff working together to deliver ‘joined-up academic and non-academic support for students in a holistic way’ (staff quote in Stone 2019: 8). The demands on teaching staff become more manageable if a team approach is taken to supporting online students with their learning. Library services, academic skills development, other specialised personal support services—and very importantly educational technology and online learning designers—all have roles to play, to ensure a holistic approach is taken within teaching, learning and support. Embedding resources within course content at the right times becomes achievable through this team approach, such as one example from a Library Manager, ‘if their referencing is not great … okay, we’ll get one of my team in … we’ll create some sort of online resource to embed’ (quote in Stone 2019: 8). Collaboration between learning designers, academic staff and professional support services staff can ensure that a course is designed to include timely support at different stages, such as when assessments and exams are approaching, or new skills are required to meet learning objectives. Clear information about specialist support such as for students with disability or those needing personal counselling, can be more easily and appropriately included through such a team approach to course design, with the added advantage that all staff become more aware of each other’s roles and what each can offer to students, making cross-referral easier.

The sixth and final point is about the need for institutions to be prepared to adapt to changing environments—be they internal, external or both—and this this must be led by strong leadership from the senior executive levels. This has been highlighted in 2020 by the sudden imperative to make rapid changes across institutions in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Across Australia, as in other countries around the world, the need to increase online offerings as a result of Covid-19 and campus closures has seen universities quickly examining and strengthening the infrastructure and policies that support this mode of learning (Ali 2020). Added to this was the realisation that the short-term loss of international students may, in fact, prove to be the pre-cursor to a new post-mobility world where students no longer cross borders to study internationally (White and Lee 2020). Hence, there has been an increased focus on the tensions that exist between the rhetoric and the reality of online higher education, with calls amongst the academic community for ‘a change in mindset’ within universities (Warburton et al. 2020); ‘sustained dialogue and collaboration’ with students (Dollinger 2020); and the need to embrace ‘the great online education opportunity’ (Verbyla 2020), to name but a few.

From these key points discussed above, a number of recommendations on ways to improve the retention and success of online postgraduate students are offered for institutions and educators.

10 Recommendations

To improve student retention and success in online postgraduate education, a strategic whole-of-institution approach is required. While this needs to be led from the top, a bottom-up approach to its development is essential, so that it is informed by those within the institution who have the practical and theoretical knowledge and experience of online delivery (see also Fawns et al. 2021, this book). Ultimately, the institution needs to treat online education as 'core business' and award it at least equal attention and resources as for on-campus delivery. It is *different* from on-campus delivery and as such requires dedicated quality standards that encompass online development, design, delivery and support, developed through the professional expertise of those involved and experienced in each of these areas. These standards should be widely and articulately disseminated across all areas of the university, with clear expectations that they are followed, reviewed and revised through a process of continuous quality improvement.

Within this context, the following recommendations are offered as essential components in the development of a strategic, university-wide approach to online postgraduate education; one that is understood and embodied across all levels of the institution, including programme, course, discipline and all other academic and professional services. Each recommendation is followed by some questions to consider when beginning to think about possible implementation.

1. *Know your students:* their demographic characteristics, strengths, needs and experiences. Are they likely to need additional support/orientation/academic preparation? Are they likely to have significant caring and/or employment responsibilities that they will at times need to prioritise? How can this be accommodated? Are there ways in which their life and work experience can contribute to the learning and interactions within the class?
2. *Consider how much flexibility can be offered to this cohort:* Is there sufficient flexibility within university policies and processes to enable staff to use their discretion in how they adjust their practices to better meet the needs of online students? For example, how and when can they access course content and work on learning and assessment tasks? Are there any barriers to their participation? Are synchronous activities compulsory? Has their need to study on weekends and after-hours been considered? How do assessment extension policies and processes impact upon this cohort? Are they disadvantaged by being subject to the same expectations as on-campus students?
3. *Recognise the importance of a strong teacher-presence:* regular, meaningful communication and interaction between teacher and students is essential to building a strong learning community. Recognise also the time-demands this places on teaching staff. Do lecturers/tutors have sufficient time to connect and interact with their students? Is training and mentoring available to help build skills in online teaching? Who is supporting the teachers?
4. *Design for online:* what may work well on campus will not necessarily provide an engaging experience online. How could the material be designed differently

for online? Does the university have quality standards for online design and delivery? Are there learning designers, experienced in educational technology, working with academic staff to advise on appropriate course design that will engage remote students and keep them better connected with the course content and the online class? To what extent can support be embedded?

5. *Build collaboration across the different areas of the university:* a range of different skills are needed to design and deliver an engaging, supportive and holistic learning experience for online students. What different types of input/expertise are needed? How can these be brought together? Are academic and professional staff talking with each other about this? Do they each know what the other is doing, and how and why? Does the university have a strategic approach to online postgraduate education that involves cross-disciplinary and cross-division teamwork? How could this be achieved?

11 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have explored the findings from a range of research studies into online student experiences, applying them particularly to online postgraduate education. Based on these findings, we contend that the delivery of online postgraduate education cannot be separated from the social and cultural contexts within which students are managing busy and complex lives. Furthermore, these contexts need to be recognised at an institutional level. From the summary of key research findings, we have offered recommendations for educators at all levels across higher education institutions, including those who design, coordinate and teach online, those who support students with their learning through library services, academic and personal support, as well as administrators and policy makers. These are recommendations on ways to ensure that the lived reality of the student cohort is well-understood and appropriately considered in the development, design and delivery of online postgraduate education, thereby enhancing student engagement, retention and success.

As mentioned at the start of this chapter, with the expansion of online learning to a wider range of students due to Covid-19, there has never been a more urgent time to improve the quality of online design and delivery in higher education. During and post-pandemic, on-campus content has been hastily redesigned for online uploading, with the likelihood of a very mixed experience indeed. We propose that the recommendations contained within this chapter are equally relevant for the broader postgraduate student population now studying online. As a predominantly older group of students, many within the postgraduate cohort are juggling significant responsibilities and constraints, requiring flexibility and support to successfully manage their studies within this context. We encourage all involved in the development/delivery/design of online education and online support services, including those who have by necessity entered this domain more recently, to use these recommendations to inform both strategic direction and day-to-day practice, thereby improving outcomes for online students.

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Postgraduate Education in a Postcurriculum Context

Derek Jones

1 Introduction

The chapter is intended to provoke a conversation about postgraduate education in the context of an environment that I propose can be described as postcurriculum.[1] Postcurriculum is characterised by a situation in which ideas around what a curriculum is are in a heightened state of confusion, conflict, and concern. As a result, the competing ideological conceptions of curriculum (described later in this chapter) are foregrounded. I argue that the environment within which curricula operate in the 2020s contains at the same time both radical and conservative elements. What at first sight appear to be radical reforms of 'the curriculum' become operationalised in prescriptive, bureaucratic ways due to the logics that typically drive large organisations (standardisation, control, compliance, and quality assurance performance indicators). There is a fundamental problem with any conceptualisation of the curriculum as a 'thing' that can be reformed or modernised because of the complex ways, and environment, in which it is enacted. I suggest attaching the prefix 'post-' as a means of preparing people involved in higher education to engage with something in need of discussion.

This chapter starts with an exploration of the challenges in defining the curriculum and the ways in which it has been understood and described. I propose four 'ideal' types (modernist, post-modernist, new-modernist and post-curriculum) as a device to aid understanding and analysis of this key concept in higher education. The second half of the chapter considers implications of postcurriculum in the context of postgraduate education and being a teacher.

[1] For the sake of consistency over grammatical accuracy I use the singular 'postcurriculum' throughout.

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2 What is a Curriculum?

The first part of my argument is that 'postcurriculum' acknowledges that curriculum is an ill-defined, vague, label. Often the term is understood as synonymous with 'syllabus' (simply the subjects covered in a course) (Burton and McDonald 2001); it can also cover programmes of study leading to a named award, general guidelines for programmes leading to a professional award (for example social work), topics within such a programme (for example ethics within business studies) (Crane and Matten 2004), or short courses designed for professional development rather than academic credit. The Council of Europe (2020) defines the curriculum as a 'plan for learning' and takes a holistic perspective, noting that the school curriculum is part of a wider curriculum which is the:

> …path travelled by a learner through a sequence of educational experiences, whether under the control of an institution or not… [It sees the] 'educational' curriculum as part of an 'experiential' and 'existential' curriculum, which starts before schooling, develops alongside it, and continues after it.

The short answer to the question 'What is a curriculum?', is that there is currently no consensus and little sign of one emerging in the near future. As Gosper and Ifenthaler (2014: 1) noted, '[a] necessary precursor to exploring curriculum designs for the twenty-first century is to highlight that there is not a shared understanding of the notion of curriculum by either theorists or practitioners in higher education'. This alone should at least raise some concerns about using the term without signalling a degree of caution. The problem is not so much the lack of consensus but the assumption that everyone thinks in the same way about the curriculum resulting in potential impact on attempts at change and development (Fraser and Bosanquet 2006).

The following extracts come from a course entitled 'The Curriculum' that forms part of the online MSc in Clinical Education at the University of Edinburgh.[2] Participants are asked (via a discussion board) to provide a metaphor for the curriculum.[3] These examples illustrate some issues with the concept:

> I think of a curriculum as obtaining an ECG [(electrocardiogram)]. I have definite outcomes: seeing the ECG trace and being able to interpret it… but there are lots of steps and preparation to allow this to happen...And at the end of it, it's all a bunch of squiggles anyway :)

There is more truth in that last phrase than perhaps the author intended if we take 'a bunch of squiggles' as something that is difficult to make sense of. In contrast, another student sees curriculum as something that is built:

[2] See https://www.ed.ac.uk/medicine-vet-medicine/postgraduate/clinical-education. Accessed 17 March 2021.

[3] Permission has been granted for the use of these quotes.

> …my thoughts are more about it [the curriculum] as a set of instructions to achieve an end goal…The instructions will also allude to the different methods in achieving our goal e.g., hammering, screw, glue. The instructions are available, but the student may decide to take their learning in alternative directions to meet their individual needs (change the door-knobs!). The instructions will also have a picture from which to evaluate the end product.

This quote highlights a couple of enduring ideas, including constructivist conceptions of learning, and defined outcomes.

Other quotes, however, convey more critical perspectives, or at least a social process, with a degree of dynamic tension:

> For me a curriculum is a 'like labyrinth'. A convoluted maze of learning objectives and outcomes that are difficult to navigate to the end.

> For a health care training programme, the curriculum is a memorandum of understanding between the consumers of health care, the Institution, the faculty and the trainees.

> A tug of war between the designers, executors and the users!

These quotes all reflect (knowingly or otherwise) different aspects of a range of definitions of the curriculum, its stakeholders, and purpose, including the idea that teachers have come to be seen as technicians implementing pre-set policy (Priestley 2011), rather than, for example, Lipsky's street level bureaucrats (2010), creatively managing policy diktats at the coalface of practice.

The definition of the curriculum has a particular place in professional education, more so at undergraduate level, but also at postgraduate level where it may be a reference point for programmes seeking to meet the accreditation criteria of professional bodies. This definition of curriculum comes from medical education.

> …a sophisticated blend of educational strategies, course content, learning outcomes, educational experiences, assessment, the educational environment and the individual students' learning style, personal timetable and programme of work. (Harden 2001: 123)

Print (1993: 9) provided a similarly broad definition, with an additional note (reflecting when it was published, no doubt) that it is 'invariably' presented as a written document.

In this context, it is interesting to note that our MSc Clinical Education students (all health professionals engaged in teaching) frequently report that they are unable to find or obtain such a document pertaining to the students they are teaching. Despite the difficulties encountered by those charged with delivering the curriculum in actually getting hold of it, such documents (in hard copy or digital version) form a central part of the validation processes of professional and regulatory bodies. Such validation documents typically include an element of mapping (also called blueprinting) defined as 'showing the relationships of all aspects of the curriculum, [it] is a linchpin to attain the objectives/outcomes of any curriculum. It illustrates the relationship between the different components of the curriculum so that all the connections are easily visualized' (Al-Eyd et al. 2018: 1). Having engaged with a

number of these documents over the past 25 plus years, they are in my experience, very rarely easy to visualise. Such an approach also assumes that what is in the document is what happens in practice; the planned versus the enacted curriculum (Remillard 2005).

Having established that the curriculum is a problematic concept, I propose it can be viewed from a number of different perspectives, which have been dominant (but not exclusive) at different times, culminating in what I am calling a postcurriculum context that is salient at this point in time. There are, of course, other classificatory approaches to the curriculum in higher education, that refer to what is being taught or learned (and how) (the hidden, enacted, intended, formal) (Remillard 2005; Bergenhenegouwen 1987), typologies of curriculum design (Toohey 1999; Burgess 2004), and types of definition (Fraser and Bosanquet 2006). The curriculum types I have developed and describe in the following section represent a process in which elements of a former type persist, unlike Kuhn's (1962) concept of revolutionary paradigm shifts where there is a break with previous ways of thinking. My approach, in Ritzer's terms, 'rejects the idea that there are hard-and-fast dividing lines between social phenomena, focuses on social relations…[and] is deeply concerned with both conflicts and contradictions' (2008: 184). In proposing these curriculum types, I see them not as fixed things, but more akin to sociologist Max Weber's 'ideal types' (Swingewood 1991). For Weber, 'ideal types' are abstract analytical constructs representing phenomena with typical elements or characteristics that may not always be present. Ideal, in this context, relates to ideas rather than perfection.

2.1 The Modernist Curriculum

This type of thinking on curriculum was at its peak in higher education at a time well before the first major expansion of the sector in the 1960s and the more radical restructuring of the 1990s and beyond. During this period, the University was still an elite, relatively autonomous, institution with very few postgraduate students. The award of a postgraduate Master's degree has an interesting and varied history both within the UK (from the Oxbridge MA awarded without further work, to the Scottish MA awarded as a first degree) and internationally (Borchert 1994). During the early part of this period, taught postgraduate study, as we currently understand it, although popular in the USA, was less common in the UK. In fact, it was only in 2001 that a QAA report specified 'M-level' learning outcomes for all programmes in N. Ireland, Wales and England leading to a qualification with the title 'Master' (QAA 2014).

Modernist conceptualisations of curricula reflect a 'normative' approach to education, that is to say, one in which curricula reflect dominant ideas of what education can and should be. This approach aligns with what has been called the factory model of schooling, compatible with Frederick Taylor's principles of scientific management with its focus on efficiency and rationalism (Lindén et al. 2017). This normative (or structural functionalist) orientation is also evident in the traditional

perception that the main goal of education is to produce students trained to reason and be fully functioning citizens (Nguyen 2010). Structural functionalism views society as an organism in which elements (the family, legal system, educational system, political system, etc.) combine to form a cohesive whole (Thompson 2003). Within each system, individuals perform defined complementary roles. From a structural functionalist perspective, organisations (such as universities) serve the purpose of producing individuals who can fulfil specific roles in society and thereby contribute to the maintenance of social cohesion. The university degree (and the 'curriculum' on which it is based) has the manifest function of producing individuals deemed to be qualified to undertake specific roles in society (historically the traditional professions, civil service and managerial positions).

The idea of the modernist curriculum complements notions of what Dewey called 'traditional' and Biesta called 'strong' education, in which the teacher selects and communicates knowledge to students who, following acquisition, use this after school or university (van der Kamp et al. 2019). Although aspects of this modernist perspective of the curriculum persisted (and persist), in the 1960s critical perspectives started to highlight and challenge dominant ideologies informing curriculum design. It is also in the 1960s that we see the rise of poststructuralism and postmodernism.

2.2 Post-Modernism and the Curriculum

In this section, I treat postmodernism and poststructuralism as referring to the same set of broad ideas (though they actually represent a wide range of theories, it is not my intention here to attempt to untangle them). Some curriculum scholars may or may not use these labels in a way that is built on a thorough understanding of the field; my point here is that, whether based on in-depth knowledge or misunderstanding, postmodernist ideas have had an influence on thinking about the curriculum. My focus here is on the uptake of the idea, not whether an author has used the ideas of particular theorists 'correctly'.

At an early stage of thinking about 'postcurriculum', I searched Google Scholar and identified only one paper explicitly using the term, and that was specifically in relation to English language teaching (Green 1995). As used by Green, postcurriculum refers to a relationship between curriculum and postmodernist ideas and the notion that emerging educational initiatives represent a move away from what I have called the modernist curriculum. He outlined a shift in English teaching in the 1960s from a traditional approach to one emphasising, '… "self-expression", "voice", "sincerity", "authenticity", "commitment", "spontaneity",…subjectivity, [one that is] socially critical and praxis orientated' (Green 1995: 393). Though not referring to postmodernism, Nelms (1991: 6) proposed a definition of curriculum in the context of nurse education that aligns with Green, noting:

> The educational journey, in an educational environment in which the biography of the person (the student) interacts with the history of the culture of nursing through the biography of another person (the faculty) to create meaning and release potential in the lives of all participants.

The idea of a postmodernist curriculum in higher education has been welcomed by some as emancipatory, challenging the dominance of the western heterosexual male, pale, and stale (Sperring 2020). At the same time, it created a kind of pedagogic moral panic amongst commentators within and outwith universities, who expressed outrage at its relativism and the dumbing down of higher education or its apparent failure to address structural inequality (see Dawkins 1998; Beyer and Liston 1992).

Despite a reduced influence of postmodernism within some academic departments, it continues to attract advocates as an approach to education. Nguyen (2010: 92, 95), for example, proposed that in the postmodern university the aim must be to, 'create a citizen who is sensitive to his or her racial, sexual, and class identity … While modernist education tried to educate students for citizenship and fixed jobs, postmodernist education is believed to train them for uncomfortable uncertainties and the ability to live with chaos.' In a similar vein, Doll (1993: 155) described a set of curriculum concepts derived from a postmodern perspective, his educational vision is based on the belief that 'there does exist a fascinating, imaginative realm where no one owns the truth and everyone has the right to be understood.'

2.3 The New Modernist Curriculum

Developments since the 1990s point to a reinvigorated form of modernism in higher education, with particular relevance to postgraduate education and digital technologies. This new modernist curriculum has a different character from the previous version due to being tied up with neo-liberalism and higher education.

The 1990s (in the UK at least) saw a massive expansion of higher education which continued well into the twenty-first century, though Covid-19 has exposed some structural weaknesses in the model of the university as a business, with the future of some institutions looking decidedly financially shaky (Ahlburg 2020). Key features of this period have been the expansion of postgraduate study, the shift of most health professions to degrees as the registration level qualification, internationalisation in the form of universities opening overseas campuses, and the growth of online programmes. More recently, we have seen increasingly close tie-ups with 'for profit' education corporations, and micro-credentialling (Milligan and Kennedy 2017).[4] At the same time we see standardisation of university processes, often based around a model of undergraduate programmes and students, with little

[4] Also known as micro-masters, these are small packages of online learning aimed (typically but not exclusively) at graduates that can be accumulated for academic credit or used as standalone recognition of learning.

acknowledgement of the nature of postgraduate study and the characteristics of its students (Aitken et al. 2019a). Analyses of university documents highlight the use of language that reflects a process of depersonalisation: thus, it is the curriculum (rather than teachers) that deliver outcomes, policies that enact aims, and programmes that produce graduate attributes (see Hayes and Jandrić 2018; Aitken and Hayes 2021, this book).

These changes represent a return to modernism and the university sector being seen as servicing the needs of 'society' through employers. A key difference between this instrumentalism (i.e., the job of higher education being to serve the needs of employers) and that of the early twentieth century is the explicit attempt to gain financial reward and business growth from such developments, with postgraduate students a clear market for universities (Aitken and O'Carroll 2020). Consider the following advert for an event being run in early 2021 by AdvanceHE[5] and directed towards strategic leaders in higher education which noted,

> Thought leaders have recognised that the emerging skills landscape cannot be supplied by a one-directional pipeline between secondary education and professional work. They envision agile, lifelong learning opportunities where learning is at the heart of an eco-system that supports seamless and equitable transitions between tertiary education providers and employment. (Hack 2021)

Leaving aside the business speak, the vision for the future could not be clearer. Whilst it would be difficult to object to lifelong learning, this eco-system conveniently opens up the opportunity for a life-long postgraduate income stream for organisations (typically funded by workers, either directly or via loans). It is perhaps no surprise that the Higher Education Academy changed its name to the more corporate sounding AdvanceHE.

Often presented in terms of responding to the demands of students and reflecting consumerist notions of choice, the increasingly popular approach of modularisation and micro-credentialing has been used in a way that supports modernist, rationalist, and instrumentalist approaches to the curriculum. This is supported by the adoption of the principles of constructive alignment (Biggs and Tang 2011), (mis)used in such a way that the role of the teacher is diminished, becoming merely an interchangeable instrument required to deliver activities designed to achieve intended learning outcomes (Loughlin et al. 2020). Ralston (2021: 83) described this approach along with the 'craze' for micro-credentialing as reflecting, '(1) administrative urgency to unbundle higher education curricula and degree programs for greater efficiency and profitability and (2) a renascent movement among industry and higher education leaders to reorient the university curriculum towards vocational training.' Co-incidentally, a precarious academic workforce is highly compatible with this approach (Aitken and Hayes 2021, this book). Educational developments

[5] AdvanceHE is a UK agency formed in 1981 from the merger of the Equality Challenge Unit, Higher Education Academy and the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education. See https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/. Accessed 17 March 2021.

and the associated issues identified here reflect their use within a new-modernist approach to the curriculum; it doesn't necessarily have to be that way.

In this new-modernist curriculum, developments are frequently presented as promoting student choice and a process of student centredness. This approach is nicely characterised by Biesta (2009) as the 'learnification' of education, whereby content knowledge is replaced by transferable skills. The emphasis is on what are seen as not just academic skills (critical appraisal for example) but also employable soft skills, such as team working and problem solving, that prepare graduates to address 'wicked problems' in the workplace. One medical school in the USA has gone so far as to introduce an innovation pathway for those interested in commercialising their practice (Scott et al. 2021). For Lindén et al. (2017: 11) these changes are usually promoted by 'non-educationalists' and lack a theoretical base resulting in a curriculum 'full of tensions and contradictions'.

In the new-modernist curriculum, digital technology is seen as instrumental in opening up new markets and as something to be either contrasted with face-to-face teaching or combined in some way, as in so-called 'hybrid' models (Jones 2019; Meydanlioglu and Arikan 2014). Technology is seen as a 'theory free' (Hew et al. 2019) means to an end, opening up further opportunities to casualise academic labour and monitor student engagement. In this context a new type of specialist, the educational technologist, has emerged, often with a focus (from the perspective of the university) on the technology aspect rather than education (Ritzhaupt et al. 2018).

McNutt (2018: 456) has characterised the educational technologist as often residing, 'within the fractures of organisational structures – straddling various strategic priority pillars such as Digital Campus, Teaching and Learning and the Student Experience'. Inevitably, they operate in ways that are shaped by institutional understandings of the relations between education and technology. Techno-centric views of these relations are prevalent, as evident in definitions of educational technology such as this one: 'Educational technology is the study and ethical practice of facilitating learning and improving performance by creating, using, and managing appropriate technological processes and resources.' (Januszewski and Molenda 2013: 1).[6]

The new-modernist curriculum does not represent a complete departure from some of the radical emancipatory ideas of the 1960s and 70s. This is reflected in a willingness to talk (but not necessarily act), adopting a supportive stance to, for example, the concerns of LGBTQ+ students, the decolonisation of the curriculum (Batty 2020) and widening participation, which has, to date, focused on undergraduate programmes (Wakeling and Laurison 2017). However, it does this in ways that are also essentially modernist (Wheelahan 2010), seeking to standardise approaches across institutions, embedding core ideas in all programmes (with the inevitable institutional check-listing, mapping, and blueprinting) – all based on documentation (texts), of course, rather than what actually happens.

[6] My point is that this is a view of educational technologists, not a description of individual educational technologists and how they perform their role.

2.4 Postcurriculum

The changes to higher education that started in the 1990s have accelerated into the twenty-first century and, from the perspective of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020–2021, have been turbo-charged in relation to online learning and expanding postgraduate education. The starting point for my postcurriculum proposition is that we can no longer go back to simplistic assumptions about what a curriculum is. It is not a question of coming up with a better, more precise, or expansive definition. I propose postcurriculum as a recognition of the actual state of affairs in higher education, in contrast to the value based positionings of the previous sections. A pessimistic interpretation of our present postcurriculum context is reflected in the view of Osberg and Biesta (2021: 57): 'The idea and practice of education, tied as it is to socio-historical moments shaped by a wider history, has in our time, fallen into a form of disrepair, or perhaps one could even say despair.' My more optimistic position as proposed later, is that we are where we are, but it doesn't have to be all bad.

Derrida famously said, 'there is no outside text' (Bowden 2020), meaning there is only interpretation of it, the text does not represent any reality. If my interpretation of Derrida is correct, curriculum documents, digital or otherwise, do not represent reality; they are always the subject of interpretation. Despite the long-acknowledged existence of the hidden (Snyder 1973), enacted, and experienced curriculum (Remillard 2005), there persists the idea that they can simply be refreshed, reformed, mapped, blueprinted, or (to borrow the title of the University of Edinburgh 2021 Learning and Teaching Conference[7]) be a *site* (my emphasis) of transformation. The curriculum is not where learning takes place (Fawns et al. 2019). In fact, it would be entirely possible to talk about learning, course, or programme design without the need to talk about curriculum at all. Who would miss it? Not students, I suspect, particularly those engaged in putting together their own collection of credit bearing courses.

Universities, educators, and professional bodies will continue to talk about the curriculum (and students will continue to probably not care or be aware what their 'curriculum' is). The purpose of thinking in terms of a postcurriculum is, as highlighted by Sinclair and Hayes (2019) in relation to postdigital, that we should not assume a shared understanding. Postcurriculum may not be the most elegant of terms, but just as Knox (2019: 360), citing Cramer's (2015) comment on the postdigital, noted, it is 'a term that sucks but is useful'. And its usefulness is as a tool for conversations around conceptions of learning and teaching.

Weber characterised the modern world as being like an 'iron cage' in which people are trapped by rationalism, and bureaucracy and systems of control; a process he saw as an inevitable outcome of capitalism (Ritzer et al. 2018). Schroeder and Ling (2014) take a (slightly) less pessimistic view of society and talk about a situation in which Weber's iron cage has been replaced with a rubber one. Schroeder

[7] https://www.ed.ac.uk/institute-academic-development/learning-teaching/cpd/workshops/learning-teaching-conference Accessed 17 March 2021.

and Ling's position is an interesting one if put in the context of postdigital education. Their argument (drawing on the work of classical sociologists Durkheim and Weber) is that the growth of information and communication technologies (ICT) is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, ICTs support the increasing bureaucratization of institutions and surveillance of populations, and there is the popular view of technology reducing community and increasing isolation; on the other hand, ICTs open up new spaces for communication and relationships. Thus, technology can constrain *and* enable. For example, as Selwyn (2020) has highlighted, learning analytics can be developed for use in ways that support behaviourist approaches to education and institutional control, or can be developed to be used and controlled by students for their social benefit (particularly those from disadvantaged groups).

Postcurriculum contains elements of traditionalism (evident in the resistance with which some have greeted a move to teaching online due to Covid-19), the concern of postmodernism with relativism and identity, *and* a narrow instrumentalism associated with economic drivers and the neoliberal university. Thus, critical perspectives around race, gender, the environment, disability, and colonialism that have been enthusiastically taken up by universities (Claeys-Kulik et al. 2019), can co-exist with outsourcing of facilities, intrusive proctoring of online exams, and tie-ins with for profit educational corporations (Morrissey 2015; Swauger 2020). Whilst there may always have been alternative and critical voices around conceptualisations of the curriculum, postcurriculum as an ideal type is designed to draw attention to the increasingly manifest co-existence of these contradictory elements.

2.5 What Does it Mean to be 'Post'?

The sociologist Anthony Giddens (1995: 1) recounts the only sociological joke to his (and my) knowledge:

> Q: What do you get when you cross a sociologist with a member of the Mafia?
> A: An offer you can't understand.

The joke will raise at least a smile by simply replacing 'sociologist' with postmodernism, poststructuralism or any other 'post' conception. Such gentle attacks as Giddens' re-telling are hardly surprising given the plentiful availability of writing that seems designed to confuse rather than illuminate. Even the poster boy for postmodernism Michel Foucault (not noted for the clarity of his prose) once described the writing style of another noted postmodernist, Jacques Derrida, as 'obscurrantisme terroriste' (Postrel and Fesser 2000). I'm no French linguist, but I understand his point.

This doesn't need to be the case. The prefix post- can, of course, be used to simply refer to something that comes 'after' something else, a period in time (a 'post-match' debrief, 'post-traumatic' stress, post-industrial). However, it is also used as a form of shorthand to refer to something more complex. Sinclair and Hayes (2019) explored the prefix post- in terms of the job it performs in drawing attention to the

need to 'question' and 're-work' the concept to which it is appended whilst retaining the sense of a phase of development. Thus the 'postdigital' perspective is one in which there is 'no turning back from a convergence of the traditional and the digital.' (Sinclair and Hayes 2019: 119). My proposition is that we can usefully use 'post' as proposed by Sinclair and Hayes (2019), to refer to a critical approach to what follows (in this case 'curriculum').

3 Postcurriculum and Postgraduate Education

An increasing number of professions have a route to initial qualification via postgraduate study, albeit linked in some cases to a relevant undergraduate degree. These preregistration programmes (for example in nursing or social work) map closely to the equivalent undergraduate programmes in terms of meeting regulatory requirements. My concern here is to focus on postgraduate study that *extends* a relevant degree, either through (increasingly online) non-award bearing continuing professional development, or a postgraduate degree.

The expansion of taught postgraduate education has been explicitly tied to vocational relevance, employment, and career development. Even within the postgraduate research arena there has been the rise of the workplace-focused professional doctorate which often includes a substantial taught element. This is in line with a major aim of higher education policy in the UK since the late 1990s which has been to increase skills and promote lifelong learning in the service of private and public sector enterprises, as evident in the Dearing Report (National Committee of Enquiry into Higher Education 1997). Universities have been only too happy to respond to this policy and develop demand, and in turn, the potential for improved career prospects has been a significant attraction for prospective students (Donaldson and McNicholas 2004).

With the growth of the taught postgraduate market, as with most consumer enterprises, market pressures encourage those in the business to develop new models (such as fully online programmes) to grow and compete with other providers. The logic of the market is an initial expansion of providers (including the so-called 'disrupters'). In postgraduate education, this has led to increasing interest in the development of micro-credentials, 'mini-Master's' and the like, developed in partnership with education businesses. This development, and the accompanying focus on outcomes and competencies, certainly carries risks for those interested in transformative education. As Sadler (2007: 392) has noted,

> I believe that a blinkered conceptualisation of curriculum, the strong trend towards fine-grained prescription, atomised assessment, the accumulation of little 'credits' like grains of sand, and intensive coaching towards short-term objectives… The logic of this phenomenon is obvious: if you break something into pieces, whatever originally held it together has to be either supplied or satisfactorily substituted if the sense of the whole is to be restored. The relationships and dependencies that should characterise a good sequence of learning units tend to get lost when course documentation, teaching, and assessment all focus on units, modules, or even specific tasks as self-contained, hermetically sealed elements.

In this postcurriculum context, we see the extension of the 'proletarianization' of the professional class (Oppenheimer 1972) to the academic labour force, with an increasing division of labour and specialisation (despite calls for researchers to also be teachers). This is evident in the expansion of job titles. In addition to the traditional Lecturer and Research Fellow, we now have Teaching Fellows and new titles for those servicing taught postgraduate online programmes. More recently there has been much discussion of the 'precariat' (a combination of precarious and proletariat) in higher education (see for example Courtois and O'Keefe 2015). The precarious, proletarianized, worker is exemplified by the online teacher with many of the challenges faced discussed in other chapters in this book (Buchanan 2021; Bussey 2021; Aitken and Hayes 2021). The postcurriculum educator is at high risk of alienation in the classical Marxist sense, having little control over their labour and what they produce as universities seek to exert ownership of the intellectual property produced by their employees (which is easier when everything is archived online) (Hall 2018). This raises the question, how can educators working in a postcurriculum context exert some agency, are there opportunities for resisting or subverting some of the negative features highlighted above? I think there are some possibilities.

We can re-think constructive alignment; it doesn't have to be a bureaucratic constraint on learning, creativity, and flexibility in teaching. Gough (2013: 1223) has called for a complexivist view of teaching and learning, arguing for 'deconstructive nonalignment' and proposing that 'even if a curriculum is planned to function as a simple system we can choose to interpret it as an element of a complex system – as part of a living agential space rather than a 'dead' mechanical space'. And Loughlin et al. (2020: 1) have called for a reclaiming of constructive alignment, suggesting that it is 'neither the panacea, nor the unalloyed evil depicted in the majority of higher education discourses'. Whether we want to deconstruct or reclaim, the take home message is that we have some options.

The response of universities to the Covid-19 pandemic, and the phrase 'pivot' to online teaching (e.g., Nordmann et al. 2020), has been to develop academics' skills in the use of technology and re-purpose materials for online 'delivery'. Such an approach, however, neglects a different set of skills that teachers require, particularly those engaged in taught online postgraduate courses. Aitken and O'Carroll (2020) conceptualised directors of online postgraduate programmes as being akin to acts in a circus: clairvoyant (a visionary), conjurer (being able to pull things out of a hat), blind-folded tight-rope walker (being surefooted in the face of complexity), trapeze-artist (working with trusted partners), and contortionist (working with constraints). An alternative to current approaches to academic development for this group would be to use 'seasoned performers' to enhance the skills of the novice in performing these acts.

Finally, a postdigital approach to postgraduate education as an embodied and socially meaningful activity (Fawns et al. 2019) reminds us that meaningful experiences are there to be had. This approach opens up the possibilities of working with 'students', not just as 'students' but (in a postgraduate context, at least) professional peers with a common concern. The 'seamless and equitable transitions between

tertiary education providers and employment', envisaged in the AdvanceHE event highlighted earlier, does not have to be on the employers' terms. Aitken et al. (2019b), drawing on the work of Bourdieu, explored experiences of online postgraduate students from two online Master's programmes. The findings present an alternative to the kind of graduate attributes commonly espoused by universities, focusing instead on the acquisition of social and cultural capital that support personal and professional development.

At times, it feels like critiques of instrumentalist approaches to education, in a taught postgraduate context, at least, fail to acknowledge that taught postgraduate programmes (online, in particular) are increasingly valued by working professionals as a means of gaining a postgraduate qualification while employed. Aitken (2020: 181) notes: 'Online learning is often discussed in instrumental terms, as if abstracted from the social and material settings in which learning and work take place, but my own conversations with student and graduates about the impact of their studies contrast strongly with such views'. Her analysis of interviews with health professionals undertaking online postgraduate programmes identified a process by which learning 'moves horizontally within and across academic and clinical settings: crossing boundaries, [generating a] ripple effect, eroding structures and hierarchies and [leading to] expansion'.

This reflects the contradictions and complexity of a postcurriculum context. Yes, there are many constraints, and yes constructive alignment and other constructs can be used in mechanistic instrumental ways, but it is also possible to engage with 'students' in ways that are not driven by online delivery or the technologies used. Taught postgraduate programmes can be designed in such a way as to meet the particular needs of the student and the requirements for job satisfaction for the teacher.

4 Conclusion

Postcurriculum is an attempt to define a state of affairs, rather than what should or could be. We cannot avoid reference to curriculum in higher education any more than postmodernism can avoid reference to modernism, but we can change how we think about it and work within the constraints we face as educators. We can use ideal types of curriculum such as modernism, post-modernism and new modernism to think about what vision is being proposed when people talk 'the curriculum'. We can also use 'postcurriculum' as a short-hand description of the emerging landscape of academic practice, from the perspective of practitioners who are constrained by the structures within which we operate. Moreover, once we have a way of thinking about what we are faced with, we can begin to develop strategies to respond to it. A key element of operating as an online postgraduate teacher is the importance of developing social networks to avoid isolation and to develop alternative designs for postcurriculum practice. Nurturing these relationships and taking advantage of the opportunities to connect with others online, can reduce the isolation that may be

experienced by teachers. To return to Schroeder and Ling (2014), we might be in a cage, but it can at least be one of rubber rather than iron.

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Institutional Contexts in Supporting Quality Online Postgraduate Education: Lessons Learned from Two Initiatives at the University of Edinburgh

Tim Fawns, Michael Gallagher, and Siân Bayne

1 Introduction

While there are a range of practices and principles that underpin quality online postgraduate education, this work cannot all be done through course design and teaching. Good educational practice is also embedded in institutional policies, strategies, cultures and infrastructures. In this chapter, we consider the autonomous and interdependent institutional relations that shape, support and constrain online postgraduate taught (PGT) education. Comparing and contrasting two digital education initiatives at our institution, the University of Edinburgh, we examine the tensions and interfaces between centralised (i.e., institutional-level) and localised (i.e., programme level) activity, in order to understand how policy and practice align and diverge across the institution, paying particular attention to the online postgraduate taught context.

For the purposes of our chapter, we define 'senior leadership' as University staff directly involved in centralised governance of teaching and learning, and 'programme staff' as educational designers, practitioners and administrators involved in localised education of students. We recognise the problematic nature of these definitions, as some individuals within centralised, senior leadership roles, with input into central university committees and institutional teaching and learning policy, also have localised, School- or programme-level roles. Thus, alongside what we will argue is considerable ambiguity between central and local aims, values, policy and practice, there is also ambiguity within the roles performed by those associated

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with these different categories. Further, we note that there are various elements in play that operate in the space between centralised and localised activity (e.g., department, School or College-level governance), and also externally (e.g., regulators and accreditors). While we should not overstate local and central roles as oppositional, we do find the terms useful in helping us to gain some purchase on the otherwise volatile and varied composition of higher education institutions.

While it is relatively easy to see how course or programme level adjustments influence the learning activity of students, as Fawns and Sinclair (2021) point out in their chapter of this book, these adjustments happen within a broader terrain. To start with, many of the resources and infrastructure used within formal curricula, and by students outside of them, are established at University level. As Enriquez (2009) points out, with the installation of a central virtual learning environment (VLE), many of the design choices have already been made before teachers become involved. It is not possible within the configuration of our institution's installation of Blackboard Learn, for example, to allow students to contribute to the content or structure of pages without asking a teacher or administrator to make the changes for them.

In UK universities, the library is another key resource that is usually managed at institutional level, yet has a disproportionate impact at programme and course level. Where some books and journals are kept only in physical form, or are difficult to access through web-based interfaces, online students will be significantly disadvantaged. Services to digitise and manage easy access to online content are crucial to maintaining quality in online programmes (and will also shape the practices of on-campus students, since online content is made available to them too). Office space is another example of a resource that affects online teaching, and that is controlled at a level above that of the programme. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, during which most teachers were required to work from home, the physical space needed to teach online classes was not recognised within building architectures and room booking systems that gave preference to larger physical classes, leading to situations where teachers had to facilitate live online sessions from corridors or from shared offices with people talking and working in the background.

The governance of education will also shape practice, as well as the possibilities for practitioners to design their approaches and develop their expertise (Bannink et al. 2015). For example, in the discourse of managerialism, activity is streamlined, through top-down approaches, towards efficiency and effectiveness, at the expense of local discretion. As Biesta (2009) notes, though, effectiveness requires a direction, and different elements of the institution might be aiming in different directions. Institutional approaches to shaping teaching practice may be unsuccessful due to a disconnect between central decision-making and School and programme-level activity. This can manifest in unsuccessful attempts at 'competence control' (where centralised leadership decides what local expertise should look like), or excessive local discretion without sufficient support and structure (Bannink et al. 2015). There may also be a danger in assuming that there is a coherent entity that constitutes 'the institution' (or, indeed, a coherent centralised leadership group),

and that arranges and configures these different elements. In the next section, we ask 'who is the institution?' in order to examine how teaching and learning practices respond to institutional-level policy and initiatives.

2 Who Is the Institution?

A whole-of-University approach to online postgraduate education (as suggested in another chapter of this book by Stone et al. 2021), requires consideration of the complexity of who or what makes cultural and procedural change happen. Decades ago, Weick (1976) positioned universities as 'loosely coupled' systems, referring to a combination of autonomy (loose) and interdependence (coupling) between different elements of the institution (e.g., educational programmes, faculty development units, senior leadership). These elements are responsive to one another but retain evidence of separateness and identity (Orton and Weick 1990). However, it is important to note that the nature and complexity of these coupled systems differs across different kinds of institutions and over time.

The discussion taking place in this chapter centres on two initiatives (one launched in 2010, the other in 2017) within the University of Edinburgh, an ancient Scottish University, founded in 1583. It currently has around 40,000 students and 15,000 staff, organised into three Colleges—Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences; Medicine and Veterinary Medicine; and Science and Engineering. Schools comprising (more-or-less) aligned discipline areas sit within each of these Colleges, made up largely of academic departments and administrative centres. While much of the most significant educational policy, strategy and infrastructure is centrally-organised, in loosely coupled institutions such as ours, financial planning and resources for teaching and local cultural change are not centrally-allocated but devolved to Schools (of which there are 21 across the three Colleges; see Haywood 2018 for more details of the governance of the University). In these Schools, attitudes towards teaching, and the extent to which it is valued in relation to research, knowledge exchange and other activities, are important in terms of how workload is allocated, how able teachers feel to undertake activities that help them develop, and how teachers are supported, recognised, valued and understood (Aitken and Hayes 2021 this book).

The University's collegial structures and administration have been largely predicated on academic freedom and autonomy for scholars, and a centralised administration (Kok et al. 2010). Such structures, common to ancient universities and despite some movements towards more managerialist approaches, contrast with those of newer institutions, particularly 'post-92 institutions' (named after the Further and Higher Education Act of 1992) where the administrative emphasis is on control, accountability, and performance, presenting a stricter and more scrutinised form of administration (Davies and Thomas 2002). In ancient universities, the extent to which centralised managerial governance impacts the work of online PGT programmes is muted, beyond merely gradually tightening the traditionally 'weak

regulation and control mechanisms' (Sporn 1995: 72). In relation to the University of Edinburgh, our answer to the question 'Who is the institution' is broadly*:* it is a loosely coupled entity constituted by the negotiation of centralised and local policy and practice. Therefore, a whole-of-University approach requires not just clarity of centralised decision-making, but alignment with local aims and values, and the right kind of balance—as appropriate to our particular institution—of support, structure and discretion.

3 Recognising Educational Expertise

Meaningful institutional change in complex terrain such as online PGT education is likely to require some mutual negotiation of top-down and bottom-up approaches. Bannink et al. (2015) note that, where there is ambiguity (i.e., an absence of a clear set of shared aims), the use of incentives (e.g., reward and recognition) can be used within a managerialist approach as a form of control. However, this is not likely to be effective where there is also complexity (i.e., where knowing what constitutes educational quality is not simple). In part, that is because management cannot specify precisely enough what should be rewarded across a wide range of subjects and degree levels, and also because teachers recognise that centralised reward processes rarely take into account the more complex and localised aspects of value or quality.

The use of incentives and rewards as a mechanism for aligning local practices with centralised aims and values is more difficult where online PGT education is marginalised in relation to other, more traditional activities. At our institution, centralised educational policy has historically been aimed at, and informed by, on-campus, undergraduate (Aitken and O'Carroll 2020) and traditional, on-campus postgraduate programmes. Not only does online postgraduate taught education have different considerations in terms of how it is designed and enacted, but it involves student cohorts with different characteristics (e.g., a stronger representation of older, part-time students, Stone et al. 2021 this book). As Aitken and O'Carroll (2020) found, ambiguity between policy and programme-level context can inhibit creativity in design and innovation, and result in online postgraduate Programme Directors and their programme staff 'contorting' their practices to comply with regulations that are not fit-for-purpose. Such tensions reveal subtle misalignments of programme and teaching support, structures of faculty development, and centralised agendas of growth.

We would also argue that, particularly in ancient, research-led institutions like ours, education more generally has been marginalised in relation to research. Despite calls to see teaching and research practices as interconnected (Gravett and Kinchin 2020), and rhetorical moves like the encouragement of 'research-led teaching', these domains remain fragmented (Tight 2016). At the same time, the economics of teaching and learning are entangled with those of research, knowledge exchange and other activities. Some authors have argued that income from student fees (those paid by international students, in particular) subsidises research activity

(Olive 2017), yet teaching in general, and online PGT teaching in particular, is still perceived as less valued in terms of promotions and institutional agendas (Aitken and Hayes 2021 this book). At Edinburgh, attempts are being made to recognise and reward teaching, for example, through formal criteria for teaching-related promotions and a teaching awards scheme led by the student union. However, such changes need to be approached with care in order not to further marginalise online PGT teachers.

For example, in the promotions guidance (University of Edinburgh 2015), the term 'front of house teaching' features prominently, carrying strong connotations of classroom lecturing and tutoring. Where online learning is mentioned, simply teaching online or creating online materials are taken to be examples of innovation, presumably because they are seen in relation to traditional, on-campus courses. Yet differentiation within online education practices, as demonstrated across the chapters of this book, is crucial to understanding quality within this modality. It will be interesting to see how processes of reward and recognition change in response to so much traditional 'front of house' teaching moving online during the Covid-19 pandemic (promotions are 'frozen' at the time of writing).

In both promotions and awards, there is a small number of winners and a larger number of losers, and we should be wary of promoting a culture of competition in teaching that undermines collaboration and innovation (Rogers 2019). Subtler forms of recognition are also needed, that can be threaded throughout University discourse and rhetoric (e.g., talking about teachers in strategy documents and websites, greater prominence in non-teaching-specific materials, involvement of teachers in decision-making processes, etc.; see Aitken and Hayes 2021 this book). At the same time, discourse, policies and strategies are important in conveying what is valued and how teaching is understood at an institutional level. The institutional discourses that arise around digital technology can reinforce a neglect of teaching by emphasising efficiency, scalability and solutionism (Fawns 2019) at the expense of acknowledging the expertise and labour of teachers and programme staff (Hayes 2019).

The challenges faced by Programme Directors are illustrative of differences between what is valued by students and staff at the programme level and what is recognised in policy and discourse. Aitken and O'Carroll (2020: 1416) interviewed Programme Directors of online PGT programmes, finding 'a lack of institutional visibility' of this important role. The authors likened balancing local challenges with disconnected, centralised policies and systems to being a 'blind-folded tightrope walker'. This is further complicated by the pressure from external parties that individual programmes might operate under. PGT programmes, in particular, operate 'at the interface of academia, the professions and commercial pressures' (Aitken and O'Carroll 2020: 1411). In ancient, research-intensive universities, senior academic roles are often drawn from the academic base (e.g., Heads of School might become Heads of College or University Vice Principals). Such staff will have had long-term experience and involvement in teaching practice but, given the shortcomings noted above of recognising teaching within promotion processes, are likely to have been primarily focused on research. Senior support service staff are usually not academic and often have a more managerial and commercial orientation.

However, applying a centralised, managerialist approach in this context is potentially problematic due to the ambiguity of goals and values between the various stakeholders. For example, metrics for measuring 'contact time', workload allocation models and promotion criteria that fail to properly account for online teaching all contribute to the marginalisation of programme staff (Bussey 2021 this book) and, by extension, of online PGT students. At the same time, a lack of appropriate support and structure, in the form of resources, infrastructure and faculty development tailored to online education, means that online postgraduate teachers are left to develop themselves and are disconnected from getting help where it is needed. Too much ambiguity between policy and practice can have the knock-on effect of allowing insufficient focus on supporting programme staff, directly and indirectly. For example, it could lead to insufficient numbers and experience of programme staff, teachers not being appropriately recognised and rewarded, and inadequate structures for ongoing development.

To build expertise, educators need support and space to develop sound pedagogical values and principles, and practices that align with these. Fortunately, there are informal networks for teachers to draw on and informal ways of development (through dialogue around teaching practices, for example) (McCune 2018). However, without an awareness of the value of teachers rooted in the formal systems all the way through the institution, such endeavours may exclude those who are not connected into those networks of teaching expertise. Not only that, but institutions may then fail to adequately recognise the demands of good online teaching and the support and flexibility that may be needed for online teachers to be able to do their job well and maintain their physical and mental health (see Bussey 2021 this book). Sector mechanisms for promoting teaching quality, including the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and external accreditation such as Advance HE, alongside the institutional mechanisms designed to support uptake of these and other teaching development opportunities, potentially contribute to the building of wider networks, but do not address the fundamental issue of creating space to develop teaching practices.

In the next section, we consider two institutional initiatives aimed at shifting educational practice, which highlight important aspects of the cultural and structural make-up of decision-making, and the negotiation of educational values at our own University.

4 Comparing and Contrasting Two Institutional Initiatives Aimed at Shifting Educational Practice

4.1 The Distance Education Initiative (DEI)

In a strategic effort to boost online education at the University, both in terms of student numbers and programme staff expertise, the Distance Education Initiative (DEI) was launched in 2010. Five million pounds (a large sum for teaching and

learning initiatives) was allocated for the generation of a suite of fully online postgraduate programmes across the University. The project had two strategic aims: to bring 10,000 fully online students into the University by 2020, and to establish at least one online PGT programme in every School across the University (University of Edinburgh 2016; see also Haywood 2018). These programmes went through the normal quality assurance and course approval processes, thus motivating related academic and administrative staff to learn about online education (though the extent to which this learning was informed by research or practitioners with prior experience of online PGT education remains unclear). Student fees were comparable to on-campus courses.

Teams could bid for up to £250,000 to support development of new programmes. Programme staff appointed to do this work could contribute to the design and development phase, with a two-year period to generate enough income to demonstrate sustainability. This was appealing in the constrained economic climate following the 2008 financial crisis, and 34 bids were submitted. While not all of these programmes survived, the DEI increased the breadth of online teaching and design experience, and raised the profile of online learning at the University. Overall, the DEI approach seems to have been broadly successful in relation to its targets. According to the University's unofficial data, it resulted in well over 6000 graduates of DEI-funded programmes from more than 150 countries since its formation.

4.2 Near Future Teaching: Values and Preferred Futures

In the years following the DEI, largely through initiatives in internationalisation within undergraduate programmes, the University has recruited an increasingly diverse and international student population, with just under half coming from non-UK countries. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, just under 4000 of the current student body studied online (primarily at postgraduate level) in formal degree programmes. It was within this context that the Near Future Teaching project (NFT) was launched as a formal institutional project to generate a future vision for digital education which could inform University strategy. Between 2017–2019, the project team worked with over 400 students, staff, and other stakeholders in the co-production of institutional values to shape the preferred future for digital education at the University of Edinburgh. The NFT project was values-driven and participative and did not bring with it funding for the direct recruitment or development of teachers. Although embedded within a strategic push for the University to become a leader in digital education, the NFT was not intended as a direct mechanism for structural change.

The NFT project team employed futures methods (e.g., through speculation and discussion of possible futures, discussed in Facer and Sandford 2010) and articulated a vision for a preferred future for digital education based on the underpinning values of 'Experience over Assessment', 'Diversity and Justice', 'Relationships

First' and 'Participation and Flexibility'.[1] The results of the project included indicative aims and actions that Schools might undertake to realise these values in their digital education offerings and within their own disciplinary context. These results, and the preferable future they advocated, were intended to be interpreted and adapted at programme level, with the onus of change largely placed on Schools, units and individuals. In not prescribing how the quality of teaching might be defined, assured or evaluated, the NFT project allowed for the ambiguity and complexity of higher educational activity, and the loose coupling between the project output and teaching practices.

5 Governance and Development

Beyond their material and strategic outputs, both projects were helpful in surfacing some interrelations of policy, strategy, governance structures and programme-level practices that influence the quality of online PGT programmes. Firstly, both DEI and NFT projects were embedded within institutional strategy. In the DEI, there was a clear strategic push by senior leadership to grow numbers of online students. In the NFT, the strategic context was to lead in developing a vision of digital and distance education at the University of Edinburgh.

Secondly, the two projects used different mechanisms that imply different underpinning values or ideologies. DEI was financially-driven and used top-down methods such as the designation of target numbers which sat alongside School and programme-level discretion. It was presented as a (primarily financial) mechanism with a clear set of underpinning values centred on growth, quality and increased revenue via the 'efficiencies' of online. Where growth and revenue were more precisely defined, it is not clear how quality was operationalised, beyond the premise that online PGT programmes should be 'at least as high a quality of education as our traditional, on-campus, education' (Haywood 2018).

While it was largely non-prescriptive about how teams ran their programmes, the DEI initiative was also a means to reinforce relevant policies, processes and strategies already in play. Programme and faculty development within this initiative largely centred around normative models, such as training in centrally-supported platforms and programme governance. In contrast, the NFT, while there was oversight and sponsorship from the central Senate Education committee (a centralised senior academic group), was research-led and deliberately used co-design and participative methods to enact change. By the time this project ran, there was strong central support for academic and teaching development (via the Institute for Academic Development), which was not available at the time of the DEI. NFT was driven by a perceived need to establish a set of pedagogical values to underpin

[1] Full detail of all phases of the project and outputs are available for viewing and re-use on the project web site: www.nearfutureteaching.ed.ac.uk (accessed 29 March 2021).

developments in digital education, as a means to support decision-making across different parts of the University and to create alignment, not in terms of practices, but in terms of institutional direction. It sought growth, not in numbers, but in alignment of educational values.

Thirdly, both initiatives can be seen as attempts to create space for creativity, adaptation, and new practices, by redefining some of the loose couplings of the institution. Both projects were non-prescriptive about implementation and devolved the execution of their outcomes to Schools and programmes. The DEI gave Schools the remit and resources to develop their programmes, and the initiative functioned primarily at programme level, with only quite loose structures to bind together different contributors to the initiative across programmes and Schools. In the NFT, a loosely structured vision was produced that would be interpreted at School, programme and practice level. Its origins can be traced to a perceived need to update the ways in which programmes and courses were designed and run, such that they could break out of the constraints of real and imagined policies and practices and orient themselves more to the future and all its uncertainty, complexity and dynamism. The NFT project embedded a call for space within its constitution ('open space for reflection and the application of collective agency to the question of the future of teaching and learning') and its aspirational outcomes ('Teaching should be designed to provide the time and space for proper relationships and meaningful human exchange') (Bayne and Gallagher 2019: 15).

Fourthly, both projects contributed, albeit in different ways, to the development of communities and networks of online educators. In the DEI, although a number of programmes eventually ceased to operate for a variety of reasons, a set of commercially successful and well-evaluated programmes are still standing, and, alongside some online programmes established before DEI (e.g., in Law, Digital Education, Clinical Education), many of their staff are active contributors to teaching networks across the University. However, there is a potentially important distinction between those teachers whose core function was to work on new online programmes, and those who had a smaller role added to their core work. Being stretched across multiple programmes, or having only a limited amount of time structured into one's workload to invest in online teaching can lead to *ad hoc*, fragmented approaches to online learning and a greater challenge to developing practices and strategies (Aitken and O'Carroll 2020). The need for more time and new understandings of teaching was not addressed through central structures, instead falling to Schools which, having bid for additional funding, may not have had the capacity or knowledge to reconfigure working practices and structures to allow for these additional requirements.

The emphasis of both DEI and NFT initiatives on the creation of new approaches to development suggests tensions within the institutional dynamic: that the ambiguity of the existing loose couplings was necessary but not, by itself, sufficient to generate coherent advances in online PGT and other forms of digital education. Our interpretation is that to better support rapid acceleration of development or structural change in online education, established governance and quality assurance mechanisms (e.g., exam boards, School postgraduate teaching committees, and the

University-level learning and teaching committee) required more input from programme staff with sufficient knowledge and experience of online PGT, who were motivated to make changes.

The DEI used economic capital as a way of circumventing the established financial constraints around setting up a programme with existing resources and only recruiting more staff once the programme itself had generated sufficient income. This accelerated expansion into online education, along with structural elements to support such a move: staffing, technological infrastructure, support infrastructure, and so forth (Haywood 2018). It also increased the legitimacy of online PGT programmes for many staff at different levels of the institution, though we recognise that this is an ongoing struggle, even in the wake of the increase of online teaching due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In many ways, the results of the DEI initiative established the basis for further online or digital education initiatives at the institution, including the Distance Learning at Scale initiative,[2] the NFT project, and a large number of MOOCs (discussed in Macleod et al. 2015), for which more than three million people have registered, and which form a stated part of the University's commitment to knowledge exchange and community outreach.[3] At the same time, the DEI initiative amplified a strategy and narrative of growth, which arguably did not take enough account of institutional culture and the on-the-ground realities of designing, developing and sustaining innovative new programmes.

As a contrasting example, NFT sought to develop methodologies that could generate a vision of digital education which connected current practices to a future-oriented dynamic. As a piece of participative visioning work, it attended to culture, not to strategy, and unlike the large, well-funded institutional change project that was DEI, it did not have such immediate impact. Its longer-term influence is yet to be seen (and, indeed, the mechanisms for change remain ambiguous), but changes in programme-level values and practices encouraged by the project are likely to be slow to emerge and not easily visible. It is also notable that NFT was targeted not just at online PGT programmes but took a wider view of digital education as permeating undergraduate and on-campus. This lack of attention to modalities signalled a growing awareness of an erosion of the distinction between online and on-campus, or digital and non-digital (Fawns 2019), leading up to the current emergence of hybrid programmes (which was already underway before the Covid-19 pandemic, most prominently by the Edinburgh Futures Institute (EFI)[4]).

The NFT's assertive dissemination of project results and outcomes contributed to the ongoing, gradual reconfiguration of informal teaching-related networks within the institution, and the extension of these outward to connect with others beyond the University. However, expertise in online or digital education develops slowly, and this means that networks, and patterns of influence within them, must also transform slowly. In the move to emergency remote teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic,

[2] See https://www.projects.ed.ac.uk/project/p0305. Accessed 29 March 2021.

[3] See https://www.ed.ac.uk/studying/online-learning/free-short-courses/about. Accessed 29 March 2021.

[4] See https://efi.ed.ac.uk/. Accessed 29 March 2021.

for example, parts of the University's online education community provided both formal (e.g., where experienced online PGT educators designed and ran courses on online and hybrid teaching and course design for on-campus, undergraduate teachers; see, e.g., Fawns et al. forthcoming) and informal support (in the form of dialogue and communication through teaching networks). It is, however, notable that formal courses were primarily facilitated by teachers attached to programmes that were already fully online before both DEI and NFT initiatives (e.g., Digital Education and Clinical Education). Further, the largely informal, loosely-coupled mechanisms of the University mean that making use of these forms of help is also at the discretion of programme-level staff and, in the absence of top-down approaches to distributing support, those not connected into teaching networks must find their own way.

This *ad hoc* approach to faculty development and support in relation to online teaching, without reconfiguring teachers' workloads or recruiting more staff to create space for what is increasingly recognised as a challenging enterprise (Aitken and Loads 2019), is a continuation of the previous institutional approach, where central processes and structures were slow to adapt to the different context of online PGT. Alongside this, evaluation processes have not been adapted for online PGT (see Fawns and Sinclair 2021 this book) and there is limited central oversight of quality. Ultimately, some tension remains between ill-fitting central structures and policies, and excessive local discretion without sufficient support and structure (Bannink et al. 2015).

6 Alignment and Coherence

In this section, we consider what these projects can tell us about how an organisation like the University of Edinburgh might increase alignment between centralised and localised policy and practice, and the extent to which such alignment is desirable.

As we have argued above, loose couplings allow for ambiguity between the aims of senior leadership and the values expressed through the day-to-day practices of teachers. This, in turn, allows teachers considerable programme-level discretion (Weick 1976) in the way they interpret and realise top-down policies, strategies and governance structures (Bannink et al. 2015). Through our conversations with the online PGT community at our institution, we are aware of a range of examples of such discretionary practice. Online PGT programmes, being predominantly asynchronous, deviate from centralised and standardised timetabling processes. In workload modelling, online teachers have to translate a significantly different set of practices into an approximation of on-campus equivalence (see, e.g., Stone et al. 2021 this book). While most online PGT programmes now use the primary, centrally-supported virtual learning environment (Blackboard Learn), many other platforms are also brought in to get around its limitations. Assessment practices for many online PGT programmes deviate from institutional expectations due to differences in student cohorts, pedagogical approaches, or an increased emphasis on trust

and community-building (for example, some programmes avoid using Turnitin, or use it for submission and marking but disable its plagiarism-checking functionality).

Teachers may exercise their discretion to subvert and modify centralised policy, in part as a way of resisting change that they feel is forced upon them without sufficient recognition of their local needs and existing practices. Indeed, some of the current resistance to online learning is remarkably similar to that seen in the University's first institution-wide technology initiative, *Email for all*, in 1992. As Professor Emeritus and ex-Vice Principal of Digital Education, Jeff Haywood (2018: 109), writes, those looking to drive this change in staff communication process had to contend with responses such as 'the traditional face-to-face methods are better, ... students would find electronic communication "impersonal" and local desire to be distinct against a uniform system ("won't work here")'. However, the examples of programme-level discretion above are also expressions of a programme's established philosophies, pedagogies and perceived student needs (Fawns et al. 2019; Aitken and Hayes 2021). Allowing localised discretion may be particularly important in an online PGT context, where the student cohort has a different set of characteristics from the dominant undergraduate context (Stone et al. 2021 this book), as well as a different and more varied pattern of progression (Haywood 2018). Through this, a diverse array of teaching practices can exist across different programmes and Schools. These can cross-pollinate across distributed teaching networks and, potentially, inform institutional strategy and policy. For example, the early developments in online PGT programmes in Education, Medicine and Law were an important basis for the argument for creating the DEI initiative.

Importantly, however, in a loosely-coupled system, the adaptation of teaching practices or programmes in response to local contexts, emerging research or external activity in the field will not, by itself, exert influence over formal institutional decision-making processes, strategy, or policy (Weick 1976). Indeed, there is a risk, particularly in ancient universities with more entrenched and systemic loose couplings, that such discretionary practices might exacerbate a disconnect between programme-level practices and centralised and streamlined governance. Representation on central committees by teaching-focused staff is limited, particularly in research-focused institutions, and centralised actors may be unaware of that expanding disconnect, or may try to address it by tightening the couplings between centralised policy and systems, and local practice (e.g., by standardisation or incentives). This is particularly likely where centralised leadership and programme staff hold different views of the nature of educational challenges (Bannink and Trommel 2019).

7 Meeting in the Middle: Negotiating Top-Down and Bottom-Up Activity

Mihai et al. (2021) argue that if initiatives in blended or online learning are to become institutionalised (i.e., established and embedded across the institution), they must have the endorsement of diverse stakeholders (managers, teachers,

administrators and students). However, 'endorsement' is not binary–after all, senior leaders and managers officially endorsed the DEI project at a high level (e.g., by writing it into policy and funding structures and by promoting it to Schools) but were not directly invested in how it was implemented, or in the practices or communal knowledge and expertise produced through it. While the creation of space to develop new practices within both DEI and NFT projects has undoubtedly led to valuable developments in programme-level expertise, this will not result in a coherent institutional approach without a collective direction, which suggests that an effective whole-of-institution approach (Stone et al. 2021 this book) is cultural as much as it is strategic.

A whole-of-institution approach suggests to us a degree of alignment across a loosely-coupled system, in which the values, purposes and approaches are—broadly—internally coherent. The NFT project can be seen as an attempt to formalise a focus on developing the wider educational culture (by threading values through the different institutional layers), as an integral aspect of structural change. Yet, even with such an institutionally-endorsed initiative, such change takes considerable time, during which the way that values need to be interpreted is also changing.

Mihai et al. (2021) stress the need for 'an integrative approach, whereby individual actions are met with support from leadership'. As they note, endorsement in the form of permission or setting up a budget is insufficient, and a lack of further action is likely to impede the development and success of such initiatives. To be sustainable, cultural change requires reciprocity between central and local elements (as implied by the term 'coupling'), where teaching practices emerging from programmes are routinely communicated to and inform those generating centralised policy and strategy, just as strategy and policy is translated down into Schools and programmes. 'Whole-of-institution' means reframing these central/local tensions in terms of distributed processes and positioning new relations to bring coherence to them. Notably, attempts to reframe teaching in relation to prominence (relative to research, particularly), interdisciplinarity, digital education, and postgraduate-level study can be seen in annual reviews and strategic plans over a number of years (University of Edinburgh 2019), signalling the ongoing work that is needed to produce cultural change.

Where DEI was disruptive, introducing a range of new features, practices and decision mechanisms all at once, the NFT initiative took a more gradual, 'bottom-up' approach to the development of shared values, with the aspiration to support sustainable, incremental change across the institution (Mihai et al. 2021). The implicit aim of both DEI and NFT to create space for the development of new practices highlighted the distributed nature of institutional decision-making at the University of Edinburgh. Yet Maassen and Gornitzka (1999: 302) explain that 'institutional fragmentation', and the ways in which decision-making is distributed, shape the possibilities for coherent and coordinated change. As Lipsky (1980) notes, while 'street-level' practices may have little or muted influence on formal, standardised policy and processes, it can be argued that through using their discretion to reinterpret the top-down forces of centralised management, programme staff exert influence on diverse 'institutional practices' and constitute 'the institution' as much as central managers do. Thus, without some alignment with localised culture and practices, strategic plans are limited in their capacity to signal progress.

Beyond initiatives such as those discussed in this chapter, distributed governance requires the ongoing involvement of educators and students in developing School-level and centralised goals and processes of evaluation. Through this, educators might also come to better understand the rationales for centralised initiatives and may adapt their practices accordingly. In other words, there may be benefit in including programme-level educators and students (including online PGT representatives) as legitimate members of what Empson (2017) calls a 'leadership constellation', within centralised decision-making contexts, in which they can exert influence and act decisively without formal authority. Arguably, with its co-creative methods, the NFT provided opportunities for teachers, students, administrators and others to be part of a leadership constellation for the duration of that project, and established stronger ties that would continue beyond it. Of course, this was still an exclusive process (not every teacher or student could be part of the NFT project group) but it did allow for a greater variety of voices to influence institutional vision.

It follows that coherent approaches to online education require ongoing, progressive negotiation of top-down and bottom-up activity. While centralised support and structure, in the form of policy, infrastructure, resource allocation and faculty development initiatives, are crucial in providing a base for successful teaching and course design, the discretionary practices of educators and programmes could also form a valuable source of expertise for informing institutional change. Institutional alignment could be increased by allowing and encouraging students' and educators' perspectives to feed up into centralised policy and governance. After all, in a non-traditional educational domain like online PGT, the experience of practitioners and students is necessary to inform policymakers of the different requirements of the online modality and the online postgraduate student population.

Processes of faculty development, programme and course approval and quality assurance, workload models, promotion processes, etc., require adjustment for online postgraduate contexts. The appropriateness of these processes for our context not only affects people's ability to do the work of online teaching but their attitudes towards it (Mihai et al. 2021; Porter et al. 2014). For example, diverse programme-level practices could usefully inform technological acquisition and use, and subsequent policy and strategy governing that use. Teachers could also help to shape more sustainable recruitment, workload and promotion processes by updating institutional definitions of teaching to incorporate online educational practices. Similarly, students' insights can be a valuable source of change. Alongside formal instruments (e.g., student representatives and Student Staff Liaison Committees at the programme level and student representation on all major University committees) and informal, programme-level channels (e.g., course discussions and individual student support sessions), students should have expanded and diverse channels through which they can more readily contribute directly to centralised decision-making. This was the case with the NFT, which used collaborative methods involving a range of stakeholders, but not with the DEI, which provided resources but placed the onus for changes in practice to programme staff.

Supporting those (both staff and students) with programme-level expertise and experiences to inform institutional discussions around policy, administrative

systems and the procurement of technology is both challenging and critical. Indeed, this was explicit in the intended outcomes of the Near Future Teaching project and its stated need to 'put the student and staff experience at the centre of educational technology development, decision-making, and procurement' (Bayne and Gallagher 2019: 19). The backing of the NFT project by senior leadership also provided a basis for programme-level educators to resist inappropriate directives, by providing a set of institutionally-endorsed values against which educational practice can be evaluated (Fawns et al. 2021). The NFT project, with its co-design methods, can be seen as an attempt to fill a gap between existing governance structures (in which School-level strategy and governance feed 'up' to College and University committees governing bodies) and the perceptions of those 'on the ground' of being disconnected from institutional governance. However, as a vision project which intentionally did not set out an implementation plan, it remains to be seen whether it will be successful in this regard.

The NFT attempted to not only centre student and staff experience, but to incorporate it into a vision that could inform institutional development and procurement, by making teachers and students a legitimate part of a dynamic and temporary leadership constellation (Empson 2017), while, at the same time, making senior leadership a legitimate part of an influential teaching network. In contrast, the methodology of the DEI project involved primarily senior leaders and teachers in the development of its aims, objectives and quality criteria. Reducing ambiguity may require an ongoing, reciprocal involvement of senior leaders within local teaching networks, such that they take on some of the values of educators and students. In this way, students, educators and leaders might develop more constructive and trusting relationships and work together to define 'the governance arrangement and its application' (Bannink et al. 2015).

Haywood's (2018: 124) position that 'shared leadership depends upon trust, between those in the most senior and the most junior positions in the organization' illustrates the challenge this presents. For practical reasons, not all teachers can be involved in governance, and not all managers can be involved in teaching networks. However, as Evers and Kneyber (2015: 282) put it, 'in order for trust to rise, there should be spaces where teachers, students, the state, teacher educators, politicians and so on actually meet'. To some extent, the communication channels through which programmes surface exemplary or innovative practice to policymakers, and through which policymakers consult with educators, are also ambiguous and emergent. Where existing networks and forms of communication (e.g. formal channels between Boards of Study, PGT committees, School, College and University-level committees; or established informal channels such as faculty development units) are insufficient to realise the aims of leadership constellations centrally and teaching networks locally, new ones may need to be generated to complement these.

More than anything, trust across the breadth of online PGT programmes and the wider online education initiative requires attention to the ways in which the pillars of strategy, structures and support (Graham et al. 2013) are adapted to be sensitive to this context. This all requires time, and effective communication, for the themes and values emerging from programme-level practices to inform or translate into

strategy and policy. The time and space needed for cross-pollination of practices to routinely occur will rarely align with managerialist tendencies towards efficiency and accountability (Boitier et al. 2018). However, the generative surfacing of teaching practices that emerge across the University's array of online PGT programmes requires focusing less on generalised outcomes (consistent with efficiency and accountability) and more on ecologies (consistent with encouraging an array of online programmes to surface innovative or exemplary practices, see Fawns and Sinclair 2021 this book). Here again, we see a need to negotiate centralised processes with programme-level discretion (Bannink et al. 2015) in order to produce complementary, holistic evaluation practices, to both describe and develop the quality of online PGT programmes and teaching (Fawns and Sinclair 2021). Thus, beyond connecting teaching networks with leadership constellations, we might look at how more open and formative evaluation practices might help to inform desirable change at different levels of the institution.

8 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have argued that quality in online PGT programmes is contingent, not only on the educational practices within courses and programmes, but also on institutional policy, governance and infrastructure. Looking at our own 'loosely-coupled' institution (Weick 1976), the University of Edinburgh, we have considered the dynamic negotiation of centralised values and aims of the wider institution, and the diverse local values and aims of educational practitioners. Significant ambiguity may be inevitable due to competing pressures (e.g., market-forces, quality assurance processes, educational scholarship, discourses of good practice, etc.), and some ambiguity is also necessary to allow educators discretion in reinterpreting policy for localised contexts.

Through an examination of two initiatives aimed at enacting institution-wide change in online education, we have considered the importance of alignment and ambiguity in allowing for centrally supported and structured, yet discretionary, localised practice. We have argued that localised problems cannot be solved by centralised interventions, and that to build expertise, educators need support and space to develop practices based on sound pedagogical values and principles. This requires a negotiated, distributed approach in which centralised support and structure complements localised, discretionary practices. To this end, we have argued for an overlapping of centralised and localised perspectives and practices, in which programme-level educators participate in centralised leadership constellations, while centralised staff also participate in localised teaching networks.

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A Little More Conversation, A Little Less Factionalisation: Thoughts for the Postdigital Future of Online Postgraduate Education

Tim Fawns, Gill Aitken, and Derek Jones

1 An Opening for More Dialogue

The various chapters of this book make clear why the particular contexts in which education is carried out matter, and why educators need to develop specialised expertise in those contexts. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, postgraduate taught (PGT) programmes were the primary form of online teaching in many higher education institutions, including our own University of Edinburgh. That is no longer the case, as large numbers of undergraduate courses moved online in 2020 in what has been termed 'emergency remote teaching' (Hodges et al. 2020). That term recognises, as the chapters in this book show, that good online education requires significant planning, the nurturing of a culture, the development of specific forms of educational expertise, and numerous iterations of design and evaluation, in order to build an approach that works for a particular team of educators and their students, in their context, for their purposes.

Some of the online activity that has emerged during the Covid-19 pandemic, and some of the lessons learned about education more generally, are likely to sustain beyond any mass vaccination of the population or relaxation of physical distancing regulations. We are hopeful about some aspects of this sustained change, particularly where it leads educators to diversify the approaches used in both online and on-campus education, and to be sensitive to the conditions and concerns of their students. As we have said elsewhere, having to think about differences in design, orchestration and practice can lead to the development of insights and principles that apply across modalities (Fawns 2019; Fawns et al. 2021). Thus, we believe that on-campus education is likely to improve because its practitioners have had to engage in online education.

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However, we are worried that, once again, undergraduate education will come to dominate the discourse, this time in relation to online education. Over the past year, we saw many media articles that discussed online education as if it was a new thing, discovered through the sudden necessity for physical distancing (e.g. Carey 2020). Article after article appeared, claiming that online learning doesn't work (e.g. Paxon 2020), wondering if it works (e.g. Zimmerman 2020; cf. Fawns and Sinclair 2021, this book), or suggesting that online learning could work if only we change this or that (often written by people affiliated with EdTech companies) (e.g. Janssen 2021). Many of these articles showed no awareness that there were already decades of research into online learning that demonstrated that, of course, online education can, and often does, work, outlining many valuable principles that new online educators could have made use of (see, e.g., Riel and Levin 1990; Johnstone and Krauth 1996; Jones et al. 2000). The voices of many experienced online educators, who had already long realised the potential for high quality online learning, were drowned out by the crowd (see Weller 2020).

Of course, while we think that all educators new to online could learn a lot from the established community of online PGT educators, the postgraduate context is importantly different from the undergraduate one, as outlined by Stone et al. (2021) in their chapter. The student characteristics are different, their needs are different, the contexts in which they study are different, the purposes of their study are different, the range of possible approaches and opportunities for application and development are different. These differences are important and should be preserved and attended to. For example, the work of Aitken and colleagues shows how some online PGT programmes straddle academic and professional contexts, with each informing learning in the other via a horizontal process (Aitken 2020; Aitken et al. 2019). Such considerations bring with them the need to adapt practices, such as we saw in the chapters of this book by Hounsell (2021), Marley et al. (2021) and Lee (2021).

Our aim for the book was to illuminate some principles of quality online education and their application to particular, postgraduate contexts, and to reflect on the cultures and infrastructures that underpin and/or undermine them. As we had hoped, the chapters have provided a range of relevant jumping off points for further discussion. Therefore, rather than providing a final word on the wide range of ideas contained within the book, we use this concluding chapter to reflect on avenues raised that deserve further exploration. In what follows, we present a lightly-edited conversation amongst the editors, recorded in March 2021, about our thoughts on online PGT, having lived through a tumultuous year of editing this book, during which the world of online education was both turned upside down and brought under the spotlight. We have divided our conversation into some themes that resonate with us as we ponder: what's next for online PGT, and how do we continue to look beyond technology when our educational worlds have become so saturated with it. The Postdigital Science and Education journal and book series has an emerging tradition of dialogue (see, e.g., Jandrić et al. 2019), fostered by the series editor, Petar Jandrić. We offer this 'conclusion' in that same tradition, and in the spirit in which the book has come together (and also in much the same way as we approach our teaching): through discussion.

2 The Experiences of Online PGT Students are Unique, but in Similar Ways

> You can't have a one size fits all approach to this type of education because when you're dealing with working professionals, particularly those working in the health-related fields, there's no such thing as a typical experience. Everybody has a very different story to tell…

Tim Fawns (TF): In the chapter written by Marley et al. (2021, this book), one of the most interesting aspects was getting insights into actual experiences of how those programmes work. Two of the students were on a programme I wasn't very familiar with, and it was helpful to see the differences and similarities between programmes, and also the differences between the experiences and perspectives of students who were on the same programme. Those differences were significant, I thought.

Gill Aitken (GA): It was interesting; you could argue that there was a health-related theme running through all of the students' accounts, but there was a huge diversity in their expectations, and in what they all got out of quite similar teaching approaches. I think that is one of the things that have come out of the book as a whole. You can't have a one size fits all approach to this type of education because when you're dealing with working professionals, particularly those working in the health-related fields, there's no such thing as a typical experience. Everybody has a very different story to tell…

Derek Jones (DJ): I think there is also a sense in which, although they are all unique, they are unique in similar ways. By that, I mean that each individual has their own unique cluster of experiences, but there are also common themes—all these recognizable issues and experiences that we see turning up throughout the chapters. For example, the transformational aspect of postgraduate education: it's not just about gaining a workplace-relevant skill or ticking a certification box. It takes us back to our paper on graduate attributes in online postgraduate programmes (Aitken et al. 2019). We used Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus and capital to understand the changes in how graduates see themselves, how they think about education, and the idea that graduate attributes don't capture everything about the ways postgraduate study can have an impact on individuals. I think there's a risk of over-individualising students' experiences and losing sight of the importance of the common structures within which those experiences take place.

3 Tower of Babel

> … we might say that teachers and managers are not just going in slightly different directions, they don't understand what each other is talking about…

TF: The chapter on institutional approaches (Fawns et al. 2021) was very hard to write because we were trying to talk about the relations between people who are developing institution-wide policy, and those who are teaching on online PGT programmes. The problem is, there aren't coherent groups that fall neatly into those categories. Different teachers take very different approaches and are trying to do very different things; they have different purposes, and they have different contexts. And the 'leadership' group that supposedly makes policies isn't really a coherent entity either. Different groups that might be said to be part of the institutional leadership have different agendas; Information Technology groups have different agendas from the economic heart of the institution, from the various Vice Principals who sit on the Senate Committees—they're not all trying to do the same thing in some coherent way.

DJ: It's like the different parts of the University live in these different worlds and speak different languages, and they don't understand the other groups' languages. Even if they do some translation of what other groups are saying, the way they translate it is not true to the original meaning. The words are translated but the meaning is not.

GA: It seems like an issue that is particularly acute for people like us, who work in a very big institution where, just by the scale of those managerial decisions that senior managers must make, they are necessarily going to be quite far removed from people who are involved in the teaching. I wonder if this situation is different in smaller institutions or if it is a universal issue?

DJ: I suspect it's not so different. If you take Edinburgh University as the institution, that's one thing. But if you break it down to the College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine, for example, that's like a small institution in its own right. That issue of different languages and cultures still applies, but on a smaller scale.

TF: It's hard to separate everything out. For example, we might say that teachers and managers are not just going in slightly different directions, they don't understand what each other is talking about. But at the same time, they are not separate; it's not clear to me exactly which processes come from our College, or exactly which influences come from 'the University', or from a particular department or School. They're all tangled up in each other, aren't they? So, you have different groups that are connected and entwined, but don't understand each other.

DJ: It's like the Tower of Babel.

GA: The tensions caused by a lack of common language between the different groups involved in online postgraduate education is touched on in several chapters in the book. As your chapter on institutional approaches (Fawns et al. 2021) shows, Tim, different groups can be seen to judge the same initiative in very different ways.

4 What's the Point of It All?

> …postgraduate education is all about the human interaction, irrespective of whether it's an online programme or on campus programme, or blended or whatever; what you have is an opportunity for professionals to come together.

GA: For me, the tension is not exactly that people don't understand each other, because I think we (teachers) probably all would have some insight into the challenges that senior managers within institutions are facing, particularly in the current financial climate. I think the issue is more about what people see academic institutions as being *for*; the purposes of these institutions. I think we would sit quite firmly in the camp that sees education as a social good— as a transformative and almost philanthropic activity, and that is never going to be easy to reconcile with the primary focus of modern academic institutions, which seems to be largely about money and business.

TF: But then many teachers would not allow the idea of education as a social good to entirely be ignored. They would always try to make their practice reflect those values as much as they could, even within these constraints. Without some agency to work towards the values they believe in, many teachers would just quit, wouldn't they? That's what we tried to say in our chapter (Fawns et al. 2021): it's not just the managers that determine 'the institution', it's also the teachers and all the other staff, and the students and other stakeholders.

GA: But that's also contingent on what mechanisms you have available to allow you to contribute to and influence these conversations about values and purpose, and our decision to edit this book was largely an attempt to do that. We want to think about how best to mobilise that educator's voice, I think, because, individually, we don't have much weight but collectively, within and across institutions, the situation can be changed. Sharing our thoughts with the wider community in a volume such as this, starting conversations and debates… you would hope that we would have a stronger voice or a more coherent, collective voice.

TF: That's a nice connection to your chapter (Aitken and Hayes 2021), Gill, because, whether anyone means it to or not, the way that we write about our education programmes hides those voices. Hides those communities. And I guess what your chapter is saying is that this is too important; we need to highlight this community, make these voices heard, and so we need to resist these kinds of discursive moves that foreground the technology or process or the strategy.

GA: Exactly. So, for us, postgraduate education is all about the human interaction, irrespective of whether it's an online programme or on campus programme, or blended or whatever; what you have is an opportunity for professionals to come together in a way that straddles academic and professional spheres to discuss things and learn with, and from, each other. If you don't recognise that, then I think you lose what is unique and special about this type of education. And suggesting that you can remove the human agency will just kill the whole sector stone dead. It's not about what is easily scalable or easily measured or quantifiable, it's really just about human conversation and the opportunity to share, and that, I think, is what needs to be considered more carefully at institutional level: how these processes and this type of education—well, probably all education, actually—is described and discussed.

DJ: But to play devil's advocate, we know that some people do undertake postgraduate degrees for very instrumental reasons, and aren't that bothered about the human interaction and the quality. Though, as we said earlier, in relation to the chapter by Marley et al. (2021, this book), people do change in terms of their motivations and what they value over the course of their studies.

5 What Constitutes Quality and Expertise, and Who Decides?

> …they (students) didn't know what they were going to get out of it when they started, so it's difficult to judge their experiences against their expectations, and I suppose that might also be true for other stakeholders.

TF: So, I think one of the issues is: who gets to decide what quality is? You've got what teachers think, and you've got the economically driven measurements and outcome measures, and you've got the student side as well (although, often, the students' ideas are voiced through satisfaction surveys, which, for me, don't represent what students think). One of the valuable aspects of the chapter by Marley et al. (2021, this book) was that the authors were not content with satisfaction surveys, and, instead, they featured students and graduates writing quite in-depth or 'thick' descriptions (see Fawns and Sinclair 2021, this book) of their experience. That's when you see more about what they think is important, and it isn't just one thing. There are lots of things in combination. Community is important, for example, but it isn't the only thing, because you also might want the qualification, and you also need things to fit in with your life, etc.

DJ: And you might *need* the qualification, whether you want it or not. It might be, 'given the choice I wouldn't do this but, given the career demands, I now have to'.

TF: Also, they (students) didn't know what they were going to get out of it when they started, so it's difficult to judge their experiences against their expectations, and I suppose that might also be true for other stakeholders. University managers might say that what's important is meeting learning outcomes, or that people are satisfied, or whatever, but if even the students don't know what the students are going to get out of it—or if they're not able to judge the relevance of what is learned on the programme until after they've been through it, then I don't know what position managers are in to judge that either.

GA: I think there's something interesting about the novel nature of online study and the fact that it's not well understood and, I hate to say, 'disruptive'. I'm thinking about the chapter by Kyungmee (Lee 2021). It very nicely described her struggles and how she got to where she is, currently. But, actually, that vulnerability that she exposed… you can understand that not everybody would be comfortable with that approach and that way of being a teacher and educator. I think that, as a group, within our team, it probably comes quite naturally to us, because we don't set ourselves up as the fonts of all knowledge; it's a collaborative approach. Perhaps that compounds the lack of visibility we've mentioned, because, if you're not a leader then what are you?

In a way, by following a more collegial approach that is beneficial to the community and the students, you can disadvantage yourself as an academic, because you're not seen as an expert. Yet, I suspect that we would all argue that you must have a high degree of expertise to transcend that traditional conception of teaching to get to this stage. I think that we, and probably many of the authors of chapters

within this book, are in a challenging position within our institutions. We have developed forms of teaching expertise that are invisible, and so there's an important question of how we adequately present ourselves as expert teachers and how that is recognised within institutions.

DJ: I think our view, and the views of the authors of the chapters in this book, are not mainstream yet in the online teaching community, or postgraduate education more generally.

GA: No, but it's a question of whose voices are privileged, isn't it? I was just thinking back to the issue of reward that you were talking about earlier, Tim, about the focus on easily captured metrics. For me, this also raise questions about Teaching Awards. Are people who win a best teacher award the best teachers? How we recognise good teaching is the challenge, and I think that we're struggling as a group to identify that. Thinking about the chapter by Cathy Stone et al. (2021) and the diversity of the online PGT student group, that makes it even harder to think about what good teaching in this sphere is.

TF: I think it is difficult if teaching becomes a popularity contest. That goes against the principles of diversity and inclusivity to me, if the person who wins the teaching award is the one whom 80% of students thought was great. What about the other 20%, who might have different needs, or different purposes, or different situations?

GA: Many other programmes, at least within healthcare education, have one key person associated with them. I don't think that's the case for us—people say 'Edinburgh', I don't think they identify our programme with me (being Programme Director). They associate it with a wider group of people. I think that's a good thing, but, again, this has implications for recognition and reward, it doesn't do much for our individual visibility or career progression.

TF: I agree that that's a massive problem. Well, it's a problem if you care about recognition. All of the things we think make good teaching… they don't highlight individual practitioners. They just create a space where good stuff happens.

GA: We talked a bit about superstars, and how could you be a superstar if you have a team-based, collaborative approach, because it's the antithesis of that isn't it? It's about a collective. It's a difficult problem.

TF: Yes, and it involves relinquishing the spotlight, not always being the focus of attention. Kyungmee's discussion of vulnerability was quite striking, in that it showed that you can't just create a flattened hierarchy while still maintaining control. As a teacher, that's only going to work if you're open and honest about your own limitations, feelings and worries. Something that concerns me about evaluation is that expertise is required to understand what good education is. This is a complicated issue, because the voices of students, employers, managers and other stakeholders are important, but they may not have this evaluative expertise. Teachers may, or may not, have it, but even within teaching communities, different people will have very different views on what constitutes good teaching. One danger, then, is that we take up a kind of elitist position, where we think that we are the only ones who are smart enough to be able to tell good teaching. On the other hand, good teaching often isn't very visible, as we've said.

There's the classic model of someone 'swanning in' and doing a fun presentation, then swanning out again, and everyone thinking 'that was amazing'. But did they consider what had been learned before, by those students, or what was going to be learned after? Did they help the students to understand how their different elements of teaching fit together? Did they work on community building before the day of their session, were they involved in the wider, logistical planning? There are people working hard behind the scenes to make sure that someone can swan in and do a good presentation that people will like, and so it isn't really that one person *does good teaching*, it's more like *good teaching happens* in a distributed fashion across a programme.

6 Training or Transformation: Being Explicit About Our Approach

> ...a competency-based approach where everything is assessed by multiple choice … it's postgraduate only insomuch as you have people who are graduates undertaking the study, but it's more typically what you might think about as work based learning or training.

TF: The challenge with the sort of teaching that we are proposing, and that is illustrated within the chapters of this book, is that it doesn't fit easily with a model of neatly packaged methods and outcomes. It requires quite a sophisticated analysis to understand it—which is why we're doing the kind of research that we do. We want to understand what's learned, what is the benefit. And it also comes back to this shifting of hierarchies, you know, trying to treat students as peers because we aren't necessarily the ones who should be judging or explaining what was learned.

DJ: We know that in postgraduate education there are also those course or programmes that are entirely focused on getting people through some professional exam or accreditation process. In some places, they take the kind of approach we talk about, but, to others, postgraduate education seems to be not much more than advanced training rather than education. This comes back, again, to Gill's question about what the university is for, because there's also a need for all of those advanced training type courses. They're obviously popular for a reason, but should they be called Master's degrees, and should they still be within the university context?

TF: And would programmes like that still benefit from having a community, and strong relationships with peers and tutors, or are there contexts in which that doesn't matter?

GA: They tend to be very much a competency-based approach where everything is assessed by multiple choice … it's postgraduate only insomuch as you have people who are graduates undertaking the study, but it's more typically what you might think about as work-based learning or training. If I worked on that type of programme, I'd be worried about losing my job to a machine. Where is the room for uncertainty, exploration and dialogue in these programmes?

TF: One of the things I thought was interesting about Dai's chapter (Hounsell 2021) was how, in an online postgraduate context, feedback is often not about

telling people the right answers. It's often more about how you can help students to think about ideas that have not been predetermined. Students are applying ideas to very different contexts in different countries, within complex settings and, often, professional practice. In many cases, teachers can't know in advance what the focus of the students' work is going to be about, or what is needed, and don't know their settings as well as the students do, so this is a different framing of feedback. What questions might students go on to ask, what kinds of tools might they use in their own thinking about work in their setting? So, we are often not engaging in feedback as experts on the practice that the feedback is about, but as people who can help them to develop useful habits of mind in that domain.

GA: Dai's chapter brings us back to the invisibility of teachers, because if it's not about telling someone the right answer or moving them towards specified outcomes, it's much harder to describe how feedback practice is transformative, isn't it? You need someone experienced to take a more subtle approach, and we all know that it takes years to get the necessary level of confidence. But that comes back again to how you can describe that to people who are interested in quantifying things. Because it's a very difficult thing to quantify. And while we might think that it's the pinnacle of teaching, it's quite hard to argue that case, isn't it?

DJ Particularly with plaudits going to those who quickly turned courses around and delivered them to thousands of people online during the Covid-19 pandemic, where the successful outcome is the number of students that were processed.

GA There's a link here to Derek's chapter (Jones 2021) because there is a tension between different conceptions of the curriculum, and a kind of hidden curriculum for teachers. Maybe we have too much hidden, maybe we need to be a bit more explicit in how we talk about our approach to postgraduate education with our students, and more widely.

7 Money, Money, Money

> We're all being constrained by different factors, but it does raise questions about why the institutional focus seems so often to be about income, rather than quality, because that's the nub of the problem, isn't it?

DJ: Tim, you recently posted a tweet that attracted a lot of attention, about teaching online being like an iceberg, with the online synchronous class being just the visible element of a huge amount of other activity.

TF: I posted this rough illustration (Fig. 1) on Twitter,[1] along with the statement that 'recognition of activities as a legitimate part of teaching decreases as depth

[1] https://twitter.com/timbocop/status/1348651874224889858. The iceberg received thousands of likes and retweets, along with many comments expressing teachers' frustrations with the lack of recognition of their efforts. These conversations made clear that teachers were experiencing online teaching during the pandemic as more onerous than classroom teaching, without being given additional time or sufficient support for teaching development or course design.

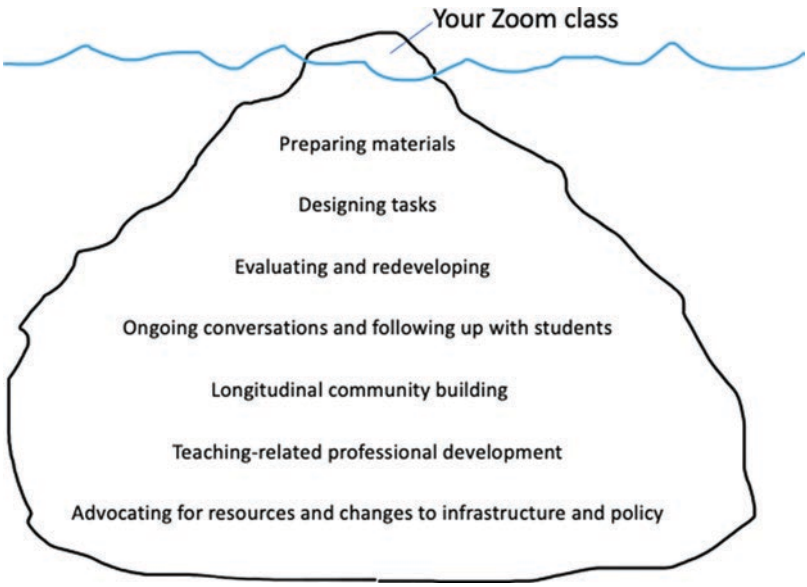

Fig. 1 The online teaching iceberg

increases'. This was both a call to managers, students and the general public to recognise the hidden work that often goes into online teaching, and a statement to teachers about the activities that I saw as pre-requisites to high-quality online teaching. The reference to a Zoom class was simply because that was what seemed to be the most common proxy for online teaching at that time. Formally scheduled, synchronous video sessions are just one aspect of online teaching and learning.

GA: I think we're arguing for a more nuanced understanding of the labour involved in online teaching, where more voices are heard. I think that is the crux of things. We want mechanisms for people to be heard, and that's not just the superstar teachers or the people who win awards. It's all teachers, and it's administrators and students. It comes back to what you wrote in your chapter with Christine, Tim, on the need to think about evaluation in a much more holistic way (Fawns and Sinclair 2021). It's interesting, in other fields if something is easily measured, you would often be sceptical about the veracity of it, but in education it seems to be 'oh its easily measured, let's just use that'.

DJ: That focus on the easy measure is perhaps a reflection of the business model universities now operate on. The bottom-line in the business model (for a multinational or a university) is the bank balance, and that is easy to measure.

TF: But the bottom line, and devices like 'contact hours', retention and outcome measures, etc., all hide what's actually happening for students and teachers within a course. Education looks so different through different lenses; zoomed-in versus zoomed-out. At the macro level, if our student satisfaction scores are better than they were last year, then we think we've done well, but if you zoom right into the micro level, it looks very different. Imagine the number of times you've had an end

of course survey and it's been pretty good, but two students have written something like 'it needed more structure' and suddenly you're saying, 'I really need to think about whether it should have more structure'. It's the opposite at university level; if 90% of people are happy then the thinking is 'that's great'. We'll make some cost savings because we can afford to drop to 80% satisfaction.

GA: But then it comes back to what universities are for, doesn't it? In your example, Derek, of the university business model, banks and multinationals are all about dividends for shareholders. Academic institutions are charitable bodies, with no shareholders, so why are they so focused on income? It's not coming back to the people who are doing the teaching, so where's the money going? In our programme teams, we're fretting about things like student satisfaction scores, whereas, presumably, university leaders are worrying about institutional rankings on the world stage, the Research Excellence Framework (REF) or the Guardian league tables. We're all being constrained by different factors, but it does raise questions about why the institutional focus seems so often to be about income, rather than quality, because that's the nub of the problem, isn't it?

DJ: I suspect that institutional leaders will say that you need income to have quality, because that's what pays for the nice buildings (which are all part of the 'student experience' and being a prestigious University) and the superstar research performers; that's what we need money for—to pay for those things. As someone in senior management might say, teaching pays the bills, but research creates the status and reputation.

GA: And, of course, the Covid-19 pandemic has put things into a different perspective, hasn't it? When were you last in any of these super-fancy buildings? It will be interesting to see if the move to more online teaching comes with more investment in learning technologies and ways of supporting students online.

TF: It's a good question, though, the extent to which what matters is what kind and how many superstars of each category we have, versus how everyone more broadly is doing. If you're only worried about superstars, then you're not concerned about these more subtle, programme-level issues.

GA: But could you expect a Vice Chancellor to be worried about programme-level issues? I don't think you can. What you need is the right voices being heard in the right places, so it's the bit in the middle, isn't it, between programme level and the very senior echelons. That's where you need to be having your influence, so that the opinions can be magnified in a way than can inform decision making.

8 Marginal Gains

> I do think that managers sometimes think that. Everyone's been sitting on this spare 10% the whole time, and now it's time to dig that 10% out of your pocket.

TF: In a previous role, my department was going through a difficult period (little did we know!) and there was this message from a senior manager, who said 'yes, it's

been difficult, but what we really need is for everyone to just work 10% more efficiently.' And we thought, 'Oh brilliant, yes, I cannot believe we didn't think of that.' I do think that managers sometimes think that. Everyone's been sitting on this spare 10% the whole time, and now it's time to dig that 10% out of your pocket.

GA: What were you all waiting for?

DJ: Team GB (Great Britain) cycling went through a very successful period, and it was claimed that this was due (in part, at least) to working on the basis of making just 1% improvements in many areas, and every 1% adds up. Perhaps it's making the small changes here and there that are important, rather than big changes. And sometimes it can be about doing less rather than more – do we really need so many pieces of assessment, for example?

GA: Marginal gains in online teaching.

DJ: I like that. This conversation has made me appreciate that there's possibilities out there for change, and you know you are not going to turn things around overnight, you're not going to suddenly make institutions truly value teaching. But you know you can do *some* things that make you think 'that's a little bit better (even 1%) than it was before'. That's a win, at the end of the day.

9 Having Your Cake… And Eating It

> …what a brilliant type of job it is, and what a great type of education to be involved in, and how professionally rewarding we find it.

GA: We've highlighted some of the challenges, but I think what we're also doing is foregrounding what a brilliant job it is to be an educator involved in online PGT, and what a great type of education it is to be involved in, and how professionally rewarding we find it. Kyungmee's chapter (Lee 2021) is a great example of that, isn't it? It describes how she really struggled, but then turned it around, and I think we can all identify with that. Part of the motivation for doing this book was to highlight that these programmes are about so much more than the money that they generate for institutions. They are not 'cash cows', students are having valuable and meaningful experiences on these programmes. Of course, institutions value the income generated from online postgraduate programmes, but the narrative needs to change. In the book, we and the other authors are pushing back against the idea that this form of education is primarily about income generation, and there are a lot of positive ideas and practices throughout the chapters.

TF: It's also the case that both Kyungmee (Lee 2021) and Rachel (Buchanan 2021) were doing something within their teaching practice that they realised was problematic, and their chapters show that they did still have the agency to stop and do something else. So, although there are a lot of pressures on us as teachers, we often do still have the discretion to try out different approaches, to decide when those practices aren't working, and to do something else.

GA: Yes, and so we should be careful what we wish for. A lot of what we've been able to do on our own programme is because we've been largely, not misunderstood, but perhaps overlooked by senior managers. That has given us a lot of discretion and a lot of scope to develop things in line with our values, and while we are arguing for more visibility and better links to senior decision-makers, we're still saying that we want a lot of autonomy in our academic practice. One thing that concerns me is whether you can have one without the other.

10 Looking Beyond Technology

The conversation above is just one of many we have had, within our team, as a routine part of our practice. Such conversations allow us to reflect on what we do and what is important, and they fuel us with ideas and energy for further development. They are a fundamental aspect of our collective and discursive approach to online postgraduate education. As promised in the title of our book, our conversation—like the other chapters—has gone *beyond technology*, to explore the social arrangements, material infrastructures, and pedagogical practices that simultaneously shape and are shaped by our encounters with digital software and media. For us, technology is just one aspect of online PGT, and it is always tangled up in everything else. In talking about *a postdigital world* (Jandrić et al. 2018), we do not wish to argue that everything is digital now, or that digital elements are no longer worth thinking about, but that anything digital always is, and always was, also social and material. Our postdigital positioning of the book is a call to interrogate the economic, political, cultural and environmental forces and factors in play whenever a digital technology is introduced. It is a way of seeing our virtual learning environments, videoconferencing software, assessment systems, etc., not as neutral tools, but as potentially emancipatory, discriminatory, empowering, oppressive; as playing out and being experienced differently by different people under different circumstances.

In this sense, though the label might have reached prominence only recently, the postdigital conception is not new. It is implicit in many ways of appreciating the complexity of relations with technology (Sinclair and Hayes 2019). While not all of the chapters explicitly adopt a postdigital framing, they all exemplify the idea that online learning is not just digital or online but an embodied, socially meaningful experience, entangled in economic, political and material contexts. They recognise that online postgraduate students are often working professionals, caregivers, employers, etc. Their learning is messy and dispersed, it spills out of scheduled sessions and class structures into their home, work and social lives. The authors of the book's chapters take pains to avoid instrumentalism and determinism, and to examine the nuanced tensions between local and general considerations. From this, we are able to see patterns of similarity as well as the rich variance within this under-researched form of education. As a whole, this volume offers some insights into

what online postgraduate education is like, why it matters, and how quality manifests through structures and practices as much as through uses of technology.

Online postgraduate programmes operate in a complex global environment that is increasingly competitive and commercialised (Aitken and O'Carroll 2020). The competitive nature of the field has, no doubt, contributed to some of the difficulties exposed within this book. Yet we know from other conversations, and from our research and teaching practice, that, while many other programmes are facing similar challenges to our own, it is possible to displace commercial sensitivity with collaboration and a sense of community across otherwise 'competing' institutions. In short, we are stronger together, and our hope with this book is to contribute to a more coherent academic voice for those involved in online postgraduate education.

Bayne et al. (2020: XXII) argue that 'good digital education lies in the hands of teachers'. Crucially, though, this does not mean that other stakeholders (managers, institutional leaders and administrators, students) are absolved of responsibility for quality. As implied above, nor can we consider technological tools and platforms and the companies that make them, as neutral within the arrangements of online (or any other) programmes. The purpose of this book is to consider how all these elements come together to make up online postgraduate education and how we might actively seek to shape both programmes and courses themselves, and the practices and structures that directly and indirectly shape them. At the same time, keeping some focus on the practice and sensibilities of teaching is important to us to avoid an overemphasis on individualism, self-direction, misleading claims of 'student-centredness', commodified notions of 'student experience', etc. In this current moment, as we contemplate a slow recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, it is vital that we remember what is important. For us, online education is about people, and its core is building trusting relationships between teachers, learners and other stakeholders, supported by appropriate policies, cultures and infrastructures.

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Afterwords: Considering the Postgraduate, Postdigital and Postcritical

Peter Goodyear

1 Introduction

I am grateful to the editors of this book—Tim Fawns, Gill Aitken and Derek Jones—for the invitation to contribute some thoughts to sit at the end of this collection, and for the opportunity to consider ideas raised in the preceding chapters and to explore some of their implications for further research. *Online Postgraduate Education in a Postdigital World: Beyond Technology* is a welcome addition to the literatures of two overlapping fields: teaching and learning in higher education and educational technology. While each of these is a well-established area, with many books aimed at researchers and practitioners, the area of overlap has, until recently, been relatively small. Moreover, most of the literature on teaching and learning in higher education has concerned itself, implicitly or explicitly, with undergraduate rather than postgraduate courses, and much of the literature on educational technology in higher education has taken the form of practical 'how to' guides for teachers. So the current book is important in opening up lines of inquiry in postgraduate education, and the authors' insistence on asking hard questions, and challenging taken-for-granted assumptions about learning, teaching and 'the digital' is refreshing.

I am not, in these 'afterwords', providing a commentary on individual chapters. I'm not comfortable 'sitting in judgement', especially when the authors have no right of reply. Rather, I hope this chapter can be read as an encouragement for researchers and practitioners in higher education and educational technology to engage in respectful discussions about ways of making new knowledge (forging new understandings) and of making knowledge useful. In other words, I try to weave some ideas about actionable knowledge and knowledgeable action with themes from the chapters, and fragments from my own experience. 'Respect' does

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not rule out emotion. I have strong feelings about some of the issues, including the promotion of teachers and teaching over learners and learning, and the promotion, especially by academics, of critique over care. Let's start with teachers and learning. (Critique of critique will come later.)

2 Clearing Some Ground, and the Air

The verb 'to learn' and its gerund 'learning' have been in common use in English for more than a thousand years (Old English *leornian*). They connote coming to know, movement towards mastery of an art or skill, and the growth of understanding. In some parts of the British Isles, though the practice is dwindling, 'to learn' can be used colloquially with the meaning of 'to teach'—as in 'I learned him his manners'. One of the lessons I learned at primary school was that manners matter a lot to many teachers, and that matching middle class manners was a key to being judged smart enough to benefit from an extended education. I polished my shoes, and my Ps and Qs, and passed the 11-plus. (I was one of only three children in a class of 35 to pass this notorious exam, which controlled access to grammar and other selective schools.) I joined the posh local grammar school, and started well: in all subjects except Latin. At age 12, I learned that my teachers believed that success in Latin denotes a fine mind, and that I would not be placed in the track leading towards Oxford or Cambridge.

Fortunately, I had not read the research literature on teachers' attributions, with its compelling evidence about the pernicious role of teachers' prejudices in shaping educational opportunities and outcomes. Over the remaining years of my high school career, I set out to prove each teacher wrong, by turns, focussing on coming top in subjects where I'd been written off. I became intensely competitive and intent on success, not through love of a subject or to beat my peers, but to challenge what seemed to me to be inadequate summations made by judgemental men—they were all men—who relied on fictive connoisseurship rather than evidence. It was too late for Oxbridge. That door closed at 13. But I ended by winning a school prize—and chose a book that fired in me a lifelong passion for curiosity-led research (Haggett 1965).

Do you detect a hint of self-pity in that paragraph? I hope not. But I am still angry, 50 years later. To be fair, that anger has been stoked by more recent experiences: the many meetings at parent-teacher evenings at which it's become embarrassingly obvious that the teacher is unable to fit a child to a name; the readiness of teacher-educators to infantilise university students and treat them as errant schoolkids; the open contempt shown by some academics to 'non-academic' staff; the way some scholars of teaching dismiss technical knowledge. I struggle to subsume these neatly under a pithy heading, but they feel to me to be close relations—different faces of some clustering of fragile status and petty power.

I am curious about teaching. In some of my research I have observed it close-up and I have interviewed teachers about what they believe they are doing, and why. I've written some well-cited papers and books about teaching. I'm readily impressed by excellent episodes of teaching work and I recall good teachers with fondness and appreciation. And because of all this I react badly to accounts in the educational literature (not in this book) which romanticise 'the teacher', or which court popularity among the educational commentariat by centring educational work on teaching not learning.

3 What Did They Learn, and How? What Have We Learned, and How?

Much of the core material in this book arises from experiences of postgraduate teaching, mostly 'online' and mostly at Master's level. Many of the authors use their recent experiences working in online postgraduate education to make critical observations about issues that are of general interest (e.g. commodification of courses, the shrinking autonomy of teaching staff, diminishing resources and uncertain leadership). This is valuable, but I need to make the point that it is not the same as taking one's courses and teaching *as objects of research*. There are many excellent approaches to making new knowledge. The concern I'm sharing here, is *knowledge of what*? The paucity of good descriptions of innovative postgraduate educational work—detailed insider accounts—limits what can confidently be said about the field.

In reading the chapters, and making notes towards the first draft of some 'after words', I found myself wondering about the students taking these courses: who they were/are, what they learned, and how that learning came about. A few of the chapters give a strong sense of the students, especially when we hear the students speak directly, as in the chapter by Marley et al. (2021, this book), or where care is taken to acknowledge the heavily freighted and often fraught lives of mature students, as with the chapter by Cathy Stone et al. (2021). Stone et al.. But in many of the chapters, the students and their learning are harder to see.

Perhaps I should not be surprised to learn so little about what students were learning, and how, and why. The literature of higher education is notoriously silent on these matters. There are notable exceptions—some areas are very focused on discipline-specific concerns, threshold concepts, professional competencies and standards, the nature and attainment of graduate attributes, and so on. But there are also vast acres of published work in which one reads of such-and-such an educational innovation, or approach to teaching, without glimpsing what it is that students have actually learned, and how, or what they experienced (beyond a simple sense of liking or hating it).

So a meta-question presents itself: what did the teachers of these courses, the writers of the chapters, learn from the experiences about which they are writing?

And then we have the meta-meta-question, to generate even more 'after words'. What can we, the readers, learn from reading these chapters? Not just what—but also how? Through what processes are these lessons learned, insights gained, and knowledge formed? What might be claimed about the trustworthiness and value of such insights? What feels both new and true?

(A knowledge of Latin won't teach you this, but in Greek *meta* means *after*—and more. I'll come back to this in the final section.)

The rest of this chapter talks about some things that I have learned from (and with) this book. Some points align with the clearly expressed preoccupations of chapter authors, but some arise from questions I've been asking myself about how we make knowledge and what work we expect that knowledge to do, once we have set it free.

I have tried to gather these thoughts under three main headings, though as even a cursory glance through the book will reveal, there are dense connections between many of the ideas in this area. I focus on:

(a) the challenge of recognising teaching without marginalising learning,
(b) educational design as a situated, knowledgeable activity, and
(c) a critique of the critical disposition.

But before that, I want to risk some more disclosure.

4 Positioning, and a Spoonful of History

Like Kyungmee Lee (2021, this book), I've recently been experimenting with auto-ethnography, as a way to combine writing, inquiry and reflection. I mention this to help explain why I have shaped this chapter on a biographical and historical armature. Like Kyungmee, my first university lecturing position was in the Department of Educational Research at Lancaster University (1986). At a week's notice, I found myself teaching the MA course on *'Qualitative' methods for the acquisition of evidence in educational research*. (The 'scare quotes' around 'qualitative' were part of the formal title of the course. 'Colleagues' in Sociology and Politics had insisted, when the course was put up for validation at the Board of Studies, that the phrase 'qualitative methods' made no sense. My predecessor compromised by proposing that 'qualitative' would appear between quotation marks.)

In the mid-90s, I led the course team which designed and ran Lancaster's new Doctoral Programme in Higher Education. The Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) Programme that Kyungmee describes in her chapter is a specialised spin-off from this original. Lancaster's Doctoral Programme in Higher Education has run successfully for over 25 years, but it did not grow out of nothing. It used structures, methods, materials, designs and dispositions from an earlier Master's programme, of which I was also the founding course director: the MSc in Information Technology and Learning (ITL), which enrolled its first students in 1989. The MSc (ITL) was set up as what we would now call a 'blended learning' course: a mixture of

intensive, 1-week, residential 'block' sessions interspersed with home-based study using printed resource packs, email and computer conferencing (Steeples et al. 1992; Goodyear and Steeples 1993).

Some of our colleagues in the Management School at Lancaster (notably Vivien Hodgson, David McConnell and Ginny Hardy) launched a Master's in Management Learning (MAML) that same year, also in a 'blended' mode, with substantial use of computer-conferencing (Hodgson and McConnell 1992). MAML and the MSc ITL were the second and third postgraduate education programs in the UK to make extensive use of online communications. In 1988, Birkbeck College London launched a postgraduate course in Organisational Psychology which in some ways was the true pioneer of this approach, but it was discontinued after a year, largely because the staff involved found the online work too labour-intensive (Hartley et al. 1994).

I was also the founding director of Lancaster's Centre for Studies in Advanced Learning Technology (CSALT).[1] In 1991, CSALT became home to several large-scale research and development projects funded by the European Commission. Among these was JITOL: short-for 'Just-In-Time Open Learning'.[2] As with many EC-funded projects, the title was tweaked to appeal to grant proposal reviewers from industry—just-in-time production methods then being all the rage. Like many other academics, we had learned to play productively with ambiguity and contradiction. The JITOL consortium included some serious bastions of capitalism and the military-industrial complex (banks, big tech companies) and there were strong pressures to bring new ('ed-tech') products to market. But the longer-term benefits of the project arose from timely work that some of the academic team were able to do, most notably by translating ideas from Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger's recently published book on situated learning (Lave and Wenger 1991). In brief, this allowed us to formulate and test models for online open learning within geographically-distributed communities of practice, in which much of the valued knowledge was bound up in working practices in innovative workplaces (Lewis et al. 1992; Boder 1992; Goodyear and Steeples 1999). Naturally enough, the teaching teams from the MSc ITL and MAML played significant roles as researchers in JITOL and outcomes from JITOL and successor projects fed back into our teaching.

In various guises, both the MScITL and MAML continued well into the 2000s (Goodyear 2005; McConnell et al. 2012) and spawned a number of 'daughter' programs that used similar approaches, including Lancaster's Doctoral Programme(s) in Education [mentioned above and described by Lee (2021)] and the Masters in Networked Collaborative Learning at Sheffield University (McConnell et al. 2012). In 1994 British Telecom funded the Lancaster team to run educational development workshops, helping share online teaching experiences across London, Sheffield, Edinburgh and other universities (Steeples et al. 1994, 1996) and in 1998 UK JISC funded them to organise a large-scale research, development and dissemination

[1] See http://csalt.lancs.ac.uk/csalt/. Accessed 12 April 2021.

[2] See https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/D2015. Accessed 12 April 2021.

project that laid the foundations for the Networked Learning community (see Goodyear 2014; Networked Learning Editorial Collective 2021; Networked Learning Editorial Collective et al. 2021). Over the last 20 years, the Networked Learning community has run a biennial conference,[3] with open access conference proceedings, and has established a complementary book series[4] (see, e.g., Dohn et al. 2020). One might argue that it has created one of the most convivial sites for researchers and innovative practitioners to meet and discuss ideas about online undergraduate and postgraduate education, and has been a seedbed for theorising about many of the issues raised in this current volume.

I offer this history lesson for two main reasons. First, although what we are now calling online education is new to many people in higher education, there is a very substantial body of research and documented practice, extending back over 30 years and more. Very few of the headlines or 'hot takes' in social and mainstream media about 'online' or 'online versus face-to-face' are new. Most of the issues involved have been thought about, carefully and deeply, by people with skin in the game, for years. Secondly, the technologies we had available to us in the late 80s and early 90s would be regarded as unusable by people in universities today. Yet the modes of use, the high-level pedagogical frameworks, the kinds of relationships valued and formed, the ideas about ways of knowing and distributions of knowledge were almost as sophisticated 30 years ago as they are today. Put differently, technologies have improved beyond recognition, and permeated cultural practices to the point where we speak of a 'postdigital', but strong pedagogical ideas are rarely new.

Why is this history of research and educational innovation so little known today? How is it that the documented experience became inert and fragmented? I'm not suggesting that the historic work produced the last word on anything, but some of the first words can be found in neglected texts from 30+ years ago.

I will give just three examples, each of which connects with work described in chapters in the book: adopting design strategies to avoid teaching burnout, peer teaching and communities of practice, and the layered nature of hospitality.

Sonia Bussey (2021, this book) provides a compelling description of the many demands placed on online teachers. During our first year teaching the MScITL, we quickly experienced what it takes to be properly 'present' for our students. Like the team at Birkbeck, we might have been tempted to give up, but we stuck to it and survived by adopting two strategies: team teaching every course module and investing upfront time in creating task designs that would enable students to be more self-managing.

This also included sharing rationales for peer-teaching with students and emphasising the value of knowledge they were individually bringing to our online community of practice. [On these issues, see Jeremy Moeller's piece (Marley et al. 2021, this book), the discussion by Cathy Stone and colleagues of students' doubts about the value of interacting with their peers, rather than their teachers (2021, this

[3] See https://www.networkedlearning.aau.dk/. Accessed 12 April 2021.

[4] See https://www.springer.com/series/11810. Accessed 12 April 2021.

book), and Sharon Boyd's strategies (2021, this book) for helping students see and share their own expertise.]

Marley et al. (2021, this book), also raise the complex question of what and whether a teaching team should design prior to meeting each intake of students: an issue addressed under the heading of 'hospitality'. Online teachers' experiences documented in some of the other chapters speak to the inflexibility of university processes, rules and infrastructures that have evolved for on-campus, face-to-face teaching. With the MScITL, the requirements of a course mixing 1-week blocks of residential teaching-learning time with longer periods of home-based study, using rudimentary online communications systems, proved even more challenging for established systems. For example, there was just one port for dial-up access to the university's main computer: the only machine available to support email and computer-conferencing. The timetabling unit were unable to schedule teaching rooms for block teaching. Also, there was no catering on campus on a Sunday and the refectories serving undergraduate students did not open till 10 a.m. on a Monday morning. So the course team cooked a welcoming Sunday evening meal for the arriving students, and gave each of them cereal, milk, bread and jam, bowls, plates and cutlery, to make their own Monday morning breakfasts. Charles Marley, and Jacques Derrida, would have done the same. We did not wait to see who turned up, or check whether they had health-related or belief-based dietary requirements. We cooked vegetable curry for everyone. Reflecting on interpretations of 'hospitality', I suggest that:

(a) the notion that 'hospitality is underpinned by the impossibility of predicting the students that will arrive or what they will need' (Marley et al. 2021, this book) needs refinement,
(b) what a course team should do ahead of time can be based on envisaging common, urgent needs and a well-grounded sense of how and when other needs can be elicited and catered for, and
(c) hospitality, upfront design and designed structures are best understood as *nested*. One can set up nested or interleaved structures that alternate 'tight' and 'loose' arrangements.

Members of the MScITL course team began publishing about these matters from the early 90s onwards. See, for example, Steeples et al. (1992), Goodyear and Steeples (1992), and Steeples et al. (1994) on upfront design; Goodyear (1995, 1996) on peer-teaching, situated learning and communities of practice; Jones et al. (2000) on 'tight-loose' design issues and Goodyear (2005) for a narrative account of the scope and scale of infrastructural problems to be overcome—and the *breadth* of hospitality needed—in running the MScITL programme.

It is important to point out that in creating, reflecting on and publishing about our experiences, we were able to draw on writing by other pioneers of open, distance and online learning like Robin Mason and Tony Kaye (1989), Linda Harasim (1990), Starr Roxanne Hiltz and Murray Turoff (1978).

At risk of sounding hard-done-by, I wonder why these names, publications and ideas feature so rarely in the current collection, and in other contemporary writing

about online education. What is learned can be forgotten. Those writing today about the postdigital may see themselves as inhabiting a different intellectual tradition, and even different domains of educational practice. Or perhaps the random paths by which people move into online teaching can't be guaranteed to provide glimpses of prior learning?

5 Master's Courses as Neglected Sites for Study, and the Opportunities That Arise

Gill Aitken and Sarah Hayes (2021, this book) note that online postgraduate teaching is an under-explored area. I agree, and I'd add two further thoughts. First, as I've just argued, some of the early travellers' tales may have been lost from view. Second, postgraduate education as a field is badly neglected.

Peter Knight was a member of the original course design team for Lancaster's Doctoral Programme and among the many writing projects on which he was working at the time was a book on Master's-level courses (Knight 1997a). He observed then that there was very little research on taught postgraduate courses. Relative to research on undergraduate education, the postgraduate sector, and especially the taught postgraduate sector, remains a strangely neglected area.

The rapid growth of coursework (taught) Master's programs in the 1990s, and their growing economic importance for the universities that offered them, in Britain, the USA, Australia and elsewhere, began to lead to calls for research, to address a number of areas of uncertainty and ignorance. For example, McInnis et al. (1995), in a report to the Australian federal government, pointed to widespread doubts about the quality of taught postgraduate degrees, arising particularly from uncertainties and disputes about the value of, and relations between, 'traditional academic goals' and 'professional or vocational needs' (McInnis et al. 1995: 4). Knight (1997b) pointed to the urgent need for research on a range of interconnected topics relevant to taught postgraduate courses, including postgraduate student learning, teachers' working conditions, better conceptualisations of research-practice relations, definition of standards, quality assurance and marketing, composition/demographics of the postgraduate student population, and the generalisability of research on undergraduate student learning to more mature and/or experienced postgraduate populations (see also Hounsell 2021 this book).

But postgraduate coursework is still a Cinderella area. Peter Knight's groundbreaking edited collection on Master's courses (Knight 1997a) has accrued only 30 citations and as Kiley and Cumming recently observed, after reviewing the international literature

> … published research on master's level education – especially when compared with that of either the doctorate or the undergraduate – is at a low ebb. (Kiley and Cumming 2015: 106)

Scanning through recent, well-regarded books on 'the university' (Ashwin 2020; Barnett 2018; Collini 2012; Connell 2019; Croucher and Waghorne 2020; Trowler

2020), I struggle to find explicit treatment of taught Master's courses or consideration of distinctive issues pertaining to postgraduate courses. One could be forgiven for thinking that 'teaching' means 'teaching undergraduates'.

The slightness of research on, and theorising about, Master's courses creates a problem for books like this one, on online postgraduate education. Neither authors nor editors can safely assume that readers will share a sense of what Master's courses are, or should be, or even whether they should exist at all. In the worlds beyond the book, doubts are expressed about whether a Master's course must necessarily be more advanced, in conventional academic terms, than undergraduate courses in the same or cognate disciplines. (What then of 'conversion' courses?) Doubts are also expressed about the value of different forms of knowledge and ways of knowing. (What then of induction into academics' epistemic practices, or those practiced in a profession?)

As Dai Hounsell puts it (2021, this book), Master's degrees have a *polymorphic* character—they take multiple forms. I would add that they are also *polyvalent*, not simply in the narrow medical sense that they might protect one against multiple dangers, but that they are offered for different mixtures of purposes, with different ends in sight [see also Derek Jones's comments (2021, this book)]. Our MScITL was initially designed as a conversion course for unemployed graduates to retrain for jobs in the emerging technology-based education and training sector(s). It was funded under a Thatcherite initiative—the High Technology National Training (HTNT) programme—and was also used to demonstrate that the Open University (a Labour invention) was lamentably slow and bureaucratic in its course design and development practices. I harbour a complicated sense of pride in the fact that we fed a higher proportion of women into the maw of capitalist industry than any other HTNT programme, and I still think universities ought to have the capability to design, validate and implement a new Master's program in under a year, as we did. (There's more to socialism than helping students name the structures of oppression.)

Which leads me to another point about the costs of providing online postgraduate education. As the editors observe in their introduction, and the argument is illustrated in a number of chapters in the book, it is a mistake to assume that good online teaching is cheap. But as students point out [see e.g. Arfang Faye, Angi Pinkerton and Elizabeth Hurst in Marley et al. (2021, this book); see also Cathy Stone et al. (2021, this book)], there are life-changing economic advantages that flow from being able to afford online study and weave it around work and family responsibilities. Thinking clearly about issues of cost-cutting, profit-making and managerialism becomes more complicated when we also take into account access and affordability for students.

So, there is much more work that can and should be done to build upon what we know, have known, do, and have done, in the area of online postgraduate education: inquiry and reflection, as well as course and curriculum design and development. In pursuing that agenda, I suggest that we could benefit by resolving to: rehabilitate teaching without marginalising learning; become more pragmatic about the nature of design and design knowledge and make critique a tool for both analysis and action. I expand on each of these in turn, in the next three sections.

6 Rehabilitating Teaching Without Marginalising Learning, and Especially What to Learn

I'm sure I'm not alone in finding the word 'learnification' irritating, particularly when it's accompanied by a self-satisfied smile and a gentle rocking back on the heels—as if the speaker half expects a punch on the nose.

If we can walk and chew gum at the same time, then we can value both teaching and learning and we can treat both—and their relations—as worthy objects of research. I've already mentioned my aversion to romanticising teachers and teaching, and I will come back to the problem of conflating a critical disposition with an aversion to psychology and the learning sciences.

I agree that teaching is very important. It is underestimated, undervalued, misrepresented and marginalised in a variety of ways in universities. This is well captured by Aitken and Hayes (2021, this book), and underpins a number of the concerns expressed by authors in other chapters. We need better shared understandings of how online teaching is done, and sharper accounts of teachers' individual and collective agency.

That said, 'agency' itself is in need of careful attention. As Nieminen and colleagues observe, educational researchers have mobilised at least four distinct sets of accounts of agency, drawing on a range of sociological and psychological traditions: ecological, authorial, socio-material and discursive (Nieminen et al. 2021) and to this I would add Sannino's theory of transformative agency, which might be seen as endemic to education, rather than an import from other domains (e.g. Sannino 2020). We would also benefit from some recognition of the difficulties arising, and some smart thinking about how to proceed, when we bring together accounts of agency and materiality. There is no space here to elaborate on the point, but as Ingold (2011: 215) puts it: 'the more theorists have to say about agency, the less they seem to have to say about life'.

Moreover, we need to be able to theorise and understand teachers' actions without abandoning the best of what we know about the mind, including what we know about how, why and what people learn—whether in the role of student or teacher.

At a minimum, I would say that a shift of attention from the psychological to the sociological, and from learning to teaching, is *ill-timed*, because recent developments in research on thinking, doing and memory are constructing fruitful accounts of the connections between mind, body and world, not least through work on ecological, embodied, embedded, enactive, and extended cognition. Among other liberating achievements, such work helps relocate cognition, from being an individual property to arising in the relationships between a person and their material and social worlds—the things and people around them. Accounts of what teachers do, and why, that depend upon implicit, vernacular or 'folk' theories of mind (and learning and capability), lock inquiry and professional development into an old cul-de-sac.

This self-inflicted myopia is compounded by mischaracterisation of research on learning and on design for learning. For example, Tim Fawns and Christine Sinclair

(2021, this book) quote Gert Biesta as saying: 'learning' is a term that 'denotes processes and activities but is open—if not empty—with regard to content and direction' (Biesta 2009a: 39). On this point, I find Biesta unconvincing. I don't know a textbook or a course in the learning sciences that would agree that there's nothing to say about content and direction (the 'what' and 'why' of learning). Indeed, those antecedents of educational design that can be found in instructional (systems) design put 'what?' as *the* orienting question (see, e.g., Mager 1988). Earlier in his paper, Biesta also says

> the past two decades have witnessed a remarkable rise of the concept of 'learning' with a subsequent decline of the concept of 'education' (for empirical support for this thesis see Haugsbakk and Nordkvelle 2007). (Biesta 2009a: 37)

I wondered about this empirical support. Haugsbakk and Nordkvelle (2007) do indeed offer supportive bibliometric data, but it is worth noting that (a) the material on which they draw consists of Norwegian government policy documents and (b) they cite Biesta on the rise of the 'new language of learning' at the very start of their paper. In other words, (b) they are looking for signs of the rise of this language, and (a) their dataset tells us about policy texts rather than what researchers and practitioners are doing in the learning sciences (or even in education).

My main point here is that reference to 'learnification', which Biesta coined as a 'deliberately ugly term' (2009a: 38), is on the rise: as a badge to discredit, and indeed 'other' (ugly labels are good for vilification), researchers and practitioners who see learning, design for learning and the characteristics of learning environments as complex, needing careful study, and important, if not central, to educational work. If 'learnification' is 'the transformation of an educational vocabulary into a language of learning' (Biesta 2009a: 36) then I am even more worried about a language of teaching that is mute about learning, capability and the mind. In a contemporary article from 2009, on Dewey and 'educational engineering', Biesta makes another misstep, which seems to me to further undermine his qualifications as a *savant* to be drawn upon, uncritically, in discussions about learning and technology. He raises the question of 'whether the kind of engineering activities we need to build bridges are the same as the kind of engineering activities that we need to "build" human beings' and he dismisses Dewey's argument by denying that they are the same (2009b: 15). Of course they are not the same. But what Biesta misses—which Dewey would have spotted in a flash—is the difference between engineering a learning environment and engineering a human being. Biesta misses what Andy Clark observes as a fundamental quality of our species:

> We do not just self-engineer better worlds to think in. We self-engineer ourselves to think and perform better in the worlds we find ourselves in. We self-engineer worlds in which to build better worlds to think in. We build better tools to think with and use these very tools to discover still better tools to think with. We tune the way we use these tools by building educational practices to train ourselves to use our best cognitive tools better. We even tune the way we tune the way we use our best cognitive tools by devising environments that help build better environments for educating ourselves in the use of our own cognitive tools (e.g. environments geared toward teacher education and training). Our mature mental routines

> are not merely self-engineered: they are massively, overwhelming, almost unimaginably self-engineered. (Clark 2011: 59–60)

To be clear: part of Biesta's response to 'learnification' arose from his concerns about the pandemic of standardised testing in school systems—as evidenced in PISA and in the kinds of policy documents examined by Haugsbakk and Nordkvelle (2007). The othering term 'learnification' is now being used within self-styled critical writing in higher education and educational technology to marginalise knowledge about learning: a trend that runs much more widely than the confines of this book, and which I see as dangerous.

7 Educational Design and Analysis as Situated Activities, and the Creation of Design Knowledge

Raewyn Connell's inspirational book on *The Good University* (Connell 2019) gains great strength from her insistence on grounding our understanding of universities in the actual work accomplished collectively by real people. Universities are workplaces: research and teaching are forms of work. Teaching is a *composite* labour process, in which episodes of 'face-to-face' or 'live, interactive' teaching and learning are interspersed with many other activities, including preparation, design, reflection, administration, and so on. As Sonia Bussey (2021 this book) and Connell both note, teaching is also a *collective* accomplishment.

> The public image may be a solo lecture by a star performer. The everyday reality is a team of technicians, administrative staff, tutors and lecturers moving in a ballet in which that lecture is only a passing moment. The know-how of *all* these workers, their day-to-day coordination, and their capacity to sustain the coordination over months and years, are what really make up mainstream university teaching. (Connell 2019: 48–49)

Over the last decade or so, I have been particularly interested in the 'designerly' aspects of university teachers' work and have helped carry out a number of studies of educational design activities in which university teachers have collaborated with educational designers, developers and/or technologists to (re-)design courses, curricula and learning spaces (see e.g. Goodyear 2015, 2020; Carvalho et al. 2019; Kali et al. 2011a, b). Within this body of research, I see educational design, or design for learning, as having two sets of relations with theories of activity as situated (Suchman 1987, 2007). The first set of relations frames students' activity as situated: socially, physically and epistemically (Goodyear et al. 2021; Lave and Wenger 1991; Sawyer and Greeno 2009; Yeoman and Wilson 2019). The second set of relations frames the educational design activity itself as situated—what teachers and teaching teams (can) do during a design activity is influenced, in subtle and powerful ways, by the social, physical and epistemic constraints and affordances of the situation in which they are doing that work (Carvalho et al. 2019; Goodyear and Dimitriadis 2013). Simonsen et al. (2014) and Costanza-Chock (2020) make similar arguments about design, in general, as a situated activity in which specific

configurations of place, tools and people can have profound effects on process and outcomes, access and equity.

When we acknowledge that course, curriculum, technology, learning space and other design decisions are shaped by the circumstances in which they unfold and are made, we can sharpen a number of questions raised in chapters of this book.

First, there is the point that the interests, expertise and situations of a variety of actors—distinct but inter-related sets of participants and stakeholders—shape educational design work and its outcomes. [As Tim Fawns, Michael Gallagher and Siân Bayne (2021, this book) point out, there can be significant tensions between, as well as inherent limitations to, top-down and bottom-up initiatives within universities. To these I might add 'middle out'—Trowler et al. 2003.] Top-level managers, deans, course teams, solo academics and students (themselves many and varied) are differently placed. This has implications for how they participate in educational design (understood comprehensively), and for the outcomes of their participation. An important corollary for those of us who are thinking about what these groups of actors can learn from our research and writing is that their situations and capacities create differences in what counts as actionable knowledge and knowledgeable action (Goodyear et al. 2018; Ellis and Goodyear 2019). For example, top-level managers are better placed to act on clear-cut spending decisions than on lending their endorsement or support, whatever that means, to fuzzily-defined pedagogical innovations. (Vice chancellors showed little or no interest in educational technology until they found themselves facing decisions about which Learning Management System to buy. Few were concerned with online education until decisions had to be made about which MOOC platform provider to deal with. Few deans were interested in collaborative inquiry-based learning, until deans of Medicine started buying into PBL.)

Recognising this positioning is part of how we might diagnose the problem recently lamented by Thompson and Lodge (2020)—written against the background of the Covid-19 epidemic and the shift to emergency remote teaching.

> Expertise and evidence related to the effective use of educational technologies in higher education do not hold an esteemed place amongst those who make decisions, and the continued decline in funding for research on innovation in higher education reflects this. In 2020 we have observed a fundamental communication breakdown in higher education technology research. Neither the teachers nor the policymakers appear to have used research in educational technology. (Thompson and Lodge 2020: 4)

Secondly, our corpus of research into the actual work of educational design in higher education highlights the yawning gulf between normative accounts of how design *ought* to be done (the stuff of instructional design textbooks, for example) and the messy contingencies—I might even say perverse and self-sabotaging arrangements—of real world practices. Educational design, situated in the real world of contemporary Australian higher education, can look dangerously compromised by organisational politics, resource constraints and incompatible distributions of knowledge and power. For example, we have seen:

- Course redesign meetings in which it becomes clear that one member of the team will actually do all of the design decision-making, between meetings.
- Course redesign processes that have been carefully planned and scheduled to take several weeks, in which most or all of the key design decisions are taken rapidly within the span of a single meeting.
- Meetings in which members of the design team announce that they are about to be made redundant.
- Design activities in which it suddenly becomes clear that expected student numbers have doubled, teaching hours have been halved, or that specialised teaching spaces are no longer available.

I suspect such occurrences are not rare. Experienced educational designers shrug them off, and mutter about institutional politics. But like Thompson and Lodge, and several of the authors in this book, I feel obliged to press the case and ask about relations between knowledge and action in educational work of this kind. If we take seriously the arguments about design—and other educational work—as situated, then we also need to think seriously about *time*. University teachers work to unforgiving time-cycles, with limited information, limited room for manoeuvre and a professional obligation to act. If knowledge that is potentially useful in design work is not available at the point of need, it is not actionable, and the action will be less knowledgeable than it might have been. Moreover, ways of talking about time are tools through which power can be exercised. Deans and other leaders skilled in risk-management and efficiency-maximising can mobilise discourses of time to sideline evidence and critique. 'Teaching staff are already doing too much. There's no time for them to learn new tricks.' 'Now is not the time for complicated ideas.' Working on a much larger stage, Wendy Brown puts it like this:

> Critical theory is essential in dark times not for the sake of sustaining utopian hopes, making flamboyant interventions, or staging irreverent protests, but rather to *contest the very senses of time invoked to declare critique untimely*. If the charge of untimeliness inevitably also fixes time, then disrupting this fixity is crucial to keeping the times from closing in on us. It is a way of reclaiming the present from the conservative hold on it that is borne by the charge of untimeliness. (Brown 2005: 4) (emphasis added)

Turning now from time to method: Tim Fawns and Christine Sinclair (2021, this book) offer ethnographically-inspired 'thick description' as a better way of gathering useful information on which to base improvements to courses: better than the standard institutional tools of student surveys, satisfaction measures, etc. I'm persuaded by the argument that a proper understanding of the complex meshworks that constitute online postgraduate programmes needs the kind of close observation and interaction with participants that ethnographically-inspired approaches can provide (see, e.g., Goodyear et al. 2021; Yeoman 2015), I also think that research and practice in online postgraduate education have much to learn from anthropological and ethnographic theory and methods (Ingold 2000, 2011, 2017; Gunn et al. 2013; Pink et al. 2016). My one doubt about the adequacy of 'thick description' concerns the actionability of the knowledge produced, for the specific purposes of course redesign and enhancement purposes.

> The strength of evaluation research depends on the perspicacity of its view of explanation (Pawson and Tilley 1997: 219).

My question is this: can the thick description be relied upon to *resolve disagreements* within a course team about what should be changed, and what is likely to happen as a consequence of such a change? In other words, does it provide an account of how the course functions—the ecology or architecture of the course, if you like—that can support (situated, local) explanations and predictions, or at least, collective imaginings? (Can ecologists and architects get by with thick descriptions?)

Finally, I want to pick up a point made by Kyungmee Lee (2021, this book), about auto-ethnography as a pedagogical device—to develop the idea, echoes of which can also be found in the students' accounts in her chapter, that rich personal narratives from students can be an invaluable aid to course quality enhancement (and assurance, for that matter). Especially with mature, busy, postgraduate students, it seems to me, sharing ideas about how a course and its components function the way they do (and why) can be pedagogically useful, in immediate terms, and also useful in improving a course for future cohorts. As Lee cautions, it is far from straightforward to set up situations in which new students will write accounts of themselves that come from a vulnerable, authentic self (see also Veen 2021). As Lee puts it, those early accounts can emanate 'a nervous, heavy but fast-spreading air of competition and intimidation' (Lee 2021, this book). But as she also demonstrates, the building of trusting relationships, over time, can help transcend this early recourse to self-protection. And open discussion of needs and experiences, designs and their logic, is one of the best ways to learn how to improve a course.

8 Sharpening Our Sense of the Critical, and Moving Towards the Post-Critical

In this last main section, I want to air some suspicions that have been growing in my mind, as I read self-styled critical writing in some of my main fields of interest: educational technology (including online education) and innovation in university teaching and learning. In parts of this literature, it is depressingly fashionable to be freely critical of the work of others: framing other educators as politically naïve, simple-minded dupes or immoral opportunists. I don't think the authors of chapters in this book have been swept away in the same fashion, but some of the same suspicions were activated when I was thinking about some of the chapters in the present collection. The suspicions are still inchoate, but I will try to pin them down a bit, as puzzling questions, conflations and non-sequiturs littering critical commentary.

- Why is sociological explanation and theory seen as progressive? Are sociologists the only people trained in the use of a moral compass?
- Why are psychological framings of educational activities and phenomena seen as embodying the worst of enlightenment science? Is psychology necessarily a tool of oppression?

I think these bother me particularly because I find the meeting ground of psychology, cognitive science, epistemic practice theory and science and technology studies (STS) a particularly fruitful place in which to reconsider educational dilemmas.

And then I have better-formed questions, like:

- What is 'solutionism' and why is it a bad thing?
- What does 'instrumental' actually mean, and why is it (always) a bad thing?

And I am uneasy, because I want to use the insights I gain from research on the meeting ground of psychology, cognitive science, epistemic practice theory and STS to inform my analysis of how educational programs, courses, ecologies, environments (etc) actually work, with a view to proposing better ways of doing things.

A related doubt that began to take shape and trouble me as I read my way into the chapters can be expressed as follows. Several of the authors talk about using one or more theoretical lenses—critical, postdigital, poststructuralist, posthumanist, feminist, socio-material—to gain insights into their experiences of teaching online courses. In many of these examples, what is seen through the lens(es) is neither new nor surprising. Yes, we live in a capitalist world. People are exploited: particularly those people who start out from positions of disadvantage. Labour is rarely, if ever, properly rewarded. Institutions and their operations often reproduce disadvantage and propagate value systems and accounts of the world and its workings that protect the interests of the already rich and powerful. So, I have to ask: do the authors' insights arise from close study of the course(s) they are teaching, aided by looking through such-and-such a theoretical lens, or do the insights arise from the existing literature, such that the course experiences themselves serve primarily to provide illustrative examples? And if the latter, what can the rest of us learn that is new?

To be clear, I am neither condoning nor accepting the current state of the world. I am posing a question about the intellectual work being done and about the potential this knowledge-making activity has for equipping us to do things differently. In particular, I long to hear more about what the people engaged in these courses can now do to improve them, where 'improve' is understood as embodying the radical, emancipatory, empowering values and capabilities that suffuse the theoretical resources on which the authors are drawing. In my own practice as a teacher-researcher, such improvements depend upon understanding the specifics of how a course functions, what changes are both desirable and possible, and what outcomes might reasonably be anticipated.

This invites a supplementary question, which arises from a concern I have about the conflation—one might sometimes say the confabulation—of theoretical positions, such as a perspective drawn from work on socio-materiality, with a critical disposition. One can use the epistemic tools provided by Orlikowski or Latour without saying a word about neo-liberalism, the patriarchy, colonialism or surveillance. One can invoke socio-materialism, slide quickly sideways into a critique of platform capitalism, and have nothing new or sharp to say—because one has not actually *used* the espoused epistemic toolset.

On one view, a postdigital mindset makes this problem harder. I have worked with computer technology—writing programs, analysing data, building networks—since the 1970s and it is *decades* since I became weary of educators' othering of commonplace technologies. I'll smile benignly at anyone who says 'chill – the digital is everywhere now'. And yet … one cannot look clearly at the world through a socio-material lens without acknowledging that the material qualities of material things can make a difference to how they are used and understood. It's not just that matter matters (Barad 2003, 2007) but materials matter (Ingold 2007).

> … the ever-growing literature in anthropology and archaeology that deals explicitly with the subjects of *materiality* and *material culture* seems to have hardly anything to say about *materials*. … the stuff that things are made of … Their engagements are not with the tangible stuff of craftsmen and manufacturers but with the abstract ruminations of philosophers and theorists. To understand materiality, it seems, we need to get as far away from materials as possible. (Ingold 2007: 1–2).

Schatzki takes a similar view:

> Social thought has had an unsteady relationship to the material world. … although some recent social theory has attended to materiality, it still regularly underestimates the contributions made to social affairs by material entities, the material properties of things, and the processes that happen to these entities by virtue of these properties… (Schatzki 2019: 51)

I fear the same might be said about the growing literature that invokes sociomateriality in education and even educational technology. If we are serious about situativity, or about the structures on which agency depends, then we cannot speak only, or even preferentially, about the social. If matter matters, then the peculiar affordances of specific configurations of materials for uniquely embodied and capable human actors need to be understood. This is so, whether we are considering spaces and places, material and digital-material tools or networks and ecologies of devices. If we cannot speak carefully and precisely about these relations, where is our science?

At the same time, I think we need a more ambitious concept of 'the critical' in research on and in innovations in higher education. Almost 20 years have passed since Latour talked about critique 'running out of steam' (Latour 2004). Yet in the 'EdTech' literature we see a steadily growing stream of papers by researchers who identify as 'hypervigilant'—ready to see every educational experiment as the work of dupes and devils. One picks up these papers with a strange sense of anticipation—the plot and the ending are always the same; only the choice of target varies.

> Generals have always been accused of being on the ready one war late— especially French generals, especially these days. Would it be so surprising, after all, if intellectuals were also one war late, one critique late—especially French intellectuals, especially now? … history changes quickly and … there is no greater intellectual crime than to address with the equipment of an older period the challenges of the present one. (Latour 2004: 225–6, 231)

Among Latour's arguments is an observation that when philosophers are thinking about the nature of the world, they habitually use, as exemplary 'objects to think with', simple and familiar things—a mug or a pebble.

> … their objects are never complicated enough; more precisely, they are never simultaneously *made* through a complex history and new, real, and *interesting* participants in the universe. Philosophy never deals with the sort of beings we in science studies have dealt with. (Latour 2004: 234)

In educational technology, online education (etc) we need to treat this complicatedness seriously—carefully tracing relations, following the materials (as in good STS), and avoiding the temptation of that easy jump to critique as debunking.

> The critic is not the one who debunks, but the one who assembles. The critic is not the one who lifts the rugs from under the feet of the naïve believers, but the one who offers the participants arenas in which to gather. The critic is not the one who alternates haphazardly between antifetishism and positivism like the drunk iconoclast drawn by Goya, but the one for whom, if something is constructed, then it means it is fragile and thus in great need of care and caution. (Latour 2004: 246)

The challenge in educational technology, including online education, as I then see it, is for us to go beyond (or to sidestep) debunking and to do more than utter a superficial acknowledgement of socio-(digital)-materality. This will need sharper analytical tools and a commitment to mastery of methods, not just a fresh disposition.

We need better understandings of how the complicated things that we have reason to care about actually work (hang together, associate, etc.); a better understanding of their fragility and how to care for them, and make them stronger. We need to understand how to do this collectively—as members of intersecting networks drawing together around matters of concern—recognising that insights have to be worked for, and that care involves careful thinking and discussion, agreements about lines of joint action, and so on.

9 Postscript: Critical After Thoughts, and Going Meta-

With apologies to Yann Martel, I want to say that: to choose the critical as a philosophy of life is akin to choosing a pulpit as a means of transport.

What then do we make of advocacy for a ‘critical postdigital perspective’ [editors’ introduction to this volume (Fawns et al. 2021); Rachel Buchanan (2021, this book) and also Fawns 2019; Sinclair and Hayes 2019]. As Derek Jones observes (2021, this book), ‘post-’ is an awkward term. It is useful in that it simultaneously queries the nature and asserts the continuing importance of the word and idea to which it is prefixed. Some of the difficulties created by its use stem from the locational fixity of its dominant primary connotation. The Latin *post-* is tied to ideas of *behind* or *after*, whereas the Greek *meta-* floats more freely: *after* and *beyond* admit transcendence, reflection on and from higher levels, reflexivity and ‘going meta-’. But at least for now, we too are tied to ‘post-’ and need to make the best of it.

As I understand it, the phrase ‘critical postdigital perspective’ encourages us to do two things: (1) question more carefully the nature of claims about ‘the digital’; be wary of the traps that are set when the digital and material (or non-digital) are set

up as two exclusive and exhaustive categories; embrace the knowledge that the digital is here to stay, (2) think carefully about—and inquire fearlessly into—the sets of arrangements that constitute each instance of online postgraduate education; look out for whose interests are being served; search for the outer boundaries of what can and should be changed in the near future.

While the phrase enjoins us to look searchingly at our own work (and the works of the rich and powerful) it doesn't give us a licence to trash the efforts of our peers.

It's often the case that we need subtle ideas, tools and methods to understand how the world works. Sometimes things are simple. Some writers—not in this collection—write as if the world is already understood, or at least they simplify parts of the world's processes—those in which they are particularly interested—to the point where one has to wonder whether they lost their sense of wonder.

Understanding the world is one thing. As teachers, we are always already involved in changing the world, and our change-making is distributed: it works in and through other people, and through the reconfiguration of places to make them more likely sites for productive learning and convivial action. In online teaching for postgraduate students, we configure and reconfigure many elements and agents—epistemic, social, digital, material and hybrid. We work with students to bring things into temporary alignments that suit a particular task, activity and set of valued outcomes. In concert with them, we create temporary meshworks that enable what needs to be done now, and which act as modifiable patterns for later work.

Understanding these arrangements, places, configurations, meshworks, assemblages and patterns needs subtle ideas, tools and methods. As online teachers, working collectively, we depend upon reliable, shared (if partial) understandings of the functioning of what we and our students create, if we are to act rationally: connecting valued aims with appropriate means, deliberating together over matters of fact and matters of concern, knowing that nothing is certain or determined, but making decisions and moving ahead with sharp eyes and a sense of purpose. [Ingold (2011: 211) alludes to this as an 'ability to find the grain of the world's becoming'.]

The main concern I'm trying to articulate here, and it reflects an apprehension that has been growing in me, over the last few years, as I have seen younger writers take a critical turn, is that we lose our sense of wonder and of possibility. Standing in a pulpit, debunking the efforts of well-intentioned peers, is sad work and it's never ending. It seems there will always be room for another preacher, setting themselves up in another pulpit, positioned perfectly to say 'I am holier than thou!'

Taking up the ideas, tools and methods needed to make sense of the world, and to co-configure ways to work with others to understand and change it—that's the start of things, not the last step you take before surrendering to cynicism.

Which brings me to another post- word: *post-critical*. In my experience, the greater visibility and persistence of the things we create and use in online teaching makes it a productive site for solidarity around issues of inclusion and equity. As Sonia Bussey puts it:

> Done well, online teaching provides a showcase for highlighting the contribution made by all teachers, irrespective of their additional needs, and in turn, normalising the culture of accessibility that universities seek to promote. However, to get to that point, teachers need

> to feel safe and supported to make those needs visible, to colleagues, the university, and the students. As professionals, we all have the individual responsibility to educate ourselves about these issues and play our role as allies in that process. (Bussey 2021, this book)

So if we have to stay with Latin, rather than Greek, I offer post-critical pedagogy as a better mode of transport—indeed a transport of delight.

> Instead of hierarchical relations between a master of critique and an ignorant student, education is conceived as an act of giving, which creates common ground between the generations. Rather than ceaselessly calling for a brave new world in an imaginary, unattainable future, post-critical education calls for renewing the existing world based on what is good and worthy in it. Prevailing injustice is not denied, and education by no means excludes politics: it simply refuses to force predetermined 'critical' patterns on reality, allowing the new generation to be political in its own way (Snir 2021: 202).

Once again, I thank the editors and authors of this thought-provoking volume for the opportunity to pursue some implications of ideas they are exploring. So much to do! So little time!

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Index

T. Fawns et al. (eds.), *Online Postgraduate Education in a Postdigital World*,
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