

2020

JUTLP Editorial 17.3: Connection, digital education, and student-centric teaching practice before COVID-19

Joseph Crawford

University of Tasmania, Australia, joseph.crawford@utas.edu.au

Alisa Percy

University of Technology, Sydney, Australia, alisa.percy@uts.edu.au

Jo-Anne Kelder

University of Tasmania, Australia, jo.kelder@utas.edu.au

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/jutlp>

Recommended Citation

Crawford, Joseph; Percy, Alisa; and Kelder, Jo-Anne, JUTLP Editorial 17.3: Connection, digital education, and student-centric teaching practice before COVID-19, *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, 17(3), 2020.

Available at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/jutlp/vol17/iss3/1>

JUTLP Editorial 17.3: Connection, digital education, and student-centric teaching practice before COVID-19

JUTLP Editorial 17.3: Connection, digital education, and student-centric teaching practice before COVID-19

It is apt that the articles published in the second standard issue of the *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice* for 2020 address the significant issues for higher education during 2020. While many of these articles were submitted before the COVID-19 pandemic, each explores areas that have practical implications for higher education during coronavirus. The Australian sector's dependency on international students and transnational education has ruptured the economic and social sustainability of higher education institutions (Marshman & Larkins 2020). However, this is not the first pandemic to impact higher education: University of Oxford scholars and students retreated to their countryside estates during the Black Death (Courtenay 1980). More recently, severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS-CoV) resulted in travel lockdown measures, albeit on a smaller scale than COVID-19 (Crawford et al. 2020; Feast & Bretag 2005).

Globally, there are significant conversations about the future of higher education, following a period of rapid curriculum digitalisation. A growing volume of publications are documenting changes in university teaching and learning practice, and we continue to encourage scholars to reflect on their progression through rapid changes in education due to COVID-19. For those scholars, we encourage deep connection to the existing practical and theoretical literature on COVID-19 as well as evidence pre-dating the pandemic. Research that is practical in nature needs to be networked to existing knowledge of that practice, and remains essential in a period of rapid publication of institutional and country-specific case studies. Student connection is well-researched, and digital education is well represented in publications.

Scholarship should seek to understand how assumptions about research domains (such as digital education, student wellbeing, and academic development) have been challenged by the current situation. The balance to strike in higher education practice is between fast publication to enable practical advice to educational leaders in the field and ensuring that advice is connected deeply with the existing evidence and contextualised within our temporally-displaced learning and teaching environment. This issue provides pre-COVID conversations that begin with student connection and collaboration. It continues to provide evidence of digital education in broad international undergraduate contexts, as well as providing evaluations on specific instructional strategies, learning activities, and assessments.

Connection, collaboration and communication

Focussing on student connection with each other and their home institution while studying abroad, **Jarrett and Ellis** explore the challenges faced by the students making the transition to a new country and culture, and the home institution who have a duty of care for the student experience. Using the methodological resources of story-telling with an ongoing student blogging activity, the authors enabled a communal process of sharing stories to provide an interpersonal space for ongoing connection and foster reflective learning from experience. The student blogs were analysed to

identify the core challenges that students faced during their study abroad, and found that students' challenges of decision-making while abroad provided a fertile area for further research.

Linking in with the move to online during COVID-19 and the difficulties of doing collaborative learning in the online space, **Patterson and Prideaux** investigate how academics minimise the complexities of designing and facilitating distributed online group-based assessment tasks. Using interviews with academic staff to elicit details of their pedagogical praxis in their role, design choices and facilitation practices in relation to online group assessment, the authors analysed these through the lens of five educational constructs identified for effective group work. Within the descriptions provided by staff, they found a heavy emphasis on teaching presence and the deliberate design of the student group work experience, followed by authenticity of the task, individual accountability, group skills development, and positive interdependence. They suggest further research into the co-presence of all of these constructs in relation to student performance on group tasks.

Also concerned with collaborative learning, **Cooney and Darcy** explore the pedagogical value of educational games for fostering twenty-first century skills. Using an open-ended questionnaire with a large cohort of undergraduate students to evaluate their engagement in a team-based problem-solving puzzle, the authors found that this 'intervention' provided a low-stakes opportunity for students to understand what it takes to work effectively in a team, and increased their awareness of how a high performance team functions. The authors advocate for low-tech games that offer a high-quality collaborative learning experience as a way to prepare students for group assessment activities.

In relation to communication, **Sonnenschein and Ferguson** examine the perception of international and domestic students' perceptions of the importance of communication skills for the workplace and the development of these skills at university. Using semi-structured interviews with a card sorting technique, the authors found that while the students were mostly satisfied with the communication skills they had developed during their study, they recommend the incorporation of pedagogical strategies and structural improvements to encourage students to develop their general and intercultural communication skills to overcome challenges in their workplace learning experiences.

Digital

The preferred student experience to maximise learning, from a student perspective, has changed. Using learning management data, an online survey, and institutional student evaluation data, **Patterson et al.** sought to understand student engagement with video learning resources. Evidence from the triangulated data supported student preference for short premium videos over lower quality lecture recordings. Students, on average, felt their attention span for video-based learning materials was only 10 minutes. Interestingly, lecture slides were perceived as most useful. Perhaps there is a need to balance short premium videos with downloadable resources equivalent to lecture slides for asynchronous learning.

The use and facilitator evaluation of an online asynchronous student discussion board is the subject of the **Douglas et al.** manuscript. The focus is on semi-structured in-depth interviews with academics who have implemented the online discussion board guide (see Douglas et al. 2020) in their subjects/units. Their results argue effective academic development with the online discussion board guide has the capacity to enrich student learning outcomes.

Rural and remote learning has created an impetus for digital delivery to provide accessible and inclusive educational opportunities for regional students. **Muir et al.** discuss the role of design-based research to evaluate the efficacy of online teacher facilitation. The outcome of the study highlighted that a focus on social, managerial, and technical facilitation strategies enabled a sense of online presence to exist while motivating active learning from students in the online environment. As we progress in and out of lockdowns, waves, and variations during the pandemic; all knowledge surrounding how we can support and motivate students who are working from home is going to be crucial to our success as educators.

Student choice through enabling self-determination (e.g. Patall et al. 2010) is a key tenet of effective education. This is particularly true in digital education environments, where students often have less immediate access to their lecturer or university-coordinated support. Too much flexibility may be onerous for students, too little may disengage (Dillenbourg & Tchounikine 2007). The **Colasante et al.** manuscript explores the role of in-subject choice for their mode of delivery. This conversation is particularly important when universities begin their respective COVID-19 return to campus strategies. Collected thoughts from staff, students, and learning analytics provided opportunities to learn from this promising hybrid pedagogy model.

Next, we turn to **Nnadozie et al.**, who reflect on South African university student experiences of email-based feedback. With an activity-theory lens, students with diverse previous knowledge highlight diverse levels of self-efficacy and psychological ownership for their learning. Within this context, students also need to be aware of, and have the self-efficacy to, engage in the utility of their received feedback (Jonsson 2012; Lake et al. 2018). This manuscript provides a useful foundation for those academics considering how students who were expecting to be studying on-campus during our current semesters may still benefit from being digitalised recipients of asynchronous instructor feedback.

Evaluation

Evaluation of changes in approaches to curriculum delivery, development of resources or learning tools is a critical component of teaching and learning practice. The rapid and wholesale transition of curriculum into fully online modes of delivery due to COVID-19 rarely, if at all, included resource- or time-allocation for evaluation. It is timely to reflect on how we can build resilient systems for curriculum evaluation that can adapt to crisis curriculum design and delivery, and ensure that unexpected and rapid-fire curriculum changes are evidence-based and evaluated for impact on students' learning. This issue includes four papers which provide a range of insights and examples of planned evaluation; evaluation aiming to assure students' engagement in their learning or improvement of their learning outcomes.

Muscat-Ingloft developed the STOP reflection tool to enhance students' learning in a health course aiming to develop skills in continuing professional development and lifelong learning in the workplace. The study used a mixed-methods approach to evaluate both how the tool was delivered within the specific curriculum and how it was used by students who participated in the study. Of particular interest is the discussion on students' difficulties implementing reflection *on* and *in* action and framing the tool as a "working resource" for teachers and learners, specifically when seeking to develop propensity for reflection in action.

Focusing on evaluation of another kind of resource to enhance student learning, **Biggers and Luo's** systematic review explores the impacts of providing students 'guided notes' as an instructional strategy. In particular, the review looks at impact on student perceptions, outcomes and participation, seeking to unravel the mixed messages from the relevant literature. Guided by their research questions, the review identified and analysed twenty two papers, across several cognitive theories to identify affordances of guided notes for student learning.

Koeper et al. report on their radical restructuring of a first year Chemistry course (removal of all lectures, tutorials and exams) so that students acquired content knowledge by completing a series of challenges, supported by trained staff. The heart of the paper is the description of the new design, which is grounded in both chemistry education literature and the more extensive higher education literature, and the integrated process of informal evaluation and redesign over three iterations. The head of the paper is the design and implementation of the formal evaluation of the new curriculum, which is presented in detail and itself evaluated for limitations and improvements.

Thompson and Houston evaluated their use of a modified progress testing approach in a single semester capstone Paramedicine unit. The paper explains the collaborative process by which the progress test was designed and integrated into the student learning experience and its impacts. It provides a useful model for how to introduce a programmatic assessment approach into a teaching program, in particular for a context in which the viability of the process must be established prior to larger scale (e.g. course wide) implementation..

Where is the Journal heading?

2017 was the first year that the *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice* was ranked and featured in Scopus. In that year, we saw a Quartile 4 ranking and a Scopus Journal Ranking of 0.120. Since then, we have seen strong growth. In 2018, this grew 73 percent to a SJR score of 0.208. In 2019, we similarly saw strong growth (up 51 percent) to an SJR score of 0.315. Our international collaboration has grown significantly since first reviewed by Scopus from 2.44 percent up to 10.87 percent. Since the Journal has commenced, we have sought to publish timely articles on the current and future climate of higher education practice. Indeed, this issue is our largest in recent years with 13 thought-provoking and practice-oriented manuscripts.

As part of this growth, we are reflecting deeply on how we continue to ensure and enable the Journal to grow in a sustainable way as part of our commitment to the pursuit of knowledge in the higher

education domain. We are considering how we can best support emerging authors to create high quality manuscripts within our Journal. This includes our plan to develop revised author guidelines and begin to curate relevant research presentation guides, and refresh our reviewers list. As our Journal grows, we will also need to seek additional partners and collaborators, including a larger team of Senior Editors, Associate Editors, and Reviewers to provide more tailored feedback to our authors. We are excited by the future of the Journal, and encourage you to join us as we expand to push the conventions of higher education practice for the benefit of our students, academics, and society more broadly.

This curation of manuscripts is a testament to the practice and evidence-based scholarship that the higher education sector is capable of, and we hope you find the evidence insightful and thought-provoking within your own practice.

Joseph Crawford, Alisa Percy and Jo-Anne Kelder
Senior Editors, Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice

References

- Courtenay, W 1980, 'The effect of the Black Death on English higher education', *Speculum*, vol. 55, no. 4, pp. 696-714.
- Crawford, J, Butler-Henderson, K, Rudolph, J, Malkawi, B, Glowatz, M, Burton, R, Magni, P & Lam, S 2020, 'COVID-19: 20 Countries' Higher Education Intra-Period Digital Pedagogy Responses', *Journal of Applied Teaching and Learning*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 9-28.
- Dillenbourg, P & Tchounikine, P 2007, 'Flexibility in macro-scripts for computer-supported collaborative learning', *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, vol. 23, no. 1, pp. 1-13.
- Douglas, T, Mather, C, Earwaker, L, James, A & Murray, S 2019, 'Supporting digital engagement: An evaluation of the use of a Guide for effective development and facilitation of online discussion boards', *Journal of Applied Learning and Teaching*, vol. 3, no.1, pp. 78-87.
- Feast, V & Bretag, T 2005, 'Responding to crises in transnational education: new challenges for higher education', *Higher Education Research & Development*, vol. 24, no. 1, pp. 63-78.
- Jonsson, A 2013, 'Facilitating productive use of feedback in higher education', *Active Learning in Higher Education*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 63-76.
- Lake, W, Boyd, W & Boyd, W 2018, 'Transforming Student Expectations through a Real-Time Feedback Process and the Introduction of Concepts of Self-Efficacy--Surprising Results of a University-Wide Experiment', *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, vol. 15, no. 5, pp. 1-23.
- Marshman, I & Larkin, F 2020, 'COVID-19: what Australian universities can do to recover from the loss of international student fees', *The Conversation*, 3 June 2020.
- Patall, E, Cooper, H, & Wynn, S 2010, The effectiveness and relative importance of choice in the classroom. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, vol. 102, no. 4, pp. 896-915.