

# Higher Education for Good

Teaching and Learning Futures



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<https://www.openbookpublishers.com>

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# 17. Humanising learning design with digital pragmatism

*Kate Molloy and Clare Thomson*

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As learning designers, we are often supported to discuss, reflect, and grapple with critical issues in learning technology within our personal learning networks. These networks outside of our daily work, like Special Interest Groups (SIGs), online communities, and conferences, afford us the freedom to reflect on power structures, inclusivity, privilege, accessibility, agency, surveillance technologies, and more. But then, we return to our daily work and our day jobs. We return to existing power structures. We return with our senses critically heightened and brimming with ideas, wondering how to reconcile our newly informed pedagogies with conventional institutional practice, whilst upholding our values.

The pandemic has further compounded this, with students being increasingly disadvantaged by lack of technical resources and exhausted staff with even less available time. Maintaining good mental health is a huge challenge for both groups, and self-care is often pushed further down the list (Campbell et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2021; Mofatteh, 2021; Morrish, 2019). This prompts our reflection on the word “good”. If we are to aspire to a higher education for good, we need to explore who this good is for: students, staff, the institution, the sector and/or society. The care of these individuals and groups can be in tension with current demands for “excellence”, understood as good quality education, and competitive individualistic approaches need to be problematised (Urbina-Garcia, 2020; Watermeyer & Tomlinson, 2022).

In this chapter we champion a pragmatic approach to critical instructional design. Educationalists John Dewey and George Herbert

Mead were known for their pragmatic philosophy, seeing each person as unique and working together on small, incremental changes to create solutions (Vanderstraeten & Biesta, 2006). Beyond practical problem solving, we draw on critical pragmatism to explore power relations and propose new ways of thinking and doing in the face of established historical approaches (Feinberg, 2015).

We set the theoretical considerations within the daily constraints that educators find themselves within. In Honeychurch's exploration of creative online spaces, an alternative term used for pragmatism is "satisficing" (Honeychurch, 2021). Satisficing, a combination of "to satisfy" and "to suffice" is viewed positively as a means of achieving forward motion rather than stagnating, trying to find the perfect solution to complex problems, accepting that good can be good enough. Those of us in support roles provide "good help" for colleagues and advocate for "good help" for students in our design consultations. This "good help" is generative, iterative and positive, guiding towards achievement in small steps, eventually leading "to transformational changes".<sup>1</sup>

As practitioners we are reflecting on our lived experiences pre and post COVID-19, with a combined experience of 30 years. We write from a position of supporting students and staff whilst occupying the third space which can be difficult to navigate with regards power structures, being neither senior management nor academic (Whitchurch, 2008). However, this unique third space can afford us an advantage as our strong networking abilities can position us well for collaborations and transformations (Veles et al., 2019). We are learning technologists situated in Ireland and the United Kingdom and, as with many in our position across the UK and Ireland, learning design is only one element of our complex roles. There is not one single framework that we draw on when designing for teaching and learning; rather we have a holistic approach that pays close attention to the complexities of each context. Inclusion and accessibility are at the heart of what we do, and Universal Design for Learning (Edyburn, 2005; Rose et al., 2006) informs that work.

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1 <https://www.nesta.org.uk/report/good-and-bad-help-how-purpose-and-confidence-transform-lives/>

The chapter is structured into six sections, each corresponding to an element of adrienne maree brown's (2017)<sup>2</sup> *Emergent Strategy*. Using a biomimicry orientated lens, brown's framework facilitates an exploration of micro, meso and macro methods for changing and developing learning design culture. Whilst each of the six elements is distinct, their boundaries can blur and overlap in places, reflecting the complexities of policy and transformation. We identified with the aspiration of achieving transformation through a strategy which builds "complex patterns and systems of change through relatively small interactions" (brown, 2017, p. 2). To illustrate each of the elements, we use an example based on our experiences as learning technologists situated as we are within our respective institutional contexts, a broader sectoral context, and the global higher education community. In addition, we include an "educators' activity" in each section, so that interested readers can explore how these ideas might apply in their own context.

Our aim is to explore practical, humane solutions to digital problems related to teaching and learning in higher education — demystifying some of those challenges with creative and playful solutions. We focus on prevalent issues raised by staff and/or students in our own teaching settings and support sessions, as well as local and national surveys, literature, conferences, and community of practice settings over recent years.

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2 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_people\\_with\\_lower\\_case\\_names\\_and\\_pseudonyms](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_people_with_lower_case_names_and_pseudonyms)

## 1. Fractals: The relationships between big and small

How we are at the small scale is how we are at the large scale. The patterns of the universe repeat at scale. (brown, 2017, p. 52)



We use the metaphor of fractals to consider the micro and macro relationship in teaching and learning practice. Fractals in nature replicate their micro elements numerous times, resulting in macro versions that are replicas of the micro. Small individual elements replicate again and again to create complex structures. As humans, we may feel we lack the agency to effect large scale change. However, as

fractals, rethinking transformation as the result of multiple actions of individuals growing and growing until cultural change occurs.

### Virtual learning environment (VLE)

One of the most significant online spaces in any higher education institution is the one which hosts the teaching and learning resources, usually the VLE. However, over the years a debate between using the VLE versus freely available third-party tools has persisted (Clay, 2019; Weller, 2007). Proposed benefits of the VLE when exploring uneven power dynamics in digital spaces are the safety of a contract agreement, adherence to FERPA regulations (GDPR for those of us in Europe), and student privacy and data concerns (UMW Division of Teaching and Learning Technologies, 2018). In contrast, projects that go “beyond the VLE” spaces such as DS106 and Domain of One’s Own (DoOO) offer creative freedom and the chance for students to better hone their digital literacy skills (UMW Hurley Convergence Center, 2016). As instructional designers, these dichotomous positions may leave us with a sense of unease, of tension.

While understanding the ins and outs of an institutional VLE might not be the best avenue for developing transferable digital skills, a more in-depth understanding of the tools available could benefit

students immensely and provide them with a more engaging learning experience. Local technologists or designers can likely offer some support and insight. There are also supportive communities and user groups associated with many VLE providers that will offer peer-led, practitioner-oriented support and shared practice.

In our work, we often see frustration arise during design work when the VLE does not do the thing that staff *really* want it to do. We understand this, but to avoid that level of frustration, it is important to understand how the VLE and external systems work, and what their strengths and limitations are. To start, there are many different settings behind the scenes that only administrators can see. Often, certain tools and functionalities are not enabled because information technology (IT) specialists within the institution cannot support them, or because they might impede other core functionality, such as security or student information system feeds. The same can apply to roles and privileges. If there is limited freedom to customise courses, there might be a technical reason for it. Clear communication between digital education, IT and academic teams can help alleviate these frustrations and work towards alternative solutions.

A wider understanding of how institutional systems interact with and feed into each other can also guide decision making at a course design level, such as how student data get to the VLE. If it is through registrations on a student information system (SIS), then changing a student's pronouns or name on the VLE might later be overwritten. There are likely workarounds if there is no way to change a name or pronouns on the VLE. In some cases, a student may be able to edit their profile pictures, so they might do that and add some text. They could include their pictures in their signatures on discussion board posts, or in the chat or profile names during online classes.

Another example is that curriculum management software may only be updated annually and if so, there may be only a single point in time during which to state course learning outcomes and assessment approach. Therefore, it is beneficial to find out when this takes place within the academic year to fit with course/programme design work.

**Educators' activity**

Jot down a VLE "wish list". What could the VLE do to create a better learning experience? Working with the local teaching and learning centre, information services or library or an online community, can generate possible solutions. There may be tips or workarounds to facilitate the items on the wish list. These will vary across the different VLE platform suppliers, but through different sources of support, there are sure to be answers to address the frustrations.

It is worth investigating how tools that are available can help to build a community of learners. Reflecting on hooks' (1994) thoughts on community, we are reminded that voice, presence, and excitement are crucial parts of the learning experience: "our capacity to generate excitement is deeply affected by our interest in one another, in hearing one another's voices, in recognising one another's presence." (p. 8).<sup>3</sup> Bowles provides practical advice for building safe online communities in spaces like the VLE,<sup>4</sup> offering tips around the timing of activities, allowing space to opt out, and involving students in the learning process. Within the functionalities of any VLE, it should be possible to provide safe options for personal stories, such as discussion boards (where posts are visible to the whole course) or an anonymous survey tool (ensuring a higher level of safety).

## 2. Intentional adaptation: How we change

Change is definitely going to happen, no matter what we plan or expect or hope for or set in place. We will adapt to that change, or we will become irrelevant. (brown, 2017, p. 70)

We reflect here on the breath-taking murmurations created by starlings and how this concept can be applied to learning design. Thousands upon thousands of birds fly seamlessly together moving as a single entity. They work in sync, always communicating clearly, with collective

3 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_people\\_with\\_lower\\_case\\_names\\_and\\_pseudonyms](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_people_with_lower_case_names_and_pseudonyms)

4 <https://onehe.org/resources/some-safety-considerations-for-online-community-building/>



leadership and deep trust with one another. Even when employing an institutional VLE, (learning) technology continually updates, new features are added, old ones disappear, connections to other systems change over time and may even be replaced. Keeping abreast of all these changes can be a time consuming and never ending job. Recognising where and when key knowledge is required by reaching out to colleagues across the institution, and working closely with advice and guidance can result in working intentionally for good — good for time constraints and good for students gaining from consistent and appropriate deployment of materials.

### Video recordings

One specific activity that has frustrated many teachers we have worked with before and during the COVID-19 pandemic is video recording. Gone are the days when a video production expert was required to capture the footage, edit the takes together and then upload it to a server. Now teachers can use a range of tools to record, edit, upload directly







to a streaming service, and embed the result in the VLE, whether a live session or an asynchronous recording of content. However, training and practice are required to become competent and confident to ensure that the finished product has both the correct visuals and sound. Frustration and work can rob the creator of precious energy and time.

Other crucial considerations include how provision of video affects those who are experiencing digital poverty, and the time required to caption content. Many systems now have machine-generated captions, but the accuracy of these vary considerably from speaker to speaker. It is essential to reflect on which course elements would benefit most from being presented as video and how design can encourage engagement



(Brame, 2016; Zhu et al., 2022). From our own student feedback and video analytics, students want short videos containing summaries, key assessment advice, demonstrations of practical skills, and to “meet” their teacher. The video tips we include here (see Table 1) are based on our experience supporting staff, but we encourage exploration and drawing inspiration from wider sources too (Boateng et al., 2016; Brame, 2016; Buchner, 2018; Harrison, 2020).

Table 1

*Top video tips (for educators)*

	<p>Planning out content in a storyboard will help minimise the time required to record and will also serve as the basis for subtitles. This can be done on paper or digitally in a presentation program for example.</p>
	<p>Avoid aiming for perfection, rather get the best possible outcome by minimising background noise, articulate clearly, and adjust the narration speed to maximise clarity. Leave in minor errors or leave a pause of several seconds that will show in the audio track as a flat line and easily be spotted for removal.</p>
	<p>Short bursts of recording are much easier to achieve and research. User analytics show viewers rarely watch any video beyond approximately 19 minutes.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, splitting content over multiple short videos is an advisable approach.</p>
	<p>Depending on the design, video can require significant time and effort. Therefore, ensure it is as timeless as possible for reuse for many years. For example, don't say the current date, avoid phrases such as “last year”, “next year” etc, don't provide assessment specifics, instead, refer to the course handbook for details.</p>

5 <https://www.techsmith.com/blog/video-statistics/>

	<p>This is not about having expensive high-tech equipment, rather a clean background, a solid surface for the recording device, good light, and a quality microphone.</p>
	<p>For simplicity and effectiveness, turn the camera on when doing a personable piece for human connection, but if talking to slides consider keeping it off. This decreases the cognitive load for both the creator and students as viewers.</p>

#### **Educators' activity**

Record a 2–3-minute welcome to the course including a personal introduction, an overview of the course and why it is exciting or interesting. End with a prompt asking students to share why they are interested in taking the course or if it is a mandatory course, what apprehensions they may have. Give them a choice of where to share this: discussion forum thread, social media or at the start of a live session.

### 3. Interdependence and decentralisation: Who we are and how we share

The idea of interdependence is that we can meet each other's needs in a variety of ways, that we can truly lean on others and they can lean on us. It means we have to decentralize our idea of where solutions and decisions happen, where ideas come from. (brown, 2017, p. 87)

Many organisms in nature are mutually reliant on one another, each flourishing because of the other. Spencer defines characteristics of co-operation, independence, and dependence between actors, rather than interdependence which is central to collaboration.<sup>6</sup> Further differences between collaboration and co-operation are long term

<sup>6</sup> <https://spencerauthor.com/can-you-force-collaboration/>

visions and values (rather than short term goals), generation of ideas (rather than sharing of ideas), and empowerment (rather than engagement). Joining and collaborating with colleagues within and without the institution has a focus on partnerships, where individual contributions add together for learning at scale. The richest collaborations include student voices, not as a superficial add-on, but to truly integrate their views and experiences, with benefits such as enhanced literacies, increased motivation, and engagement, decreased dissonance (Bovill et al., 2011; Carless, 2020; Deeley & Bovill, 2017). In this section, we explore some of the open spaces for collaborations, both to learn from past work or to contribute to new ones.

### Learning technology communities of practice



Conferences and events (online, in-person and hybrid) can serve as safe spaces to connect with others as we explore new ideas and approaches. When we step away from our everyday lives to participate in events, we are afforded space to reflect. There is an inherent value in the multiplicity of support we receive from these networks, ranging from technical support to emotional support. Beyond

familiar communities of practice (Wenger, 2008), conferences and events can offer a support more akin to *affinity spaces* where diverse participants come together to act, learn, teach, create and problem solve around a common interest, “without regard to credentials, ages, outside status, or degrees of expertise” (Gee, 2017, pp. 28–29).

Every institutional setting is different, but finding local support and community is vital. Local learning technologists, instructional designers, librarians, and academic developers are a great place to start. Learning technologists can have a myriad of job titles, but the teaching and learning department can usually suggest appropriate contacts (Czerniewicz, 2021). Offering colleagues care-based support can afford

them the agency and confidence to critically reflect on their teaching and learning designs, and perhaps implement small changes as a result.

Looking beyond institutions, across the sector and across the world, various organisations, projects, and initiatives can offer support. The range and scope of some are vast. For instance, the Association for Learning Technology (ALT)<sup>7</sup> in the UK has a network of over 3,500 educators in the UK and globally. In Ireland, groups such as the Irish Learning Technology Association (ILTA),<sup>8</sup> the Computers in Education Society of Ireland (CESI)<sup>9</sup> and the Irish Universities Association Enhancing Digital Teaching and Learning (IUA EDDL)<sup>10</sup> project (see Flynn et al., Chapter 14, this volume) have helped build a more comprehensive network of practitioners across Ireland. Beyond the UK and Ireland, TEL Advisors<sup>11</sup> is a community of practice in Australia and the Open/Technology in Education, Society, and Scholarship Association (OTESSA)<sup>12</sup> is based in Canada.

Other communities span across sectors and borders and are richer for their extensive reach. Initiatives like Virtually Connecting<sup>13</sup> and Equity Unbound<sup>14</sup> have helped to create and foster open networks of practitioners using the open web. Such open communities have developed learning opportunities, networking opportunities, and collaborations such as the #FemEdTech Quilt (see Bell et al., Chapter 10, this volume).<sup>15</sup>

#### **Educators' activity**

Opt-in! There may be hesitancy before signing up for new mailing lists or engaging in new activities or communities due to lack of time, and overflowing inboxes. However, selectively and intentionally opting-in to engage with new networks can pay dividends. Lurk at first, sit back and take in a webinar, or follow social media discussions or email/discussion forum threads. Evaluate the discourse before opting-in.

7 Association of Learning Technology (ALT): <https://www.alt.ac.uk/>

8 Irish Learning Technology Association (ILTA): <https://ilta.ie/>

9 Computers in Education Society of Ireland (CESI): <https://www.cesi.ie/>

10 EDDL Project: <https://edtl.blog/>

11 TEL Advisors: <https://teledvisors.net/blog/>

12 Open/Technology in Education, Society, and Scholarship Association (OTESSA): <https://otessa.org/>

13 Virtually Connecting: <https://virtuallyconnecting.org/>

14 Equity Unbound: <http://unboundeq.creativitycourse.org/>

15 FemEdTech Quilt: <https://quilt.femedtech.net/>

#### 4. Nonlinear and iterative: The pace and pathways of change

In a non-linear process, everything is part of the learning, every step. That includes constructive criticism, it is part of the feedback loop—experiment, gather feedback, experiment again. This is how we learn. (brown, 2017, p. 106)

The familiar adage of chaos theory is the butterfly who beats its wings, and the effects reverberate thousands of miles away. Problems are often considered *complicated* in higher education — linear, stable, following predictable patterns. Yet it may be beneficial to consider them as *complex* — networked, unpredictable, adaptable, evolving, uncertain and emergent (Hager & Beckett, 2020; Morrison, 2008). Educational technology is complex: entangled with capitalist, social, cultural, and human perspectives. For example, every device used by educators and learners has different configurations. Rather than try to solve these at an individual level, it is important to design activities that will work in multiple modes and to give learners choices regarding how to interact with activities or resources.



#### Learning design frameworks

Considering accessibility and inclusion of resources across courses may seem a huge task. For example, to bring material up to appropriate accessibility standards such as the W3C Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI)<sup>16</sup> to meet disability legislation may take many hours of work. However, making one small change for each semester or academic year

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.w3.org/WAI/>

will make an immediate impact (Bong & Chen, 2021). Frameworks can help map out the complexity such as Universal Design for Learning<sup>17</sup> (see Ramparsad Banwari et al, Chapter 16, this volume) or THRIVES.<sup>18</sup>

Learning design frameworks can provoke new ways of thinking about teaching and learning. In our support roles, we take care not to evangelise any one approach, but to distil meaning from these frameworks to create meaningful change in teaching and learning. By encouraging staff to adopt a plus-one approach, we help create achievable goals that are beneficial to all involved (Tobin & Behling, 2018). In this work, we often find when educators make one small change, for example permitting alternative format assignment submissions, we see benefits such as increased submission rates. They are then encouraged and inspired to build on those changes going forward, delving deeper into design frameworks.

#### **Educators' activity**

Set a "plus-one" challenge based on a framework of choice such as:

ABC Learning Design uses Diana Laurillard's learning types as the basis for quick course redesign (Laurillard, 1999). Quickly jot down which types of learning already take place in modules and re-balance activities, and tools used, to enhance student access and engagement.

Alternatively, examine the CAST Universal Design for Learning guidelines (see footnote 17) and arrive at one manageable change that may improve a course/programme design. For example, is there an assignment that could benefit from clearer instructions, could students submit the assignment in a different format or are there topics that might prove particularly difficult for students?

## 5. Resilience: How we recover and transform

Resilience is in our nature, and we recover from things that we would be justified in giving up over, again and again. (brown, 2017, p. 126)

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17 <https://www.cast.org/impact/universal-design-for-learning-udl>

18 <https://blogs.qub.ac.uk/digitallearning/accessibility/>

Following the pandemic, we each have had to heal from the wounds it has inflicted — mental, emotional, and/or physical. If a starfish has a limb removed, it immediately seals over the damage, gradually building a tough callus over a few days for increased protection. Eventually, it may even extend fully as a replaced limb, though this may take some time. Likewise, as humans we have the capacity to heal damage to ourselves, if we have the time required. This healing often occurs within the supportive structures of communities and alongside colleagues, friends, and family.

The pandemic is not an isolated instance of a traumatic event. Crises such as climate change, global inequities, energy poverty and war will continue to affect education. Working together within our communities, alongside strong leadership, is crucial for recovery from wounds, seen and unseen.

It is necessary to acknowledge our own fragility, as well as that of our students. Support is manifest in designed interactions which ensure support, flexibility, and kindness by applying approaches such as Universal Design for Learning, pedagogy of care, community building activities, space for engagement and discourse.

### Assessment and feedback

At the design stage of a course/ programme, consider the digital skills required by teachers and students for the planned assessment.

Discussions between designers, teachers and learning technologists can clarify the most appropriate approach to create assignment submission areas in the VLE, this will not only be a clear area for students to upload their work to but ensures a seamless

system for marking and feedback. Time spent at this stage will pay dividends: if multiple files are required, then ensure the submission box





can accommodate this; if video files are required, check which system the institution uses for this. Additional setting choices may include individual versus group, peer marking, due dates if students can make more than one submission or submit after the due date. A significant number of support tickets we deal with regarding assignments are due to incorrect submission box settings.

Regardless of the chosen approach, it is crucial that guidance, support links and other aids are located above the submission box for students. This will reduce the number of queries received as well as reducing the stress on students. In addition, creating a discussion forum thread for the assignment allows answers to queries in a transparent space to avoid repeated questions in inboxes as well as the means for peer support.

Following institutional conventions or guidelines may result in tensions with personal values. Within design settings, there may be those with limited agency regarding assessment marking approaches. However, there may be opportunities to design in assignments without numerical scoring, referred to as ungrading (Blum, 2020; Flaherty, 2019). Many VLE platforms will be able to meet these needs, such as having “complete/incomplete” appear in the grade column to afford the ability to provide formative feedback without a number or percentage. Designing assessments such as this provides opportunities for students to learn and act on feedback across the course.

Feedback can be shared in multi-modal formats such as audio, video, or script annotations. This can potentially save time but can also add humanity and personalisation. Options for educators include recording a short podcast that highlights the most common feedback and comments emerging from an assignment, for example. This approach can help to lessen workload, whilst providing a unique opportunity for students to see that they are not alone in receiving this feedback (Gould & Day, 2013; Hennessy & Forrester, 2014). Students who internalise such feedback as criticism may be assured to hear others face the same issues, and the audio format is more personal than written feedback in which tone can be misinterpreted (Hayman, 2020; Parkes & Fletcher, 2017).

**Educators' activity**

Ask students to create a learning resource about a specific learning outcome and a specific target group and provide at least half a dozen formats/platforms for them to balance choice with scaffolding and guidance.

Look to others for inspiration as redesigning assessment practice can be a daunting task. There is a wealth of experience across institutions, networks, and wider afield. One Irish example is the *History of Life* project by John Murray of the University of Galway.<sup>19</sup> Over several years, he supported students to produce their own video documentaries for the public domain, develop digital storytelling skills through guerrilla filmmaking, and contribute to the world of science.

## 6. Creating more possibilities: How we move towards life

Authentic, exciting unity takes time, and lots of experimenting. (brown, 2017, p. 156)



Looking toward the future of learning design, we can learn from water. A river can begin life as a small trickle, building and growing as it travels ever forward. It never stands still, constantly evolving and navigating around obstacles, such as rocks, changing with the weather and terrain. Bringing this generative and evolving ethos to learning design can

result in experimentation and explorations to improve engagement with students. Remembering to accept that failure can open new possibilities, learning and successes.\* As we move and flow forward as a sector, consideration of what is and is not sustainable for teaching and learning

<sup>19</sup> <https://media-and-learning.eu/type/featured-articles/filming-the-history-of-life-a-student-perspective/>

is paramount to grow transformative justice cultures. As with other elements, the actions one builds and replicates numerous times results in transformative changes across higher education.

### Rethinking the lecture

Face time is overvalued is one of the *Manifesto for Teaching Online* statements, which was written with specific reference to distance online education (Bayne et al., 2020). As learning technologists who went into the pandemic worried about how infrastructure would hold up, lack of access to internet connections and varying levels of digital skills, we initially advocated for a slow approach to the online pivot. “Use more asynchronous (non-live) activities and interactions, be intentional in your design”, we repeated daily. However, again and again we saw teachers default to the synchronous norm and replicate the large didactic lecture theatre design in the online environment. The usage statistics for webinar systems soared beyond what was thought possible.<sup>20</sup>

After the early months of remote learning frustrations surfaced, teachers sought a connection to students through cameras, but students wanted privacy in their own chaotic, personal environments (Castelli & Sarvary, 2021; Leung et al., 2021). Soon after came the “Zoom fatigue”, the continuous live interactions were exhausting for everyone unequally (Bailenson, 2021; Fauville et al., 2021). The physical, social, and emotional toll of live engagement was evident amongst so many of us, but particularly difficult for those who felt it imposed upon their personal space and agency, especially those who lacked appropriate learning spaces in digital poverty, anxious, lacking confidence etc (Curelaru et al., 2022; Li et al., 2022). The daily repetition of “you are on mute”, “we can’t hear you”, “we lost you for a bit”, “can you see my slides?” — a monotonous background to our daily lives.

Recording theory and information-heavy segments in short videos and making them available before the live session, referred to as flipped learning, frees up time in the session (refer to the video section above) (Eppard & Rochdi, 2017). Class time can then be better utilised

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20 <https://www.researchnester.com/reports/webinar-and-webcast-market-global-demand-growth-analysis-opportunity-outlook-2023/237>

for tackling misinterpretations, clarifying difficult areas, and testing students' understanding. Small groups that retain the same student members throughout the course allow those important relationships to be built. Combining them with asynchronous activities such as discussion fora, reflective diaries, group blogs, photo logs, can ensure student-teacher interaction as well as with each other on their terms.

In addition, designing-in short but fun icebreakers or welcome activities bring presence lacking in didactic lectures. Emojis, GIFs and memes can contribute significantly to communication in these spaces, conveying meaning quickly and joyfully. Setting affective, hands-on tasks such as scavenger hunts, 3D metaphors, mapping exercises, sketchnoting give both relief from the screen and needed pauses for reflection, bringing in elements of emotion. Two rich sources of inspiration are the *OneHE* online community-building activities and the *Intention: Critical Creativity in the Classroom* book (Burvall & Ryder, 2019).<sup>21</sup>

#### **Educators' activity**

Oreo challenge. Ask students to come to the session with an Oreo cookie or similar two-layered cookie. Set a task that requires the student to create a poster/infographic/chart (whatever suits the context best) with the Oreo. They can use it whole, split it up, smash it, colour it — whatever they want, but the main element of their poster must be the cookie.

## Conclusion

We are excited by what we can create, we believe it is possible to create the next world.

We believe. (brown, 2017, p. 16)

Taking a humanising, pragmatic approach in our learning design work enables us to vacillate between the practicalities of our on-the-ground work and the systemic change that is possible if we consider the big picture and work within trusting collaborations. Drawing on the tenets of emergent strategy, championing individual actions, which at scale

<sup>21</sup> OneHE Community building activities: <https://onehe.org/equity-unbound/>

generate complex patterns. This collective and collaborative work can lead to transformative justice for ourselves and our students. Flexibility, time, and training are required to ensure high-quality education. Educating the educators to embrace the complex entanglement of pedagogy and technology is a necessity in a post-digital world (Fawns, 2022).

In an educational landscape that remains in a state of flux, heightened by the pandemic, emergent strategy frames our design approach between the micro and macro levels, and not only outlining how they intersect, but how cultural change can be driven (brown, 2017). Power imbalances can be addressed through collaborations and drive policy change for “good” such as inclusion, decolonisation, anti-surveillance, and wellbeing.

Ultimately, our reflections on nature-based metaphors, aim to empower colleagues to design for learning with increased attention to humanising it and ultimately “help students become more capable, self-managing participants in the processes” (Goodyear, 2015). We continue to believe in higher education for good, higher education for transformative justice.

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