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Contextual marking: Fair or foul play?

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Introduction and background

When the Covid-19 (C19) pandemic and the associated campus closures struck in March 2020, the majority of undergraduate teaching was already completed for the academic year in UK Higher Education Institutions (HEI), making the move to online-only work less disruptive. However, end-of-year assessments were affected, particularly those which relied on traditional in-person in-room examinations. Universities responded to these in a variety of ways; the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) provided an overview of the changes institutions made (QAA, 2020), and these included:

1. The introduction of temporary assessment regulations
2. Where assessment could not be undertaken, use of previous grades as a proxy for terminal performance
3. Reductions in the number of assessments and tweaking formats
4. Allowing additional time for exams or amending the format to open book exams.

In many cases, it was a combination of some or all of the above that was used and it is important to note that much of what was done by HEIs was made possible by a relaxation of the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) requirements around material information (including assessment), with the rider that HEIs must make 'reasonable efforts to protect the interests of the students' (OFS, 2020).

The QAA (2020) overview goes on to explain that in most cases institutions calculated two degree classification outcomes for students, one as if there were no changes to regulations and a second after changes such as those identified above were applied, the better of the two classification outcomes being the one that the student received as their result:

'In practice, for many higher education providers, "no detriment" means students were guaranteed that their final grade would be no lower than their average academic performance in advance of the pandemic. For some, this guarantee was dependent on the student achieving (at least) a pass in the assessments taken during the pandemic.' (QAA, 2020, p.1).

Responses that universities made to the situation were labelled by many HEIs as 'no detriment' policies, although in some instances institutions were wary of using this term as there was no 'guaranteed safety net' provided. In addition to these

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'no detriment' provisions, many HEIs also relaxed their mitigating or extenuating circumstances policies, through measures such as self-certification. This was a response to the difficulties faced by students in gathering evidence, such as doctor certificates, and to try and prevent the existing processes becoming overwhelmed by the sheer volume of requests.

This thought piece sets out the case for contextual marking (CM), a complementary approach to the measures outlined above that was developed and used by one large HEI as a response to the assessment disruption caused by Covid-19, to ensure groups of students were not disadvantaged in terms of degree outcomes. In brief, the approach eschewed formal quality approval processes and instead established a set of quality principles to be applied by academics at programme level with departmental oversight. This approach is explored in the context of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, using Gibbs' (2010) explanation of Dimensions of Quality, Presage, Process and Product as an analytical framework.

For academic developers supporting such an approach, there are significant questions around the tension of maintaining standards and fairness for students being assessed and working with academic colleagues to arrive at a defensible position.

What the QAA Quality Code says

The QAA Quality Code (2018) is a sector-developed document, with the purpose of making clear what is expected by way of quality by awarding institutions in the interests of students, the public, and the wider international reputation of UK HEIs. It contains a set of principles around the student experience with the purpose of maintaining the quality of the provision and the academic standards of awards. A distinction is drawn between expectations for academic standards and expectations for quality of delivery. Expectations for standards (academic standards) can be characterised as the qualification received by the student as meeting the relevant qualifications framework in line with sector benchmarks. Expectations for quality (quality standards) can be characterised as those factors that contribute to the student learning experience through the full student taught life cycle from admission to the award of their degree. Drawing on this thinking, a practical analysis is provided by Advance HE in their Professional Development Course for External Examiners (2018):

'Academic standards: "output" measures demonstrated in what students produce, for example in their written work, examinations, performances, conduct of practical clinical skills. The academic standards for a programme are reflected in students' actual achievement.

Quality standards: "input measures", focussing on all aspects of the assessment cycle other than students' achievements. Include things like the qualifications of the staff, the library resources, the classroom environment, laboratories, and student entry qualifications.'

As well as the environmental factors identified as quality standards, there are also sets of processes within 'quality' around assessment, committees and boards, and course improvement mechanisms.

An alternative well-established quality model (Biggs, 1993) applied internationally and here in the UK, is the three Ps of Presage, Process, and Product variables. Presage variables include everything before students start their learning and includes their own characteristics as well as those of the institutions and the staff who teach there. Process variables include teaching, learning and assessing – the experience that the student has had at their HEI. Product variables are the outcomes of the student learning experience, narrowly defined as academic standards in the above models, but in reality a much richer set of capabilities that reflect who the student has become during their time studying and living, not all of which are intended or measurable.

The approach of CM sought to tread a fine line between recognising that there had been disruption to the process variables brought about by the response to C19 in

the final few weeks of teaching and to planned assessments, and the need to maintain the standards of the products (the academic standards), although these may look different from those initially planned.

The main tenet of CM is that it is possible, through careful adaptation of expectations of what students could now be reasonably expected to produce due to disruption, to modify assessments and assessment criteria/mark schemes in such a way that academic standards are maintained. Arguably, using the wider definition product, a case could be made that students had developed new capabilities through dealing with the changing and challenging circumstances they found themselves in, and that some of this experience could be used as part of their revised assessments.

The following section sets out what the institution that developed CM undertook in practical terms. This is then followed by a discussion of the potential impact of the approach on different stakeholder groups and some conclusions for future implications of the approach are offered.

What is contextual marking?

Assessment is the way that institutions identify and accredit student progress, and a key part of this is grading student work. Contextual marking is about recognising and taking into account that students may find it challenging to do the tasks originally intended due to a significant disruption – in this case the Covid-19 circumstances. To put CM in place, academics need an approach to planning and marking work according to criteria which are suitably adjusted to reflect the constraints facing students, whilst also maintaining robust academic standards. The overall aim of the approach is that undergraduate students can maintain their academic progress (pass and progress) from one level to the next, or to gain an exit award without detriment, despite the disruptions.

The key principles of CM are that:

1. Assessment should take into account the situation brought about by constraints (for example, in the case considered here, due to C19)
2. It applies to the task for all students, not an individual submission
3. In all but exceptional circumstances students must demonstrate all of the learning outcomes through their assessed work
4. Academic staff should keep the modified tasks and existing or new criteria as similar as possible, because they have been designed to allow student demonstration and achievement of the intended learning outcomes
5. Where possible, changes in requirements to be notified to students in advance
6. Any changes must maintain academic standards.

The CM approach is not intended to be applied to individual students, as this is taken care of by the arrangements for exceptional factors/mitigating circumstances which are designed for an individual student who has a very particular situation, which means that they cannot do a particular assessment task. Whatever academics decide to do by way of CM, it applies to all students on the module.

What the University did

Through a series of workshops, all staff mail-outs and the development of an Intranet site, the University socialised the idea of contextual marking (CM) so that staff had a shared vocabulary and understanding to help discuss, understand and consistently apply the measures being developed.

The key message communicated to academics was that CM allows for the adjustment of some aspects of assessment to recognise the work completed by students whilst not creating unreasonable expectations of what can be achieved by students, and to maintain academic standards so that students can continue through their academic development. Additionally, the approach prevents inviting a whole class to apply for exceptional factors/mitigating circumstances and extensions which may simply add to pressure and excess workload for everyone later in the year.

Detailed guidance explained that the task type should remain the same (e.g. essay, portfolio), but that academics might vary their expectations of the word count, the range of resources expected to be used by students, or the number of questions set and required to be attempted, for instance, as long as students were given sufficient notice.

In some cases, CM has to be applied following the submission of work where a calibration activity between the marking team to establish a shared understanding of academic standards uncovers issues that mean that if students were assessed as planned, they would be unfairly penalised.

Contextual marking adaptations

Table 1 indicates in practical terms how CM can be applied to address particular challenges by modifying in some way the assessment requirements. This is not intended as an exhaustive list, as the particular context of an assessment will determine how this might be applied. For example, if the assessment required learners to collect primary data on a field trip and C19 restrictions meant they could not do this, then a data set could be provided. If taught sessions had to be curtailed, then it might be possible to shift the focus away from that content to a reflection of personal progress.

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Challenge	Possible adaptations
Late access to systems, reduced time to access resources.	Reduce expected size of assessment – expect same level of focus, but on fewer areas.
Absences due to illness/self-isolation.	Place more emphasis on independent work.
Switching between on-campus/online disrupting plans for taught sessions.	Replace part of planned assessment with reflection on personal progress academically.
Learners unable to collect primary data.	Data set provided for analysis.

Table 1 Examples of potential changes

At the granular level of assessment criteria that are expressed as University-wide standard descriptors, Table 2 illustrates how CM may also be applied. For example, criteria worded around synthesising sources of information may be amended to recognise the fewer sources required, but that the level of

analysis is maintained. Assessment criteria worded around professionalism could focus on students’ ability to adapt to changing circumstances recognising that they had to change the way that they work and learn.

Standard descriptor focus	Possible adaptations
1. Critical analysis	Reduce expectations of range of sources – maintain expectations of depth of analysis of those which remain.
2. Professionalism	Reward reflection on coping with changes in academic plans.
3. Expressing ideas	Reduce size of assignment, reward clear structuring and presentation in the same ways as planned.
4. Team work	Reward efforts to build and maintain an academic community during disruption.
5. Professional development	Reward reflection on independent skill development and future planning.
6. Synthesising information	Accept fewer sources, maintain a level of analysis.
7. Social and community contexts	Consider wider implications of disruption and impact on disciplinary context.

Table 2 Descriptor adaptations

Quality process

University-level sign-off was not required for contextual adjustments. Instead, the decision making was devolved to course leaders and academics with responsibilities for academic matters at departmental level. The quality assurance focus was on departmental-level peer review of relatively small changes, rather than the creation of a new approval process. However, clear parameters were set around what is out of scope for CM and this includes changes to learning outcomes and the mode of assessment (exams/coursework). A simple process was developed for module leaders to record decisions so that they can be explained to students and external examiners if required:

1. Identify any changes that may be required, check that they fall within the scope of CM, share with colleagues for peer feedback
2. Write an explanation of decisions, detailing what

alternative arrangements were put in place, and check it with the programme leader or another nominated colleague as a peer review to sense check the proposals. In some situations, the programme leaders may need to escalate to senior colleagues

3. Communicate any changes to the assessment team
4. Write an explanation for students which contains enough detail to reassure and explain to them how to submit their work. Ask a colleague to peer review this to ensure that it makes sense and is readily understandable language as a sense check.

Fair or foul for whom?

The title of the article pointed to one of the key issues for an approach such as contextual marking and, perhaps even more controversial, to no-detriment policies. Table 3 sets out some potential positions of different stakeholder groups.

Stakeholder group	Fair	Foul
Staff	We over-assess and complicate the process of marking and this provides an opportunity to maintain standards and at the same time reduce students and staff workload.	We are continually dumbing down our courses due to management pressure to get graduate students and this is just another example of that.
Current students	I should not be disadvantaged by circumstance that are beyond my control.	Future employers will not trust the degree that I have earned because they will think my grades are inflated.
Previous students	It isn't current students' fault that their studies have been disrupted and they deserve adjustments made to put them on a level playing field.	I am now in competition with students who have had an unfair advantage and are leaving with inflated grades.
Employers	We need a steady flow of new graduates particularly in disciplines such as health care.	How can I trust applicants' qualifications are a fair reflection of their capabilities?
UK HEI	Keeps the system afloat at times of extreme uncertainty.	Lowering quality standards damages the reputation of UK HEIs.

Table 3 Fair or foul

Perhaps there is a philosophical tension between two distinct camps in whatever stakeholder group they fall. There are those who believe university degrees are subject to significant grade inflation caused by institutions changing algorithms that calculate degree classifications and thereby lower standards (Universities UK, 2020). Alternative views are that, in part at least, some of the improvements are down to students coming into universities better prepared with capabilities that will improve their outcomes and that academics are better at teaching. Another view is that league tables have placed significant pressure on institutions to compete with each other and this has led to internal pressures placed on academics to ensure that not only do students not fail, but that grades are forced up. When dealing with CM, it is these familiar arguments that come to the fore around questions of fairness and equitability and maintaining standards that academic developers are familiar with. However, established practices of level-appropriate learning outcomes and well-constructed assessment criteria or mark schemes underpin the approach to maintaining standards, rather than a normative approach to assessment of allocating degree classifications by comparing students.

Conclusion

In the context of CM, *Presage* indicators feature most predominantly in relation to what experiences have shaped the student contribution and experience. These predispositions have been influenced by the C19 situation, particularly in relation to the impact on learner expectations, abilities and subject knowledge in engaging in assessment. Similarly, the influence of the teaching context will have had a significant impact upon *presage* factors resulting inevitably in a change to *process* and *products*. The contextual and interrelated features of this CM model demonstrate its potential to inform the 'transformation' of pedagogy and curriculum delivery in enabling an academically robust approach which maintains quality standards whilst being proactive in ensuring an equitable student experience in exceptional circumstances.

Approaches like contextual marking should not be used casually, but when circumstances are exceptional they can provide another tool for supporting students through their study. In normal times, it may also be the case that an

acceptance that assessment intentions go wrong for a number of reasons and that the application of the professional judgement of academics to make reasonable and defensible adaptations, is something that could be used more widely when supported by the rationale set out above. As with all distinctions, however, there are fine judgments to be made around when to step outside of formal, established quality processes to make changes that materially impact on the assessment of students' work. The C19 pandemic made it possible, for a period of time, through the relaxation of CMA requirements, to test the boundaries of the contractual arrangements with students and the established quality measures, and we argue that some of these changes could, perhaps, become part of the mainstream teaching, learning and assessment practices.

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Ten years on: The UKPSF revisited

Jo Peat, University of Roehampton

It is now 10 years since the current iteration of the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) was written. The initial 2004 version was reviewed with a few changes in 2011 and Advance HE is now looking to redevelop the framework and launch a new, updated version. Discussions, including with SEDA, have been under way for some time but, because of organisational changes and the global pandemic, this review has been delayed.

In June 2014, I wrote a piece for *Educational Developments*, 'UKPSF: a vehicle for development or a hierarchical ladder?' (Peat, 2014). I had worked with the UKPSF for a decade and had reservations about its true value and the associated Higher Education Academy (HEA) fellowships. As Chalmers (2017) points out:

'While the UKPSF took some time to gain influence beyond the accreditation of professional development programs and the fellowship scheme, [...] they have become more influential in institutional policy and practice and individuals' understanding of teaching over time.'

So, ten years further on and given the impending revision, it is timely to think about the advantages the sector has seen from using the UK Professional Standards Framework, and possible changes that might make it a better fit for use in 2021 and onwards.

Although from the outset I was fully supportive of a framework to recognise the quality and breadth of learning and teaching in higher education, I was far from convinced that the UKPSF and HEA fellowships provided a valuable model. In my 2014 piece, I considered elements that I found problematic. A primary issue was the implied hierarchy in the different UKPSF Descriptors and the corresponding categories of HEA Fellowships. It seemed inescapable to conclude that a Principal Fellowship outranked a Fellowship. Equally, to be

at Descriptor 1 of a framework was surely not as high as being at Descriptor 4. No matter how often that hierarchy was disavowed, it was still seen as such by many academics. Countless emails were received from those in senior positions stating that only a Principal Fellowship would be commensurate with their experience and standing. This is demonstrated by an email from a senior academic who had been advised not to apply for D4, but to consider D1, given that their expertise and main body of work lay in discipline-specific research and not teaching:

'This all seems very demeaning, and I know I am not the only relatively senior academic who finds it seriously demotivating.'

Has this changed? As the UKPSF has become more embedded in higher education processes, a greater understanding of the different categories has developed; however, the idea of a hierarchy persists and the nomenclature sustains this. As this is now so ingrained across the sector, included in promotions criteria, probation documentation and QA processes, significant change is unlikely; however, there are ways to mitigate this. The accompanying text for each Descriptor could be adjusted to clarify the expectations and focus of each Descriptor. To add a clear explanation that Descriptor 4 is for those making strategic decisions about teaching and learning in HE, for example, and omitting the typical career role and reference to experience, may help colleagues to see that this category of Fellowship is not 'higher' than an Associate Fellowship, just designed for those with a different focus to their role.

A second area that concerned me was the potentially limited opportunity for progression through the Descriptors: colleagues who are excellent teachers but who may not have the opportunity to disseminate their practice widely and who do not seek out strategic roles of impact and influence, find themselves limited to Descriptor 1 and

Descriptor 2 of the UKPSF. This would not be problematic if there were not the implicit hierarchy. Many universities, my own included, have, however, built recognition into promotions criteria. This has been helpful in terms of encouraging engagement with the UKPSF and HEA Fellowships but becomes a double-edged sword when colleagues must apply for recognition at D3 to gain promotion. A solution here is not immediately obvious, but perhaps a renaming of the Descriptors and associated Fellowships to remove the idea of hierarchy would address this, for example: Fellowship: supporting learning; Fellowship: teaching and learning; Fellowship: leadership in L&T; Fellowship: strategic impact L&T. The requirement to evidence remaining in good standing and demonstrate continued engagement in pedagogic CPD in the form of regular reflective accounts would be an additional way to ensure continued development. A peer review system such as that used for SEDA Fellowships could be trialled as a way forward here.

My third reservation was the trend for recognition to become a KPI for institutions. This was largely a result of the unmet expectation that the number of colleagues with recognition would be required as a TEF metric. As universities set KPIs, recognition looked set to become tokenistic for many, a way to tick institutional boxes. Making recognition a KPI did, however, have some advantages, as it encouraged engagement by those who would otherwise choose to forgo the opportunity. There is evidence that, once engaged, some more reluctant colleagues begin to see the value in reflecting on their teaching practice, becoming motivated and enthused by seeing what they have achieved. The findings of Shaw (2017) and van der Sluis *et al.* (2017) suggest that the value of the HEA Fellowships might not be found in their direct application to practice, but in the opportunity to confirm and reinforce academics' commitment to teaching and learning, which was hitherto sadly neglected.

Many universities do not have the resources to offer pedagogic CPD on a regular basis; post-PG Cert and the gaining of recognition at D3 and D4 of the UKPSF can encourage colleagues to rediscover this activity. This positive outcome is largely dependent on the level of support and encouragement provided by institutional mentors, but in the schemes I have been involved in as an external, this support is almost invariably thorough, developmental and kind. That the number of colleagues with recognition was not adopted as a TEF metric has had benefits: educational development colleagues can continue to encourage engagement in their institutional schemes or via the direct recognition route without the additional onus of meeting pre-set, arbitrary targets. Hopefully, this will enable recognition to retain its real value as a resource for reflection and development. This will, of course, continue to make it challenging to engage some colleagues, but perhaps engagement for the 'wrong' reasons is not a great loss.

A final, important reservation was in the monopoly that Advance HE, then the Higher Education Academy, had over the awarding of recognition for engagement with the UKPSF. It is important to remember that Advance HE manages but does not 'own' the Standards. For Advance HE to be the only body conferring recognition on those who engage with the UKPSF does not reflect the breadth and number of organisations involved in the development of the UKPSF, nor does it recognise those working actively with the framework to underpin other schemes and frameworks. Happily, this reservation has been partially overcome. There have been significant developments, not least of which is that two SEDA Professional Development Framework (PDF) awards have been recognised by HESA at D1 and D2 of the UKPSF. Supporting Learning has been mapped to Descriptor 1 (D1) and Learning, Teaching and Assessing to Descriptor 2 (D2). These awards can be included in the Key Information Sets collected by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) as follows:

'01 Successfully completed an institutional provision in teaching in the higher

education sector accredited against the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF). This includes courses accredited by SEDA against its Named Awards that are aligned against the UKPSF (Supporting Learning; Learning, Teaching and Assessing).' (SEDA PDF Awards and UKPSF)

SEDA's success in persuading HESA to recognise that the HEA Fellowships were only one agency's way of interpreting the UKPSF, and that SEDA had other ways of recognising the achievement of D1 and D2, was no mean feat. Seeing how the UKPSF can be linked to schemes and programmes of study other than those accredited by Advance HE, demonstrates the breadth and applicability of the UKPSF. Similarly, in consultation with SEDA and others, Vitae developed the 'Teaching Lens on Vitae Researcher Development Framework and the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF)' (Vitae, 2013). This demonstrates the important – and unequivocal – links between research and teaching once again and is a definite advancement in the use and application of the UKPSF.

So, have I changed my opinion about the UKPSF and its benefits and drawbacks? Not completely; however, I am able to see real benefit from colleagues engaging with the framework. A primary benefit is that engagement requires colleagues to reflect on their pedagogic practices and the enhancements and developments they have made and are making in their teaching and support of learning. Too often this reflection does not take place: academic colleagues are time-poor and ongoing reflection, although highly desirable, is often omitted. Those who wish to gain recognition against the UKPSF, both through the Advance HE Fellowships and the SEDA PDF awards, must reflect on their teaching, as applications necessitate a reflective narrative rather than a descriptive account. Many colleagues write after achieving recognition and express how useful this has been, allowing them a real insight into their own practice. They report that without these drivers they would not take time to consider their pedagogic practice in depth. This is a very positive experience for most and

they can see the value of such an activity and, in addition, this can make their next job application much easier as their quality and value have been formally recognised. Equally, the achievement of recognition can help colleagues to protect themselves, their work or their unit if needed, during times of internal uncertainty in their organisations.

Another benefit from engagement with the UKPSF is that it has given a more definite identity to learning and teaching in higher education. Colleagues can now 'benchmark' their performance against a national framework of practice. Measurements of performance, of course, can be unhelpful and even harmful; however, it is useful for colleagues to consider their experience against the UKPSF and the expectations of academics at their stage in their career. It also provides a shared language for talking about learning and teaching. Many academics in the UK now know about the Areas of Activity, the Core Knowledge and the Professional Values of the UKPSF. This enables us to talk about learning and teaching using the same vocabulary. In addition, the UKPSF has been instrumental in encouraging engagement with the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL). Many academics have been largely unaware of SoTL until engaging with the UKPSF. As well as introducing them to learning and teaching as a discipline with a significant scholarly literature, many have subsequently engaged in producing outputs focusing on pedagogic practices.

It is helpful to reflect on how others perceive the UKPSF. The fact that other countries want to either adopt the UKPSF or develop one of their own attests to the value that higher education can see in such a framework. In illustration, in 2016 SEDA and the University of Roehampton were part of an Erasmus+ project, E-Taleb, with universities across Lebanon. The higher education ministry in Lebanon wanted to develop a professional standards framework that would support colleagues to develop the quality of teaching and support of learning in a structured way, common to and understandable to the whole of the national sector. This project focused on working with our Lebanese colleagues to consider the values, expectations, behaviours, common knowledge and

skills that they wanted to underpin higher education. The resulting framework is different from the UKPSF, but it is important to recognise the UKPSF as the catalyst for this local framework and the influence it has had on similar developments in other countries.

A final aspect I would like to consider is whether the UKPSF Dimensions are still fit for purpose. By and large, I think they are. This does not mean that certain changes would not be helpful. A consideration, particularly in our current climate, must be a greater emphasis on digital skills and digital learning. This already features in the Core Knowledge: K4 focuses directly on technology, but does not raise the profile of our new, digital environment quite as high as it might. Advance HE has recently published 'Digital lens on the UKPSF' (2020), but a more overt focus on digital learning in the framework would obviate the need for a supplementary document. Since the beginning of the pandemic, academics have striven to translate their previous, in-person teaching to an online, digital environment. Enormous progress has been made, progress that must not be lost when we go back to campus on a more full-time basis. To give digital learning a higher profile in the UKPSF would reflect this fundamental change to our ways of teaching in the UK.

Another area for consideration is in Area of Activity 5, which focuses on continuing professional development (CPD). Currently, the Areas of Activity do not automatically project forwards but are more a snapshot of a moment in time or a projection backwards to

reflect sustained good practice over time. Admittedly, many institutional schemes include a CPD action plan in their local schemes, but it is not a central feature of the UKPSF itself. Area of Activity 5 could include a forward-looking section, ensuring that an academic's pedagogic continuing professional development is future-focused, not just a reflection on what has already taken place.

Graduate outcomes and highly skilled employment are key priorities for the Office for Students. These areas can, of course, be interwoven into accounts of practice but do not feature explicitly in the UKPSF. Perhaps the time is right for them to feature more prominently, perhaps as an additional area of Core Knowledge or more explicitly in the Areas of Activity, for example, by linking the design of learning in Area of Activity 1 to real-world opportunities and focusing on authenticity in assessment in Area of Activity 3. The UKPSF must focus on national, local and institutional priorities to be seen as being of real value and this is an area that is ripe for exploitation by the framework.

In conclusion, this is a personal reflection on having worked with the UKPSF for 17 years. I have certainly become more positive about the framework and the benefits it can bring. I would like to end on an element I have found to be most useful: the UKPSF has been designed not to be overly prescriptive. It allows colleagues from a range of roles and backgrounds to consider a variety of experiences and expertise and to frame these to meet the UKPSF criteria. Whilst it is timely to reconsider the framework

in the light of changes over the last decade and the experience of engaging with it across the sector, its flexibility and scope to recognise different experience are elements that we need to celebrate and retain.

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Observing very large classes in very large spaces: Starting conversations about engaged learning

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Introduction

The current higher education context of increasing class sizes, space and budget constraints, and pressures on teaching staff to ensure quality learning outcomes, results in a push for more effective and more cost-effective approaches to teach

en masse. Learning approaches such as the 'flipped classroom' are often seen to be a panacea for these challenges, promising greater student engagement in such contexts. However, in this era of massification of education, when large classes are defined as those

with a cohort of over 300, 400 or even 1000 students, how can one confirm whether students are actually engaged? Or whether the strategies embraced by teachers will lead to engaged learning? Or even whether adopted teaching approaches are

indeed examples of engaged learning strategies, and members of teaching teams are operating from the same understandings?

These questions become even more pertinent as we grapple with how teaching and learning has been forced to change by the Covid-19 pandemic. It is highly unlikely that post-Covid-19 teaching will fall seamlessly back into the way we have taught in the past. One thing that is clear about the new teaching models is that interactivity, engagement and connectedness will become increasingly more important, and classes, unconstrained by physical spaces, increasingly larger.

At our research-intensive, large, comprehensive University, pre-Covid-19 classes were already becoming massive; particularly first-year units of study in programs with a common core. With some of these units having in excess of 1000 students enrolled, the lecture was still seen as the most efficient way of teaching. In the heady pre-Covid-19 days, when few at our University were prepared or able to embrace online learning, there were still coordinators interested in moving away from the traditional lecture, repeated multiple times, towards harnessing the power of digital and collaborative learning, adopting engaged learning activities – the very type of learning that is becoming more important in new learning environments.

When our University's Exhibition Hall, a large, multi-purpose event space that could easily accommodate over 700 students at a time, was made available for teaching purposes, a number of units leapt at the chance to transform their courses. The large, flat-floored space allowed up to ten students to sit at round tables to work collaboratively in groups and for staff and students to move freely around the room as required, so class activities could be redesigned to include groupwork focused on collaborative design and problem-solving activities.

As this was a new model for teaching, teachers sought a mechanism to gather evidence that engaged learning could be achieved in such a large context. We needed a mechanism to capture whether behaviours anticipated in an active learning environment actually

occurred in this large space. This mechanism needed to be used across different discipline knowledge areas, learning activities and in massive classes.

The solution

A comprehensive literature search for existing, freely available and tested tools focused on active learning techniques, surfaced two potentially useful approaches:

1. Teaching Dimensions Observation Protocol (TDOP) tool (Hora and Ferrare, 2010) – used to describe teaching practices and observed student behaviours
2. STROBE (O'Malley *et al.*, 2003) – a time-dependent observation protocol.

We combined the processes and scales from the TDOP and the STROBE protocol tools into one tool – the Active Learning Observation Tool (ALOT). The tool captured behaviours and commentary that could be used to feed back into future changes in practice.

Developing ALOT

Various time allocations and observation activities were trialled, drawing on the STROBE experiences of five-minute group 'strobe' intervals of observation cycles. The final protocol shifted observational focus between the general classroom and small group, across a series of five-minute small group strobe and a five-minute general observation of the whole room, over four repeated cycles. Different groups were selected as a focus for each small group strobe.

A hard-copy prototype of anticipated learner and teacher behaviours was tested *in situ* in actual classes by three observers. The anticipated teacher and student behaviours contained on the tool were refined in consultation with the teaching teams. This prototype went through a five-trial and redrafting process before arriving at a stable tool used for the remainder of the project.

Once finalised, ten observations were conducted over a semester with a minimum of three observations for each course. Four observers were trained in the use of the ALOT protocol and nomenclature to ensure cross-observer reliability. A minimum of two observers collected data in each

observation instance.

At the conclusion of the semester, all records collected were analysed via visual scan to establish the dominant trends. Further coding analysis was conducted using both deductive and inductive coding processes that were consistently checked against each other (Muir-Cochrane and Fereday, 2006). Codes developed through this process were tested against course intentions and themes evident in the literature related to active learning and flipped-classroom pedagogies. In addition, a frequency analysis was conducted to derive an overall average frequency of the different types of activity observed across all classes. A report was developed for each course convener and a synthesis report was developed for central administration.

ALOT as a professional learning tool

On the face of it, this process would appear to be fairly pedestrian. But the power of ALOT lay not in the final tool developed or the reports that were generated, but rather lay in the conversations that were sparked between academic developers, technicians, tutors, lab demonstrators, lecturers and course coordinators.

After each iteration of testing, the tool was refined in consultation with teaching staff. It was within these conversations that the true power of ALOT was noted – it wasn't the tool, but the process of considering observed learning behaviours in the light of theory emerging from the engaged learning literature. The data captured in the ALOT tool and reports certainly enabled the teaching staff, who were tied up in holding these large classes together and making sure that students were on task, to understand what students were doing and experiencing. The reports allowed them to make the judgements as to whether students were indeed actively engaged, and to make the necessary adjustments to teaching if the desired outcome wasn't achieved. However, of more importance was that language and practices were being shared across the team.

The act of refinement, the arguments as to whether this behaviour or that could be considered engaged learning, allowed teachers to translate the theory

into their own practice. It allowed course coordinators to describe and re-articulate the practice of engaged teaching into a massive class context across the whole teaching team. Guided by the academic developers who were more familiar with the existing body of research, teaching teams redefined expected student behaviour, expected staff behaviour and expectations of teaching in this manner amongst the teaching teams.

While teachers were focused on refining the tool, they were developing a shared view of what constituted engaged learning in that setting, in that discipline and in that team. And, as observers, we noted an increasing degree of consistency across teaching practices across the teaching teams, both within and across the disciplines taught in the teams that actively engaged with the process of refinement – more so than in other classes we observed that didn't engage with this process. In those classes, we noted that members of the teaching team who were not the course coordinators generally slipped into the familiar patterns of transmission-based lecturing and students passively listening.

Conclusion

The ALOT tool provided a means to acquire a time-bound 'scan' of student activity in a large space. But more importantly, the process of refining the tool proved useful for helping translate teaching practices that supported genuine engaged learning. It exposed the traditionally closed space of teaching and learning to the gaze of others and sparked conversations between teachers, engaged learning champions and academic developers, to transform large class teaching from traditional lecturing actions to classes where teacher actions leaned towards guiding/monitoring engaged learning across the whole teaching team.

Now, in a world transformed by Covid-19, teaching and learning that engages students is even more necessary. And a mechanism to capture data across multiple platforms is needed. But, more importantly, what is really needed is a means to bring together the diverse teaching teams that online and hybrid teaching require, to forge a unified understanding across the team of what constitutes engaged learning in *this* course, in *this* mode, for *these* students.

The ALOT package is freely available to download from <https://itali.uq.edu.au/resources/evidencing-teaching-innovation>. We invite colleagues to use the tool as a starting point to spark conversations about engaged learning approaches.

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From walking to surfing: Reflections on moving an educational leadership activity online

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Over the past year, the necessity of adapting our interactive, engaging, face-to-face group activities into an online learning experience has tested the limits of our creativity and academic practice mindsets. This article outlines how I have translated an activity based on a walking and learning experience into an online activity. In the process, I have reflected on what the key outcomes of the activity are and consider how I can adapt this in the future when we are again allowed to undertake group walking and learning activities.

The developing leadership module

As part of our Masters in Academic Practice at City, University of London, which is designed for both new and experienced staff working with students, there is the option to take a module on educational leadership entitled 'Developing your leadership and reflective practice'. The module team's approach to this module is to encourage

participants to understand themselves in order to understand their leadership practice and influence others (Avolio and Gardner, 2005). Thus our educational approach to the module is not to see leadership as automatically related to a particular position in the organisation, instead we take an inclusive approach as we believe that everyone, regardless of their role, is capable of exhibiting leadership skills and behaviours (Sinek, 2014). The module considers personal leadership and what skills participants have already – both considering their self awareness, as well as thinking about those leadership attributes they aspire to, and why.

Leadership in academia is not always an area that is uncontested or simple (Bryman and Lilley, 2009). Much of the literature about leadership skills and change is created from corporate environments, where leadership skills are more easily defined. In academia, there is much less clarity and frequently many leadership models are challenging to

apply to academia where leadership roles are much more opaque. (Gibb *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, encouraging critical thinking about the University environment and reflective practice is vital in this module. The module aims for participants to ‘appreciate a range of techniques to reflect on their own practice and development’. One way of achieving this has been through using a walking and learning activity to facilitate reflective practice, creative discussion and active learning (Zundel, 2013).

Leadership development journey through the British Museum – In person

The notion of going on a leadership journey is central to the module, which takes place over a six-month period, and therefore the walking and learning activity supported this development. This is particularly helpful for those participants who struggle with some of the storytelling or metaphorical aspects of the module, and gives them a more tangible opportunity to explore their current leadership practice and development. To this end, a day in the British Museum was designed which centred around exploring the use of leadership metaphors. This location was chosen as it is sufficiently large enough to enable the participants to explore the building and varied enough that with the size of the group there will always be enough objects to explore.

The day starts in the British Museum café where participants are asked to review a list of leadership attributes and identify five that represent their current leadership style. After discussing this with a fellow participant, they then explore what five attributes they would like to develop. This activity enables participants to think about their own practice and where they currently are in terms of their leadership style.

Participants are then given time to explore the museum and find at least two artefacts: one that represents their current practice and one that encapsulates leadership attributes they aspire to. They are asked to prepare a narrative journey between the two objects, discuss why they have chosen these artefacts to the group, and what they might need to do to make that transition. After that time, participants in turn then lead a walk around the museum and between their artefacts, and narrate the journey to the rest of the group. The day concludes with a reflective activity exploring the participants’ experiences of the day, focusing on how the selection of artefacts has deepened their understanding of their current leadership practice and future development.

Initially, the participants express surprise that they are ‘allowed’ to explore the museum and given the free time and space to walk around selecting the artefacts. For a number of participants this is often a dislocating experience – some of them have never visited the British Museum before or not been since they were a child. There is a sense of being on a ‘school trip’ and also sometimes a sense of illicit time: ‘Is this ok?’, ‘Can I really do this in “work time”’, are sentiments often expressed.

Some participants seem to travel around the museum very quickly and when this happens, they are asked to go around again and repeat their tour, hone it down and ensure they know the path easily between their artefacts. This usually brings fresh insight. Once participants return from the

initial exploration, they are usually overwhelmed but also exhilarated by finding out new aspects to the Museum they had not seen before and artefacts that encapsulate their experience.

During the walking tours of the artefacts, frequently participants have expressed surprise that after choosing their first artefact, they have walked around the museum and selected a second artefact in the same room as the first; but then they usually take everyone on the tour of the museum they followed, to demonstrate their thought process. Indeed, taking participants on a journey exploring a range of artefacts has been an unexpected addition to the exercise but one that has been included by a number of participants in a very positive manner. Participants have found that as they explore the Museum, choosing their current and future leadership artefact, they ‘stumble across’ additional pieces that reflect their journey or transition. Then, the journey becomes as important and significant as the artefacts themselves, and it is the movement between them, both literal and metaphorical, that enables them to explore more deeply why they feel they are acting in certain ways currently in relation to their own practice and how they want to develop. Often, these journeys illustrate challenges that may be holding them back or different facets of their leadership personality, so for example, they may enable the participant narrator to explore how spiritual and personal values impact on their professional leadership behaviour, or what support systems they need in their personal life to enable them to develop their leadership skills. These additional objects also have illustrated different facets of their current challenges or images of leadership that they do or do not want to aspire to. They add richness and depth to the developmental narrative and tangibly enable participants to illustrate what they need to develop as a leader.

The day in the British Museum has many benefits and positive outcomes for the participants. Firstly, it enables them to bond as a cohort and build trust between each other as they often reveal quite personal experiences around leadership and their self-confidence. Secondly, this foundation of trust enables greater engagement in the activities later in the module, particularly the initial assessment where participants outline their leadership philosophy. Thirdly, the day takes participants out of their ‘comfort zones’ in terms of their learning experience and enables them to experience a different form of learning and reflection. Fourthly, it gives participants the opportunity to focus on their core values and where they want to go in a very tangible and creative way. Often participants come back to the artefacts that they have chosen at later points in the module. And finally, the freedom of the activity enables participants to explore connections and ideas about their leadership practice in a more creative manner.

Moving walking to surfing

When the pandemic hit in 2020, I was in the middle of teaching the module, but fortunately, in 2020 I was able to carry out this day in person; however, although I had hoped to be able to run it in person in 2021, my optimism was ill-founded as we went into our third lockdown in the UK in January 2021.

Initially, I considered not including the day at all as I did not want to offer a weaker version of the activity; however, I considered the exploration of values in a creative way as a key component of the module and did not want to lose this exercise. I also considered moving the day to a later part of the module when we were likely to be out of lockdown. However, the day works well early on in the module, particularly due to the building of trust element as well as preparing participants for presenting their leadership philosophies as part of the first assessment which is due mid-module. This would not work if the day was held later. Given that all major museums have considerable online presence, I decided that it would be possible to replicate the activity online, and although the experience would be different the outcomes would be similar. For the online iteration of the module, the days are taught differently; rather than running a whole day from 10am to 4pm, online the structure is that an initial plenary session is held for one hour to introduce the topic and various activities. Participants are then free for the rest of the day to explore the activities and work independently, returning at 3pm for a one-hour wrap-up session where they feed back on the activities and engage in further discussion. This structure lent itself well to the adaption of the face-to-face British Museum day into the online environment.

The initial session replicated that taken in the British Museum café. Participants were introduced to the notion of leadership values and their significance for leadership development. I did prepare a short presentation on this which I would not normally do face to face, as it worked better online to provide more structured content. Then participants engaged in the same activity where they identified their current leadership and aspirational values. This was initially done individually, then, participants were placed in pairs via breakout rooms to discuss these values and interrogate their rationale around selecting them and other experiences they had had in this exercise. There was then a short plenary discussion around the activity and an outline of what they would be doing for the remainder of the day. Participants were asked to go to the British Museum website and spend some time browsing the collections to choose two artefacts: one that represented their current leadership values and approach; and one that represented the leaders that they aspired to be. They were asked to think about the differences between the two and consider why they had chosen the artefacts. This was fairly similar to what they would have done in the actual Museum itself. They were also asked to think about the narrative around the artefacts, but obviously because we were not able to physically move around the Museum the narrative around the journey would be different. It was more focused on the discovery process. For the final session at the end of the day, participants were asked to give a five-minute presentation or summary of their experience.

During the final session, I was impressed at how rich the reflections were and how ordered the presentations were. Many of the participants had prepared short presentations reflecting on their journey through the Museum, and although it was harder to replicate the serendipity of the physical experience of walking through the Museum, many participants had stumbled across objects as they browsed the website.

Differences between walking and surfing

Undoubtedly, the online experience of the British Museum was very different to the face-to-face one, but was it a lesser experience? My initial reluctance for moving this day online, as stated earlier, was that the participants would end up with a watered down experience of the walking and learning activity that would not generate the rich reflection and creative thought that the face-to-face experience encourages. However, reflecting on the activity, I do not believe this to be the case for the following reasons.

Firstly, the initial reflective activity works just as well online as face to face. It may even work better, as participants are not distracted by the unfamiliar environment of the Museum and the café! This did enable the participants to fully reflect on where they were and discuss these values with others. Secondly, whilst not exposed to the range of potential artefacts in the Museum, online, participants were not as overwhelmed by the experience of the huge physical Museum and selected artefacts with more ease. Feedback from the participants was that they were very focused on what they were doing and whilst they did not take so long to browse the Museum, they were more intentional from the outset. This intentionality and purpose around identification of values and development needs did demonstrate a more confident approach to the activity. Thirdly, the quality of the presentations, whilst certainly different from the narrative journey walking around the Museum, was definitely equal in terms of reflection and presentation. By being able to create a short presentation or share the images online, participants were more organised in their thoughts and started to build their reflections in different directions. They made similar creative leaps between the artefacts, and the journey was more reflective. Fourthly, these short, more formal, presentations were a much better practice for the video presentations that participants needed to submit as part of the assessment. I noticed that there was greater reference to the British Museum activity in these presentations than in those cohorts who had undertaken the activity face to face, and this gave new narrative dimensions to the presentations and a more personal tone in many cases. Finally, the element of trust and relationship-building for the cohort was equally present. In many ways, the shared experience of being in lockdown and all accessing the material from home had created a bond between the participants earlier. In my personal experience the fact of sharing my home space with children, dogs, noisy neighbours, partner *etc*, with my work colleagues, has often engendered deeper connections. I certainly noticed this with my participants who were all facing similar challenges and this shared experience helped bonding and building trust.

There were some disadvantages to running the activity online. Firstly, because participants did not spend as much time exploring the British Museum website as they would have done the physical Museum, the immersive nature and freedom of the experience was not replicated online. Secondly, we usually run a reflective activity at the end of the day to summarise and wrap up the experiences. Due to time constraints this was less possible and thus that element of shared learning from the day was not replicated as well online. Of course, this would be possible with scheduling

longer sessions or asking participants to complete some kind of reflective activity online.

Adapting this activity from a very located, physically engaging environment into the online world has been an informative and useful creative process. Whilst I sincerely hope to be able to run the activity in person for my next iteration of the module, I need to think about some of these benefits that have transpired from running the module online. The key takeaway was the quality of the feedback from the participants and how this benefited them in preparing for the assessment. This is something to consider for future design of the module. One option would be to run the day in two parts, the first part physically in the Museum with the exploration of the artefacts and some short sharing of the journey, then to run a follow-up session where participants present back more formally their findings. The challenge with this would be to ensure that it is not repetitive and that the journey element was not lost. A further option would be, instead of a formative version of the presentation, to ask participants to submit a reflection on the day as a formative activity in preparation for the activity.

Conclusions

In this article I have explored how to adapt a walking and learning activity into an online setting. The design of our walking activities to scaffold and promote creativity and leadership reflection can be used online with similar outcomes. A positive outcome was that the metaphor of a leadership journey that is literally carried out through taking a walk through the British Museum could be recreated online through meandering through the British Museum website. Both forms of the activity engendered a deep reflection and engagement with the reflective practice that is required for the development of effective leadership skills.

As walking is a relatively accessible and generally inclusive activity – it requires no special equipment, no budget and can be moderated to suit the majority of requirements – it is

also something that participants can utilise freely and easily in their ongoing leadership practice beyond the module. It is a skill that they have acquired which will enable them to support their future leadership development. This is also something to consider in relation to the online activity, which is equally inclusive where participants have access to the technology. Ensuring that the element of inclusivity is retained in both forms of the activity is a key part of the design of the activity.

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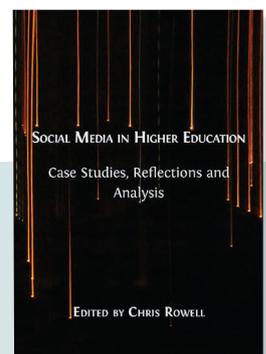
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Book Review

Social Media in Higher Education: Case Studies, Reflections and Analysis

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To some folk, 'DMs' are those tough and uncompromising boots, often to be seen, sometimes at painfully close quarters, at the end of turned-up drainpipe trousers. If this is your overriding impression of the DM, then you really ought to take a look

at *Social Media in Higher Education* (#SocMedinHE), as a vast majority of the nearly 400 million active Twitter users will be eager to inform you that DMs are 'direct messages'.

#SocMedinHE is a collection of 23

papers, largely focused on professional practice and critical reflection, teaching and learning, leadership, network building and approaches to innovation. Over the last decade and a half, numerous social media platforms have vied for our attention: Facebook,

Twitter, Pinterest, WhatsApp, YouTube, TikTok and Instagram probably all feature on most people's smartphones. As someone who dabbled in trying to find a purpose for social media in HE teaching just after Twitter was launched (Mistry, 2011), I remain dogged by a couple of issues.

First, in view of the distancing effects of social media, how can an appetite for learning by largely Gen Z students, whose lives and experiences are mediated by all sorts of technology, be tapped into by teachers whose lives have, largely, been interrupted by technology? Or, perhaps more to the point, how can social media unleash an enthusiasm for teaching that intersects with learner interests and motivates student engagement? I am not sure #SocMedinHE really

answered these overriding issues and, whilst it was interesting to dip in and out of the book – it touches on several themes and multiple ideas – there is perhaps a little too much for a single book. The reach of this book is slightly too ambitious – reaching out to both the expert practitioner/researcher and novice. Even with the rude awakening of a global pandemic, purposeful integration of social media in teaching and learning is still lagging, but I admire how #SocMedinHE has been put together – with an intention to stimulate conversation (in the ePub version I reviewed, there are hyperlinks to short audio clips from several of the contributors). If there is a second edition or follow-up publication, perhaps it could have a more focused perspective and tone (*cf.* the excellent *Smart Learning* (Middleton, 2015) may

be a useful guide), or one with greater synthesis of evidence, as most insights into the utility and effectiveness of social media appear to have been limited to self-reported data or simple content analyses.

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Moving beyond emergency remote teaching: Some aspects to consider when working online

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This article outlines some of the aspects of online teaching that have been experienced in the recent pandemic. It summarises aspects of practice that academic developers may want to consider when planning future professional development for academic staff.

The challenge

The pandemic necessitated a move from face-to-face teaching to an online format at a staggering pace. This initial shift, which may be termed emergency remote teaching, was put in place to mitigate the loss of traditional taught sessions. The transformation required may have been stressful for both lecturers and students as they assimilated new working practices, but it revealed the values inherent in the profession: educators always strive to provide good learning experiences for their students and do this in increasingly creative ways. This usually requires providing accessible resources and timely instruction, to minimise negative external influences and support students in their studies.

The Covid-19 pandemic brought video-conferencing to our desks more readily than we imagined. This disruptive technology had been predicted to change our working practices for some time, but voluntary adoption had been quite slow. Although the technical capability to do it was available, the workforce more often chose to continue with traditional ways of interacting by meeting in the same physical place. This resonates with my own experience, as pre-pandemic, I had tried to harness the power of remote

working by conducting professional meetings online with colleagues in our academic partnership, with mixed success. The variable reliability of external networks, unfamiliarity with the software and perhaps a lack of tenacity to make it work, all contributed to a less than satisfactory outcome. The successful colleagues valued it as they did not need to travel after a long day's teaching. Those who were unable to connect were excluded from the experience, found it stressful, and missed out on the professional interactions.

To manage this seismic change to their practice, lecturers had to come to terms with the fact that their professional routines would need to change. When managers instigate a planned change, they usually appraise the current staff skills to identify strengths and gaps that need to be addressed, yet there was almost no time to implement this process. Classic change management theory indicates that a sense of urgency needs to be present to effect the change, yet who could have imagined a more pressing demand than a global pandemic?

Staff CPD

Hodges *et al.* (2020) draw a distinction between emergency remote teaching and online learning, the latter benefiting from careful planning and systematic design. As a School of Education, we had moved beyond emergency remote teaching and wanted to adopt the best practices moving forwards. Having survived the first wave of online learning, we decided to hold a staff training session that would allow us to reflect upon our experiences to identify the barriers and

opportunities presented and share best practice.

I developed a presentation that included a range of factors that may impact online learning for an audience of higher education lecturers who were teacher trainers. This was used to stimulate some group discussions using breakout groups to allow them to share their experiences. Prompt questions required participants to reflect upon the ideas presented and consider the changes they had to make as they transitioned from face-to-face to online teaching. This provided a good opportunity to discuss the issues with empathetic colleagues as they considered the theoretical ideas that resonated with or challenged their own practice.

The following topics formed the basis of the presentation.

Zoom fatigue

The term 'Zoom fatigue' was quickly added to the nation's lexicon, as people found the experience of interacting online all day to be exhausting. Bailenson (2021) outlines the key factors that contribute to this fatigue. They include:

- Focusing on a screen that is at a close distance
- Increased self-evaluation by staring at a video of oneself
- Increased cognitive load as the presenter tries to manage the technology, the subject content and the students' online interactions
- Constraints of physical mobility.

Uncomfortably close

When considering the impact of students having to look at their lecturer on the screen, we can use the analogy of strangers getting into a lift or being crammed on the tube. They often have to stand closer to people than they normally would, so what do they do? They avert their gaze down. An interesting experiment to try at home is to measure the size of the face on the computer monitor when video-conferencing and compare how close you would need to be near someone in real life to achieve the same size head. If this distance is less than 60cm, it would be considered to be intimate – so these interactions can often replicate the distance you share with your loved ones!

Centre of attention

Lecturers become used to having the eyes of the class on them. In fact, they often demand it as an indicator of the learners' engagement in the session. However, when online, each student may feel like they are being looked at, as the grid of participating students provides a set of eyes. The impact of this virtual audience is that every listener is transformed into a 'speaker'. Being stared at can induce some physiological symptoms and may make the participants feel uncomfortable.

Cognitive load

Online, non-verbal behaviour is complex as the users need to work harder to send and receive signals. Hinds (1999) conducted an experiment where she compared video-conferencing to audio-only interaction whilst pairs of students performed a guessing game task. There was also a secondary

task which was used to measure cognitive load. Students who had the video to watch made more mistakes in the task than the ones who only had the audio input. She argues that cognitive load is increased by having to send more cues. For example, centering oneself on the screen, nodding in an exaggerated way and looking into the camera (as opposed to the screen) to make eye contact when talking. You may have noticed yourself that you speak louder when interacting on video, possibly mimicking the process of projecting your voice in a normal class. This can add an extra physical burden to the lecturer.

Receiving cues

In normal face-to-face conversations, people pick up affective cues from head and eye movements which can help with taking turns in the conversation. Bailenson *et al.* (2005) conducted an experiment where a meeting was held between three people wearing VR headsets. The listeners were able to tell which direction the speaker was looking. In normal life, the presenter would scan the room, look at their notes and make eye contact with individuals. In the virtual meeting, the listeners could see they had the unwavering eye gaze from the speaker, often for up to eight minutes straight. This led to the listeners not feeling 'in-tune' with the speaker and they did not perceive the interaction to be smooth.

Increased self-evaluation

Many video-conferencing systems show a small thumbnail video in the corner of the screen so the speaker can see what is being broadcast to the audience. This has a similar effect to looking in the mirror as you are carrying out your presenting task. Imagine carrying around a mirror during your working day and every time you had a conversation, you made sure you could see your own face in it! People tend to evaluate themselves when seeing a mirror image and this too can have a negative impact on the presenter.

Physical mobility

In normal face-to-face meetings, people move. When conducting an online meeting, there is a fixed space, defined by a conical viewing area that radiates from the camera and is known as a frustum. When you are on a video-call, you need to stay inside the area of the frustum, so that you can be seen by others. Added to this, you are often tied closely to your desk too, so that you can reach your keyboard to interact in the call. This invisible cage constrains you, hence the need for regular breaks away from the keyboard. It has also been shown that people who are sitting down come up with less creative ideas than those who are walking around.

Paying attention

When we make traditional telephone calls, we often assume that the listener is giving us their undivided attention, but the truth is they often multi-task, whilst holding the conversation. The video-conference destroys this illusion and may make the speaker feel less productive. How often have you turned off the video feed, so you can carry out another task without the other participants' knowledge?

SWOT analysis

Modelling an online pedagogy, the participants were tasked with completing an online SWOT analysis. The focus of the contributions was aimed at providing advice for lecturers and students when working in an online environment. The lecturers had to reflect upon their own practice as well as the characteristics of the successful online learner.

A simple analysis of this information resulted in the identification of some key strategies that could be used by lecturers and some advice that could be given to students prior to their course of online study. These submissions were refined and summarised before being distributed to the team (Table 1).

Lecturers	Students
<p>These are the things we will do to support your learning. We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan lectures that are tailored for online learning by providing engaging activities and accessible resources appropriate for the online world. • Encourage interaction by sharing comments and questions. It helps us to maintain flow and alter what we're saying accordingly. • Offer various platforms that enable different types of collaboration. • Offer a balanced diet of communication media, to appeal to a range of learners. • Provide materials in advance in accessible formats. • Offer variety without overload, modelling how various platforms operate. • Build in regular breaks to help you to maintain attention and engagement. • Check the technology before the session starts to ensure learners can see and hear the presentation. • Use announcements on the VLE as an effective way to communicate with the cohort. • Have clear expectations that have been co-constructed between staff and students together. Be explicit and ask for and monitor participation: use tools in the chat to get a 'reaction' and to monitor learning. Set expectations around attendance. • Record the lecture when/where appropriate. • Be caring, available to support, creating opportunities to discuss and clarify in an online environment. Lecturers will indicate when they are available for a chat at the end of an online session. • Copy useful links in the chat window. • Set up platforms so that you can work collaboratively with your students. • Use humour and emojis in the chat. • Make it clear when we are transmitting information and when it will be discussion time. • Provide guidance and support for using the technology effectively (privacy, backgrounds, sharing, collaborating). • Staff, it is a good idea to make use of two screens (or split the screen). One for teams and one for the presentation. 	<p>These are the things you should do to maximise your success:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful students engage with online collaborative platforms in a thoughtful and sensitive way. • Do not be afraid to offer support and suggestions to aid collaboration. • To maximise your success, undertake the preparatory tasks to ensure you are able to take part in dialogue and support your classmates' learning. • Come prepared to engage. • Engage when and where appropriate through the chat, making contributions via video, and in groups. • Ask questions. • Be punctual. • Through Course Reps, share good practice or concerns in relation to online provision in a timely and appropriate manner. • Be present and prepared to engage and contribute in the chat window and when you are in a breakout room. • Work out what works well for you in terms of online learning. • Share with tutor any issues you are experiencing if this may impact your learning online. • Check your own technology before the start of the session (microphones, webcam etc). • Arrive online a few minutes early before the official start time. • Turn your phones off. • Download documents in advance. • Make your own notes during the session. • Share your camera if you feel comfortable but check your background if you turn your camera on. • Allocating time for reading/contributing to a discussion board. • Making sure students organise a way to keep in touch. Setting their own expectations for the group. • Observe microphone etiquette. • Be comfortable in your space and in a space that allows you to be calm and prepared for the session.

Table 1 Getting ready to learn online: A summary of guidance for online learning

Moving forwards

It has taken thousands of years to develop the social norms of communicating in person and this recent technological shift has markedly shifted the parameters of our interactions. The learning curve has been steep for lecturers and students. Increased familiarity with the electronic systems means we are getting better at doing this, but we are still learning. The suggestions above provide a range of tips and strategies that have been born through the experience of delivering taught sessions online.

Most researchers caveat their findings in this new online world with respect to emergency remote teaching and indicate that more work needs to be done in this area. Reflective practitioners have already started this process and sharing this experience within our communities will be of benefit to all.

Whilst a pragmatic approach was taken to deliver courses online, it was inevitable that comparisons would be made with the 'traditional' method of delivery, perhaps inviting criticism of all that is lost in this new format. Hodges *et al.* (2020) identify the stigma attached to online learning in terms of it being perceived as lower quality. There is a growing body of research that indicates well-planned, high-quality instruction delivered online can have a positive impact on learning outcomes and achieve high student satisfaction ratings. Whilst we yearn for the immediacy of interacting in person, there will be beneficial opportunities that are only available in an online setting. It may be harder to see the glimmer of understanding in a student's eyes or the lecturer acquiescing to be taken off topic by a timely facial expression or nuanced body language, yet these are the skills we need to develop if we are to engage our learners in this online world. After all, if we can induce a genuine interest in our

students for our subject, does it matter how it is achieved? Perhaps one of the key answers is to manage expectations at the beginning of the course and explicitly outline the ways in which the teaching will be conducted in this new online classroom?

The staff training exercise provided an outcome in the form of best practice tips for online learning. The summary of this work here may form the basis for discussions about online teaching for academic developers in their cross-institution work. It is only the start of an ongoing conversation but as it was co-constructed, it should be accessible for all disciplines and enable us to explore specific areas of interest at future training events. Online teaching and learning is here to stay, so we need to make best use of it.

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A coaching approach to dissertation supervision

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The past two years have been challenging for all involved in higher education. The pandemic, subsequent lockdowns and the measures rapidly introduced to safely provide a high-quality educational experience has seen us all, students, staff and families alike, having to adapt at speed, and often without much warning. Whilst this has led to the development of valuable skills, including flexibility, thinking creatively, developing resilience and self-reliance, embracing alternative approaches, and managing stress, it has also produced a great deal of anxiety and presented barriers to students' learning. Not least with those students approaching the end of their studies,

and who feel there is a great deal riding on their academic success as they face a volatile employment market.

Challenges

I recently conducted a research study with final-year students at my institution to understand what they felt had challenged them most this past year, and what had helped.

The biggest obstacles they named were fear of failure, stress and anxiety, adjusting to online learning, feeling overwhelmed, procrastination, lacking confidence, self-doubt, perfectionism and negative self-talk. All of these, with the possible exception of online

learning, are largely self-generated barriers that emanate from the individual's state of mind and beliefs.

A coaching role

I had observed throughout the year that while the advice I imparted with my mentor/subject expert's 'hat' on was well received, it was when I employed basic coaching skills that students responded most positively, leaving our meetings feeling more confident, capable and happier, and achieving the goals they had identified between sessions. I was not coaching them as such, as that would be inappropriate in my academic role, but using open-ended 'what' and 'how' questions,

and a non-judgemental space to draw on their own internal resources and creativity to perform at their best in their studies whilst maintaining their wellbeing (mental, physical and emotional). The true value of this approach is that one is not coaching the immediate issue but the person as a whole – not solving an isolated difficulty but addressing the underlying issues of self-confidence, motivation, fear of failure. Slowly, even those students who felt crippled by anxiety were able to achieve and recognised a personal ability and resilience they had at times doubted.

The respondents in my study said what had helped them succeed in their studies despite the challenges they faced, was regular support and feedback from caring academic supervisors, nurturing a positive mindset, being well organised, and feeling motivated and interested in their studies. A coaching approach can help to foster all of these.

Encouraging self-reliance

External help and support (through the university, family and friend networks, GPs and counsellors, *etc.*) can be invaluable, but encouraging students to also explore and trust their own inner wisdom, capabilities and creativity within a safe framework can lead them to generate their own best solutions. This can feel strange at first for both student and supervisor, as the power within the relationship is more evenly balanced, co-creating a space of mutual trust and support, but can be very empowering. As one student reported: ‘I feel like my supervisor was a coach – she led me well but without spoon-feeding me which helped me gain my own understanding’.

A coaching approach

There are many different schools of coaching, each with their own ethos, aims and methods. However, ‘at the core of the coaching approach is the facilitation of learning using active listening and inquiry and providing appropriate challenge and support’ (Devine *et al.*, 2013) in which teachers help students to learn, rather than teaching them (Whitmore, 2017). At the heart of most coaching is the desire to help others to develop by listening to them, challenging their thinking and encouraging them to

take action (Starr, 2016).

So, which methods can academic staff use to be supportive and effective without being a coach and, more importantly, doing any harm? Here are six simple (but not necessarily easy!) techniques to empower students to foster a positive approach to challenges.

1) The ‘set aside intention’

Tara Mohr, who advocates bringing a coaching approach to educational roles (Mohr, 2021) recommends coaches and educators alike bring this intention to conversations with students (and colleagues too): ‘Help me set aside everything I think I know about this person, their challenges, this conversation, so that I may be open to the possibilities and truths of this moment’. In essence, this requires us to put aside any judgement about students and things we think we know about them. To simply see and accept them as they are, in that moment, and be open to what they express (both spoken and non-verbal) without bias, assumptions, stereotyping or responding to our own triggers.

2) Listening

Attentive, focused listening is hard, but can be transformative. Try to focus fully on your student’s words and non-verbal language (body posture, facial expressions, tone of voice) without becoming distracted by your own inner monologue. If you become aware that your attention is wandering gently bring your focus back to the student.

3) Questions

Asking powerful and appropriate questions depends very much on developing rapport with the student, a mutually trustful relationship, and good observational skills. As a rule of thumb, open-ended ‘what’ and ‘how’ questions are more generative than ones beginning with ‘why’. For instance, Tara Mohr suggests if a student is procrastinating, you might ask, ‘What makes it difficult to tackle this?’ If lacking direction, ‘What would be motivating for you?’, and for uncertainty, ‘What further information do you need to gather to help you?’

4) Nurturing silence

When there is a lull in a conversation (especially when time is limited and it

feels there’s a lot to cover) it can feel uncomfortable, and tempting to jump in to fill the gap. But silence can be a powerful coaching tool, allowing time for students to process questions or prompts, reflect, and generate ideas. Coach John Polemis advises viewing silence as ‘a container to be filled’ and taking three deep, slow breaths before interrupting a silence.

5) See the student as creative, resourceful and whole

The students I surveyed understood that coaching is not about telling people what to do, but about empowering others to do their best. They talked of the value of someone who guides, motivates, encourages, and gives feedback. One described a coach as someone who ‘encourages people to try things out in a supported way and to learn from their experiences in that supported environment’. The vast majority responded positively to the suggestion of a coaching approach as part of the relationship with their supervisor and other tutors. As one commented: ‘It could be helpful. I think at the very least all supervisors should be trained in these (coaching) skills. From my personal experience I could tell that my supervisor was a very accomplished academic researcher but I think they lacked the skills/experience to really challenge and bring out the best from me. I think universities need to understand that being good at research doesn’t necessarily mean that you are good at teaching or coaching it.’ This student recognises that the core aim of coaching is not to tell the student/client what to do and how to do it, to try to fix them, but to recognise that the student has the ability to explore their own issues and challenges, and the creativity and resources to find the best solution for themselves. The supervisor/coach’s role is to scaffold that self-belief, and through the use of listening, silence, and good open-ended questions, to provide that ‘supported environment’ to find their own best solutions.

6) Goal setting

Many students also expressed a desire to be supported with identifying and achieving their aims, both big picture goals and interim steps (and, relatedly, to have the supervisor hold them accountable to keep them motivated).

One told me, ‘more support with structure and what to prioritise would have been helpful’, while others said they’d have welcomed help with their time management, reviewing the progress made and next steps to be taken, and creating SMART targets.

Goal setting can certainly be a valuable element of both dissertation supervision and coaching (to varying extents depending on the model of coaching you subscribe to). I would cautiously encourage supervisors to fulfil this role where appropriate, but note that people tend to work toward goals more effectively when they have set them personally, rather than having the supervisor impose them, so that they are genuine goals that they feel invested in. When we set an aim for others that they don’t see any inherent value in,

even if we genuinely believe it will be effective for them, they are unlikely to experience the motivation required to achieve it.

This coaching approach to supervision (and indeed to teaching and mentoring) is not for all, and there is certainly no suggestion that we, as academic staff, should be attempting to conduct therapy or even coaching *per se* with students – the coaching or therapeutic relationship is an entirely separate one to that of student and supervisor, with its own regulations and safeguarding guidelines. But to practise empathy, enhance our listening skills, ask good questions and believe in students’ potential and ability to overcome challenges, can, I believe, only be a good thing.

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5 Steps in the design of blended learning programmes

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Preface

Although many students are returning to face-to-face education, it looks like blended learning is here to stay. The question is: do our medical educators know how to ‘blend’ or ‘flip’ their courses? Do our academics know what proportion of their teaching could be best delivered in a self-directed way and what could be best delivered in a collaborative way in the classroom or online. Do our medical educators know what pedagogic approach to follow?

It is particularly important in the current situation to guide educators in the design of effective blended learning programmes. This article outlines the 5 steps in the design of Blended Learning programmes aiming to provide medical educators with guidelines for identifying the right ‘blend’ in creating pedagogically-sound blended learning designs. The advice draws on different studies carried out in this area providing practical recommendations and examples.

Introduction

Blended learning has been growing in demand and popularity for many years in higher education (Alammary *et al.*, 2014). However, it has taken priority recently due to the pandemic and the need to design hybrid modes of learning, teaching and assessment to accommodate current pandemic restrictions (UNESCO, 2021). In previous research, blended

learning was also identified as the new traditional model for course delivery in higher education (Norberg *et al.*, 2011; Ross and Gage, 2006). As discussed by Alammary *et al.* (2014, p. 440) ‘the question now is not whether to blend or not; it is how to design an effective blend’.

According to Graham (2006) there is a wide range of models of delivery in the design of blended learning programmes, with some authors focusing their design on the combination of different instructional methods and web-based technologies. One of the definitions of blended learning proposed by Oliver and Trigwell (2005) focuses on the combination of traditional classroom-based learning with web-based online approaches.

The 5 steps model presented in this article is based on the Blended Learning Design Tool – BLEnDT© developed and applied at the School of Medicine, Imperial College London (Morton *et al.*, 2016; Toro-Troconis, 2015; Toro-Troconis, 2013). BLEnDT© was embedded in the interactive curriculum mapping tool (SOFIA) of the School of Medicine at Imperial College London (Imperial College London, 2021) and later adapted at the University of Liverpool (Lewis, 2020; CoDesignS, 2020; Toro-Troconis *et al.*, 2019).

This article brings together knowledge from across the sector offering simple steps for identifying the right ‘blend’ between

online self-directed learning and in-class face-to-face learning. As explained in the steps presented below, blended learning, according to the BLENnDT© framework, starts by identifying the learning outcomes and competencies to be acquired by the learners rather than from the technology available. Therefore, the first step in identifying the ‘blend’ should be the identification of the competencies the learners

need to acquire; this will then lead to identifying the best way of delivering the learning and teaching activities and lastly identifying the best technology to support it (Toro-Troconis, 2015).

Figure 1 below presents the five steps proposed.



Figure 1 How to ‘blend’ your course in 5 steps. Adapted from the Blended Learning Design Tool (BLENnDT) (Toro-Troconis, 2013)

STEP 1: Identify clear descriptive verbs that match the competencies or learning outcomes expected to be achieved

As discussed by the authors (Morton *et al.* 2016; Toro-Troconis, 2015; Toro-Troconis, 2013), the first step is to have clear descriptive verbs that match the competencies or learning outcomes to be acquired, as presented in Tables 1, 2 and 3.

Bloom’s Taxonomy of Learning Domains: Psychomotor, Cognitive and Affective domains (Bloom, 1956) will then be used in Step 2 to link knowledge acquisition with the level of learning, guided by the learning outcomes or competencies identified in this step.

STEP 2: Match the learning domain associated with the descriptive verbs

Learning outcomes and competencies will fall within one or more Learning Domain one way or another. That is the reason why Learning Domains are core in identifying the ‘blend’ as presented in the next step.

The Psychomotor domain focuses on the development of psychomotor or manual skills (Dave, 1975). The Cognitive

domain (Bloom, 1956) focuses on developing understanding from remembering facts to being able to produce or critically appraise the concepts learned. The Affective domain focuses on behaviour and attitude (Krathwohl *et al.*, 1964).

The descriptive verbs are then associated with the different learning domains: cognitive, affective and psychomotor (Bloom, 1956; Anderson and Krathwohl, 2001) as presented in Tables 1, 2 and 3 below.

Once the descriptive verbs used in the competencies or learning outcomes have been identified, proceed to define whether the delivery of the learning is best suited for self-directed learning or collaborative learning online or in the classroom.

According to the research carried out and evaluated by several authors (Morton *et al.*, 2016; Toro-Troconis, 2015; Toro-Troconis, 2013):

1. If the learning outcomes or competencies are focused on the development of lower-order cognitive skills (Cognitive domain: Factual and Procedural), the learning outcomes or competencies can be delivered in a self-directed way using teaching-learning materials, such as video, podcasts, readings, quizzes, *etc.*

2. If the learning outcomes or competencies are focused on the development of higher-order cognitive skills (Cognitive domain: Conceptual or Metacognitive), the learning outcomes or competencies can be delivered online or in the classroom, as long as they are delivered using collaborative activities where students have the opportunity to discuss, practise, and reflect. Some examples of collaborative activities are forums, mind maps, reflective activities and problem-based activities, among others.
3. If the learning outcomes or competencies are focused on the development of attitudes and behaviours (Affective domain), the learning outcomes or competencies can be delivered online or in the classroom, as long as they are delivered using collaborative activities where students have the opportunity to discuss, practise, and reflect. In this case, discussion and collaboration activities focused on the behaviour in question are encouraged: simulations, role-play activities, among others.
4. If the learning outcomes or competencies are focused on the development of manual skills (Psychomotor domain) or practical or experimental activities such as laboratory, field trips, external practices or clinical practices, the learning outcomes and competencies are most likely to be fully delivered face to face in the classroom, in clinic or in the field.

STEP 3: Identify the delivery mode (online or face to face)

As explained above, once the descriptive verb and the learning domain associated with the verb have been identified, the most appropriate delivery method can be obtained. Tables 1, 2 and 3 below present the recommended delivery type (online or face to face) associated with the learning domains and descriptive verbs associated with each domain.

Cognitive domain	Descriptive verbs	Recommended delivery type
Factual knowledge	Knowledge of essential facts, terminology or elements that learners must be familiar with in order to understand a discipline: retrieving, recalling, or recognising	Online (self-directed activities)
Procedural knowledge	Knowledge that helps learners to perform something specific to a discipline or subject. It refers to methods of enquiry, techniques, and particular methodologies: distinguishing, differentiating, organising, executing, implementing	(In a 'Flipped Classroom' approach, these activities are delivered before the synchronous or face-to-face class.)
Conceptual knowledge	Knowledge of classification, principles, models, structures related to a discipline: explaining, interpreting, classifying, summarising, inferring, comparing	Face to face or online (collaborative activities)
Metacognitive knowledge	Level of reflective knowledge gained which allows learners to solve problems and cognitive tasks: assessing, critiquing, reorganising, generating, planning, and producing	(Activities at this level can be online or face to face, but they have to be centred on a collaborative model where discussion and reflection are encouraged.)

Table 1 Adaptation of Bloom's taxonomy for learning activities that focus on knowledge development (Al-Shorbaji et al., 2015, p. 119)

Affective domain	Descriptive verbs	Recommended delivery type
Receiving phenomena	Awareness and willingness to hear or listen to others with respect	Face to face or online (collaborative activities) (Activities at this level can be online or face to face, but they have to be centred on a collaborative model where discussion and reflection are encouraged.)
Responding to phenomena	Being active to the stimuli or phenomena. In this case the learning outcome may emphasise the willingness to respond or the satisfaction in responding	
Valuing	The value that a person attaches to a particular object, activity or behaviour	
Organisation	Comparing, relating and synthesising values	
Internalising values	The behaviour of the learners that focuses on consistency and predictability	

Table 2: Classification of learning activities that focus on the development of attitudes (Al-Shorbaji et al., 2015, p. 119)

Psychomotor domain	Descriptive verbs	Recommended delivery type
Imitation	Observing and replicating behaviour after someone else	Face to face or online (The learning and teaching activities falling within this domain in many cases must be delivered face to face, such as: laboratory practices, field trips, external practices, clinical practices, among others.)
Manipulation	Being able to perform a certain number of actions by following instructions and practising	
Precision	Becoming more effective and refining the activity with few errors	
Articulation	Being able to coordinate a series of actions in a consistent and harmonious way	
Naturalisation	Being able to perform the activity naturally, having a high level of performance	

Table 3 Classification of learning activities that focus on the development of skills (Al-Shorbaji et al., 2015, p. 119)

STEP 4: Identify the teaching strategy to be used

Once the learning domain and the type of delivery (online or

face to face) have been identified, the next step is to identify the teaching strategy to be used. Table 4 below shows possible application of teaching strategies according to the learning domains previously discussed.

Types of learning and teaching activities	Cognitive		Affective		Psychomotor	
	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High
Lecture	✓✓✓					
Demonstration	✓✓				✓✓	
Team teaching		✓✓			✓	
Discussion		✓✓		✓✓		
Debate		✓✓		✓✓		
Question and answer		✓✓✓✓				
Video		✓✓	✓✓		✓✓	
Seminar		✓✓	✓✓			
Laboratory/Workshop		✓✓	✓		✓✓✓	
Gaming/Quiz		✓✓	✓✓			
Brainstorming		✓✓				
Buzz group		✓		✓	✓	
Role play		✓		✓✓		
Simulation		✓		✓	✓✓	
Case study		✓✓				
Project/Assignment		✓✓	✓✓		✓✓	
Tutorial		✓✓	✓✓			✓

Table 4 Possible application of teaching strategies in the three domains (Reece and Walker, 2007, p. 102)

STEP 5: Calculate the ‘blend’ of online and face to face activities

Once all the steps explained above have been completed, the percentage of activities identified for online and face-to-face delivery are calculated based on the analysis carried out in the previous steps.

Example – Application of the framework in the design of a course on cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR)

Based on the conceptual framework presented above, the following example illustrates the application of the 5 steps in the identification of the ‘blend’ for a course on CPR (Toro-Troconis, 2015; Horton, 2006).

STEP 1	STEP 2	STEP 3	STEP 4
Identify clear descriptive verbs	Match the learning domain associated with the descriptive verbs	Identify the delivery mode (online or face to face)	Identify the type of learning and teaching activities to be used
1. Identify the steps to follow when applying CPR	Cognitive – Factual	Online (self-directed)	Video
2. Order the steps to follow when applying CPR	Cognitive – Procedural	Online (self-directed)	Video
3. Explain the differences between CPR techniques in adults and children	Cognitive – Conceptual	Online (collaborative)	Discussion (Forum)
4. Be able to coordinate manual movements when executing CPR	Psychomotor	Face to face (collaborative)	Practical

5. Demonstrate the ability to remain calm in an emergency	Affective	Face to face (collaborative)	Practical
STEP 5			
Calculate the 'blend' of online and face-to-face activities			
According to the analysis carried out in the previous steps, three of the competencies (60%) will be delivered online and two face to face (40%)			

Table 5 5 steps process in the identification of the 'blend' for a course on cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR)

Example – Application of the framework in the design of a course on performing dental extractions in paediatric dentistry

Based on the conceptual framework presented above, the

following example (Table 6) illustrates the application of the 5 steps in the identification of the 'blend' for a course on performing dental extractions in paediatric dentistry.

STEP 1	STEP 2	STEP 3	STEP 4
Identify clear descriptive verbs	Match the learning domain associated with the descriptive verbs	Identify the delivery mode (online or face to face)	Identify the type of learning and teaching activities to be used
1. Identify the correct instruments for use in paediatric dental extractions	Cognitive – Factual	Online (self-directed)	Video/quiz
2. Recognise the steps to follow when performing a safe dental extraction	Cognitive – Procedural	Online (self-directed)	Video/quiz
3. Interpret and infer from dental radiographs in the planning of dental extractions	Cognitive – Conceptual	Online (collaborative)	Workshop/Forum/ Case-based discussion
4. Demonstrate safe and effective practical skills in performing a paediatric dental extraction	Psychomotor	Face to face (collaborative)	Practical
5. Critique age-appropriate non-pharmacological behaviour management strategies in relieving dental anxiety	Affective	Face to face (collaborative)	Role-play
6. Reflect on identified learning needs	Cognitive – Metacognitive	Face to face (collaborative)	Workshop/Forum
STEP 5			
Calculate the 'blend' of online and face-to-face activities			
According to the analysis carried out in the previous steps, three of the competencies (50%) will be delivered online and three face to face (50%).			

Table 6 5 steps process in the identification of the 'blend' for a course on performing dental extractions in paediatric dentistry

Conclusions

The design of blended learning programmes requires careful consideration. Educators need to pay special attention to the way online self-directed activities and in-class activities are identified and designed in order to create pedagogically-sound quality learning designs. The focus should be placed on the learning outcomes or competencies expected rather than the technology available in order to achieve a pedagogically-sound solution. Although this article focuses on medical education, the five steps in the design of Blended Learning programmes are also applicable to other disciplines.

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ABC to VLE workshops: Interdisciplinary dialogue with faculty members as curriculum innovation

Briony Supple, University College Cork

Introduction

Inspired by recent work regarding writing about learning and teaching in higher education (Healey *et al.*, 2020), we have compiled this piece: a reflective article regarding the sites, settings, processes and dialogical products generated by faculty members who engaged in a series of curriculum development workshops. The ABC to VLE rapid-workshop method provides conversational prompts for teams to discuss elements of the curriculum for redesign. We found this method not only met our needs in terms of democratic engagement of multiple stakeholders for curriculum design, but also allowed us insight into interdisciplinary perspectives regarding teaching and learning through the conversations they prompted.

Characteristics of conversation participants, sites and settings

This is a reflection on interdisciplinary dialogues generated by a curriculum development workshop, an approach called

ABC to VLE. This article discusses how we have leveraged these conversations with faculty members for applied pedagogical transformation, as we write about the process as a way of contributing to 'the conditional and the human aspects of our [SoTL] inquiries and our partnerships' (Cook-Sather *et al.*, 2019, p. 23).

Our fully online Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education is a qualification for faculty members who teach, and draws its participants from across all disciplines with active teaching timetables in higher education settings from within the country as well as from international contexts. Those facilitating the teaching of the program and participants themselves were included in the conversations about design at yearly intervals through the use of the ABC to VLE method in focus groups. We also sought to capture how participants responded to the design changes via data captured in the discussion boards and also yearly feedback evaluations.

We adhere to the call for democratic, collaborative approaches to curriculum development with multiple stakeholders (O'Neill, 2010; Oliver and Hyun, 2011; Adagale, 2015; Brown-Wilson and Slade, 2020), underpinned by an ethos which is supportive of interdisciplinary dialogues framed as conversations (Strober, 2011). As part of the ongoing redesign of the programs, we sought to capture the processes and products of these conversations at each iteration. The ABC to VLE workshop enabled program participants as active agents in their learning (Kandiko Howson, 2015; Baxter Magolda, 2012). We have found the processes useful and reflect now on their many stages and layers, focusing for the purposes of this reflective article on the ABC to VLE curriculum design workshops.

Capturing processes and products of our conversations: The ABC to VLE approach

Arena Blended Curriculum to Learning Design (ABC to LD) is a rapid-development workshop method for curriculum design (Young and Perović, 2016). The method focuses on integrating research-based teaching within module design and locates learning across six dimensions: practice, production, collaboration, acquisition, investigation, and discussion (Laurillard, 2012). The design method is focused on active, dialogical engagement by teaching faculty and allows for the integration of local and theoretical considerations for the particular disciplinary and institutional contexts (Erikson, 2019). The workshops provide useful data generated by active discussions by its participants via storyboarding and mapping curriculum elements pertaining to the six learning dimensions.

In a series of three face-to-face ABC to VLE workshops held at various classroom locations at University College Cork, we engaged with both faculty who had undertaken our fully online program as well as those who facilitate the program. Within these workshops a diverse range of disciplines and levels of teaching expertise were represented. We received ethical approval through the university social ethics research committee to seek permission from workshop participants for the use of anonymised data generated to be used for publication purposes. The data generated via workshop participants' engagement with the ABC tools were captured using photographs and notes by the authors.

This study exists within a set of complexities which are perhaps beyond the full scope of explication for this piece (though it is anticipated that this is the start of many papers which will delve deeper into these complex layers). First and foremost, are the many hats which the participants in these conversations wear: disciplinary experts in fields such as medicine and health as well as others from humanities, also having been students themselves undertaking the Certificate program. Facilitated over a series of months, availability of busy faculty meant workshop attendees varied, but in each session up to around 12 people were present for 3 sessions which each lasted around 90 minutes. The dialogues were constructed in a way which ensured feedback of the current Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education curriculum, the content of which itself is on teaching and learning.

We take our inspiration for conversational prompts from the ABC to VLE method and our epistemological standpoint in informed by Strober's (2011) work on Interdisciplinary Conversations. Like Strober, although our workshops had a general structure and prompts for conversation, we did not intend for them to be too prescriptive and allow attendees to 'go with the flow'. As with conversations, tangents emerge and ideas ebb and flow. Our reflections on the conversation points now follow, under broad themes of 'Rethinking', 'Creating', and 'Collaborating, community and conversation'. We follow these ideas with reflective prompts for us to consider regarding the pedagogical transformation they help us to conceptualise regarding our teaching of teachers.

Rethinking

There was an inherent tension expressed by workshop attendees in terms of using theory to talk about teaching and learning. Much of the conversations focused on a desire to avoid the term 'tips and tricks' when thinking about re-imagining teaching innovation, but at the same time, the expectation around high levels of content acquisition regarding teaching theory also was voiced as unreasonable, and at times, isolating. How do we help to bridge the gap between theory and practice for our program participants? How do you evidence good teaching, and how do we encourage systematic use of the same for ourselves as well as our participants undertaking the Certificate?

Creating

A central tenet of a Scholarship of Teaching and Learning is the ability to find sites for investigation into one's own teaching. Here the conversational data indicated that more opportunities need to exist for faculty to investigate and fine-tune the opportunities to investigate their own teaching. How can faculty fully engage with self-reflective teaching, and include SoTL theory more cohesively as informing their teaching?

Creating, creation and creativity were also central to the discussions as a way of thinking through evidence of teaching. How can we encourage more creative expressions that evidence good teaching and reflective practice such as multi-media being used in assessment, such as video and audio/podcasting?

Collaborating, community and conversation

The strength of our Certificate program lies within its community of practice. Workshop attendees expressed a desire in increasing and designing *fora* for collaboration around SoTL. How can we add more collaborative tasks in the program to enable collaboration? How do we increase a sense of community across disciplines, within and outside of our institution?

Discussion boards are a key site of interdisciplinary conversation which are structured within the Certificate program. However, unlike face-to-face conversation, these online conversations need to be carefully planned and facilitated, in order to, somewhat ironically, create a more organic flow of ideas. What needs our careful consideration in terms of discussion prompts to improve participation and enact more organic conversations online?

What did we learn? Continuing the conversations and continuing to drive pedagogical changes

This article is one reflection on practice regarding a suite of approaches which utilised an iterative design over a three-year period, to examine the implementation of a new curriculum to an online teaching program in higher education for university teaching faculty. We are cognisant that this piece likely raises more questions than it answers;

however, as part of a dialogical process itself, this is important for us in the curriculum innovation for our program going forward. Figure 1 shows our three-phase approach as part of a bigger picture and the data captured at each stage. Phase one uses the data captured during the academic year in ABC to VLE interdisciplinary workshop conversations to evaluate and redesign the curriculum. Phase two is the program implementation and data capture. Phase three is the evaluation and preparation of feedback and data to the program team.

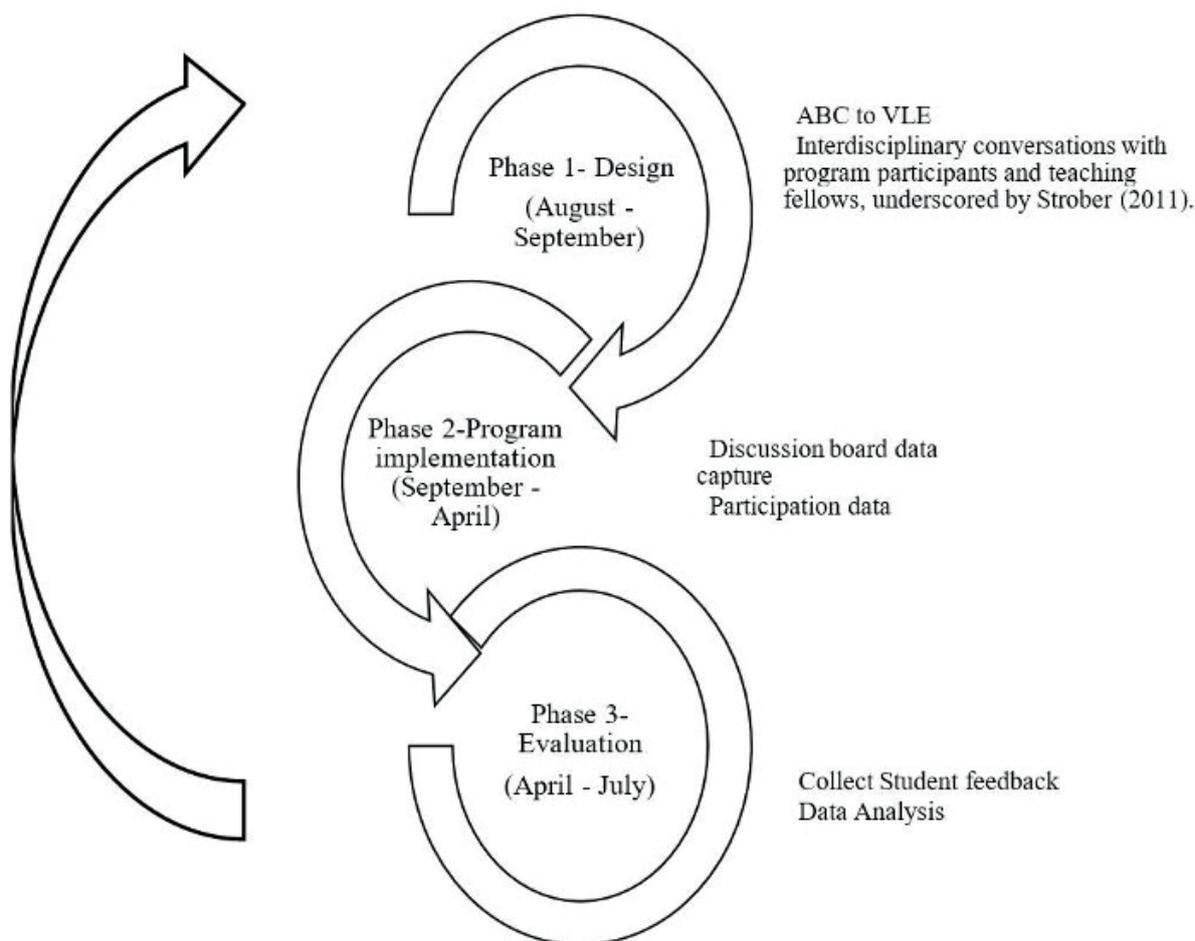


Figure 1 Yearly research, program teaching, and evaluation cycle for years 2017-2020 inclusive

Figure 1 shows the finalised process that is now an integral part of the evolving curriculum design and is employed yearly in the program. In addition, the design has provided a site to capture our conversations and integrates research-based teaching into the curriculum; each stage will form the basis of continued work and future publications. Our colleague has developed a way to facilitate the ABC to VLE workshop in a virtual way, therefore allowing us to continue engagement with our colleagues post-Covid. We have found our conversations productive, informative, enabling yearly improvement on course design and implementation. However, perhaps more importantly, these conversations have enhanced our ‘intellectual self-esteem; intellectual enjoyment and excitement’ (Strober, 2011, p. 132) about interdisciplinary perspectives of teaching and learning.

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Knowing me, knowing you...

Lisa Wakefield, De Montfort University

'Purely because of the restrictions of the pandemic, almost all in-person interactions were far less satisfying or varied than normal, the scope for activities was small and it was much harder to create productive relationships with fellow students.' (HEPI Student Academic Experience Survey 2021, Jonathan Neves and Rachel Hewitt)

There has been a lot written in both academic (Nathiya *et al.*, 2020; Liang, L. *et al.*, 2020) and charity research (Young Minds, 2021; Mind, 2020) regarding the impact that the pandemic and the associated lockdown has had on young people's mental health and loneliness.

Humans are social animals. so much so that Maslow (1943) placed social needs and belongingness as secondary only to survival needs in his hierarchy of motivation. Self-isolation, guidance on social distancing and wearing of face coverings have all impacted the ability of individuals to create and maintain networks during this period. According to a survey by Mind (2020) nearly three-quarters (73%) of university students said that their mental health had declined during lockdown and that they

had felt lonely or isolated. This is three times higher than the national position.

Social relationships refer to the connections established between family members, friends, neighbours, co-workers, and other associates. In a university context, social relationships include interactions with peers on the same course, within the same university professional services staff and academic staff. Students currently have lower than usual interactions with anyone within their academic environment and when interactions have occurred they have predominantly been online. It is therefore vital that engagement and attendance at these online sessions are encouraged.

Clare Major (2015) identifies that engagement has three elements – motivation, attention and involvement. To ensure that students feel engaged, they need to want to and be able to connect with others in the room and with the material being discussed. It is much easier to 'lurk at the back' in an online class than when face to face, or not attend and think that the academic learning can be done independently.

Motivation is a reason or reasons for acting or behaving in a particular way. Therefore, sessions need to be run so that students want to attend. They feel

a connection with others in the room through the sense of being open and available to another person and for them to feel open and available to you. They feel that they know the people they are with and are known by them. The motivation to attend could also be due to a lack of demotivators; students feel that the session is a safe space and while they find it hard or challenging, there is nothing occurring which makes them not want to be present.

To develop attention and involvement, academic staff need to consider how the information is delivered and how agreed communication strategies are established. The way in which we interact has changed significantly across generations and through the development of technology, and this should be considered when trying to foster connections between academic staff and students.

The current student population are mainly Generation Z (those born between 1997 and 2012) and recent research by LivePerson (Bradbury, 2018) stated that 75% of them would rather conduct all communication talk via text than verbally. They also communicate predominately through short instant messages on WhatsApp or WeChat or through visual storytelling on TikTok or Snapchat.

Whereas the majority of lecturing staff are Generation X, this was the first generation to embrace email and online communication, having been able to integrate digital communication in their youth. They prefer in-person face-to-face interactions and consider this the main way in which they can get to know someone.

There is also a need to be mindful of ensuring all sessions are inclusive. The Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research (2020) has noted that the digital divide has become more visible within the last 12 months. Students who are working on shared computers in shared living spaces are unlikely to want to turn their cameras on and allow others a glimpse of their study environment. Students from the poorest homes are also less likely to have hard-wired broadband connections and therefore the data usage of live video feed prohibits their ability to follow sessions.

With these points in mind, it should not therefore come as a shock that academics find themselves staring at a black screen where no-one else on the call is willing to talk using their microphone.

So, with all these limitations, what short-term or quick-fix measures can be done to facilitate productive social relationships between students and with academic staff?

The picture-superiority effect states that people are more likely to remember images than words. Therefore, if we are able to associate people with images, then they are likely to be remembered and the connection can progress rather than having to be restarted at each point. There is therefore a clear benefit of

removing or adapting the blank wall of anonymous, homogeneous grey people icons as all participants.

While there are some concerns within the student population about privacy and security (Kear *et al.*, 2014), with the use of personal photos there is no need for images to be solely of the individual.

With the ease of changing personal profile icons on teams, Zoom and Blackboard Collaborate, it's a quick and easy ice-breaker exercise and creates a knowledge of each student when each week you ask them to attend session with their profile set to an image of their favourite animal, film character, and sporting hero. This also allows each student to be known, and know each other in their online environment. How can you forget that time you taught Donald Trump about the basics of accounting standards or Princess Leia about sustainable development goals?

It also allows discussions on culture, history, nationality and current affairs without having to engage directly or put anyone on the spot to answer questions, and allows personal chats to occur regarding a specific personal interest in the background of a session or future interactions.

There is a lot still to be done in relation to ensuring that personal interactions for students in the current restrictions, and going forward, into a potentially new way of learning, are as satisfying as possible. Small things can make a big difference to allow productive relationships to flourish.

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SEDA News

SEDA Congratulates New Fellows

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