



Editorial: Academic Practice and Covid-19

EDITORIAL

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We know that lives have been recalibrated over the last 16 months, and we feel these recalibrations in our bones and in our souls. Our ways of working, caring for ourselves and others, relating to students and peers, and connecting with the meaning of our work, have been infected and inflected by the pandemic. It is too early to say how higher education and engagement in the classroom will be affected in relation to this process of recalibration. It is too early to say how we will feel when we get back into those classrooms, studios, workshops and laboratories, and feel the energy of these spaces.

Yet, these human potentialities have been affected by the governance and regulation of higher education, and in particular Government statements around: business-as-usual; the value-for-money of learning in the University during the pandemic; the autonomy of institutions in opening-up to certain courses; and, the trade-off between financial support and restructuring for institutions under stress. At the same time, these human potentialities have witnessed an amplified culture war around intersectional, intergenerational and intercommunal issues, like decolonising, Black Lives Matter, and the attainment of white, working-class boys.

As a result, the uncertainties of the pandemic have flagged a disconnect between humane values and economic value for many university workers, including professional services' staff, students and academics. Moreover, these have impacted differentially upon different bodies inside our institutions. As the delivery of the curriculum, student support, the development of professional services, research impacts and knowledge exchange, have all become mediated through screens, we note the impact of this on those who have caring responsibilities, or for whom overwork becomes culturally-acceptable and a form of self-harm. We also note that many staff still have to attend our campuses, and have put themselves at risk to keep those campuses open and safe.

As part of our relaunch of Gateway Papers, we wanted to refocus and re-centre the humane values that underpin our work, and to highlight the impact of the pandemic upon our intellectual being and doing. We deliberately wanted to use stories of lived experiences, in order to show how Covid-19 has recalibrated academic experiences of their work, cultures and institutions. Crucially, we wanted to build a collective and communal understanding of the impacts of the pandemic, reflected and refracted in relation to emotion, ill-being and well-being, workload and working practices, cognition, cooperative working, lone working, the place of technology, and so on. We were also very interested in papers that develop our understanding of the differential, intersectional impacts of Covid-19.

In this issue, we have a range of papers focused upon the curriculum, technologically- and digitally-mediated working lives, our relationships with our students and peers, and how we take care of ourselves. In thinking about our practice, Tracy Harwood asks us to question whether and how the pandemic has changed creative practice, which is then picked-up by Daniel Morley and Charlie Henshaw in thinking about how a virtual studio enables creative partnerships.

More philosophically, Jason Eyre questions our beliefs in education and its purpose. At a more granular level, this philosophical questioning leads Brett Koenig to reflect upon the impact of technology on student engagement and participation in Law. Natasha Katuta Mwila develops this in the context of curriculum design that enables engagement beyond her 'A-group'. In thinking about engagement, Kevin Merry looks at the intersection of technology, academic practice and emotional intelligence. This questioning of how we support collective emotional recovery is also the focus for Tsung-Hung Su. Roger Saunders develops this in relation to how we keep-in-touch and maintain dialogues from our kitchen tables, bedsits and bedrooms.

In terms of the relationship between the physical and the digital, Alan Brine reflects upon the adaptive identities of libraries and those who work and learn within them. In thinking about this relationship, Lisa Wakefield questions some of our assumptions about participation and engagement in each of those spaces, and what this means for connection. For Rachel Higdon, this shapes a potential epistemological crisis, through which we might question how the students conceptualise themselves when their learning is mediated through the screen.

Finally, we might reflect on these matters arising whilst listening to Rob Weale's electro-acoustic commentary in his take on the anxiety machine. For a slightly different slant, Marie Bassford offers an open account of the impact of the pandemic on her life beyond the University, and a different take on the ways in which the pandemic has mediated our place in our relationships to ourselves, our loved ones and each other.

Peace be with you, and keep safe.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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