

Title Page

“The trouble with normal ...”

Covid-19’s legacy and the multipotentiality for co-creating teaching, learning and assessing

Publication: Creative Learning and Practice in the Social Work and Health Professions: Lessons from Covid 19

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Word count: 3,900 (excluding references)

CHAPTER X

“The trouble with normal ...”

Covid-19’s legacy and the multipotentiality for co-creating teaching, learning and assessing

Although “The trouble with normal” is a title taken from a Queer Theory textbook (Warner, 2000), COVID-19 has actually *queered* higher education in ways unimaginable before the pandemic. The pandemic *queers* and challenges many traditional ways we looked at, and provided, teaching, learning and assessing (TLA), especially with specific difficulties faced by health and social care educational providers. Those difficulties have included, but not limited to, innovative ways of trying to make up for the ‘real’ human-to-human contact – in class and in professional or clinical practice settings - with a mixed effort and outcome of alternatives. The alternatives have included increased on-line learning opportunities; greater or lesser blended learning provision; synchronous and asynchronous video and virtual classroom engagement; augmented Virtual Reality (VR) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) resources; simulated practice; the gymnastics of flipped classroom pedagogies and techniques (Blázquez *et al.*, 2019), and of course, the “workload realism” for the extra hours teachers have put in striving to make all TLA meaningful and rewarding for their students (Arnold, 2021).

Whether we are providers or consumers of teaching, learning and assessment, the Covid-19 legacy is making us all scrutinise our provision and / or expectations of TLA under the microscope. Equally, this microscopic scrutiny of TLA is challenging us to move forward with opportunities, the great potential we learn from this era of current pandemic. There is no going “back to normal” or back to how things used to be. Why would we? *Why should we?* In fact, as Ashwin (2021) says of students, teachers and institutions, “the importance [is] of the design of curricula, including assessments, which provide students with access to knowledge which will transform their sense of who they are and what they can do in the world”. This sentiment is backed up by Sambell and Brown (2021: p.11), when, in relation to changes for assessment strategies, they say: “one way of supporting this change [...] is to reconceptualise assessment and feedback practices by adopting future-oriented design principles”.

Students, teachers and our learning institutions now have an unprecedented opportunity to actively participate in the co-creation of our new and evolving ‘normal’, as a continuous collaborative transformation, inspiring learning partners of today and empowering the academic citizens of tomorrow. Part of this new creation is to see how gains won and developments achieved need to be on-going – future orientated – not going back. Sambell and Brown (2021: p.11) affirm how “we now have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reimagine assessment for good, rather than simply returning to the status quo”. For example, in a literature review conducted by McDonald *et al.* (2018: p. 66) they concluded that “e-based learning and traditional teaching methods used in conjunction with each other create a superior learning style”. Shaw (2021) adds that an overwhelming percentage of young

people going to, or currently at, university prefer the whole face-to-face, on-campus, experience, including formal classroom teaching, and to counter-act what Arnold (2021) refers to as “the human act of full engagement [which] was undoubtedly compromised”. So, Covid-19 has made us reconsider our entire approach to TLA. This opportunity helps us to see traditional campus-based and synchronous on-line ‘face-to-face’ learning, (often) supplemented with a varying range of asynchronous on-line provision, not as a case of one thing or the other, an ‘either / or’ situation, but beneficial for exploring ways to combine the best elements of all, across the range of our curricula, to boost the providers’ (institutions and teachers) and end-user’s (the students or learners) experience.

Developing multi-potentialite graduates: motivating passive students into active learners

As with other current-day higher education sector students, health and social care learners have already experienced variable amounts of on-line teaching and learning provision. This provision, often in contrasting formats, with divergent passive or active learning engagement and variable quality, are an increasing part of undergraduate pre-qualifying curricula. E-learning is also an integral part of post qualifying Continuing Personal and Professional Development (CPPD) too, and – through multiple *apps* (electronic applications / programmes) and devices – operationalised across fields of health and social care professional practice in platforms for learning such as the *Social Care Institute for Excellence* (SCIE¹) and *e-Learning for Healthcare* (e-LfH²). In a way, the range of e-TLA can be harnessed and developed to capture best practice and wider potential opportunities, for an even greater all-round learning experience, enabling a compassionate “pedagogy of care” (Arnold, 2021) for a truly responsive community of shared learning values and practice, as we move forward from the Covid-19 era.

One dimension of learning frequently left behind, however, is academic assessment (Baughan, 2021). Whilst teachers, institutions and learners have heard calls from many quarters (not least the Covid-19 disruption) to totally redesign their assessment formats and processes – and to ‘scale up flexible assessment’ as Sam Elkington (2021) calls it - Higher Education Institutions often face an additional bind. This bind or responsibility is from practice-based Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) who have their own expectations of the *hoops* they require their registrants to jump through.

Reimagining assessments – a case in point

Many teachers have felt ‘thrown in at the deep end’ with Covid-19, its numerous lockdowns and rapid shifts to (more / better) on-line learning opportunities (Rambler *et al.*, 2020). Individual teachers may be effective educators, facilitating small group tutorials or standing in front of a lecture hall with 200 - 300 students, but how does one manage to be equally as good and effective with e-learning provision and delivery? This does not just mean performing in front of a camera on Zoom or Microsoft Teams, but through a total re-conceptualisation of TLA with formal and specific e-learning pedagogies. Additionally,

¹ The Social Care institute for Excellence, www.scie.org.uk

² E-Learning for Healthcare, <https://www.e-lfh.org.uk/>

and equally important, is how to manage assessment of learning in new, novel, and contemporarily relevant ways (Brown, 2021).

In considering a re-design of assessments, making them genuinely fit for purpose, Dr Joanne Tai (2021) says that teachers and institutions need to be cognisant of our students' diverse and intersecting backgrounds, their learning goals and interests, and their "futures beyond university". Such a message is imperative in helping build the multiple forms of potential in our students. To do so effectively, we also need to contemplate the specifics of genuine e-learning pedagogies and andragogies, or what some call *pedangragogies* (Evans, 2020). We cannot simply take our classroom style of teaching, and modes of assessment or exam invigilation, and transpose them onto a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE); such a move would be wholly naïve of us, as otherwise expert teachers.

A case in point

One of the exclusively e-learning modules I facilitate is called 'Promoting Sexual Health'. I inherited the assignments: a (sexual) health promotion essay, for Academic Level 6, and a paper-based (sexual) health promotion leaflet, with accompanying theoretical essay, at Level 7. I have now reinvented these assignments, teaching the students how to use and design in Adobe Spark™ and Adobe PremierRush™. At Level 6, the students critically reflect on designing a potential sexual health resource, as an Adobe Spark Page, using all three key functions of Spark (Page, Video and Post / Graphic). At Level 7, they create an actual Adobe Spark (3 elements) resource, ready for disseminating to a client population, and they must also include at least one self-edited video using Adobe PremierRush.

Some technophobic students may be apprehensive, at first, about how they will achieve their learning outcomes. With both early-in-module real-time (on-line) teaching, supported by asynchronous materials for both the Adobe apps, not only do they all enjoy their subject matter learning and novel assessment³ but they take away with them creative digital skills for the advancement of their professions and a (more) positive attitude to digital literacy (HEE, n.d.).

Digital literacy: fluency, confidence and competence

Many teachers have struggled with their own, let alone their students', digital upskilling. Over and above the required urgent upskilling, they have had to manage countless "how to ..." questions about on-line TLA, particularly in relation to the provision of assessments. Covid-19 assessment policies are not simply about 'no detriment' or being more relaxed about extenuating circumstances applications [Hale, 2021]! No longer in the proverbial sports hall, but now in individual students' own homes, questions have been raised concerning how to invigilate exams, or how to assess physical interactions during virtual OSCEs (Objective Structured Clinical Examination). Equally, asking how to facilitate role plays or simulated practice. Quintessentially important, however, is how to ensure equity, quality and inclusivity across mobile devices and Internet provision for all students. This last *how to*

³ <https://spark.adobe.com/page/v3bBVVmXeoRv/>

is especially important when many students may be technologically averse, technophobic, naïve or challenged, as well as those whose home environment or IT-resources are poor, in “digital poverty”, as Jisc (2021) calls it. Arnold (2021) states that the pandemic has “provided HE with a grounding reality check on the diversity of student circumstance.”

On this point of digital poverty, it is equally important to think of the many end users of social work, health and social care, too: the service users, clients or patients. Many service users, even the reluctant ones, may be expected to use IT resources as part of their package of care. They, too, however, may be digitally naïve or averse, and might need to be taught the skills required for usage, as well as assistance to acquire the physical resources (smart phone, iPad / tablet, etc.) especially if on exceptionally low income in the first place. Compassionate to remember, however: some may never want to use such resources!

Green *et al.* (2019: 404) say “effective communication is central to health education and requires consideration of sources, message and audience factors”. SCIE (2020) poses a crucial question: “why should social workers [equally, other health and social care professionals, too] develop their digital capabilities?” A suggested answer, given by SCIE (2020) is to “promote user and carer involvement”. Why? Because “digital technology can enable social workers to enhance the involvement and participation of adults and children in decisions about their care.” Indeed, the Royal College of Nursing echoed similar sentiments, for nurses (RCN 2018: p. 4): “[...] that the organisation should lobby for every nurse to be an e-nurse, able to use data, information, knowledge and technology to maximum effect for patients, carers and service users. These are no longer specialist issues but affect the whole nursing profession, who need to be supported to practise in new and modern ways”.

Don't just See one! Do one! Teach one!

Other points for consideration include the apparent lack of appropriate pedagogical underpinning for electronic / virtual education, compounded by a lack of practical training skills for teachers and students. These learning deficits relate to the philosophical underpinnings of e-TLA through to the simple mechanics of using so many new electronic programmes. No keener is this problem felt than in trying to promote a genuine, active-learning, flipped classroom philosophy and associated technique (Blázquez *et al.*, 2019; Evans, D.T. 2020). For example, in situations where students ‘turn up’ for class and expect to be taught something new; expecting them, now, to actively engage in a pre-session learning experience might be a shock to their system, and challenge both for students and some teachers!

“A student walked into one of my classes, about an hour late. He was rather irate at missing the first part of the session, but I reassured him that I had pre-made videos on what we were covering, and had already embedded them into his course Moodle site. He then sneered, ‘Hu! Whoever looks at Moodle!?’ This story highlights some of the struggles in turning around attitudes from spoon-fed, passive learning, often hitherto experienced by many students (and teachers) experiencing the Virtual

Learning Environment (VLE) as a repository for documents and reading materials, rather than as a zone for active and proactive engagement.”

To turn our VLEs into genuine communities for sharing learning on-line we need to start by learning how to build on and maximise the platforms we use, especially through adapting and applying relevant aspects of the philosophies of e-pedagogy / e-andragogy, as appropriate, for each different course and set of learners.

A new mindset: a cognitive reorientation about the ways we think of TLA

Included within specific e-pedagogical theories is the need to take an overview, a metacognitive approach, to the whole learning processes as well as the student’s role within it. This metacognitive approach includes answering the “why” and “how to” of the very need (the rationale behind) for their cooperation, especially in the more participatory styles required of e-learning engagement. This metacognitive approach to learning also extolls the benefits of active development for the students' own, shared, learning opportunities, be this in formal sessions or via peer collaboration and support outside formal time-tabled learning.

It is important to explain the concept and responsibilities of flipped classroom technique, especially to those who might be wondering why they have been asked to work through resources and materials prior to their shared (virtual or campus) classroom time together⁴. In explanation, it is worth clarifying that the modules students undertake, e.g. for 15 or 30 credits, mean that the all-round learning package should take about 150 / 300 hours, respectively (where 1 credit = 10 hours of study). Obviously, students do not get all of those hours in classroom, and thus they are already required to do additional self-directed and teacher-driven studies. *That's where 'flipped classroom' technique comes into its own!*

Flipping the classroom learning requires students to work through pre-learning resources, potentially equal to what they would have formerly done in class. These resources might be a week before a timetabled event with the teacher (either on campus or on-line). In the shared learning time together, rather than the teacher go over the materials from the pre-learning resource again, such as providing a traditional lecture, the teacher presumes and expects that the students will have worked through the materials. The teacher and class can then build on this learning, spending time together sharing their outcomes, reflections, ideas, questions and feedback. Such a workshop might also afford time for working in small groups / whole class, and to explore further matters to learn even more.

A case in point

When requested to teach on colleagues’ programmes, the two-hour session I would have formerly presented in a classroom, I now totally re-design in an Adobe Spark Page, such as this one on children, young people and sexual health⁵. I include elements of text, short videos, links, exercises and feedback, plus some questions to get the students thinking, ready for our time together in a workshop. I then design

⁴ <https://spark.adobe.com/video/3QPd1JFwkqJRd>

⁵ <https://spark.adobe.com/page/5zN5xpi7dFoF6/>

the workshop – and I call it that, because I expect the students to work at it! – in Mentimeter™.

Using some slides in Mentimeter for my presentation, as I would in PowerPoint™, and others with the various quiz or feedback facility specific to Mentimeter, I can then engage students and require them to contribute in numerous ways. Some engage by turning on their microphone / camera; sometimes in small group activities, or through the anonymity of voting or messaging directly in Menti™ slides. A pdf of the resulting workshop can then be added to the students' VLA, as a backup resource of our shared learning time together.

Tip: If students are quiet or slow to respond, I ask them to consider how it would be in a physical classroom, if they were expected to contribute or respond and there was silence!

By 2021, our TLA really has become technologically dependant, so much so that it is difficult to imagine a class without projector and screens, interactive boards, or Prezi, YouTube, or supported with on-line engagement. Even using programmes such as Mentimeter in class (whether a physical room or on-line) presupposes enough students a) have devices capable of using the programme, and b) know how to use it. The pace at which learning technologies are developing sometimes leave certain people behind, so, as McDonald *et al.* (2018: p.6) state: “training and preparation is vital.”

Empowering carers / enabling clients

It is imperative to consider that empowering social and health care professionals to become more digitally and e-learning experienced needs to have a knock-on effect with clients, in their respective fields of practice. It is crucial to take the end-user along with the technological developments, with the aim of such inclusivity not leaving anyone behind. When SCIE (2020) considers the impact on practice, the need is to “understand the online uses and technology needs of people who use services: [SCIE continues] Social workers should understand how different groups of people with distinct needs, use different online services and technology to support their wellbeing.” If students and teachers find the pace of e-learning technologies meteoric, and possibly difficult, how about clients? How about the populations that might not even be able to afford such technology, let alone the capability of understanding or using it?

Taking everyone with us

It is crucial we take everyone along with us, so to speak, and leave no one behind as we consider how to capture notions of digital literacy and develop them through fluency and confidence, right through to digital competency. This is as important for wider academic citizenship achievements of learners as it is for teachers. In fact, various authors of electronic device mediated TLA (e-TLA) are also raising concerns about students who fall behind, simply because they may be too shy or embarrassed about lack of resources or skills at usage (Jisc, 2021). They may equally be too shy to show their background environments, their home situation. Some might have particular domestic challenges, such as managing or caring for other people and pets at home; schooling children, or the trouble with violent or

problematic relationships (Burns *et al.* 2020). Indeed, “fully online courses and blended learning models are being integrated in all manners of instruction at all levels of education to the point that teachers and students alike would have difficulty in participating in many class activities without the Internet” (Picciano, 2019: p. 26). All of these concerns are important to consider, as part of the wider, holistic, *persona* of our on-line teachers and learners and the impact of new realities not just for teaching and learning, but assessments, also.

Truly active, participatory and best-practice e-learning provision can be a challenge, of course, for institutional providers (the colleges and universities), the teachers - especially those who often describe themselves as rather camera-shy or technophobic - as well as the student body; with a ‘one size doesn’t fit all’ motif appropriate (Compton and Almpanis, 2019). As teachers, providing learning, however, we cannot fail in our quest to deliver the very best opportunities we are able to do. Sometimes that means challenging *us* out of our comfort zones, as we embrace and develop these new and future orientated learning resources.

Future orientated learning

Particularly for health and social work / care professionals, with their range of clients across all strata of society, across the whole life-course ‘from the cradle to the grave’, new ways of learning and working will need to be practiced and reinforced, not just one-off events, like fads which are easily forgotten. To do so, genuine learning needs to be fourfold, i.e. to embrace not just the academic Knowledge, but to enhance positive Attitudes to new ways of learning, to practice fresh Skills and reinforce it all with frequent Habits (KASH: Griffith and Burns, 2014).

In light of Covid-19, so many academic quality practices have already been invigorated. These practices include automatic extenuation (extensions) for those students re-deployed to Covid-19 front line services or vaccination volunteering. Equally, “no detriment” policies for assessment hand-in dates; or judgements on the student’s diminished capacity for academic achievement. More so, however, there is a need for compassion with front-line students and workers. HEIs must take into consideration the psychological impact the pandemic has had on their learners and staff; the ‘above and beyond’ work many have done; their grief at (multiple) losses, even the personal suffering of illness and impact of ‘long Covid’ on themselves or their loved ones.

A leading international expert in assessment development, Prof Sally Brown⁶ also advocates how we need to build in ‘compassion’, not just across teaching and learning but most especially in our redesign of assessments which are truly responsive to today’s professional needs. ‘Things can only get better’ not by looking back to a fixed point in the past; nor by trying to emulate or re-create that point in time, but by drawing on a plethora of digital resources which support and promote new(er) ways of learning. We also need to enhance the potential from multiple sources of shared learning, and shape this ‘new normal’ into an

⁶ <https://sally-brown.net/>

active learning (virtual and / or physical) community that is dynamic, compassionate, relevant and inspiring.

What difference can I make?

'Impact' is such a crucial word in today's learning and practice environments. Regarding this chapter, how can social workers, health and other social care professionals use digital technologies to boost their learning potential *and* to make a positive impact on people, systems, services and organisations? SCIE (2020) demonstrates how technology is clearly here to stay, but encourages social and healthcare professionals to do more to take ownership of it, to integrate its use for the greater beneficence of those they care for, and – as demonstrated in the Adobe Spark 'Promoting Sexual Health' assignment, above, - to encourage health and social care professionals to be more proactive in the development and customisation of apps and programmes, to lead, rather than be led, in teaching, learning and assessments.

Three critical questions for practice development – especially in the face of any future lockdowns

The exercise and following questions will enable you to gain maximum benefit from working through this chapter.

Firstly, draw up a force field analysis (FFA)(Lewin, 1951), to explore the restraining and facilitating forces at play, with regards to your own experience of e-TLA at your institution. To do this, in the centre of a blank page, write up your aim, i.e. what you want to achieve in regard to e-TLA. Then, explore the hindrances, the restraining forces or barriers, which can or will block you from achieving your aim. Next, explore the facilitating forces; the enablers; the things that work and will help you achieve your core aim. You maybe doing this as a mind-map exercise, alone or with others.

In relation to your FFA, consider these three questions:

- 1) Which, and how many of the barriers to you achieving your aim, e.g. “to promote (improved) experiences and engagement with e-TLA” are within your personal control to overturn or manage more successfully?
- 2) Who can you recruit to help you minimise the barriers (restraining forces) and maximise the enablers (facilitating forces)?
- 3) How can you embed your aim, and the positive outcomes, into various e-TLA systems or networks, to ensure they are up and ready, whether or not there are any future disruptions to learning e.g. through Covid-19 lockdowns?

Summary and conclusion

This chapter has explored numerous dimensions of the Covid-19 legacy on e-teaching, e-learning and e-assessing. It has outlined suggestions for dealing constructively, positively and compassionately with barriers to a whole-system re-think for future directions, inclusive of institutions, teachers and learners. The chapter has also pointed out ways to draw on

each other's multiple potential to ensure, future pandemic or not, there is no going back to an education suited for the past: just forward.

This chapter is based on Evans, D.T. (2020)

Don't just think outside the box ... exploring e-learning ~ologies in light of Covid-19,

an Adobe Spark resource, <https://spark.adobe.com/page/HJXwxytPOXUYH/>

originally created for my teaching colleagues at the University of Greenwich.

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