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PRACTICE**

Pilot Launch Issue

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**POSTGRADUATE
PANDEMIC PEDAGOGIES**

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ABOUT THE *JPPP*

The *JPPP* is an experimental journal organised by a multidisciplinary team of postgraduates. We invite contributions opening a dialogue and reflecting on teaching practice, from PGRs and other early career researchers, in any discipline at Warwick and beyond, who teach in any capacity including lecturing, small group teaching, and laboratory demonstrating, and those who support the professional development of PGRs. We welcome submissions that fall into the following categories:

- **CRITICAL REFLECTIONS:** 500-3000 word personal reflections on PGR teaching practice, or reflections on a conference, symposium, or workshop.
- **REVIEW ARTICLES:** 1500-3000 word overviews summarising the current understanding of a topic, highlighting key papers and authors and their relevance to PGR practice.
- **CONVERSATIONS:** 2000-4000 word dialogues between PGRs comparing their teaching practice, especially across disciplines or pedagogic traditions, or interviews with academics, administrators, policymakers, etc.
- **ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLES:** 3000-6000 word more substantive, evidence-based research and exploring its relevance and consequences for PGR teaching practice.

For further guidance, see our journal aims and author guidelines on [our website](#).

We are interested through this pilot volume in ascertaining whether there is support for this sort of initiative in the future, and would anticipate annual volumes of the journal being produced by an editorial team of PGRs. If you might be interested in supporting PGRs who teach through the journal by joining the editorial team, please contact us at PGRteachercommunity@warwick.ac.uk.

Sign up to [our mailing list here](#), follow us [on Twitter](#), or visit our website for more on our other projects and team members at the [PGR Teaching Community](#), a WIHEA funded project at the Academic Development Centre.

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Josh Patel (PGR, history)

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THE *JOURNAL OF PGR* *PEDAGOGIC PRACTICE* AND THE WARWICK PGR TEACHING COMMUNITY

Editorial: PGR Pandemic Pedagogies

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Josh's doctoral research explored the development and change in how it has been imagined universities contributed to liberal society in the post-war period. Josh is interested in developing his research to consider how students and staff navigated higher education opportunities and the various and distinctive learning outcomes they derived from living and learning in higher education. He is particularly interested in pedagogies of care and the importance of space and community to learning. Josh has taught in the History department for two years, is an Associate Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, and head swimming coach at UWSWP.



Abstract

In this editorial, I introduce our pilot launch issue on postgraduate pandemic pedagogies. I explain our rationale for our experimental dialogic journal and outline our ambition through the wider project the journal is a part of. We hope to bring together an organic and self-sustaining community of practice of postgraduate researchers who teach.

Keywords: PGR teacher training, community, peer learning, academic journals, co-creation.

Hello world!

Welcome to the pilot issue of the *Journal of PGR Pedagogic Practice*! The *JPPP* team and I are absolutely delighted to have been able to bring together some of Warwick's brilliant postgraduate researchers (PGRs) to share some fascinating perspectives on their teaching practice and experiences in higher education. We hope they will be comforting examples and thought-provoking reflections for the wider community of PGRs. To others, we hope they are indicative of the sort of novel pedagogies PGRs have cultivated and the challenges they faced in their teaching during a difficult time for higher education.

Warwick's teaching quality was rated notably highly in the National Student Survey during the pandemic (**Warwick, 2021**), and PGRs were necessarily an essential component of that. PGRs are rightly coming to be recognised as key to the delivery of teaching in higher education institutions (**Fung 2021; UCU 2021**). Their precarious position in a 'liminal space' between 'staff' and 'student' means PGRs face considerable and unique challenges. PGRs often lack access and connections to wider institutional, professional, and collegiate opportunities (**Schussler, et al. 2015**). Those that do exist, such as training courses working toward [Associate Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy](#) like the [APP PGR at Warwick](#), are invaluable for PGRs. The benefits derived from training can, however, often be fragile. The self-efficacy of PGRs who teach, their self-belief in their capacity to deliver teaching, often declines after initial training has concluded (**Bandura, 1993; Chiu and Corrigan, 2019**). The wellbeing of PGRs is also notoriously poor (**Guthrie et al. 2017**).

Yet many PGRs often develop sophisticated and innovative pedagogies and educational philosophies. Others reflect thoughtfully on the successes and failures of their teaching practice at the coalface. There are few regular opportunities for PGRs to share their experiences of teaching with each

other or the wider community of practice, especially across disciplines.

We hope therefore, that this pilot issue of this experimental journal might have a part to play in supporting the personal and professional development of PGRs who teach. The aim of the *JPPP* was to reimagine the role of a journal to best support PGRs. It was proposed that the journal would provide a space maintained by PGRs, for PGRs, as 'peers'. PGRs would regularly come together to exchange, discuss, and review their teaching practice. Realising this volume of *JPPP* marks some of the very earliest movements towards sustaining such a dialogue and community of practice. Before we get stuck into our PGRs' reflections on their teaching practice, I'd like to reflect a little on the origin and ideals of the *JPPP* and its place in the wider teaching community.

The Warwick Postgraduate Teaching Community

The *JPPP* has its origins in a Warwick International Higher Education Academy (WIHEA) funded student co-creation project at the Academic Development Centre to create a '[Postgraduate Teacher Digital Hub](#)'. The aim was, by working with a number of postgraduates who teach, to foster a community of practice of postgraduates 'for the sharing of pedagogy and practice, mentorship and a resource for teaching in the digital era'. This was intended to be an ongoing community of practice and enhanced by PGR's own work. In February 2021 eight PGRs from a range of disciplines came together as a team of 'PGR Teaching Champions', to begin to tackle this task. In an interesting mirroring of our undergraduate teaching, because of the ongoing lockdowns, all our meetings and work of the team were conducted through Microsoft Teams.

At our earliest meetings in mid-April, the team keenly recognised the importance of supporting PGRs who teach. How we might

practically support them, at an incredibly difficult time in the midst of the pandemic, was a more difficult question to answer. A 'digital hub' suggested some sort of central shared community 'space', such as those information repositories offered by Warwick's Moodle, or the university's website building service, Sitebuilder. Spaces like Moodle also permit community engagement through the construction of forum spaces.

However, many of the team, including myself, were concerned that building such a space would tend towards a 'one-and-done' information dump. Such a repository of information would tend towards passive learning. The project would have no afterlife, no legacy, and a sterile community with little genuine, sustained peer-engagement. It was felt instead greater long-term support might be found by fostering of a community built around mutual interest in teaching and personal development. Recent research has stressed effective learning requires a community of trust within learning as a relational and emotional process can take place (**Yang and Carless 2013; Carless 2013; Steen-Utheim and Wittek 2017; Crossman 2007; Chatterjee and Correia 2020; Miralles-Armenteros et al. 2021**). Our idea was that postgraduate tutors would be best supported by kickstarting a process of helping postgraduate tutors organise themselves. This community would help reinforce and perpetuate peer-learning (**Arnstein 1969; Hilsdon 2014**). It would align with institutional objectives to encourage co-creation and to raise standards of teaching (**Warwick 2018**).

Sustaining a vibrant community of practice would require something more dynamic than just a repository of information. As such, we proposed that the ultimate outcome of the project might be something we called the [Warwick Postgraduate Teaching Community](#) (Warwick PTC). This community would, it was hoped, provide a social centre of gravity and in turn perpetuate the sustenance of wider activities to support PGRs in the long run. We aimed to help contribute to the beginning of the infrastructure and

architecture of such a community. The team devised a number of project outcomes in order to facilitate this community of practice. There would still be information [repositories hosted through digital spaces, like our Moodle](#). But these would be accompanied by a number of initiatives to help connect peers, including a [buddy system](#) in order to facilitate peer-observation of practice, a regular newsletter, and eventually social events and [social media accounts](#). The team also felt it was important to ascertain what types of support PGRs felt were important. A large portion of the group were involved in producing and disseminating [our Survey of PGR Teachers](#) which ran this summer. Some preliminary results of our survey are published in this volume.

The *JPPP* was a product of this attempt to kick-start the community of practice. We imagined a constructive, cross-disciplinary dialogue to collectively raise the quality of teaching and enhance the outcomes of PGR experiences. With this first edition of the journal, we intended to consider the viability of using a journal as a tool to help PGRs share their practice, learn from each other, and evidence their ongoing commitment to their continuous professional development. The process of advertising our Call for Papers, editing and reviewing submissions, and publishing the journal have, we hoped, contributed to this process. Each of the following papers was firstly put through an editorial review by myself. Secondly, the papers were submitted to a semi-formal anonymised peer review process. In this process, a fellow PGR reviewed the submissions as a true 'peer' and an expert in the practice of being a PGR who teaches. Their expert opinion, perspective, and advice was invaluable in ensuring that the pieces spoke to PGR teaching practice and might be most helpful and useful to other PGRs. This process was, I hope, constructive for everyone involved. I have certainly myself had the pleasure to have stimulating and thought-provoking conversations with a wide range of PGRs, thoughts I've taken forwards in the development of my teaching practice.

PGR Pandemic Pedagogies

After nearly two years of disruption caused by the pandemic, there was little else that our pilot issue could use as its central theme. We asked submitters to consider what unique 'PGR Pandemic Pedagogies' had emerged as they faced these challenges. We thought it was important for PGRs to see where their efforts in tackling these problems had not been successful, and to consider what they had learned from their failures. We thought that this sort of reflection would have been especially valuable for the development of their teaching practice, but also for other PGRs to hear about themselves. We were curious particularly as to how PGRs might consolidate the benefits of these experiences once universities pivot back to face-to-face teaching and learning, and what challenges still needed to be overcome.

We were delighted with the extremely interesting, varied, and thoughtful the submissions we received. To best sustain a dialogue, we have preferred succinctness over length, and most pieces in this first volume are sort critical reflections of 800-2500 words. Often these pieces are modelled on the 'Narrative of Professional Practice' as part of the work needed for accreditation for Associate Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy. They engage with the pedagogic literature and contain experimental new practices, handy tips for budding teachers, a refreshing eye on established practices, and accounts of valuable lessons learned. Some are more informal but still critical and reflective pieces. Many contain invaluable narratives of failure and experiments that didn't work. Without this journal, these accounts would probably have remained private experiences. The benefits that other PGRs in similar positions and facing similar problems might have gained would have been lost.

As our team found, the potential insights derived from comparing and contrasting the signature pedagogies of different disciplines can productively inform

teaching practice. We invited submissions from PGRs from across all disciplines and were delighted to receive submissions from across the sciences, humanities, and social sciences, and from a range of students, including experienced and new PGRs and of a wide age range. Our contributions cover the role of PGRs in traditional seminar teaching and lecturing but also practical labs. This mix of experience has been illuminating, particularly as the pandemic forced PGRs to look again at their teaching practices. It ranges from **Matteo Mazzamurro's** reflection on his seminar teaching and how his understanding of space was shifted by the pandemic, and **Joy Oti's** rethinking of Problem-Based Learning, to **Liz Bishop's** narrative of how she bought in her research in 3D printing to assist in the securing a safe face-to-face learning environment when her labs learning activities could not be migrated online. **Daniela Sordillo** takes these reflections further and applies them to PGR learning and considers her attempt to reimagine poster sessions for PGR researchers. **Alice King** draws on her research on student attitudes to sexual violence and her experience at two different higher education institutions to compare the performance of masculinity in seminars, and the problems it poses for her teaching. We have even managed to provide a reflection not just across disciplines but across the supposedly sharp divide between secondary education and higher education, thanks to **Ian Hamilton**. Ian's in-depth comparison of his experiences providing tutoring to school children during the pandemic and his undergraduate teaching. He highlights the lack of learning resources for PGRs to draw on. These papers demonstrate tangibly how the pandemic has facilitated a reflection and evaluation of existing teaching practices.

It is particularly welcoming then to see such honesty and openness in the papers in this volume. To further humanise the experiences contained within this first volume and a sense of belonging to a discussion, we have made authorial ownership of each piece especially clear by including a full title page for each piece, including a short biography and a picture of our contributor. It is hoped

that this would facilitate a sense of community, honestly, and of personal reflection – that this article was written by a real person undertaking their own journey of professional development that we might be able to reach out and talk to. We were especially pleased with how many of our articles open with a first-person pronoun. The authorial 'I' bedevils undergraduate writing; its presence has been criticised as arrogant, while its suppression 'may result in the appearance of objectivity, but it does not change opinion into revelation' (**Raymond, 1993; Halmos, 1970; Palmer 2017**). For our purposes we felt clear that it was necessary to stress the subjective perspective of our contributors that were being reported to us. PGRs should be able to articulate who they are as a teacher, as expected in professional academic development programmes. It is particularly important to empower PGR teachers. Furthermore, only with that context might we, the wider PGR community, learn from their experiences through reflection and contrast with our own experiences (**Ajjawi and Boud 2018**).

This is particularly effective in in Daniella and **Pierre Botcherby's** pieces which capture especially well the lived experience of adapting teaching during the pandemic. Both report their feelings and responses to the challenges they faced in a way that we hope will be hugely encouraging to prospective and seasoned teachers alike. Throughout Pierre's account are a smattering of helpful pointers towards facilitating a sense of community through Teams (and he is also particularly helpfully playful with the content and format of his article, including diagrams and bullet points, demonstrating the sort of range of possibilities that the *JPPP* might accommodate). The importance of this 'social-affective dimension' (**Carless 2013**) and an 'online pedagogy of care' (**Burke and Larmar 2020**) for undergraduate learning is brilliantly explored and evidenced by **Lindy Rudd** and her exploration of how she promoted student interaction during the migration to online learning. Similarly, there is a real tangible concern and care that **Giulia Lorenzi** brings to her narrative, where she reflects on her

teaching and the consequences of an inequality in the capacity of her students to access online learning resources. These papers in particular have a humour and informality which lends itself to their accessibility. There is also perhaps an interesting tension between Ian's suggestion that online learning might allow greater and more economical access to higher education learning activities, and Giulia's concern for equitability of access to the same degree of learning opportunities.

In our Call for Papers, we indicated we would be welcome to more substantial, original evidence-based research. We were therefore particularly pleased to include the preliminary results of the survey of PGR support of the Warwick PTC team by **Kate Lewis**. These make interesting reading and are a helpful contrast to the more vignette details, case studies, and experiences reported in the other narratives included. To assist this contrast, in the future, we would hope to gain reflections and responses to previously published articles, and support an ongoing dialogue. The quantitative impressions from the surveys and the qualitative discourse it can generate may be of particular interest to those who support the personal and professional development of PGRs. Our volume closes with an afterword from **Sara Hattersley**, who reflects on the challenges of supporting teaching and learning online and the persistence of PGRs who teach during the pandemic.

Future and Legacy

It was recognised very early on that the journal and the wider Teaching Community had some particularly ambitious goals. The team therefore put into place various contingencies to provide scaled back versions of the larger initiatives. The success of the Warwick PTC in its earliest stages will be reviewed more fully elsewhere. In the early plans to create a community of practice, the project was primarily concerned with developing architecture and a legacy and to

point towards future directions of development.

Initially, we anticipated reviewing interest in the journal after this issue to consider its viability. With the number and quality of submissions and their thoughtful reflections, we hope we have begun something of a dialogue. It opens up the possibility of further issues in the future. But volunteers will be needed to help support this dialogue. This might include the establishment of a more formal editorial board as part of the wider teaching community, perhaps along the line of executive of university societies. University societies are essentially fantastic examples of self-sustaining, entirely student-created spaces, beyond 'co-creation'. Support alternatively might be forthcoming from WIHEA, the Academic Development Centre, or Warwick Library to provide postgraduate representatives the opportunity to continue to act as Postgraduate Teaching Champions and

to continue to try and facilitate community work. This sort of social nucleus and community spirit seems to be extremely ephemeral in other projects to support PGRs.

We hope that this might facilitate the discussion, informally and formally, of postgraduate teaching practice and pedagogy. It might lead to future surveys, newsletters, reading groups, conferences and symposia, social events, and other initiatives. With luck, this volume may contribute to that process. I hope you enjoy the papers!

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POSTGRADUATE RESEARCHERS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO TEACHING:

An Initial Exploration of Survey Findings

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My PhD work mostly focuses on the use of statistics to look at the role of lambs in the spread of footrot, a disease that is common in sheep flocks. I have taught in statistics-based modules in both the School of Psychology and Life Sciences, and my teaching focus is on helping to make statistics and coding with R accessible

Abstract

Many postgraduate researchers (PGRs) take part in teaching or have teaching-related opportunities at Warwick, but currently, little is formally documented about their experiences. The aim of this research is to find out more about PGRs and teaching at Warwick, and to provide some insight into their experiences, many of which will have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This brief overview seeks to highlight some of the initial findings from an inaugural Warwick survey of PGRs, made in relation to teaching.

Keywords: Warwick Survey, Postgraduates, Teaching Experiences, Training, COVID-19.

Introduction and Methods

PGRs at Warwick were invited to take part in an online survey about their experiences. There were six sections to the questionnaire – PGR Teacher Characteristics, Visibility of Teaching Opportunities at Warwick, Teaching Responsibilities of PGR Teachers, Awareness of Development Opportunities, Impact of Development Opportunities and Looking to the Future.

Selected Results

Response rate and distribution

The questionnaire was advertised both online and by to PGR student via departmental mailing lists in July 2021. There are 127 responses, 106 of which are useable, having been received from PGRs at Warwick who specifically gave consent for their data to be used. Of these, 45.3% are from the Faculty of Social Sciences, 33.0% from the Sciences, Engineering and Medical departments, while

16.0% are from the Arts department. However, 5.7% of the respondents did not indicate their departments.

How do PGRs gain teaching opportunities, and what do they teach?

The survey was open to all PGRs at Warwick irrespective of teaching experience. Most respondents (61.3%) indicated that they have a teaching role at Warwick. As shown in **Table 1** below, PGRs mostly become aware of teaching opportunities via email or

departmental advertisement, followed by word of mouth from either supervisors or friends. Some (7.5%) PGRs are, however, not aware of any teaching opportunities in their departments.

Running seminars and marking are identified as the most common teaching roles for PGR students and this is illustrated in **Table 2** below. This finding may be attributed to the fact that many respondents (45.3%) are from various Social Science departments.

How have you been made aware of PGR teaching opportunities in your department?	Number of responses (%)
Email	55 (51.9)
Departmental advertisement	28 (26.4)
Word of mouth – colleagues/friends	27 (25.5)
Word of mouth – supervisor/other mentor	25 (23.6)
Not aware of PGR teaching opportunities	8 (7.5)
Warwick website: GTA job search	0 (0.0)
Other	0 (0.0)

Table 1: Awareness of Teaching Opportunities

Teaching participated in by PGR teachers	Number of responses (%)
Marking	36 (34.0)
Seminar – in person	34 (32.1)
Seminar – online	31 (29.2)
Individual student support sessions/mentoring – online	19 (17.9)
Laboratory (wet/dry) – in person	17 (16.0)
Individual student support sessions/mentoring – in person	15 (14.2)
Lectures – online	8 (7.5)
Lectures – in person	8 (7.5)
Other	6 (5.7)
Module convention	2 (1.9)

Table 2: Teaching Roles for PGR Students

What prevents PGRs taking teaching opportunities?

Table 3 shows that the biggest factor which prevents PGRs from taking teaching opportunities is attributed to PhD-related time commitments. This is followed by feelings about lack of subject knowledge.

Teaching-related development opportunities

Around a third of respondents either agree or strongly agree that Warwick provides sufficient teaching-related development opportunities for PGR teachers. **Table 4** shows that half of the respondents are aware of the Preparing to Teach in Higher Education course, which is a mandatory introduction course required by departments before teaching, while less than half are aware of any other courses run at Warwick, which are all voluntary.

Table 5 shows that PGRs predominantly take training courses to either improve their practice, gain experience, or boost their CV.

Table 6 suggests that PGRs would generally like more training opportunities, although a third would be potentially more likely to participate in programmes if they were paid. There was some suggestion that peer-support programmes would be well-received. However, **Table 7** demonstrates that awareness of available courses is currently relatively low. This invariably means that lack of awareness of the training courses on offer is potentially the bigger problem, rather than lack of opportunities at Warwick.

What does, or might prevent you from taking teaching opportunities?	Number of responses (%)
Time commitments – PhD related	53 (50.0)
Feelings of lack of subject knowledge	35 (33.0)
Unaware of opportunities	20 (18.9)
Other	17 (16.0)
Time commitments – non-PhD related	14 (13.2)
Lack of supervisor approval	11 (10.4)
Rejection via application	8 (7.5)

Table 3: Inhibitive Factors to Teaching for PGRs

Which of the following courses are you aware of?	Number of responses (%)
Preparing to Teach in Higher Education	53 (50.0)
APP PGR (Academic and Professional Pathway for Postgraduate Researchers who Teach)	38 (35.8)
PGA TLHE (Postgraduate Award in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education)	22 (20.8)
TPiHE (Teaching Practice in Higher Education)	6 (5.7)
Departmental courses/training	29 (27.4)
Academic Development Program	18 (17.0)
Other	3 (2.8)

Table 4: Awareness of Training Courses at Warwick

Reasons for undertaking teaching related development opportunities?	Number of responses (%)
To improve practice or gain experience	33 (31.1)
To boost CV	24 (22.6)
Course recommended by supervisor/mentor	13 (12.0)
Other – please state	4 (3.8)

Table 5: Reasons for Undertaking Training Opportunities

How can support for PGR teachers be improved?	Number of responses (%)
Payment for undertaking training	32 (30.2)
Mentoring/peer support	27 (25.5)
Mandatory requirements for departments to provide mentorship/support to new tutors	24 (22.6)
Further training or Continuous Professional Development	24 (22.6)
Spaces for sharing practice/experience	21 (19.8)
Networking	15 (14.2)
Socialising	12 (11.3)
Other	1 (0.9)

Table 6: Measures for Improving PGR Teacher Support

If you have not undertaken teaching related development opportunities, why is this?	Number of responses (%)
Unaware of these opportunities	28 (26.4)
They are unpaid	12 (11.3)
Lack of time	11 (10.4)
Courses were not recommended as useful by supervisor/other mentor	5 (4.7)
Courses were discouraged by supervisor/other mentor	0 (0.0)
Other - please state	0 (0.0)

Table 7: Reasons for Non-participation in Development Opportunities

Conclusions

Many PGRs at Warwick are involved in teaching in some way and this study provides some of the first insights into how PGRs acquire teaching opportunities at Warwick, their teaching roles, and their awareness of various developmental opportunities available to them. Initial findings suggest that opportunities to teach are largely departmentally-driven, perhaps through some informal networks.

The study also highlights that, potentially, a lack of awareness of the opportunities available is a barrier to PGRs undertaking teaching-related development opportunities, and that although PGRs identify that they would like more opportunities, awareness of the ones currently available is

seemingly low. The question of how to raise awareness, equitably, of the opportunities currently available to the PGR community, is one that needs to be addressed.

There appears to be an appetite, overall, for more PGR teacher support, and for this support to include mentoring or peer support. An interesting initiative that can propel this need into action is the buddy and peer mentoring scheme launched by the newly launched Warwick Postgraduate Teaching Community. This novel project aims to connect PGR teachers from a distance, whilst also creating an enabling digital environment for PGR teachers to share insightful pedagogic practices.

The full results from the PGR Teaching Survey will be published in the Autumn 2021.

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IN SEARCH OF LOST SPACE

The changing affordances of physical and virtual teaching spaces during the pandemic

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Abstract

In this reflection, I discuss the changing affordances of physical and virtual spaces in PGR seminar teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic. I start by reviewing how physical space has been conceptualised in the pedagogical literature in terms of its material aspects, affordances, and interactions with users. I then translate the above concepts to virtual teaching spaces. I discuss how the affordances of both physical and virtual spaces have evolved throughout the different stages of the pandemic, exemplifying the process through my personal experience of seminar teaching. I conclude with a personal reflection on the challenges and unexpectedly positive consequences of having to dynamically adapt one's pedagogy to changing affordances and constraints.

Keywords: Teaching Spaces; Online Teaching; Seminar Teaching; Covid-19

Physical and Virtual Space

Physical space plays an active role in teaching and learning (**Amedeo et al., 2008**). It mediates and moderates both the teacher and learners' behaviour by facilitating the execution of certain activities and impeding others (**Baepler et al., 2016**). The objects in a physical learning space have certain "affordances": properties, actual or perceived, that determine how they will be used (**Norman, 2002**). The layout of the space also contributes to the perception of what is important for a learner (**Exley & Dennick, 2004**) and, as such, it may either be an aid or an obstacle to effective learning. But the concept of physical space in teaching and learning is not limited to its material aspects, such as furniture and seating arrangements. It includes the interactions people have with and within the physical space, such as movement within the room and physical gestures (**Leijon & Lundgren, 2019**). Every aspect of the design of physical learning spaces can, thus, be seen as "built pedagogy" (**Monahan, 2002**): a transposition in built form of educational theories, philosophies, and values (**Rands & Gansemer-Topf, 2017**).

The proliferation in recent years of increasingly sophisticated virtual platforms that allow remote participation and reduce the need for physical presence has introduced another layer of complexity to the topic. What were originally conceived as tools to perform specific tasks have gradually transformed into true virtual "spaces", with their own material aspects, affordances and ways to shape interactions (**White & Le Cornu, 2011**). Online learning platforms now include a large number of features. Some of these are explicitly meant to reproduce objects and properties of physical learning spaces, such as virtual whiteboards or live-streaming. Others provide opportunities which would not be possible in the physical realm, such as access to libraries of recordings, and alternative forms of peer engagement. The presence of such features, as well as the way they are managed, shape the perceived affordances of the virtual space, by either allowing or forbidding, or promoting or discouraging,

certain actions. A great deal of interactions with and within virtual spaces are, as above, meant to mimic physical ones, such as virtually raising one's hand; but some are novel and do not have direct equivalents in the physical realm, such as modulating one's participation through turning off cameras and/or microphones at will.

Perhaps more subtly, virtual spaces interact with physical spaces in a non-trivial fashion. Scholars' opinions on the impact of introducing technology-mediated communication in teaching are mixed. Some criticise the distracting nature of virtual spaces and maintain that physical spaces in which one is physically surrounded by a supportive community, improve the student's academic performance and persistence (**Parsons, 2016**). Hybrid classes introducing technology such as live recordings and instant chats have been said to create complex and often undesirable dynamics involving the teacher, the students attending in person, those in remote, and possible facilitators who manage the virtual space in real time (**Jeijon & Lundgren, 2019**). For example, hybrid class teachers lament that the physical constraint of cameras in the hybrid environment decreases teaching style flexibility and promotes lecture-style classes. Furthermore, it reduces the teachers' control on interactions with and between the students, as well as between the students and their environment, all of which are crucial aspects for learning.

Physical and virtual spaces throughout the pandemic

Although Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and fully online teaching platforms have existed for several years, before the pandemic, virtual spaces played a mostly supporting role in higher education, almost invariably associated with in-person lectures, labs, and/or seminars. The borderline to the realm of exclusively online teaching was crossed only by those students who did so out of personal necessity and by those teachers (probably a minority) who were enthusiastic

and curious enough to experiment with different techniques and pedagogies on a voluntary basis.

As the Covid-19 pandemic struck, educational institutions were forced to swiftly adapt to everchanging social distancing measures and limitations on the frequentation of physical learning spaces. During the first lockdown of spring 2020, British universities witnessed an unprecedented and abrupt shift towards virtual spaces for every aspect of teaching, from lecture delivery to assessment and support (Ortiz, 2020; Yan, 2020; Mondol & Mohiuddin, 2020). As uncertainty persisted, a number of high-profile British institutions decided to hold their lectures completely online during the following academic year (PA Media, 2020). Some universities opted for a mixed approach and allowed partial re-openings during the Autumn term for PGR labs and seminar teaching (Toms & Karageorgi, 2020). To comply with social distancing rules, a 2-meter distance rule between students' desks and between tutors and students was enforced and, consequently, class sizes were reduced. The steep rise in Covid-19 cases during winter led to a second lockdown, which saw a return to fully online teaching and learning.

In the meantime, online teaching platforms were upgraded. New features were constantly added and old ones improved. For example, by the time the second winter lockdown hit, Microsoft Teams had introduced break-out rooms for small group discussion (Microsoft Teams team, 2020) and more intuitive and inclusive interaction options (Spataro, 2020). Hence, throughout the pandemic, both physical and virtual learning spaces witnessed radical and frequent changes in their material aspects, affordances, and interactivity.

My personal experience of physical space before the pandemic

During my pre-pandemic PGR teaching experience in labs and seminars in Computer Science, I made very little use of virtual spaces for offering direct support, and used online platforms only to provide written feedback. My relation with physical space was shaped by two prevalent forms of interactions between me and the students: the "one-to-all communication", when I addressed all students at once for essential directions, and the "one-to-one" or "one-to-few support", when I checked whether individual students or small groups of students sitting in proximity to one another were on-task or needed individualised clarifications. In spatial terms, this brought me to either occupy the front position in the seminar room or lab, next to the whiteboard, or to walk around the desks and stand near students to create bubble-like environments with one or few of them within which they could express their doubts more privately and comfortably.

My usage of space could not escape the influence of the physical layout of the rooms themselves (Smith, 2017; Brooks, 2012): computer labs, for example, in which a single central corridor is flanked by narrow and long rows of immobile desks, promoted individual work or very small group interactions, hindering communication to and between larger groups. Nevertheless, my usage of space was primarily informed by my own experience of seminars as a Mathematics student in English and French universities. These privileged, respectively, on-demand one-to-one support, and lecture-style seminars in which the teacher and the students interacted openly in front of the class through the physical support of the blackboard. These two approaches can be considered signature pedagogies for Mathematical seminars. They effectively promote the development of individual problem-solving skills, the acquisition of specific terminology, and the appreciation for clarity and conciseness in argument construction which constitute the core of university-level Mathematical learning

and assessment. That said, these individual-centred approaches are less effective in preparing for research and project collaborations in small groups, which I have found to be frequent in both academic and industrial work environments after graduation. Finally, my usage of space was the result of negotiations with the students, who were often reluctant to communicate their doubts publicly and solve problems at the board, reflecting the principle that learning space is negotiable and is designed via the interaction with the participants (Leijon & Lundgren, 2019).

Personal experience through-out the pandemic

During the first lockdown, I did not have the chance to teach. As relevant scholarly research on the dynamics of virtual spaces remained quite limited, my best sources of information were the experiences of some of my colleagues who had to adapt to using virtual tools. Perhaps the most interesting observation I heard from them is that the complex interactions that were mediated through physical space could be reproduced in virtual spaces, at least in part, through clever use of time. For example, walking around the desks could be substituted by asking students to submit their results regularly during the class and allowing extra time for questions after the class.

I first returned to teach during the first term of the 2020/2021 academic year, when seminars happened in person, but social distancing rules were imposed. I soon discovered, though, that my “one-to-one” and “one-to-few support” approach became much more difficult to implement as my movements were constrained to a small area around the whiteboard, in the front of the class, which meant that I could no longer create individualised spaces for students to ask questions. Instead, students would have to raise their doubts publicly and, as a consequence, very few did. A small number would wait until the end of the class to ask me

questions, but my overall perception was that my classes had become considerably less interactive. More creative layouts and small group cooperation were, de facto, impeded by the social distancing rules, as seating was fixed and students did not naturally communicate to one another given the distance and impossibility to comfortably share written notes. To preserve the efficacy of my classes, I had to rely on the virtual realm, which I used to solve individual doubts and to provide much more detailed feedback on students’ work, but this increased noticeably the time burden on my side.

During the second lockdown, all of my seminars happened online. My attempts to directly transpose the above-described signature pedagogies to the virtual realm proved unsatisfactory and frustrating. The efficacy of one-to-all explanations was strongly diminished by the lack of visual and physical cues from the students, which in the past I had found very helpful for gauging understanding and deciding whom to spur. I gave one-to-one support through private chats, sending screenshots instead of writing on copybooks, but it proved to be far less effective, as well as rather time consuming.

Major improvement happened through implementing an almost complete overhaul of the activities in class. I switched to a model based on small group cooperation and mutual support. After briefly introducing the intended outcome of the seminar, I divided students into groups, using the breakout room function afforded by Microsoft Teams. Each group was provided with a whiteboard that students could use for collaborating. I would visit each room for several minutes, just as I would normally move around desks, to ask students to express their doubts. Instead of providing direct help, though, I would encourage students to support each other after the doubts had been formalised. Finally, I would reunite the class to provide solutions to the exercises and make remarks based on what I had heard in the breakout rooms.

The small-group-based approach proved generally satisfactory, as measured by perceived participation and informal feedback provided by students. The most noticeable negative aspect raised by students was the fact that whiteboards in the breakout rooms would disappear once the breakout rooms were closed, so that any work they had not saved as I closed the rooms would be lost. This problem was easily solved by announcing closures in advance and taking screenshots. A major difference between breakout rooms and spontaneous group formation was that students would have less choice to cooperate with people they knew (as opposed to choosing one's companions by sitting next to them in a classroom). On rare occasions, this would create a group of shy students who would prefer not to collaborate, but this also meant a more equitable rearranging of groups in the long run, and I noticed a clear increase in collaboration as students got used to the system and got to know each other.

Another difference was that as a seminar tutor, I had much more control on group sizes, which I could tailor and adjust according to the activity. However, in practice, size was often dictated by the number of people in attendance and by practical limits on the number of groups I was able to satisfactorily supervise at the same time. In my case, I found four groups of up to six students to be the ideal size, after attempts with a larger number of smaller groups showed the impossibility of spending enough time in each virtual room and giving the students the time to formulate their questions without the fear of leaving other groups behind.

Reflection on the usage of physical and virtual space

Reaching awareness on one's usage of physical and virtual space and its impact on teaching is only helpful if such awareness is critically challenged and channelled towards practical improvements. As the Covid-19 outbreak continues to cast uncertainty on the

nature of seminars and labs in the next academic year, a natural question to ask myself is how I could implement the above reflections, observations, and research-based suggestions, should teaching take place, partially or totally, in the virtual realm.

I found it surprising that I, as a rather conservative seminar tutor, reacted much more positively to teaching virtual classes than to teaching face-to-face classes when social distancing constraints were imposed. The forced switch to virtual spaces meant that I had no choice but to familiarise myself with their features. Perhaps, more importantly, it provided a unique incentive to break my routinised practice, as experimentation became a strict necessity. I concluded that making use of small-group-focused teaching style and layouts, physical and virtual, is an entirely suitable option for Mathematical courses, even though I had never encountered them in my experience as a student.

Conclusion

The role of physical and virtual space in teaching and learning is vast and multifaceted, and research is only now beginning to unfold its full implications. Whether or not the Covid-19 pandemic will once again force universities to a complete or partial shift to online teaching and learning, this outbreak, having deprived us of a resource we so frequently give for granted, provides a priceless occasion to ponder and challenge the way we make use of it. Reflection and continuous professional development are necessary steps, but achieving best practice requires time and a certain dose of experimentation, and – inevitably – mistakes.

Making sure the students are made aware of the role that space, both physical and virtual, has played in their education and of the challenges teachers face because of the mutability of its affordances, is essential to have their full cooperation and achieve the best results. Shifting control from the teacher to the students may turn out to be a fruitful

experiment. After all, if physical spaces are designed and made meaningful via

negotiations and interaction, why should it be otherwise for virtual ones?

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FILLING THE VOID

A REFLECTION

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Lindy Rudd is a third year PhD student in English and Comparative Literary Studies. Her research highlights hidden forms of exclusion embedded in the GCSE English language syllabus and the mandatory resit policy of contemporary Further Education, by comparing similar marginalisation explicit in early modern elementary education. Lindy has been a seminar tutor for a year and also tutored as part of the National Tutoring Programme during the pandemic. Previously, she taught English at a city FE college. At home, her study overlooks a castle mound where Henry Bolingbroke, the antagonist from her favourite Shakespearean history play, lived as a child.

Abstract

This reflective piece records my experience of switching to online seminars during the pandemic with small groups of first year English literature undergraduates. I reflect on issues I experienced promoting student interaction in small group seminars and how professional development opportunities available through the Warwick Academic Development Centre helped with my use of technology and improving the level of engagement. I hope that it contains some ideas which may be useful starting points for PGRs looking to develop flipped or blended learning environments in the future. Perhaps it will also shed light on the way the current cohort of students reacted to online learning which may help in supporting them when returning to more traditional, or, more likely, hybrid pedagogies.

Keywords: digital learning, communication, interaction, engagement, social presence.

Filling the Void

I'm a qualified teacher in further and college higher education, so I have teaching experience, but Autumn 2020 was the first time I had taught in an "actual" university. I

was allocated two small groups of ten and twelve predominantly first years, but with some intermediate and Erasmus students. I expected to learn new skills, as the student demographic wasn't familiar to me, but I wasn't prepared for what was about to

happen! When my department announced that lectures and seminars would be moved online, I assumed it would be a simple matter of using existing teaching practices, but via video link. How wrong I was. Poor, naïve fool!

The first problem we encountered was getting access to reliable internet connections. I live in a rural area, and my bandwidth couldn't cope with running Microsoft Teams. Students on campus found that they had numerous problems with hardware, and the university's IT infrastructure initially seemed unprepared for the massive increase in online traffic. If students turned their cameras on their screens would freeze, the audio would periodically drop out so we could only hear one in every five words, multiple students would unmute their microphones at the same time and the only sound we could hear would be feedback, and I lost count of the number of times the 'unstable connection' message appeared, signalling a complete breakdown in communication. 'Teams' became a byword for calamity. My first attempt using breakout groups (in 'Channels' before the 'Rooms' function was enabled) took an awful lot of setting up but resulted in losing all the students into the ether mid-seminar. Hardly my finest hour. I felt that technology was preventing me from developing any meaningful engagement with the students.

IT issues were soon ironed out. Although it felt like forever at the time, this happened relatively quickly, and Teams constantly improved functionality. Come the start of the spring term, very few problems remained – but there was a new bogeyman: teaching into the void. By this time, cameras were never on, supposedly to save bandwidth, so I'd often find myself faced with a screen full of blank squares. I'd pose a question, then sit back and admire the tumbleweed rolling past, not knowing if the students were still there or if they'd got bored and nipped off for a coffee.

I found there was a real reluctance to communicate via spoken word using an online platform. Language is naturally a very sociable

medium of expression and of course we had all missed the social, face-to-face element. With cameras off and microphones muted, the very nature of online communication had altered teaching and learning completely. Speech became monologic; students didn't ask questions. There was no hedging, overlapping conversation, interruptions, gestures, facial expressions, or any of the cues and support mechanisms associated with spoken discourse. It became codified in another way – raising a Simpsons-like yellow paw to signal intent and then feeling the pressure to make an extended contribution -- and none of us were comfortable with how it worked. From the students' point of view, I worried that they were losing the opportunity to develop critical thinking skills and explore complex perspectives on subject material. Because they weren't responding to each other, I felt active learning strategies, typical of seminars, were being compromised. From my own point of view, I couldn't interpret subtle signals, such as when a student wanted to contribute but lacked the confidence to interject, or whether they dreaded being singled out. I rely heavily on a physical presence in a classroom for a constant flow of information, but I had no idea what was going on behind those blank screens. One student told me during a 'virtual' office hour, 'Some of the things you say are hilarious, but I can't turn my microphone on just to laugh. That would be so weird.' Thank goodness! I had even started to think my jokes were rubbish. Whereas in a face-to-face situation, the group supports each other's contributions with verbal and non-verbal cues, these communication tools were simply not there in the online environment. It resulted in a different form of speech that lacked the dynamism of spoken communication and was more akin to presentation. As a result, I was finding it very difficult to facilitate a meaningful exchange of ideas within the seminar sessions.

My initial response was to perceive the lack of interaction as a temporary problem that I needed to wait out rather than fix, caused by the inferior nature of teaching and learning in cyber-space. However, before the pandemic, I

had enrolled on the Warwick Academic Development Centre's APP PGR course. This too was moved online and became the biggest boon in developing new pedagogies to support student engagement. To start with, it gave me the chance to be an online student and understand first-hand how it felt to learn in a digital environment. Not only did I benefit from top-class tuition, introducing me to pedagogies I could use and experiment with, but I found having the support of my peers was invaluable. It helped me to realise that instead of waiting for everything to go back to normal, our challenge was responding to the unique nature of the pandemic to try and give the students the best experience of learning that we possibly could. Why should they settle for 'temporary' or 'inferior' now it was clear this wasn't a short-term problem? To realise that I wasn't the only one 'teaching into the void' made such a difference as my first thought had been 'is it something I'm doing wrong?' I found a network of people with a similar experience who I could talk to and who were as committed as I was to solve the issue of engagement we were facing.

On one fortuitous occasion, I was signposted to the Moodle course 'Teaching for Learning Online for PGR Teachers' and the part I found particularly interesting was 'The Role of the Tutor'. It all started to make sense when I read this, that in effect, I'd neglected my 'social presence' because I was at much at sea as the undergraduates without face-to-face contact. Anthony McMullen describes how vital a teacher's physical presence is to facilitating student interaction and in a digital space there needs to be a similar 'humanizing' element (**McMullen et al. 2020: 42**). In a physical space, I'd talk to students and offer encouragement, so why not virtually? I quickly pinged off an email reminding them of my availability, where to find information, and saying:

You've worked so hard to get this far under difficult circumstances. Just think back to the start of the year, how overwhelming everything was, and now you can discuss the epic genre so knowledgeably AND we can all make

Teams work! I'm really looking forward to reading what you have to say about the texts. You've got this.

This doesn't seem like much, but I'd genuinely overlooked how much the simple things count towards building a relationship with students, even in an online environment. I had a couple of responses almost immediately. One student wrote, 'Thank you so much for giving me a bit of optimism amidst all this.' As Jean Kidd and Warren Murray from the University of East London so perfectly summarise: 'It is by applying old values to new spatialities that educators maintain meaningful and just practices, innovating into new and professionally rich disembodied spaces' (**Kidd & Murray 2020: 554**). I was reminded that old values remain important, even if old methods did not.

My approach then focussed on managing those 'disembodied spaces'. According to a 2020 study at Xavier University, Ohio, lack of interaction is often the key component preventing engagement in an online teaching environment (**Wu & Jin 2020: 153**). If students weren't going to talk to me, I had to find another way to interact and so I set about extending my personal 'toolkit' of digital learning tools. I used Vevox for quizzes to introduce an element of gamification (also very useful as a diagnostic assessment tool), Padlet for asynchronous tasks and online discussion, and Nearpod for starter activities and discussion via the 'collaborate board'. Padlet and Nearpod were useful to pose a range of question types, from those requiring narrowly defined responses to more divergent questions. Interestingly, when I invited students to respond via these platforms, every single one of them participated. This was a very different experience to the silence I encountered when relying on them to volunteer verbally. I particularly liked Nearpod as I could set it as a student-paced lesson after the seminar so any who had missed the session could go through the activities independently. Even if they hadn't been involved in the seminar discussion, it was a simple matter to add extra content to make it a standalone resource, and the others could

revisit the material to consolidate their learning. The level of student interaction via these platforms confirmed that I needed to stop trying to solve a problem with spoken communication online and instead reframe the issue. Although in my mind's eye the exemplar of interactive learning included a belief in the primacy of speech for the seminar environment, I had to admit that maybe it was no longer relevant to an online environment.

In term 2, I tasked small groups with leading the seminars. I hoped that handing them the reins would create a bit of social cohesion as well as honing subject-related skills. However, it wasn't quite the success I had hoped for in terms of encouraging more interaction. I thought the students might support each other by increasing the level of verbal contribution during the sessions, as beforehand they had cited 'teaching into the void' as the "worst" thing that could happen. However, they didn't seem to have developed the level of cohesion where they felt responsibility towards each other, and each group met a wall of silence from their peers (and I admit I felt the tiniest touch of *schadenfreude*). In addition, I viewed my students as 'digital natives' and myself, being older, as a 'digital immigrant' and so it was something of a surprise to learn that they were as unfamiliar with learning technologies as I had been at the start of the pandemic and didn't pick them up intuitively. I just assumed they would already be skilled with using similar interfaces. I had to guide them through things like enabling video sound, sharing apps, and setting up breakout spaces. I think one big difference was that, inspired by my experience of APP PGR, I set out to learn how to use these new technologies as a focus of my professional development during, and because of, the pandemic, whereas the students didn't expect 'using educational

apps' to suddenly appear on their reading list. They did, though, get to work with some new learning technologies which, I hope, gave them opportunities to develop wider skills outside of taught content. I feel this could be more important than ever in the future with more people working remotely, and more meetings conducted using video technology.

So, as we return to more traditional pedagogies, what am I going to take away from the experience of the last academic year? Certainly the time I invested in mastering new learning technologies was worthwhile and I will be making more use of digital platforms in the future for asynchronous tasks. One student's end-of-year reflection described the seminars as 'fun, never boring and way more styles of teaching than other modules' which seems like a thumbs-up, albeit a yellow, virtual thumb. Students seemed comfortable with digital learning platforms as a low-risk medium for contributing their ideas, and those contributions can act as a scaffold for higher risk, real-time critical thinking during the seminar. I will also remember that being a digital native does not automatically mean breadth of use and so I will offer support to my students in the future in the use of any new technologies that I use. I'm still thinking about how to improve teamwork and cohesion in the online environment because I don't think I came anywhere near to solving that issue. It might just get better by itself when face-to-face teaching is reinstated but that doesn't mean it will stop being important: blended learning is here to stay. Finally, I will continue to surround myself with people who want to keep learning about teaching, however much they already know, however much experience they have. I could never have made it through this past year without them.

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PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING IN A VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT

A Critical Reflection on Teaching Business Law

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Joy's doctoral thesis draws legal insights from information systems and behavioural economics research to investigate how consumer adoption of e-commerce can be promoted in developing economies. Her teaching and research interests broadly cover the law relating to contract, commercial and consumer transactions, and their intersection with information technology. She is also interested in business management strategies, particularly, on the challenges and legal implications of conducting international businesses. Joy is an Associate Fellow of the Higher Education Academy.

Abstract

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted teaching and learning in higher education institutions, presenting novel challenges for both staff and students alike. These challenges have had an immense impact in the way postgraduate research (PGR) teachers perform their dual responsibilities as both students and teachers. Achieving a seamless transition from in-person to virtual learning was an arduous task. To this end, pedagogies evolved to accommodate the use of remote conferencing, video capture and other real time communication tools that facilitate virtual collaboration between staff and students. In this paper, I highlight the challenges of integrating online learning with a problem-based learning (PBL), a signature pedagogy employed by law and business schools. I draw on my personal experiences as a student and PGR teacher during the pandemic, and suggest proactive mitigation responses.

Keywords: Problem-based Learning (PBL), COVID-19 pandemic, Technology, PGR teachers, Virtual learning, Higher education institutions

Introduction

The unprecedented impact of COVID-19 pandemic on teaching and learning in higher education institutions in the United Kingdom (UK) cannot be over-emphasised. In March 2020, the UK was plunged into a nationwide lockdown, which meant that the delivery of seminars for business law undergraduate students at Warwick was promptly moved to Microsoft Teams and Blackboards, as virtual learning environments. This required me to effectively adapt my teaching practices to align with the unique nature of these virtual environments. This paradigm shift in learning further necessitated the broadening of my teaching skillsets, reinforcing the need to acquire more enhanced knowledge of effective delivery methods.

Although I painstakingly attempted to use available information and communication technology (ICT) tools to try and achieve the same outcome as if my seminars were conducted in traditional classrooms, adjusting to this new normal was challenging. Palatable as the use of these ICT tool were, they could not replicate the same engaging, intellectually stimulating and highly motivational environment often experienced when conducting face-to-face seminars. This underscores the importance of pedagogical innovation and raises further questions on how existing teaching methods can be seamlessly integrated with current and emerging digital platforms, presently used as virtual learning environments by higher education institutions.

As a PGR teacher in business law, I predominantly employed the problem-based learning (PBL) in my seminars: a student centric pedagogy that exposes students to the legal implications of conducting international businesses using hypothetical and realistic problem case scenarios (**Bumblauskas and Vyas, 2021: 148**). These scenarios are designed to engage students in instructional activities, stimulate discussions and solve contemporary legal problems posed by those

cases (**Kaur and Singh, 2021: 141-42**). The objective is to demonstrate their practical application in the real-world business terrain. Having already taught for two years prior to the pandemic, my third teaching year coincided with the period of transition to virtual learning. This exposed me first-hand, to the adverse implications of the disruptions triggered by COVID-19. In the same vein, since business law requires some form of collaborative interdisciplinary teaching, this experience has positively altered my perception of pedagogy by broadening my knowledge and understanding of the online teaching and learning process.

In this paper, I predominantly draw upon my experiences as a PGR teacher, and in part, as a student, to reflect upon the general impact of COVID-19 on online seminars delivered using the PBL method of teaching. I discuss the challenges faced during delivery and explain how these obstacles were curtailed to help fulfil the learning objectives for the seminar. Firstly, I present a general overview of the PBL method. Secondly, I describe the PBL process as it relates to my teaching business law in a traditional classroom setting. Thirdly, I adapt the same discussion to the online environment, highlighting the stark difference of outcomes when PBL is replicated online. Finally, I conclude by interrogating the future of online education in the context of PBL.

Overview of Problem-Based Learning (PBL)

PBL incorporates an aspect of case-based learning where problem scenarios are developed and used in training students to apply their legal knowledge to the facts of a given case (**Mao et al, 2020: 836**). This method of teaching has particularly proven to improve students' practical legal skills in higher education institutions (**Kurtz, Wylie and Gold, 1990**). PBL is also credited with simplifying the teaching of complex legal principles (**Mao et al, 2020**)

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In PBL, problem scenarios are usually solved in small groups and the process guided by a facilitator who ensures that worked solutions to problems are tailored to specific learning objectives (**Rhodes, 1999: 410**). Without a facilitator, the PBL approach could fail because students in their group discussion, may deviate from the set objectives for which the problem case scenario was developed (**Maudsley 1999**). This reinforces the role of PGR teachers as facilitators of knowledge and their responsibility towards ensuring that the integration of this pedagogic approach within the online learning space helps fulfil the desired learning outcomes.

PBL is generally known to be a successful pedagogic practice for two major reasons. First, PBL not only helps students develop competence in their specific area of study, but it also boosts their problem-solving skills (**Rhodes, 1999**). These objectives include, but are not limited to achieving productive collaboration in teams, demonstrating creative and critical thinking, acknowledging alternative viewpoints, communicating effectively, making reasoned decisions in complex unfamiliar situations, and engaging in self-evaluation and self-directed learning (**Engel, 1997**). Second, PBL incorporates other forms of cognitive learning processes such as cumulative learning, active learning, and integrated learning (**Rhodes, 1999**). Research further finds that students are more likely to retain acquired knowledge and learn better at a higher conceptual level through PBL (**Hung, Jonassen and Liu, 2008: 489-92**).

The Traditional Learning Process

At the University, third-year law and business students are usually divided into six small syndicate groups of at least five students. All groups are presented with weekly problem questions in advance of each seminar. They are expected to first outline possible issues that can be raised for determination from the case scenario to then identifying the relevant business frameworks and rules of law that can be applied to that problem scenario.

Thereafter, they are required to apply the identified frameworks and rules to addressing the initial issues raised. In solving the problem questions, students are encouraged to collaborate with one another and to actively engage with their lecture materials prior to the seminars. The aim is to exhaustively process the problem question, collectively identify legal issues and develop questions or ideas for further independent research (**King, 2021: 207**).

During the weekly in-person seminars, each group presents their findings to the class using software such as Prezi or Microsoft PowerPoint, specifically explaining how they applied the law and business frameworks to the facts of the case. This presents further opportunity for students from other groups to either ask questions or make insightful contributions to the presentation. I facilitate this highly interactive process by guiding the question-and-answer sessions, clarifying areas of ambiguities, and providing personal feedback where necessary. However, when providing feedback, I tend to avoid suggesting that specific answers to questions are right. Rather, I nudge students towards more ideal responses, recommending additional and readily available electronic resources that they could engage with to further develop their research skills. Through this process, the substantive knowledge gained from research are reinforced and students become better equipped at analysing and applying rules of law to concrete situations.

The PBL approach requires some form of independent research, through which students gain legal and commercial knowledge, and by exploring and proposing solutions to complex legal problems develop their cognitive abilities (**Grimes, 2014**). While the PBL approach may initially appear particularly tasking for students, by exploring a wide range of useful resources independent of their tutor, students become self-taught. Furthermore, since students may acquire knowledge from different academic resources whose authors share distinct but complementary ideas, I always reiterate that there is no right or wrong answer to the

problem scenarios. Rather, what matters is how students are able to crack the problem questions and apply the relevant rules of law or business frameworks to solving the case. Adopting this learning tactic not only improves students' confidence in the quality of their independent research, but also encourages them to be forthcoming with their ideas. Facilitating the development of this skill set as a PGR teacher has equally helped me gain more conviction in my ability to apply functioning knowledge of abstract legal principles and business frameworks to factual or hypothetical situations.

PBL and Online Learning

Technologies like Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Google Hangout, Adobe Connect, GoToMeeting and WebEx, and similar real time communication applications already have PBL-ready environments designed in the form of breakout rooms. Their use as virtual learning spaces is expected to stimulate learning, enhance team collaboration, improve student engagement, facilitate the fulfilment of learning objectives, and improve the overall student learning experience. Whether these objectives are fulfilled in the context of PBL is, nevertheless, questionable.

Adapting the traditional PBL process to the online environment to yield the same engaging and thought-provoking sessions within an allotted weekly one-hour synchronous seminar proved quite challenging. In my first seminar, I instantly noticed that there was a significant reduction in the number of students who participated in the interactive question and answer sessions. It felt as though most students were either unprepared for the seminar or were just not as enthusiastic as they were in the pre-COVID period. Although each syndicate group was given ten minutes to discuss the problem scenario in their Teams' break out rooms, the aim of collaboration was defeated as some students felt disconnected from others as though they were artificially separated from their group members.

I arrived at this conclusion by drawing on my own personal experiences as a PhD student who often attended webinars facilitated by group discussions at the start of the pandemic. At the time, found that I could not collaborate effectively with colleagues with whom I initially had less face-to-face interaction with. Adapting my experience to undergraduate teaching made me understand better the challenges faced by students during this period. More importantly, I realised that reduced engagement in seminars may have been worsened by the reality that students could not meet in person within their groups. Subsequent online group presentations were also dominated by an active few. This reduced collaboration meant that some students became less confident in the quality of their research and the associated solutions provided for the problem scenarios. This contrasts to the face-to-face seminars convened prior to the COVID-19. Ultimately, the once interactive PBL seminars subsequently appeared more like attending a virtual 'ceremony' with cameras shut and microphones muted; the implication being that the invaluable skillset which the PBL promotes for students became less attainable.

It, therefore, became necessary for me to re-access my teaching practice. As research shows that students are more visually engaged through technology-enhanced learning (**Passey 2013: 33-47; Daniela 2019**), I began using an interactive software called Vevox to help stimulate responsive learning. To effectively integrate this application to my teaching, I prepared short open-ended diagnostic questions that related to the problem scenario ahead of each online seminar. After presentation of findings by all syndicate groups, I allotted ten minutes to the question-and-answer session within which students are encouraged to anonymously answer the diagnostic questions. This created a buzz around the problem question as I noticed a remarkable increase in participation. Students were, perhaps, further motivated to participate since their responses were anonymous and they were no longer

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perturbed about the quality of their answers. This approach was, nevertheless, unsustainable due to bandwidth and connectivity issues, which on some occasions, prevented the software from functioning effectively within the Teams and Blackboard learning spaces.

When faced with this challenge, I resorted to asking leading questions around the problem scenario with the aim of guiding students into looking at specific areas of the case deemed very critical to their understanding of the subject matter. I encouraged students to either use the 'chat' function on Teams and Blackboards to respond to the questions, or to tap the 'raise your hand' tool bar on both learning applications, if they wanted to orally respond to the questions. Most students who responded made use of the 'chat' bar. Although this approach proved less effective in eliciting a similar level of participation compared to face-to-face seminars, those questions were formulated to ensure students achieved the set learning objectives.

To augment the learning process, I further drew upon my personal experience as a PhD student who predominantly applied the doctrinal methodology in interrogating the workability of existing legal rules, and how those rules apply in contemporary legal practice. As the validity of the submissions made in my thesis depended on the effective use of analytical and critical thinking skills already shaped by the PBL approach, I felt that sharing my experience would help students appreciate better, the long-term benefits and purpose of PBL. Sharing my experiences not only improved my confidence in delivering the seminars, but it also felt particularly rewarding hearing students engage more with the discussion. As third year students whose undergraduate studies were near completion, it was necessary for the students to understand how certain skills can be applied beyond the university environment. Thus, seeing students ask further questions about their legal and academic careers as it relates to the essence of PBL, was a fulfilling experience for me.

To summarise, PBL generally presents a case for providing a creative approach to teaching which promotes higher level thinking, and actively involves students in the learning process. The total transfer of this learning process to a virtual environment and the subsequent challenges encountered in my teaching suggests that PBL is more suited to in-person teaching than remote learning. However, the impact of COVID-19 on teaching and learning raises more implications for future practice in higher education institutions as it espouses the need to for existing pedagogies to evolve to ensure that their application by staff and students will help mitigate the adverse realities associated with online learning.

Concluding Remarks

This reflective piece has considered the significant impact of COVID-19 to my teaching practice, especially as it relates to the application of the PBL process to seminars. I drew upon my experience both as a student and a PGR teacher to reflect upon the delivery of online seminars within the context of PBL where collaboration is critical. I also demonstrated the effectiveness of face-to-face learning and the challenges that come with replicating signature pedagogies in the online environment, subsequently highlighting the tactics I employed to overcome those challenges.

A recurrent theme in this paper is the valuable skillset for potential business lawyers which can be enhanced where PBL approach is effectively applied in seminars. Highlighting how such skills may have been dissipated when learning was moved online during the pandemic underscores the need to thoughtfully improve the adaptation of existing pedagogies to align with the practicalities associated with remote learning.

COVID-19 will in the interim continue to alter teaching and learning in higher education institutions. Although restrictions are steadily

being lifted globally, the pandemic raises questions around the future of legal education, especially where PBL is employed. It further demonstrates the need for PGR teachers and teachers in higher education more broadly to become less heavily dependent on face-to-face learning and acclimatise to the realities that come with online learning. Additionally, the need for PGR teachers to adapt their style of teaching to become more flexible and

responsive to challenging learning environments cannot be overemphasised. Therefore, it is recommended that the adoption of a hybrid approach which improves pedagogic practice both traditionally and within the online environment, will be positively rewarding for PGR teachers and students alike, further arming them to face whatever challenges might arise in the future of higher education.

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THERE'S NO 'I' IN TEAMS

Creating community in the (online) classroom



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Abstract

This short reflection is about community-building in the classroom. It draws on personal experiences of Microsoft Teams from the last twelve months or so, and makes some suggestions for why community-building doesn't always work as well as desired. I don't propose hard-and-fast rules or specific 'do's' and 'dont's' but, hopefully, some light food-for-thought and reassurance for tutors who've been suffering connection issues whilst teaching online.

Keywords: community; choice; remote learning; Microsoft Teams; Warwick University

There's No 'I' in Teams

I have community on the brain. This is hardly surprising as I wrap up an 80,000 word thesis the main theme of which is community. It's also a concept which has been much-evoked

during the Covid-19 pandemic, especially in Britain's spring 2020 lockdown when the 'clap for carers' and the mushrooming of neighbourhood support groups were seen to revive old notions of community spirit (Marr, 2020). It has also been a recurring concern as academia and education have grappled

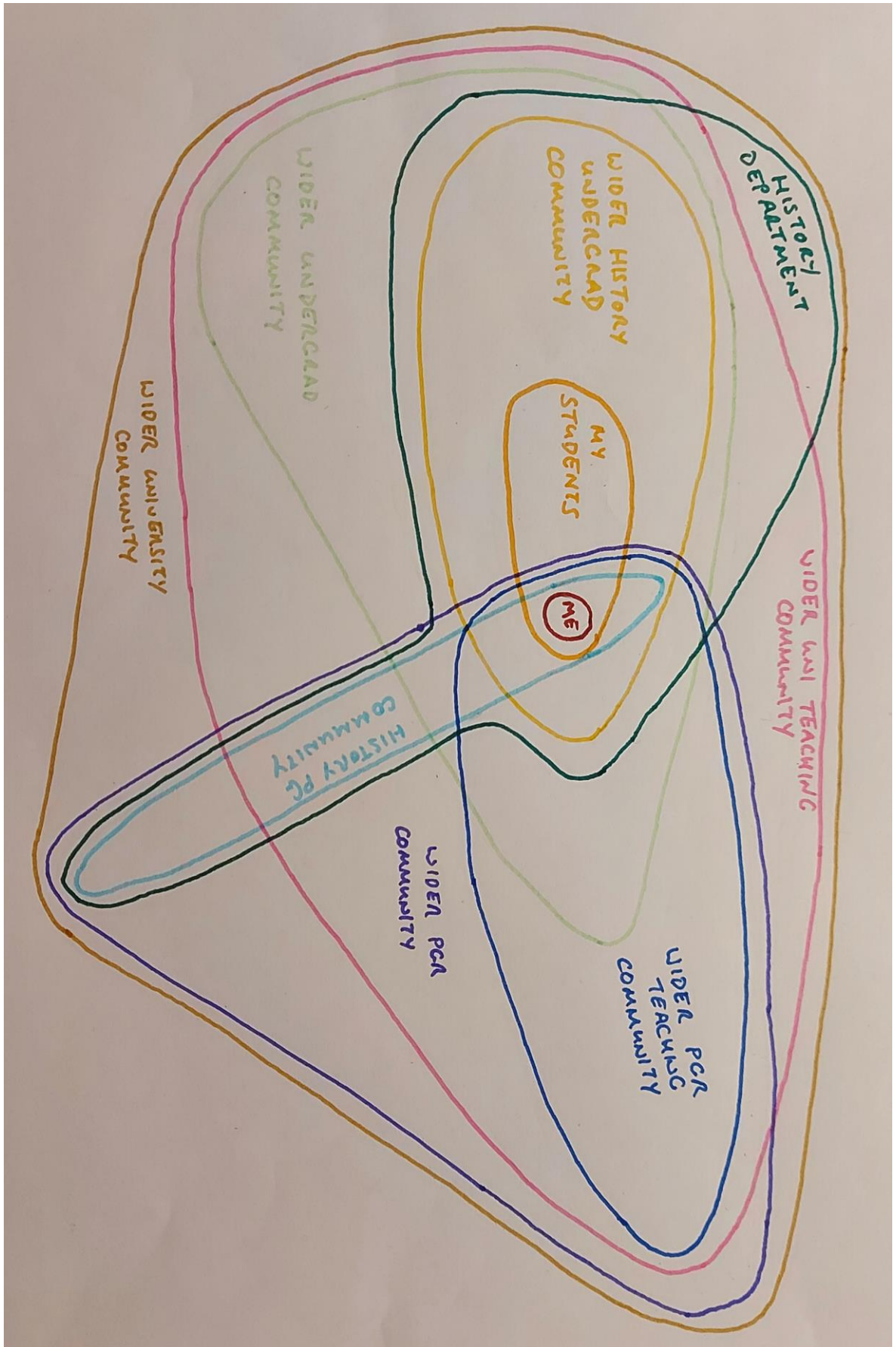


Fig.1. The over-lapping communities at a university (drawn by the author).

with the challenges of remote learning (**Batty & Hall, 2020**) – specifically, the challenge of how to create and ensure community in the online classroom.

I never worried about ‘creating community’ pre-pandemic: milling around the corridor before class, seeing people in the flesh, chatting to stragglers on the way out, bumping into people in the coffee shop... community just seemed to happen. Working with students and with PGRs and staff who love teaching is my favourite aspect of my PhD, I love being part of that community. And when I stop to think about it, that community was not just some random groups of students and a handful of colleagues but multiple, complex, over-lapping communities (**Figure 1**).

Belonging to a community doesn’t mean your sense of attachment (or even your awareness of it) is consistent. For instance, your sense of community with your students is likely to be stronger within the classroom during the timetabled session than outside of it. But the time in the classroom is a point of attachment or connection that you draw on if you run into them in the corridor or the cafe. Likewise, you may only be faintly aware of PGR tutors in other departments unless you choose to follow an interdisciplinary training course like APP PGR – but the shared experiences and status as a PGR tutor give you a point of attachment or connection to your coursemates and offer potential bases for community formation.

Take all these away and stick a computer screen and miles of not-always-well-behaved internet between everyone, and it’s easy to start missing the connection of these communities you quite possibly – as I did – took for granted. As a tutor, you still meet your students each week for an online class but it’s not the same. You can’t oblige cameras to be on (for various reasons, including but not limited to: connection and camera quality issues, students’ personal preferences, a student not wanting you to see where they are working from) so you often don’t get to see

them; I’m not sure how many of my students from this year I would recognise unless they shouted me from behind. You lose seeing them arrive and leave: who’s always early or late, who can’t wait to leave and who’s hanging on your every word, who sits with who... During the class, you lose the visual cues and reactions which often tell you more than their verbal answers about what they think of the class, of each other, of you... (**Naughton, 2020**). All these little quirks that help you and the students get to know one another, the imperceptible shared experiences which create a sense of belonging, togetherness – community – in the classroom, are very hard to replicate online.

One reason it’s hard is because it’s less natural online. Consciously or unconsciously missing our in-person communities, desirous to give our students a good teaching experience and a sense of belonging despite the distance, we’ve been trying to forge – force – a tangible version of something that was in many ways intangible. Based on my experiences this year judging the Warwick Awards for Teaching Excellence (WATE), it is possible to forge community online. For some tutors, having to think on their feet has unleashed a creative side they may have been less inclined to explore if community had kept just happening (**Warwick University, 2020**). Chapeau to those tutors because, from my experiences with my seminar group, it isn’t easy.

I’m a History PhD candidate so I teach History. This year I was teaching Britain in the Twentieth Century, one of several seminar tutors working under a module convenor who set the syllabus (lectures, readings, essay questions, etc.). Teaching was initially going to be one-week-in-person-one-week-remote but quickly became entirely online. At Warwick, online teaching takes place on Microsoft Teams.

Teams wasn’t new to me at the start of the academic year. I’d used it the previous summer term in my role as Project Officer for

the student-led research project 'Then & Now: Arts at Warwick'. In addition to Teams' basic functionalities, I'd seen its potential as a collaborative workspace capable of sustaining a sense of community amongst students, particularly in small groups. The community aspect of Then & Now's pivot online was mentioned in multiple participants' reflections on the project. I'd also seen Teams' drawbacks, including the general unfamiliarity with it, technical issues linked to internet speeds or audio and camera quality, and accessibility issues due to the different settings in which people found themselves working from 'home' (Woods & Botcherby, 2021).

With these experiences in mind, I wanted to ensure a sense of community amongst my seminar students. I felt this was particularly important as mine were first years who, due to social distancing restrictions, may not have met many people at the university – or may not even have bothered moving to the campus (Conlon, Halterbeck, & Williams, 2020). I employed various community-building tactics, which I deliberately kept simple. All were situated within Teams itself, rather than requiring other platforms which may have exacerbated existing accessibility or technical issues:

- Before the first seminar, I invited the students to introduce themselves by posting to the Teams channel. I asked them to say where they were from, why they chose the module, and suggest events/people/themes they thought would be particularly significant. This worked quite well, with 12 of 16 students engaging, and gave me a sense of who I had 'in front' of me (MS Teams, 2021).
- Each week, I posted the seminar questions and readings in the group's Teams channel. Students were asked to comment with a question based on the week's pre-recorded lecture or readings and a comment about something

they'd found interesting. In Term 1 this worked well, with 10 or 11 students replying each week; in Term 2 the figure was more like 7, with one week, coinciding with a coursework deadline, seeing only 3 (Microsoft Teams, 2021). This allowed students to contribute without speaking in front of the class, and enabled me to structure the seminar around what they needed or wanted. However, not all students contributed – some never did – and, despite my encouragement, students rarely interacted with one another's posts even when raising similar issues or themes. What I'd hoped would mimic a social media thread (albeit without the attendant vitriol!) was mostly a series of individual contributions.

- I also encouraged students to use Teams to post spontaneously about anything course-related they came across (books, films, TV series...) to encourage informal interactions in between classes and uncover mutual interests. Unfortunately, despite being a module not lacking in relevant popular culture, students only rarely posted and even when I tried to kick-start something it had little impact.
- When teaching in person, I regularly use small-group activities so I created sub-channels to recreate the small-group feel. I opted for sub-channels over breakout rooms because some Teams users cannot access breakout rooms, and I wanted the small groups to have a permanent space (the sub-channel 'Files' tab) to store their work. When used in class for small-group discussions or activities, these worked well – dropping in and out of their calls at random, discussions were usually vigorous and provided extra material I could use with the whole class. I also tried using these sub-channels to facilitate group-based seminar preparation. Although the groups

produced good work, for instance short presentations the slides from which could be retained in the Files tab for future reference, students commented in feedback at the end of Term 1 that this asynchronous preparation was onerous time-wise (on top of watching lectures and doing the readings) and that they struggled to find convenient times to schedule it, so I stopped **(History Department, 2020a)**.

One explanation as to why my community creation was less successful than those I judged for WATE might just be that I'm not as good a tutor as they are, not as good as I think I am, not as good as I think my students think I am. I can't be the only tutor to have spent a lot of time this last year wondering if I've lost my touch?

Another is the students. Look at my different experiences with Then & Now and my students this year. The Then & Now participants, further advanced in their studies and more firmly integrated into the university community/communities, had met one another in person during the pre-pandemic phase of the project so had formed the basis of a community prior to the shift online. My seminar students, by contrast, were incoming first years who had possibly never met in person and were getting to grips with university life and learning amidst constantly changing rules and, with term barely underway, a new lockdown.

Putting my thesis hat – pretty tattered after nearly four years – back on, it could also be that artificial or forced community doesn't really work. There's a degree to which community formation – of any kind – relies on people buying into the idea. Scholars of nationalism talk about there being far more potential nations than actual nations because, unless enough people jump on the national bandwagon, it won't go anywhere. E.P. Thompson's seminal definition of social class hangs on a similar requirement of shared experiences and interests:

class happens when some men [sic], as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men [sic] whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs (Thompson, 1966)

In my experiences, good online community has formed when the people involved genuinely buy into it, when the community being formed is a community of *choice* rather than necessity **(Lawrence, 2019)**. This isn't to say community can't be forged in necessity – history (including Covid-19) shows quite the opposite – but it still requires people to buy into it. Recent sociology suggests we increasingly prefer our communities chosen not given – and when we genuinely want to be part of something, we're more likely to buy into it **(Spencer & Pahl, 2006; Savage, 2010)**. The Then & Now project, the Student Research Portfolio I've been managing as Arts Faculty Student Experience Intern, and this Warwick Postgraduate Teaching Community are all extra-curricular initiatives, participated in by choice, by people with a predisposition towards the idea, and with a flexibility and freedom to participate as much or as little as they want. Timetabled seminars, by contrast, are more communities of circumstance or necessity.

So, should we forget about using Teams to create community? No! A blended or hybrid model of learning, with larger classes such as lectures conducted remotely and smaller ones like seminars or tutorials in person, will be in place for the foreseeable. This means community-building can once again start more naturally through in-person sessions, rather than being forced from scratch, somewhat mitigating the chosen-versus-given conflict. If students feel belonging and togetherness in-person, platforms like Teams should prove able (as with Then & Now) to build on these intangible bases. Teams can be a one-stop shop for storing class materials, contacting students and conducting 'office hours' more informally,

posting queries and questions about class prep/coursework, undertaking asynchronous group activities, hosting Moodle spaces and Padlets and more... It could even allow students (or tutors!) unable to attend in person to follow/lead an in-person class remotely, a hybrid approach proposed by Warwick's History department for research seminars, and increasingly seen with academic conferences

(History Department, 2020b).ⁱ This will hopefully extend and reinforce the sense of community generated within the classroom beyond the timetabled session. There's no 'I' in Teams, but there is one in community and, whatever the shortcomings of my own efforts this year, that is clearly the best place for it.

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ⁱ An example of an academic conference taking this hybrid approach is the 2021 European Labour History Network and Worlds of Related Coercions in Work joint conference, with roughly 1/3 of the 300 participants on site and 2/3 remote.

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ONLINE TEACHING AND DIGITAL INEQUALITIES

A Reflection on the Practical Challenges in Teaching Logic Seminars in an Online Setting

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Abstract

In this brief piece, I look back at the experience of teaching logic seminars in a fully online setting during the past winter, reasoning on the strategies I adopted to adapt to the situation and to mitigate difficulties emerging from digital inequalities. I highlight how, in some cases, overcoming practical difficulties generated by the online environment led to unexpected positive outcomes and how, in others, the issues persistently affected the students' experience in a way that was difficult to attenuate.

Keywords: Online Seminar; Online Teaching; New Forms of Inequalities

Online Teaching and Digital Inequalities

With the introduction of online teaching and learning, a new type of inequality based on the possibility to access digital content emerged. In their editorial to the second issue of *Learning, Media and Technology* Williamson, Eynon and Potter (2020), identified several pre-conditions for online teaching and learning: the material availability of technological devices and their appropriateness for the intended goal, and the possession of effective digital skills. These capacities, they argue, cannot be taken for granted in our students. They are, in fact, a basis that creates an unequal distribution of learning opportunities.

While teaching online logic seminars to first year students in the Department of Philosophy at Warwick this past winter, during the third national lockdown, I realised how much my teaching practice relied on the availability to my students of specific tools and skills.

With the intention to fight the sense of isolation that many students were experiencing and to create a supportive and collaborative learning environment, I tried to promote peer-to-peer interactions and engage students in discussions at various levels. Thus, I employed in my practice general discussions, small group work, and pairs activities.

Also, the nature of the discipline I was teaching (logic) required my students to engage with the exercises and be actively involved in the seminars to develop and acquire new skills. For me, besides marking their asynchronous homework, it was essential to be able to supervise their efforts in real time and provide them feedback on their work during the seminar.

Thus, after a brief recap of the weekly topics, I used to open my seminar in Microsoft Teams asking my students to complete, under my guidance, some initial exercises in a class discussion employing the screen share function. I then used to dedicate some time to revisit together some challenging exercises that I previously identified while marking pre-submitted homework. Finally, employing the breakout room function on Teams, I asked my students to collaborate in small groups or pairs to complete some sections of a worksheet that I previously made available in the file space. They could interact synchronously, giving me the chance to supervise their progress in real time. At the end of the seminar, we re-joined the main call, and I usually asked the groups to share some demonstrations, thoughts or reflections related to the exercises. I made sure to create time and space to allow them to ask questions and provide comments and feedbacks on exercises, practices, and topics we were considering.

However, these kinds of activities, that imply various forms of communication and interaction in a digital environment and the opportunity to write on an online file, are based on the opportunity to 1) use a laptop with a working microphone and camera; 2) have access to a rapid internet connection that allows fluid dialogue; 3) in the specific case of my seminars on logic, the ability to gain the most from the “file” session in Teams that allows synchronous interaction on a digital written worksheet.

Temporary connection issues, old or inappropriate devices (e.g. some types of phones), unexpected updates of programmes and platforms, and other circumstances clearly affected the delivery and enjoyability of the seminars over the term. This made it necessary for me to think about alternative ways to provide support to my students and navigate the online environment.

In practical terms, the main problems I faced were related to slow internet connections, that did not allow some of my students to interact with others (and/or me) and take exercises in real time, or issues with certain versions of apps and devices that did not allow them to use specific functions. To tackle the first kind of problem, I started using channels and functions that required less data from the internet and so enabled students to communicate anyway. For example, I made ample use of the chat function that usually works even with poor internet connections, or, in other cases, I sent communications through email. In the case of temporary unavailability of the internet connection, I also planned some catch-up meetings during my office hours with single students who experienced the problem. When people could not access the space with the worksheet of weekly exercises, I sent it, in different cases before and/or during the seminars, through email. In the cases of the malfunctioning of the breakout room function that isolated some individuals from others, I often re-employed the space of the general call creating there a small group of peers.

I found collaboration with the students essential to understanding the type of problems they were experiencing and consequently find an effective way to overcome it. I also noticed that working through a practical problem generated by technological issues on a case-by-case basis allowed me to communicate more directly with single students and, consequently, probably made me sound more human and less intimidating. This mitigated the pressure that students perceived in interacting in the general discussion and with me. Indeed, when the IT issue they were experiencing was just temporary and we managed to overcome it, I noticed that some of them felt more confident and more willing to share comments and solutions when they were able to re-connect with others. So, the aspects that initially suffered more for the digital problem – the

human interaction and the opportunity to contribute with their own perspective inside the session – sounded usually enhanced when the difficult circumstance was overcome. A more active participation allowed these students to both receive more feedback and support in their learning journeys, and, also, contributed to creating a more diverse and welcoming environment in the seminars.

Unfortunately, not all the difficulties were temporary: not all internet connections got better and not all devices could be replaced. In cases where problems were persistent, the most disrupted element was the opportunity to interact in real time with me and peers. In moments when isolation and feelings of loneliness were impacting on young people's mental health in a deep way, it was difficult for me to feel reassured at the idea that I had done all that I could to help them. Not being able to have a live chat on any of the elements of the module with fellow classmates or to take any exercises together with a tutor did not seem the ideal learning scenario, even when students were able to submit exercises or comments in the chat, through email or on a different website. This also affected the dynamics of the groups and the richness of the exchanges of thoughts inside the seminars that lost contributions from different voices and perspectives.

Some students also experienced difficulties in registering in and using the software (Zoxiy) used in my department for asynchronous tasks in logic. In the great majority of cases, furnishing them some further guidance with some screenshots about where to click and what to insert in some boxes was enough to make the tool available for their use. I also left different copies of the weekly worksheet in the file section of their Teams channel to allow them to engage with some exercises in case of further problems with the website. From my point of view, the use of different platforms with different

functions and modalities of interaction sounded like an efficient method to reach different learning goals. However, I noticed that some students gave up on the use of the additional software for the exercises and found managing more than one online space (Teams, Moodle, Zoxiy, etc.) confusing for their studies. For these reasons, in addition to the problems generated by devices and connections, I did not feel confident in introducing the use of other platforms and experimenting more in the employment of technologies in my teaching practice. The fear of both creating another barrier where circumstances and times already proposed challenges, and disadvantaging individuals that already encountered major difficulties, prevented me in diversifying activities and

employing other resources that I hope to try in future.

The impossibility of acting directly on the source of the problem by providing everyone the same IT resources and familiarity with them forced me as a seminar teacher to think about alternative solutions. I could get creative (in a way limited by the online data loading and devices' functions) and discover some new ways of reaching, more or less, the same pedagogical goals, and maybe, in some cases, also end up with positive unexpected outcomes. Still there were circumstances that were not completely fixable and days when I wish I could do more to mitigate certain disparities and allow all my students to get the same enjoyable experience of learning together.

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3 MINUTES: FROM ZERO TO HERO

Reimagining poster sessions for the digital domain

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Daniela has greatly enjoyed post-graduate teaching responsibilities; she was awarded AFHEA status in September 2020. Daniela was Lead Demonstrator for the final year Biomedical Science laboratory during October 2020, where she worked with Senior Teaching Fellows to redesign the iconic class to produce a well-received Covid-secure, accessible class for all students.

Abstract

A reflection on the trial of three-minute student showreel video presentations, in place of a virtual rendition of a traditional academic poster session, in an interdisciplinary conference held online during the Covid-19 pandemic. I revisit the motivation for suggesting this pedagogical approach and reflect on the different learning stakeholders which contributed to the learning strategy's success.

Keywords: video presentations, poster sessions, virtual teaching, virtual conference, interdisciplinary, Covid-19

Reimagining poster sessions for the digital domain

I proudly served on the student planning committee for the Medical Research Foundation's (MRF) Third Annual Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) Conference, which occurred in August 2020 via Zoom. The conference is interdisciplinary by nature, combining guests from humanities and the sciences. In those planning sessions, we explored what we could offer our guests, and how we could offer an attractive conference entirely online.

Our discussion turned to a virtual poster session: so... breakout rooms could be opened... and people could join a room, and we could view the posters in advance... and we will all be able to read the size 9 font on an 11-inch iPad... and everyone's equipment will work on the day...

The discussion filled me with palpable dread. The very idea of a virtual poster session sends chills down my spine. The real utility of a poster session, to my mind, is to enable more people to present their work without demanding that every guest must remain shackled to their chair and pay undivided attention to it. My restless legs live for the poster session. My non-stop lightning fast million-thoughts-a-minute brain lives for the chop-and-change vibrancy of the poster session. Guests can pick and choose, and float around until they find a poster, or a person, which catches their interest. After this they can choose to network, strike up a deeper conversation, and develop a connection. This is the essence of the poster session.

Poster sessions are about networking... but how do you successfully network on a Zoom call? Better still – during lunch? The virtual constraints of this conference preclude swanning effortlessly around a poster session, vol-au-vent in hand, politely nodding as an impassioned student waxes lyrical about their research. Nay, I will be rushing around to find a slice of ham, some cheese, and two slices of

bread to fashion into a sandwich, which I will inhale as I strain with a magnifying glass to follow a tiny, pixelated poster detailing the thesis of a final year PhD student with 45 papers to their name.

The horror of the potential clunkiness of a virtual lunch-poster session fusion, the exhausting “your mic isn't on” pantomime, sounded as though it would do everybody's research a grave injustice. The virtual experience would both be accidentally and substantially different from that experience in person. It would be a mirage of a poster session and an irksome distraction from our all-important lunch.

I suggested we could invite guests to submit a short, snappy, three-minute video detailing their research, or perhaps a ‘day in the life’ video. Guests would have free reign to submit practically anything related to their work. Then we could compile the videos into a playlist and play them throughout the breaks and the lunch break. That way guests are afforded the ability to watch the videos at ease, enjoy their lunch undisturbed, and the opportunity for networking still presents itself – even in an enhanced way. The videos would afford guests with hidden creative talents the opportunity to be discovered and could offer fun icebreakers for the networking session.

The idea was met with trepidation, so I went on the hard sell; I believed in the videos as an access-enhancing interdisciplinary pedagogical tool. The inflexible, deeply entrenched, dogmatic pedagogy creaked, groaned, struggled, strained, then finally yielded to the idea.

The planning committee supported the notion of showreel presentations to replace the virtual poster session, and the call for videos went live. After the grand unveiling of the showreel presentations, guests were asked for feedback.

“Really good idea! Much easier than trying to talk to poster presenters while eating lunch.”

“3 minute videos have been great, fantastic insight into your projects and what you’re doing.”

“Could we replay [the videos] tomorrow? It’s been great to see what most people are working on from the 3 minute videos”

The showreel presentations generated a buzz among the guests and infused an energetic zing into the conference, adding more of the ‘social butterfly among the flower-bed, vol-au-vent in hand’ feel I normally associate with conferences.

Poster sessions at in-person conferences offer a familiar level of visual feedback which is effectively shrouded in the privacy of the virtual realm. I imagine the reassurance of seeing engagement and interaction is comforting to event organisers and guests. Virtual teaching is often devoid of these familiar comforts due to a myriad of limits: hardware, software, bandwidth, real-world distraction... Teaching and learning is all about understanding limits of systems, then appropriately extending these boundaries: propelling the cutting edge of the discipline further. Respecting the boundaries of a pedagogical tool’s utility will help teachers avoid the fatal error of misusing pedagogical tools outside their bounds or forcing traditional pedagogical approaches into virtual spaces.

The planning committee gambled on a previously untested and potentially risky pedagogical approach, and it turned out well.

Our success was in understanding the limits of both our virtual platform and our humanity. By including this new pedagogical tool in our virtual teaching and learning experience we were able to evoke the very essence of the in-person poster session. This new approach was well received by our guests, enhanced the guest experience, and added value to the conference.

Emboldened by this experience, I hope to continue developing my teaching style by exploring different interdisciplinary learning activities with my students. Novel teaching and learning environments necessitate novel approaches to teaching and learning. Evidence- and practice- based teaching is important for honing our craft as teachers. I think, where necessary, we should encourage and trust teachers to explore dynamic and interdisciplinary approaches, releasing them (and their students) from the shackles of discipline-specific pedagogy.

Great teaching doesn’t happen in a vacuum: it is a collaborative effort. I am thankful that the MRF organised the conference online: a medium which afforded the opportunity for this creative endeavour. I am honoured to have had the opportunity to serve on the student planning committee: where my voice was heard, and my contributions valued. I am grateful for the courageous support of my confrères, without which the idea would not have come to fruition. I am indebted to the guests who put such time, effort, and dedication into the three-minute videos. I am pleased to report that the three-minute video showreel presentations were a prominent feature in the MRF’s Fourth Annual AMR Conference in August 2021, where they were elevated to having independent timetabled slots.

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EXPERIENCING MASCULINITY IN THE CLASSROOM

A reflection

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Alice's research is concerned with understanding student attitudes towards sexual violence and common sexual behaviours at elite institutions and situating these attitudes within broader discourses. Her work is informed by feminist and post-structural theories of power and gender. Alongside completing her PhD, Alice has recently taken up a lectureship at London Southbank University where she teaches a broad array of undergraduate law modules.

Abstract

In this piece, I reflect upon my experiences of masculinities in different teaching and learning spaces. I draw upon existing literature concerned with laddism and compare how masculinity is performed differently in different spaces.

Keywords: teaching, masculinities, gender, lad culture, university spaces

Experiencing masculinity in the classroom

Feminists have long encouraged researchers to reflect on their position and experiences as part of the research process (Letherby 2002). Here, I offer my reflection on my position as a

young, white, cis-gendered woman in the classroom as a PGR and ECR teacher.

My research, outside of the classroom, focuses on elite universities gender norms, sexual violence. More recently I have taken to a focus on men and masculinities. Often, the

result of this newer, emerging research interest has led to my research interests and teaching responsibilities becoming more entwined. Whilst teaching, I often find myself preoccupied with questions unrelated to the law and legal study. I ask myself:

How are my students performing and producing their masculinities in the classroom space? Are they performing their masculinities in ways that we would expect? If not, what is different about their performances of masculinities and why is this important?

This urge to question, and unpack, the behaviour of my students has been exacerbated as I now teach across two very different institutions – one ‘elite’ institution and another post-1992 institution with a vocational focus. Indeed, now I am often asking myself:

Why do students at different institutions perform their masculinity differently? What are the different ways in which male students look to assert their dominance across different subsets of peers? Is it right to ground these behaviours in a desire to assert male dominance? Or is there more at play at institutions where power and prestige have less of a force in the day-to-day operations of the institution?

These questions are not exhaustive, nor would it be possible to answer them completely within the space of a short reflection. Instead, here I am trying to start a conversation – as opposed to complete one.

Laddishness and Lad Culture

Existing literature concerned with men and masculinities within a teaching and learning context has often been centred around lad culture and or laddishness. Lad culture has been defined by several researchers, and these definitions tend to vary little and draw

on similar ideas. Arguably the most arguably the most well-known definition of lad culture comes from the National Union of Students (NUS) commissioned study *That's What She Said* (2013), which was conducted by Alison Phipps. Although study itself was focused on experiences of lad culture, rather than engagement in it, Phipps suggested that lad culture can best be defined as:

a pack mentality evident in activities such as sport and heavy alcohol consumption and ‘banter’ which is often sexist, misogynistic and homophobic (NUS 2013).

When exploring why people might choose to behave laddishly, scholars have often suggested that the origins of this manifestation of laddism can be traced to the ‘crisis of (hegemonic) masculinity’ and neoliberalist notions of competition (Phipps 2016; Phipps and Young 2015a; Phipps and Young 2015b; Warin and Dempster 2007). White, middle-class men, once automatically entitled to privilege and power, perceive themselves to be facing the biggest loss because of inclusive politics and social policy. This prompts them in turn to reassert their dominance over female counterparts through laddish behaviours. Jackson and Sundaram suggest that young men in acting laddishly and being sexist and misogynistic are trying to reassert their dominance among their peers (Jackson and Sundaram, 2020).

From this literature, laddism is grounded in a loss of entitlement. We might expect, and indeed I expected, to see more overt practices of laddishness at elite institutions rather than post 1992 institutions.ⁱ Yet, surprisingly, this has not been my experience to date.

In fact, my experiences point towards a more complicated relationship between laddishness and learning in the classroom. In elite university spaces, my interactions with

and experiences of male students has rarely involved laddishness, nor banter. On the contrary, male students in my seminars have often sought to overperform in class – to do extra reading and extra questions. Almost as if their goal is to trip you up, make you fumble over the law and perhaps have to admit that your expertise lies not with the difference between a lease and license. As the person on the receiving end of this, it often feels as though it is an assertion of dominance: a desire to make clear that although you are the teacher, they know more and can do better than you. This has often made for uncomfortable and difficult teaching experiences. The classroom often feels like a struggle – one in which you are expected to prove your knowledge and intelligence to those you are teaching.

In contrast, in post-1992 spaces, my interactions with and experiences of male students has more often involved laddishness – often specifically in the form of banter. Students are more jovial and less serious. If

they are unprepared or unable to answer, they are likely to joke and laugh. Their banter was less about asserting one's dominance but more about deflecting a sense of insecurity. It is also less overtly sexist and not targeted at me as a female tutor. There is no sense that they want to assert dominance over you as the teacher nor that they might want to point out holes in your knowledge.

As a result, for me as a young ECR/PGR, the post-1992 space is the more comfortable of the two. I feel able to teach confidently, without fear of getting something wrong or misquoting the law, or having my authority challenged. Conversations are more organic and the space less hostile. Although I cannot say with certainty, I'd imagine I am a better teacher in this space too. I can devote my energy to making sure students are engaged and understanding the material as opposed to having to devote it to ensuring if there is a power struggle that I am, as the teacher, come out on top.

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ⁱ Here, I speak about laddism in the teaching and learning context. However, laddism transcends both the classroom and into more social spaces. In this discussion, I am suggesting is likely to be more pervasive across all aspects of university life. This includes the classroom but may well also spill over into other spaces.

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TEACHING BEYOND THE TIMETABLE

How PhD Research Enabled Undergraduate Teaching – A Pandemic Outlook

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Elizabeth is a Postgraduate Researcher (PhD Student) and Teaching Fellow at the University of Warwick researching Large-Scale Additive Manufacturing (or 3D Printing). Elizabeth has been interested in 3D printing for several years now, investigating research topics across a wide range of applications for Fused Filament Fabrication, from mould tooling, to direct part manufacture in the aerospace and automotive industries. More recently her focus has been on Large-Scale Additive Manufacturing, the difficulties surrounding this emerging technology, and its exciting applications. Elizabeth is also a Maker in Residence in the Engineering Build Space at Warwick University where she is exploring making, CAD, and CAM alongside 3D printing.

Abstract

This article explores the use of PhD research at the forefront of technology to manufacture lifesaving PPE items such as face shields and how this University based research enabled face-to-face teaching to resume in the School of Engineering.

Keywords: 3D Printing, PPE, Face Shield, Engineering, Face-to-Face Teaching, Women in STEM

Introduction

In late 2019, an outbreak of infections from a novel coronavirus (now named SARS-Cov-2) was reported in China (**Riou and Althaus 2020**). The spread of this coronavirus disease 2019 (also more commonly known as COVID-19) reached the necessary level of spreading to be classified as a global pandemic according to the World Health Organisation (WHO) (**WHO 2020c**). The virus reached the UK in March 2020, and many universities were thrown into disarray as campuses were shut down, exams were cancelled, and students were forced to finish the academic year online. In It is clear in retrospect that in September 2020 the pandemic was far over. Nonetheless, for the new autumn term, the University of Warwick had in an attempt to reduce student deferral rates (**Economics 2020**) promised all students 'an element of face-to-face teaching'.

A lack of physical, face-to-face teaching would be particularly problematic for a subject like Engineering. Practical labs are a signature pedagogy in higher education engineering courses (**Lucas and Hanson 2016; Goodhew 2010**) which necessitate face-to-face teaching. There are many skills which cannot be learned, except through in-person experience. There is simply no equivalent to physically experiencing, for example, soldering an electronics board or drilling a hole in a piece of wood. These learning experiences provide students with the necessary base skills to become chartered engineers, and are therefore required on accredited undergraduate courses by accrediting bodies such as the Institute of Mechanical Engineers (IMechE) and the Institute of Engineering and Technology (IET). As the Engineering Council state that for degrees to be accredited students must demonstrate "... a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline." (**Engineering Council 2020**). Without such accreditation and understanding students cannot become Chartered Engineers.

This article explores the author's contributions to and experiences of finding a solution for secure in-person engineering teaching. It represents a direct example of the potential impact of PGR research both in terms of shaping approaches to teaching and the wider community. The research process detailed in this article enabled the University of Warwick's School of Engineering to deliver a safe and effective blended learning course for its students with the necessary face-to-face teaching during the heavily disrupted academic year 2020-2021.

3D Printing PPE

The COVID-19 pandemic had a huge impact on the supply of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). COVID-19 was being spread by aerosol and droplet infection, which occurs (as with influenza) occurs when droplets from an infected individual are generated during coughing, sneezing or even talking and pass through the air and land on the eyes, nose and mouth of another individual leading to infection (**Ather et al. 2020; WHO 2020a**). The general public were being asked to wear face coverings such as face masks and face shields to help reduce the spread of infection (**WHO 2020b**). On top of this extraordinary demand, the closing of shipping lanes and grounding of flights across the world led to a disruption in supply chains of essential PPE such as face masks, gowns, gloves, and eye protection. The shortage in countries like the UK was compounded by those countries who were manufacturing these items turning their priority to home use. The combination of more people wearing face masks beyond the normal expectations and the disrupted supply chains led to a world-wide shortage of PPE. This left the UK medical community in a desperate situation.

In response to this unprecedented demand for PPE, many companies, academic institutions, and individuals sought to use equipment such as 3D printers (generally FFF, Fused Filament Fabrication systems) to produce components for much needed PPE

items such as face shields (Larrañeta, Dominguez-Robles, and Lamprou 2020; Flanagan and Ballard 2020). Additive Manufacturing, also known as 3D printing, is a process whereby parts or objects are made by laying down layers of plastic material to build up a 3D part from a digital model. Using these [methods?] and to address the PPE shortfall members of the international 3D printing community came together in vast, rapidly formed collaborative networks to share PPE designs. Many of the community-driven designs were produced on desktop-scale 3D printers, typically taking 1-2 hours to produce.

Taking inspiration from the existing designs, the author decided to use their PhD research in Large-Scale Additive Manufacture to produce a design specifically for the large-scale machines in the University of Warwick's Engineering Build Space. These machines, with larger nozzles and faster volumetric flow rates, are capable of printing components much faster, resulting in a face shield that could be manufactured in just 3 minutes. This design passed BSI testing, ensuring that it conformed to required standards to be used in medical settings, unlike several other designs already in circulation.

Initially, these were produced for front-line medical workers, before expanding to supplying the key workers in the community, such as teachers and shop workers. It was at this point that the University of Warwick asked for the face shields to be produced for university staff to use. The University of Warwick had noticed accessibility issues around mandatory mask wearing, for example, those who wear hearing aids struggling with the interference that face mask straps cause. Those who use lip reading as a main communication method also struggled when trying to communicate with others who were wearing face masks that obscured their mouths. It was feared that similar issues could arise in classroom setting once in-person teaching resumed. The face shields, consisting of a clear visor (Figure 1), by contrast, allow

effective communication between the wearer and those around them, whilst also preventing droplet transmission. Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, the author has manufactured, packaged, and distributed over 7000 face shield kits to front-line workers, the community, and staff and students at the University of Warwick.

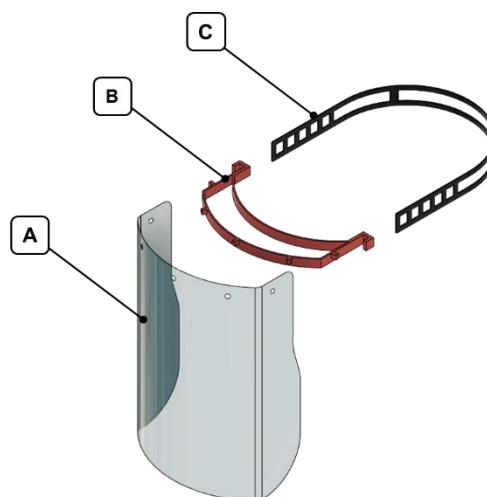


Fig. 1: Typical components making up a face shield, a) visor, b) 3D printed headband and c) 3D printed strap.

Pandemic-Proof Face-to-Face Teaching

In addition to producing viable and high-quality PPE, the author's work on the face shields, conducted in-person and on-site in the university's labs, proved that the labs could be used in a safe socially-distanced manner. Moreover, the face shield design itself would become a key piece of equipment in ensuring safe and effective teaching at the university.

The University of Warwick stipulated that from the start of the 2020-2021 academic year, any in-person teaching would need to be conducted at 2 metre plus wearing a face mask. These restrictions put huge strains on departments such as the School of Engineering who had neither the time nor capacity to conduct practical laboratory sessions for over 350 students (per year) in this way. A compromise was reached at the

University of Warwick, allowing for in-person teaching to be conducted at 1 metre plus (between 1 and 2 metres) if everyone present in the room wore a face mask *and* a face shield. Hence, the School of Engineering was able to increase the capacity that rooms were allowed and could restore some of the

previously unthinkable practical sessions. The face shields also allowed for final year students to return to their practical group projects using advanced equipment only available in the Engineering Build Space (**Figure 2**).



Fig.2: Undergraduate students returning to practical work, wearing protective face shields made with 3D printed components.

The Woman Behind the Mask – Some Concluding Thoughts

Overall, the work of the author, the woman behind the mask (**Figure 3**), has shown that PhD research can play a key part in the teaching curriculum. Their work on 3D printed face shields has not only aided the community in unprecedented times but has enabled the School of Engineering to deliver a safe and effective blended learning course for its students including the essential face-to-face teaching needed in Engineering degrees. The visible role of PhD research is at the heart of the author's teaching philosophy, showing what research at the forefront of technology can do in a teaching space such as the Engineering Build Space at the University of Warwick.



Fig.3: The woman behind the mask.

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A COMPARISON OF UNIVERSITY AND SCHOOL TUTORIAL TEACHING

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Ian is a father of two (8 and 12) with a longstanding interest in teaching. He has experience of education, as a teacher or a parent, in Uganda, Ecuador, Singapore and the UK. Together these experiences have served to reinforce his sense for the value of good teaching. More recently - having slotted a first career as a Foreign Exchange trader in between - he returned to university to study Statistics, where amongst other things, he is looking at some theoretical aspects of the Comparative Judgement methods being increasingly adopted for assessment in educational settings.

Abstract

In the Spring term of 2021, I performed two online tutorial-based teaching roles. One was with groups of second year university Statistics students; the other was with groups of Year 11 GCSE Mathematics students. In this essay I aim to compare those experiences and draw out some learnings for PGR teaching practice

Keywords: Training, Materials, Community, Engagement, Impact Assessment, Schools

Background

For some time, I have had an interest in school level teaching. Beyond the self-interest that comes with having children, I have long held an intuition for the compounding effect that good teaching can have and the positive role it can play in society. Over the recent years, it has provided an additional interest to me as an informative example of the opportunities and challenges of taking a more quantitative

evidence-based approach to assessing standard practices in an area which, in the past, has relied more on instinct and experience. In the UK, this work has been led by the Educational Endowment Foundation (EEF), formed in 2011 by the Sutton Trust, and funded by the government with the aim of helping to raise the attainment of 3-18 year-olds, particularly those facing disadvantage.

It was through following the EEF that I became aware of the opportunity to be a tutor on the

National Tutoring Programme (NTP). This programme was set up by the UK government in 2020 to address the shortfall in school education due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The programme was operated through approved tuition partners, and I applied to one of these, called The Brilliant Club (TBC). TBC specialises in taking PhD students into schools through what they call the Scholar's Programme. In the programme, PhD students design and deliver their own course to inspire school students to apply to a university, focusing on schools where university progression is less common.

Based on academic evidence on the effectiveness of small group teaching, the NTP was delivered mostly to tutorial groups of three students in a course of fifteen one-hour weekly tutorials. I had two of such groups, both based at the same school in another part of the country. As a result, all tutorials were delivered online. In the TBC programme, schools were able to choose four of six modules, each covering a substantial area of the relevant year group curriculum and being covered over three tutorials, with a tutorial at the beginning and end of the course allocated for an initial and final assessment, respectively. The intention was to use these to measure progress. The final tutorial was to be used for feedback and reflection.

At the University, I was allocated two second year Mathematical Statistics tutorial groups with around fifteen students in each group and a one-hour tutorial session for each group, held approximately every other week. As a third year PhD student, this was the sixth term of PGR teaching I had undertaken at a university level.

My intention here is to compare and contrast the experience of delivering the two sets of tutorials and make suggestions based on that. To do this, I will focus on five areas namely, training, materials, community, engagement, and impact assessment. In all cases, I make suggestions for things that could be done to improve the PGR teaching experience.

Training

TBC required us to complete around three hours of online courses. They were delivered via short videos, often interspersed with exercises. The courses covered three areas namely, general teaching, teaching online, and safeguarding. They were generally very engaging, with interesting and implementable guidance on topics such as questioning techniques and using a backward planning structure to architect the tutorial. Being able to go back to them was also useful. Having said that, I often skipped the intermediate activities. Some parts of these also did not sit well with the teaching of Mathematics or were clearly designed for delivering TBC's mainstay Scholar's Programme rather than the NTP. For example, some of the discussion-promoting strategies were not applicable, and there was some guidance relating to creating material. In addition, we were able to attend live online sessions with the mathematics course content creator going through the material. These live sessions were not mandatory but were very useful for understanding how the material was structured and getting highly relevant tips for its delivery.

Self-reflection was a key practice emphasised throughout the training and subsequent interactions. This was further encouraged by having a programme officer observe a tutorial and elicit self-reflections, whilst also providing feedback. It was further aided by the requirement to record sessions. While the purpose of this was primarily safeguarding, it acted as a valuable self-evaluation tool. I used it on several occasions to check how I had explained something and determine if I might need to clarify points at the next tutorial.

With regards to university teaching, it is mandatory to do a two and a half hour PGR tutor training session before commencing teaching in my department. This is typically done in the first year of a PhD and no refresher is required, although the same session can be

voluntarily reattended in subsequent years. In my own case, I do not recall what was covered in that session but have a vague recollection of it being enjoyable and useful. However, by the time I reached my third year, I was basing my practice on what I had done before and found successful. For the advent of online teaching, an additional mandatory training course was required for all tutors. This discussed the practicalities and technologies of delivering online. A tutorial observation was performed in my first year by a teaching fellow, and a 400-word self-reflection essay was required in that first term of teaching. Tutorials are not recorded. A senior tutor is available for half an hour of personal self-reflection over the summer, though this is not mandatory for PGR teachers.

It would not be fair to compare the two training programmes in their entirety given the gap from when I did the university training and my necessarily fuzzier memories. On the one directly comparable part, the online training, I felt TBC placed more emphasis on issues of student interaction online, whereas the university placed more emphasis on the technological alternatives. They were, therefore, usefully complementary. However, I did find the general teaching instruction of the TBC training programme interesting and applicable to both environments. I was able to digest this pedagogic instruction in the context of experience rather than just theory, so I suspect that it had more resonance and meaning for me than it did as pre-experience instruction at the university. One thing that struck me was the very clear focus on the methods and tools by which students could be helped to comprehend the material, for example in the emphasis on the use of visual bar methods. At the university level in contrast, the emphasis in tutorials seems often to be on the quality of answers rather than the route to comprehension, even where the questions are intended to be formative rather than summative. The online format of the TBC instruction was also helpful; being able to engage with it in my own time in smaller portions, was contributory to its impact. In both cases, I found that the materials

specifically related to the teaching of my own subject was often the most useful.

Taken together, this might suggest that there is an opportunity to produce more accessible materials specific to the PGR teaching of particular subjects, including in online settings, available to tutors at their discretion. Bitesize training videos introducing relevant pedagogic techniques could provide easy refreshers for PGR tutors seeking to improve their own practice. If there could be an increased emphasis on methods by which students might come to comprehend materials, this may also be beneficial. Since these are challenges faced by PGR tutors at all universities, it would seem to make sense that the production effort here could be shared between departments in the same subject at different universities, so that they can be specific to those subjects while still realising economies of scale. In Mathematics and Statistics, these efforts could, perhaps, be coordinated by groups like the London Mathematical Society, the Institute of Mathematics and its Applications, or the Royal Statistical Society.

The issue of recording is one I will touch on again from the perspective of engagement. In the context of training, I will merely note that it was useful as a self-reflection tool and could be so in the university setting as well.

Materials

TBC provided us with highly structured materials for all modules at the start of the programme. All materials were produced on PowerPoint documents with a combination of worked examples followed by student practice. It was designed with the idea that a worked example could be stepped through by proceeding through the slides, so that no second device was required. In practice I found it preferable to work with two devices, annotating slides from a tablet, while continuing to appear on screen via another device. I felt this gave a better pacing to how I

worked through questions and enabled me to visually emphasise key parts from the slide or my annotations to support what I was explaining verbally. While the use of TBC materials for teaching was not mandated, it was strongly encouraged.

In the university setting, the material consisted of a sheet of problems and an accompanying set of worked solutions. This is standard in our department. These were generally released several days before the tutorial which enabled the module tutors to work through the problems, ask questions and spot any mistakes in the solutions provided. Some guidance was given by the module leader as to where to place emphasis, but how the material was delivered was left to the individual tutors.

The material in both settings felt adequate to meeting its target, but there were differences. The university material was fully integrated with the course that the students were following. For example, questions often picked up on worked examples introduced in lectures. TBC materials, while designed from the same national curriculum, bore no relation to the timing of the delivery of those topics in the students' normal school progress. Students and teachers at the school felt the material was not as helpful as it could be, and the school requested that I teach different topics better integrated with the schedule the school was following. Some of these topics were well-covered in the TBC materials, others less so. This highlighted another feature of the provision of material. It was relatively easy to find good quality material online readily adaptable to teaching particular topics. In particular, it was very easy to find relevant problem sets. This is perhaps to be expected given the large population following the same curriculum and the more defined way in which it is covered. Such a pivot in focus would have been much more difficult in the university environment, but equally would be far less likely to be required. It should also be noted that this was the first year of the NTP and as a result, there had been limited opportunity to hone the material, whereas the Mathematical

Statistics module had existed for several years, and the problem sheet material was not impacted by the move online.

In both settings, the role of the tutorials was very much on doing Mathematics, but it felt that this was a larger part of the school setting overall, whereas the university lecture notes often had a greater focus on the theory. Worked examples and solutions were used without question in the school environment as a fundamental part of the methods and material we were given. The attitude towards worked solutions in the university environment felt much more ambivalent. Indeed, shortly after this teaching experience, I attended a teaching seminar where an academic at a leading Statistics department in the UK explained that the policy of their department was to provide no worked solutions to students. The fear seems to be that students can focus too narrowly on problems of a particular type that they have seen, rather than attaining a broader understanding of the topic through the theory, and that if they know a worked solution will be provided, then they will not do the work themselves. This opinion seems to also be represented in most Statistics textbooks which tend to publish questions without solutions.

In the school setting, there are numerous question banks available, often free, some produced by a single individual or organisation, others effectively crowdsourced. While the challenge of curating such a set of worked solutions would no doubt be much greater than in the common-curriculum school environment, in the age of sophisticated recommender systems, it does not seem impossible that a combination of students and academics could build a navigable question bank for a university Statistics setting. Doing so would make the challenge of question-setting much easier for academics, while providing a sufficient breadth of questions to students that they can practice and avoid the trap of being focused too much on a single question type. For PGR tutors, it would provide a useful additional resource if students were to request to look at some

particular topic, or to refer students to if they seem to be struggling in a particular area.

teach to attend, although they were generally still poorly attended by PGRs.

Community

The NTP recommended to tuition partners that they set up systems by which tutors offered peer support. However, the TBC did not do this. As a result, we set up a WhatsApp group for ourselves. This tended to focus on finding relevant teaching material from what they had provided and mutual reassurance that the low attendance issues that many of us faced were not unique. Beyond this, there was a much wider teaching community that was very stimulating and available in various forms, including blogposts, social media, and podcasts. In particular, I found the Mr Barton Maths podcast thought-provoking and engaging, with topics ranging from the question 'what is learning?' to practical tips on introducing new topics, and informative discussions on educational technology.

With teaching going online at university, a Microsoft Teams channel was set up for each module leader to communicate with the tutors for that module. This created a sense of community that had not been there in previous years. It was used by tutors to report back on how students had done on different problems, errors in worked solutions, or approaches that had worked well or not so well. Often, the benefit was not so much in a tangible change in practice but in the reassurance that your challenges were being shared by others. A wider channel was also set up for all PGR tutors across the department to elicit and provide information, for example to notify of upcoming Teaching Committee meetings and ask for views. Postings often attracted replies and useful conversations ensued. This new sense of community was welcomed. More widely, the department has for a couple of years held Teaching seminars. Before moving online, these were mostly, sometimes exclusively, attended by teaching fellows within the department. It seemed that the move online had also had the effect of encouraging more research fellows who also

The increased sense of being part of a team endeavour in providing tutorials was for me, the best part of university teaching in the last year. I believe it would be helpful for the department to be mindful of the benefits of it in the future and look to actively foster and encourage it. For example, departments could make it mandatory for module leaders to host a Teams channel for tutors on their module, where they would be expected to elicit feedback on problem sheets and give guidance as to how they might be delivered, and they could actively seek to promote conversations on a wider PGR tutor chat by asking for opinions on specific things like materials, training or engagement, and by encouraging PGR tutors to attend teaching events across the department.

On a wider level, there seems to be a very weak sense of community across PGR tutors more generally, and PGR tutors are often peripheral to the wider teaching community that does exist in academia. In my own subject area, there was an energetic response amongst academics to the teaching challenges of going online, but the seminars held were, as far as I am aware, almost exclusively focused on issues faced by teaching fellows such as lecture delivery, course structure, mass participation and the like, rather than those of PGRs. There is of course, a challenge here. Often, such communities form around the efforts of particularly enthusiastic and experienced individuals. On the other hand, an experienced PGR tutor is perhaps one with just three years' experience. Establishing the sort of continuity that is required for the building of such communities is, therefore, difficult. This journal itself might be thought of as a welcome effort in that direction, but perhaps other bodies could consider how they might provide the continuity for the enthusiasm of PGRs to be plugged into. This might sit alongside the sort of efforts I described with respect to training. Given the subject-specific challenges of tutoring, it may, as I suggested

there, be best taken up by relevant cross-university bodies.

Engagement

A key concern in online teaching is the engagement levels of students. There is a concern that the attention of students is difficult to hold through an online portal and there are not the physical cues to assess engagement and understanding that are available when teaching in person.

The NTP setting facilitated very high levels of engagement through the small group sizes – three students when there was full attendance. Most students were either unwilling or unable to use technology that included a camera. However, the small groups meant that questions could be directed to individuals, often with the difficulty of those questions adapted for that individual, and all students demonstrated high engagement throughout the hour of the tutorial, each answering multiple questions. Pleasingly, it was often clear that students had made progress on the material, even within the hour. On the other hand, the tutorials were held immediately after school. They were also scheduled over a period, the second half of which coincided with the students' physical return to school and formal assessments in all subjects that contributed to their final GCSE grades. As such, attendance was poor, with many students presumably opting to spend the time on other studies or just relaxing away from a pressured learning environment. Based on conversations on the tutor WhatsApp group, this poor attendance was found to be a common phenomenon of the NTP. Engagement here could be seen as very binary. When they attended, engagement was very high, but there was frequently non-attendance, that is, zero engagement.

At the university level, the picture was more mixed. In the Autumn term, I had tutored a module online to first years as a COVID-overflow to sessions that I was running face-to-face on the same module. There, I had no

problem in getting participation including often cameras being left on (when that did not cause streaming difficulties), and questions that I asked were always met with a response. In the Spring term, with a second-year cohort and module, the engagement was notably lower. No one was willing to turn on their camera, and sometimes, questions would elicit no response or simply an "idk" (I don't know) on the chat. It was also noticeable that engagement levels, measured in terms of responses to questions, decreased over the course of the term. Based on observations of the module leader, this seemed to be related to how the students found the material increasingly difficult to keep up with.

A strategy that I like to use in face-to-face teaching is to get students to work on problems together in groups (often at whiteboards), before I go through the answer to the question, taking it step by step and cold-calling different individuals at each step. This provides the opportunity for students to attempt a question with support but with the knowledge that they might be asked about any part of it, so it is in their interests to follow what is being discussed in their group, and everyone gets a correct worked solution explained to them. In the first term, it had been possible to somewhat replicate this, even online. The module leader had allocated time to put students into small groups and create their own chats and introduce themselves there. The exercise was designed to help get them familiar with Teams, and for them to meet other students. These groups could then be used to work through problems together, even if this was somewhat less efficient than the in-person non-socially-distanced version. In the second-year group, I tried to do the same, but it was impossible to check if they were being used, and they could be easily disrupted by individuals not attending. My impression was that people reverted to mostly trying to do the questions on their own.

Tentatively, I would suggest that norm-setting in an online environment is important. If we want people to have cameras on so we can better judge engagement and

understanding, then we need to make it clear that this is an expectation from the start of their course, and the message needs to be consistent and repeated. As I mentioned, there also seemed to be a noticeable drop-off in participation over the term. This is a familiar pattern, but online learning would seem to offer a way to ameliorate this. It might be expected that a large proportion of students will struggle to keep up at the end of second term if we consider that, with third term mostly taken up with exams, students are expected to digest most of the taught learning for the year in just the twenty weeks of the first two terms. With the resources all being online, perhaps, module leaders could offer the material early and with a self-directed timetable that allows students to spread the learning over a longer period of time, including holidays. The assignments and quizzes that contributed to marks would still be available only in term time, but learning for students could be better spread. For PGR tutors, this might increase the likelihood of engagement from students as they would be more comfortable with the material, having had a longer time to digest it. While the school terms were no doubt intense, especially for the assessment period, they are longer and the fact that the Year 10 and Year 11 materials were shared suggests that learning over that longer period is one that works better in schools.

Perhaps more controversially, a combination of fees and online learning could be used to incentivise greater tutorial engagement. The online resources created this year, such as recorded lectures, notes, and online assessments, could be offered as part of a lower cost course, stripped of in-person elements such as tutorials and in-person lectures. In this way, it would be made more explicit that students are being charged for in-person elements such as tutorials. It might then be hoped that they would be more invested in making the most of them.

Recording of tutorials may also be thought to have an impact on engagement, potentially both positive and negative. There

was no evidence from my school teaching experience that it had a negative impact there, though the smaller groups may have played a role in that. In the university setting, one of the major objections to recording tutorials is that students will be less willing to contribute if a session is recorded. This may be so, though there is no evidence from this particular setting, and there are potential engagement benefits from students being able to go back and review the explanations offered during the tutorial.

Impact Assessment

The public funding of NTP meant there was an effort to measure the impact of the programme. The idea was that this would be done by having students take an assessment at the start and at the end of the programme, with the results compared to determine progress. The fact that there was no control group seems a significant omission in this design. In practice, a bigger issue was that based on the discussions on the WhatsApp chat, only a small proportion of students completed a start and end of programme assessment, and it is probably not unreasonable to suspect them to be a self-selected conscientious group whose learning was benefiting from being back at school and revising for exams independent of the programme intervention. These metrics were collated for the impact from the four tutors and two subjects that were operated at the school at which I was based and are presumably also being collated at a tuition partner and NTP level. On a qualitative basis, I also received feedback from the programme officer on an observed tutorial.

In our departmental university setting, as far as I am aware, there has never been an attempt to measure the impact or effectiveness of tutorials. We do receive a voluntary feedback survey from students. I received this from only five students across approximately thirty students in the tutorial group. At an aggregate level, there is also the annual National Student Survey. As mentioned in the previous section, perhaps

this could be improved by mechanisms that meant students valued tutorials more highly. More mundanely, perhaps, mechanisms that provide greater incentives for receiving feedbacks could be put in place. For example, students could be given their module marks at an earlier date if they had completed feedback for that module.

Concluding Remarks

It is often informative to attempt the same task in two different settings, and it is to be hoped that this was the case here. The observations led to a number of suggestions. Perhaps, the foremost of which is that there would be value in inter-university subject bodies acting as curators to subject PGR teaching practice communities since the transitory nature of the PGR experience means PGRs cannot be expected to reliably do so themselves. Such

curation would be expected to consist of the provision of suitable materials, both training and topic-related, and of interactions of PGR teachers to share experiences and best practices. Additional suggestions were made in using the experience of online teaching to allow for alternative scheduling, and more controversially, the offering of lower cost course versions that might increase the value and expectations that students hold for tutorials, thus, incentivising engagement and feedback. It was also suggested that for online teaching, recording might be positive since it increases the usefulness of tutorials to students and assists PGR teachers to improve their practice; or more minimally, that an evaluation of its value would be feasible and helpful. Finally, it is suggested that departments should consider more robust mechanisms to ensure PGR teachers receive good quality feedback.

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AFTERWORD

Persistence, the Pandemic and PGR Pedagogies

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Abstract

In this afterword, I reflect on my involvement in one element of Warwick's pandemic contingency work and how PGR tutors made a significant contribution. I consider this in light of the pieces in this inaugural JPPP issue, looking at what this tells us about the value of working with postgraduate researchers who teach, with reference to recent activities, events and surveys and through the lens of persistence in learning.

Keywords: *online, learning, tutor, PGRs, persistence, teaching*

Introduction

As has been so ably reflected in the pieces in this journal issue, we faced many disorienting truths about our teaching practice just over 18 months ago. As a sector, we encountered a sudden shift in our perception of higher

education learning and teaching. Universities like Warwick had to act fast. Decisions had to be made in haste; decisions as educationalists we would all rather have spent longer considering, planning and enacting. My final words here look back on my experiences of one element of Warwick's response to the

pandemic and consider the vital role PGRs can play as institutional colleagues.

New Territory: The Warwick Online Learning Certificate

In the face of the unprecedented national lockdown, with thousands of students both physically and conceptually at distance, Warwick embarked upon some ambitious and untested projects. The Warwick Online Learning Certificate (WOLC) was one of them.

WOLC brought together a team of around 40 members of staff, from departments and professional services, to design an online course to equip first year undergraduates with the skills, knowledge and confidence to be online learners. While departments grappled with additional pressing issues, such as the pivot to online for finalists' exams, WOLC was to provide a unique space for all first years (around 6000 students) to learn together. Five units of study, with new content released every week, would:

- introduce students to the mindset of learning away from campus,
- equip them with the technology tools to help,
- invest in them a sense of Warwick's key pillars of internationalisation and interdisciplinarity, and,
- support them to think about their employability and skills.

Writing started in earnest. I was invited to contribute and I watched with fascination and admiration as colleagues shared and created brilliant, imaginative learning materials, Warwick-focused, and from scratch. They were situated in the moment; they reflected learning right then and there. There was a buzz. We were working hard and fast to author, proofread, edit and publish. It was one of the most unique experiences of my professional career.

Established assumptions: persistence

But as the resources came together, in spite of their quality, I had a nagging doubt. Would students 'just do this work', outside of their usual course context, and independently? This felt familiar. In spite of successes, the early promise of the *Massive Online Open Course* (MOOC)ⁱ has not quite come to fruition: one of the biggest complaints about the MOOC phenomenon has been attrition and challenges around engagement and completion (**Aldowah et al 2020; Liyanagunawardena et al 2014; Penstein Rose et al 2014**). I returned to thinking about the importance of persistence, a concept which has shaped my understanding of how my various cohorts of students have learned over the years at Warwick. Persistence, or how students 'keep going' to succeed with their learning, both in general and online is much explored in the literature (**Akyol et al, 2008; Croxton, 2016; Lakhal et al, 2020; Su and Waugh, 2018**). There is wide agreement that persistence leads to success. And although the literature examines persistence from a range of perspectives, a point of agreement is that students fair best when they have successful interaction with both the digital space and with other people. So how do students persist? I have previously considered persistence in online domains as three types:

- cognitive – knowledge and content which make sense together and build students' learning of concepts and ideas, structured around well-designed activities,
- physical – clear access, predictable navigation, accessible interfaces that work and make sense to students), and,
- affective – learner motivation, self-esteem, efficacy, self-confidence (**Hattersley: 2016**).

Whilst WOLC had the first two in spades, I began to think that something was needed to ensure student success in the third domain. So I asked a question.

Apposite Appointments: PGRs as online tutors

WOLC was to be a self-access, self-paced course, with flexible deadlines. All of those attributes felt right in the dire circumstances of April 2020, but if nearly 20 years of running blended learning courses had taught me anything, it's that teachers still matter. And the teachers I cared most about at Warwick, the PGR community, were also displaced, with closed classes and loss of earnings. I saw an opportunity. It took one proposal, one supportive decision from executive colleagues, one brilliant HR representative and one week, to design a unique online tutoring role, advertise positions, recruit and employ 60 PGR teachers from across the Warwick community to support the 6000 undergraduates on WOLC. Red tape? I'm sorry... what red tape?

The WOLC PGR tutors each led a mixed disciplinary cohort, of around 100 undergraduates, formed group identitiesⁱⁱ and

coached them through the course. As tutors, we worked together as a community of practice, as new study materials were released, to work out how best to support students and maximise time. WOLC tutors engaged in informal dialogue, reflected in writing on Moodle tasks and forums and offered encouraging words and updates. Viewing online learning through a Community of Enquiry lens, these kinds of interactions have been identified by Akyol et al (2008) as 'social, cognitive and teaching presence' which come in and out of focus at different times. Whilst no such analysis took place of WOLC tutor-student interactions, Moodle data is clear: relationships built and conversations grew. It wasn't perfect (because we would never have designed it in such a rush!) but student evaluation tells us that these collaborative opportunities were welcomed (Figure 1) and Moodle course analytics show that student engagement in this online space was at its best when online tutors were present (Figure 2). Persistence, then, was supported.

I enjoyed the activities where I had to contribute to an online forum, sharing ideas about all sorts of things, not only about the material we were learning. For example, people shared some top recipes or recommendations on where to travel. I feel as though contributing to online forums helped me to feel more like part of an academic community in this rather isolating time, especially because it is normally just as part of my study group so I am starting to recognise the faces and names of other students.

Wow. You opened my eyes to a new perspective that I never considered before! Thankyou.

Fig. 1. Responses from undergraduates on WOLC, demonstrating the impact of collaboration online

Hey guys, if you're having an issues with the course feel free to post them in here! Hopefully I'll be able to help and if not I'll be able to find someone who can!

Genuinely loving all your messages, everyone! Thank you for your thoughts, reflections, tips, and candor. In keeping with the latter, I'm not living up to the aspiration of my own top tip recently - I keep waking up at 6am no matter what this last month or so, which is completely new for me, and quite frustrating. Feels like my body is going through the early stages of some Kafkaesque metamorphosis... But I'm trying to listen to my body and adapt, and when I manage it, it's actually quite nice going to bed early and getting up with the sun. Not something I ever used to do, back when evening socialising was more of a thing. Anyone else seeing changes in their circadian rhythms?

I'm really learning a lot about online pedagogy just reading your posts, and hopefully you all are too, so keep them coming - and feel free to reply to each other if you are interested in something someone has said or you have another top tip that might help them out with what they're struggling with working at home and online, etc. Lots of you are missing personal interactions as part of your learning, so maybe we can replace at least a bit of that here?

Fig 2. Interactions from PGR tutors with undergraduates in their groups, encouraging dialogue and affective persistence

The value of the PGR online tutors didn't end there. To enable the best possible understanding of the materials, online tutors had access to content prior to release. This opened up the opportunity for their critical appraisal of our work; their ideas and suggestions were incorporated. They became co-producers. PGRs brought their current research to bear on several aspects of the programme, particularly in dialogue with the undergraduates. And when WOLC was done, in realisation that this was a resource and approach that could go further, it was carried forward successfully into departments in discipline-specific Moodle spaces as *Warwick Online Learning Fundamentals* (WOLF). Several PGRs I know continued this work.

Ongoing strengths: where persistence in learning can continue

Which brings me, neatly, to the value of our PGR teachers. What we had in WOLC was a microcosm of what we are blessed with every year at Warwick: the opportunity to employ, work alongside and co-create with talented postgraduate researchers. The perspectives shared in this journal have demonstrated that they bring strengths and insight to our learning and teaching work. PGR teachers often work in other educational contexts: this brings an ability to learn from other sectors, beyond the HE bubble. PGR teachers who are engaged concurrently in their own professional learning can reflect on and apply new ideas, pedagogies and tools in a meaningful and immediate manner. PGR teachers, as current students themselves, bridge these two identities, and as such have a unique perspective and closer, shared understanding with our undergraduates (Clark, 2021; Elliot and Marie, 2021).

What is also apparent, reflecting on the accounts in this journal, is just how much PGR teaching during the pandemic, alongside that of other colleagues, has been about supporting persistence. A persistence (and learning success) which has, no doubt, gone

some way towards the university's recent positive results in the National Student Survey (NSS) and the accolade of Sunday Times 'University of the Year for Teaching Quality'ⁱⁱⁱ. Back to our journal contributors then, persistence was felt in many ways: sorting out technical and access errors (physical persistence); providing additional tutorial and contact opportunities (cognitive/affective persistence); problematising and adjusting the online environment to enable disciplinary pedagogies that work (cognitive persistence); establishing online community spaces (affective persistence); and rethinking approaches to interaction and dialogue through novel technology tools (cognitive/physical persistence). All of this has kept students going; kept them learning. And if further evidence were needed, as someone privileged enough to see the *Warwick Awards for Teaching Excellence* (WATE PGR)^{iv} nominations from students, I have encountered many times the support of persistence by PGR tutors, especially in the affective domain:

She regularly emails to answer any questions that she couldn't answer during the seminar and her response time is very quick. She makes an effort to check the wellbeing of the students at the beginning of each seminar and tries to include everyone in the subsequent conversations making the seminar engaging...

He is undoubtedly, an empathetic, understanding, and caring seminar tutor. He demonstrated a genuine level of concern and care for personal circumstances that rendered me unable to attend one of his seminars, and also ensured I could catch up on the content.

Persistence in learning is not just for unprecedented times. It's a concept which should permeate all of our curriculum planning and work. It should be built into modules as part of a culture that wants students to succeed. It is proactive, deliberate, purposeful, and kind. PGR teachers are ideally

placed to enable this persistence and support more senior colleagues in departments, who have a range of other duties and pressures. There are mutual benefits for those senior colleagues too: the opportunity for dialogue and team teaching; bringing module content up-to-date; additional support in formative assessment and with large groups of students; and supporting conceptual understanding through PGRs' own research and knowledge. Many of these affordances are expressed in WATE PGR nominations from *staff* members:

(She) has taught [...] on a regular basis throughout her PhD and is an outstanding teacher. She is incredibly proficient in her subject of expertise, and highly adaptable to new topics. This intelligence, coupled with her personable and approachable nature, has made her a very effective teacher and one of my first choices when assigning a demonstrator.

What particularly impressed us about (X), beyond his excellent teaching practice, was that he brought new ideas for relating these topics to students that we had not previously considered. This will leave a lasting impact on the ways we can adapt how this is taught to be even more inclusive of different learners.

The opportunity to mentor more junior colleagues is also a benefit to staff, enhancing their own professional development and even supporting a case for promotion or professional recognition. All of this, of course, is recognised and already enacted by many at Warwick. But are we doing enough to ensure equitable access to teaching opportunities and sufficient development and mentorship of our PGR teachers? Recent evidence from the PRES survey and our own Survey of PGR Teaching^v shows that PGRs would like more opportunities to teach and would welcome more support. Taking seriously the professional learning of PGR teachers is also vital – not just as a 'nice to have' or an institutional tick box, but as a chance to develop and encourage teaching identities, reflective practice, innovation and curriculum

change. And to ensure we are offering a high-quality learning and teaching experience for our students (you know... the one that won us the accolade...). We should not hesitate, or wait until our postgraduates have passed their vivas and joined us in formal early careers positions. Developing PGR teachers *now* is not only 'growing our own' but investing, longer term, in the sector more widely.

Closing remarks: a vision for PGR teaching

I'm an idealist (can you tell?). I want all PGRs who would like to teach to have the chance. When the WOLC tutor roles were advertised we received a plethora of strong applications, not all of which could be successful and I was heartbroken to have to turn down good tutors, especially in a time of crisis. But alongside a drive for increased opportunities I am also acutely aware of precarity in PGR teaching: fairness, wellbeing, workload and adequate compensation are all essential components of good employment for these colleagues. We should insist on this and call it out when it falls short. Now more than ever, as we emerge into new ways of working as an institution, we will need a range of colleagues, who can work in nuanced ways and adapt to changing times. We should agitate for genuine opportunities for PGR teachers in our departments (**Jordon and Howe, 2018**) and plan for this; encourage them when they want to teach, see them as integral to our teaching teams (**Kajfez and Matusovich, 2017**) and invite their expertise. They're an asset, our allies and our friends. And I, for one, would not have achieved as much in the last eighteen months without them.

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I would like to thank **all** Warwick PGR teachers for their work during the past, very challenging, couple of years. I would also like to thank the eight founding members of the Warwick PTC for their dedication, ideas, expertise and collegiality: you've taught me a lot.

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ⁱ Massive Online Open Course or 'MOOC' is an open-access, online course. MOOCs originated in the Open Educational Resources movement in 2008, growing significantly by 2012. In principle of MOOCs sought to open access and liberate knowledge making it available to the masses, and beyond formal institutions, although many Universities have written their own MOOC content. MOOCs are often free for students

although there may be certification fees and charges for other institutions to use materials. Although still widely available, MOOCs have never replaced traditional HE institutional courses.

ⁱⁱ WOLC tutor groups were all given animal/bird names (e.g. the Armadillos, the Frogs, the Sharks) by the key colleague from Academic Technology who led the building of the WOLC Moodle. This successful strategy not only meant quick and easy identification and assignment of groups on Moodle, but fostered a collective identity in these cohorts, online tutors often referring to the species in question in posts and discussion, all of which supported group cohesion.

ⁱⁱⁱ The University of Warwick has recently been recognised (September 2021) as the best university in the UK for teaching quality, by The Sunday Times Good University Guide. This is attributed to positive National Student Survey results where the response to the pandemic was positively endorsed by students: Warwick named University of the Year for Teaching Quality.

^{iv} The Warwick Awards for Teaching Excellence (WATE) is an annual event where both staff and students can nominate teachers who have made a difference to their learning experience. A cross-University panel then engages in two rounds of judging, to decide the winners. There is a separate category for PGR teachers, this year seeing 11 winners. Warwick Awards for Teaching Excellence.

^v The Postgraduate Researcher Experience Survey (PRES) is a national survey of postgraduate research. Just under 100 Higher Education Institutions took part in 2021 and Warwick's response rate was above the national average. Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (warwick.ac.uk) PRES contains few specific questions about experience of teaching, so in 2021 Warwick PTC gained ethical approval to carry out its own survey, initial results of which are reported here in the JPPP and more substantial analysis of the data is now taking place.

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WARWICK POSTGRADUATE TEACHING COMMUNITY

WPTC is the outcome of the WIHEA-funded 'Postgraduate Digital Teacher Hub' project, launched in spring 2021.

The intention of the Postgraduate Digital Teacher Hub project was not to produce a finished article. Instead, the aim was to lay down a framework for building a greater sense of community amongst the hundreds of postgraduate students who teach at Warwick, whatever their department or faculty and whatever their precise teaching role.

We have set the ball rolling in terms of sharing teaching experiences and practices, investigating the needs and requirements of postgraduate tutors, encouraging engagement with continuous professional development, and creating cross-department and cross-faculty links for providing support/informal socialising opportunities.

We hope that, moving forwards, postgraduate tutors and the university more widely will take this framework, engage with it, flesh it out, and take it in new directions. We want as many postgraduate tutors as possible actively engaged with WPTC to create a sense of community amongst us and improve the experiences and quality of teaching for all.



[@WarwickPTC](https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/academic-development/pgrteachers/pgrteachercommunity@warwick.ac.uk)

Sign up to our mailing list: <https://forms.office.com/r/En9vDJKVuf>

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GET INVOLVED WITH THE *JPPP*

We are interested through this pilot volume in ascertaining whether there is support for this sort of initiative in the future, and would anticipate annual volumes of the journal being produced by a editorial team of PGRs.

If you might be interested in supporting PGRs who teach through the journal by joining the editorial team, please contact us at PGRteachercommunity@warwick.ac.uk.