Postdigital Science and Education

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Online Postgraduate Education in a Postdigital World

Beyond Technology

Springer

Postdigital Science and Education

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We no longer live in a world where digital technology and media are separate, virtual, 'other' to a 'natural' human and social life. Book series engaged with technology and education tend to view the research field as concerned with the 'effects' of digital media and other technologies on the existing activities of teaching and learning in education. This still assumes a clear division between an authentic educational practice and the imposition of an external, and novel, technology. The rapid growth of research and books and articles dealing with education and research in and for the postdigital age calls for a different approach that is no longer based on a division but rather on an integration of education and technology. This book series meets that need.

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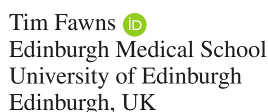
Tim Fawns 
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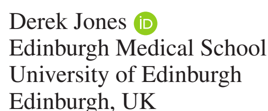
Derek Jones 
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Series Editor's Preface

Twenty-odd years ago, as a student of Physics, I mustered the courage to send my first popular science article to a small independent cultural magazine. The editor invited me to his office, took his thick, ragged fountain pen, and tore my text into pieces. My beloved article looked like Humpty Dumpty seconds after the fall, and my attempts at implementing editor's comments connected poorly fitting remains like the bandages of Frankenstein's monster. After a while, the *n*th version of the article was finally accepted for publication.

For a couple of years after that fateful day, I spent every other Tuesday morning in a darkly lit editorial office in a ruined city-centre Austro-Hungarian building, chain smoking and drinking coffee with fellow writers and editors. Upon delivery of freshly printed papers dripping with lead-based ink, we would refill our dirty coffee cups with generous portions of cheap brandy and start reading. Waving our hands and leaving black fingerprints all over the office, we would argue about whose article reads better and discuss our ideas for the next issue.

Buzzed on caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol, with a Hemingwayan posture and a few copies of the magazine below my elbow, I would head home for lunch and a nap. In the evening, I would hit the pub and resume discussions. The magazine's circulation was far from big, but every other Tuesday evening, patrons of the next-door pub expected a good discussion. Most authors made sure not to disappoint—after all, the sense of pride with which people discussed our articles, and a few free drinks, were pretty much all we made from our writing. To my 20-something aspiring writer self, every sip of that free wine tasted like nectar. Today, it would probably cause heartburn in a blink of an eye.

This year or so spent at the fringes of the bizarre world of the early-2000s dying publishing industry has sparked a lifelong addiction. I embarked on an academic career, which seemed to be the last refuge where one could get paid for writing. Started writing in English. Published my first scholarly article, authored book, edited book—and then some. Founded *Postdigital Science and Education* journal and book series. Finally, I became one of those privileged people who make their living from working with texts.

Yet these days, the old authors' rush is no more. A pdf attachment in my Inbox does not come even close to fresh newspaper pages dripping with wet ink and leaving stained fingers. A Google Scholar citation does not feel nearly as good as a semi-drunken 'hey mate, what the hell was on your mind when you wrote that crap?' Passionate discussions have moved from editorial offices, cafes, and pubs to our inboxes and social networks. Coffee, cigarettes, brandy, and wine are now replaced by a warm cup of tea. The only thing that has remained permanent is also the only thing that we unanimously wanted to change: writers' payment was meagre then, and is still meagre today.

The third book in Postdigital Science and Education book series, *Online Postgraduate Education in a Postdigital World: Beyond Technology,* is brought into the unfortunate world of corporate publishing. Today's academic books are not waited upon in editorial offices and pubs. Upon receiving our 'Congratulations, your book has been published' emails, we merely spend a few moments collectively patting each other's backs on social networks while sitting at quality meetings as useful as an ashtray on a bicycle. Springer gets its pennies, editors and authors get their recognition, and I, book series editor, get a negligible fraction of both.

This editorial makes me more Ebenezer Scrooge than Ernest Hemingway, yet I still believe in the power of writing and discussion. The editors and authors of *Online Postgraduate Education in a Postdigital World: Beyond Technology* have shown genuine passion for advancing this hugely important area of teaching, learning, and research. It is only by developing new critical emancipatory praxis of online postgraduate education that we can raise the new postdigital generation of critical emancipatory practitioners and thinkers.

Scholars of today are too geographically and culturally scattered to wait together for freshly printed pages dripping with wet ink over coffee, cigarettes, and brandy. Pubs which serve free wine to next-door magazine freelance journalists are no more. Accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic, our world has rapidly become one of stone-cold pdfs, online meetings, and postdigital dialogues which try to breathe in a bit of soul into our techno-mediated communications (Jandrić et al. 2019; Jandrić 2020).

New postdigital knowledge ecologies (Peters et al. 2021) suffer from birth pangs including questions pertaining to collective knowledge creation (Peters et al. 2020), reconfigurations of truth and lies (MacKenzie et al. 2021), and many others. These birth pangs are inextricably linked to changes in human environment and socio-biological transformations of postdigital humans (Savin-Baden 2021). The future of humanity is unpredictable, yet Postdigital Science and Education community is determined to make sense of our present and direct it towards just and sustainable ways of being.

In this task, *Online Postgraduate Education in a Postdigital World: Beyond Technology* offers multiple contributions. Situated between the world that is no more and the world that is not yet, editors Tim Fawns, Gill Aitken, and Derek Jones masterfully negotiate tensions between being and becoming. The authors' genuine passion for knowledge, education, and humanity, together with their non-determinist and non-instrumentalist understandings of technology, shows the importance of

postdigital philosophy of educational praxis. In the eternal struggle for emancipation and social justice, *Online Postgraduate Education in a Postdigital World: Beyond Technology* provides an important milestone which invites us to sit back, examine our present, and reimagine our future.

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Foreword

Universities are institutions with a long history, about a thousand years. In some respects, the continuity of the activities we engage in is fascinating. Lectures, seminars, reading and writing for the purpose of learning, written and oral examinations and vivas are examples of activities that define university life. Many of the basic features of these communicative practices have survived over the centuries. The lecture, arguably the activity that most people associate with the concept of a university, has its roots in a communicative format that preceded book printing, and where a lecturer literally would read a text to the students sitting in the lecture hall of any of the few mediaeval universities that were around. The students who could afford a copy of the text in this manuscript culture would follow the lines of the text as the lecturers made their way through the text by reading aloud. Those who could not afford a physical text had to rely on their memory by carefully listening and memorising what was read, and since most of the communication was in Latin, this was a challenge. The role expectations of what lecturers and students were to contribute were clear, recitation preceded reception in line with the conduit metaphor of learning that guided the pedagogy.

Through the centuries, the world has changed and so has the university sector. This is obvious at many levels; universities have multiplied in numbers and the proportion of an age cohort that enrols in institutions of higher learning has grown to 50% or even more in many parts of the world. In what is sometimes referred to as knowledge societies, universities are at the centre of politics and policy making. This development testifies to the fact that science, research, and well-educated professionals play an increasingly important role in society. When societies change, institutions have to adapt in order to be perceived as relevant to new societal circumstances and new challenges. While coping with change, they have to retain their integrity; there are important elements of the practices that have evolved through history that are well worth defending and refining.

Through history there have been several occasions when university life has been challenged: the decision to use local languages rather than Latin as a vehicle of learning, the diversification of universities in terms of faculties, academic areas taught and types of institutions, and, in the post-war period, the quite dramatic

expansion of the numbers of students wanting to pursue an academic career. The contributions to this volume address one of the most interesting challenges that the university sector has been exposed to, the transition into a world where digital communication has infiltrated most of what we do in private life, at work and in education. As is argued in many of the chapters, this change cannot be reduced to issues of what learning platform to use or how to adapt assessment practices to a digital format. The more interesting features of these sociomaterial developments go 'beyond technology' as the subtitle indicates, and have to do with designing social environments that offer access to academic communities and contexts for engagement with knowledge that retain the quality of learning that makes university studies a worthwhile experience for students.

A second challenge that this volume takes on is grounded in the fact that university students are more diverse in their backgrounds and orientations than before. A substantive proportion of the students we meet study part-time and combine academic study and even research with other activities, such as a profession. The diversity of students in universities today is very interesting. It testifies to the fact that academic institutions have succeeded, at least to some extent, in responding to the needs for continued and lifelong learning in societies undergoing rapid change, and where the need and desire to learn will be there throughout the lifespan. This push towards learning should not be interpreted in an instrumental sense only. Changing conditions of life and work for many people contribute to an interest in learning and competence development, a genuine feeling that there is more to know. The diversity of students we teach and supervise, in turn, enriches our own practices, since our teaching encounters the questions and issues that arise in professional practices and personal experiences in all corners of society.

As the authors of the chapters in this volume remind us of, the challenges of adapting to these changes are much broader, and much more interesting, than promoting online learning or any other technical solution. Rather, they concern fundamental questions of how instructional practices and pedagogies may successfully combine important traditional values of the student experience with the affordances of all the resources that are available, from the lecture to the in-depth encounter with teachers and fellow students in communities operating across settings and communicative formats. How successful and innovative we are at addressing and solving these issues will define the extent to which universities will continue to stay relevant for societies and individuals in future.

Roger Säljö
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For all those dedicated and hardworking teachers who feel overlooked and undervalued. Putting your students at the centre of your efforts can be hard in a modern university, and we dedicate this book to you.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the authors of the chapters for their efforts during a difficult time. Thank you to the 'EdClinEd team' (Edinburgh Clinical Education)—Debbie Spence, Janette Jamieson, Charles Marley, Brian Carlin, and Jane Hislop—for taking part in many conversations about teaching, learning, and online postgraduate education. We would also like to acknowledge our students, who have helped to shape our ideas through their knowledge and thoughtful perspectives. To our series editor and friend, Petar Jandrić, thank you for your lightning-fast work, boundless enthusiasm, unwavering support and unique vision. We are also grateful to our families for their ongoing support. If you are thinking of editing a book, try to avoid starting just before a pandemic.

Introduction: A Postdigital Position on Online Postgraduate Education

Why Online Postgraduate Education?

Online Postgraduate Education in a Postdigital World: Beyond Technology is an edited collection building on the premise that online learning is not separate from the social and material world, and is made up of embodied, socially meaningful experiences. It is founded on a 'postdigital' perspective, in which, much more than interactions with keyboards, computer screens, hardware or software, the learning that happens on online postgraduate programmes spills out into professional and informal settings, making connections with what comes before and after any formally scheduled tasks.

Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, online postgraduate taught (PGT) education[1] (e.g. Master's, and Postgraduate Certificates and Diplomas) was growing rapidly, as professionals around the world looked to build knowledge and skills that contribute to personal and collective development. As argued within a number of chapters of this book, online PGT education has been recognised within higher education as a key area for economic growth, yet it remains under-theorised, and the quality of these programmes often suffers from approaches that have been developed for on-campus and undergraduate education or, alternatively, simplistic models of e-learning where learning is seen as instrumental, and relatively independent of the practice and influence of educators. This book explores the ways in which online PGT programmes extend beyond digital spaces, and the implications for educational policy and practice. The book ties together a range of themes to create a rich picture of what happens on online postgraduate programmes, the factors behind successful practices, and how these can contribute to individual and collective change. It combines empirical and theoretical chapters, underpinned by critical perspectives that resist instrumental assumptions about technology.

[1] The term 'taught' is used to distinguish from postgraduate research programmes such as PhDs.

Unlike other books relating to online education, *Beyond Technology* combines a theoretical perspective, in which the digital, physical and social are all interconnected within complex educational ecologies, with a focus grounded in postgraduate practice. This focus has important implications for the kinds of students and learning that are explored in the chapters of the book. These students are, predominantly, studying part-time, while working as, potentially, senior professionals with significant practical responsibilities. They are diverse in terms of location, cultural backgrounds and settings, material infrastructures, age and life circumstance. They are often studying advanced concepts and developing capacities for critical appraisal, engaging with issues of social justice and ethics, and questioning the structures, policies and politics of their workplaces and disciplines. These characteristics influence the considerations of teaching, course design, evaluation, policy and governance, and faculty development, and it is these considerations that constitute the primary contribution of this book. Our aim is to provide a holistic picture of these various considerations and their combination, in relation to what is required to produce good quality, online postgraduate programmes.

Our focus on the postgraduate context differentiates our offering from other books, because of the important implications for the kinds of students (part-time, professional and potentially experts in their field, internationally dispersed, different life circumstances). It also caters for the needs of both those new to online education, more experienced practitioners who are looking to expand their repertoire of approaches, and those seeking more critical and theoretical perspectives.

Before giving an outline of the contents of the book, we look back at the commentary article (Fawns et al. 2019) with which we launched the call for chapters. First, we include the commentary as it was published in May 2019, and then consider what has changed, during a particularly unsettling year for online education due to the Covid-19 pandemic, in terms of our thinking and about the context of online postgraduate taught education. In doing so, we explain our own postdigital positionality that underpins our aspirations for the book, as well as our teaching. For us, this involves considering how our goals and philosophy relate not only to the complex needs of postgraduate students, but also to the wider community that online postgraduate programmes inhabit. From there, we set out the terrain that is covered in the subsequent chapters of the book.

Online Learning as Embodied, Socially Meaningful Experience[2]

> If there is no soul in computer-music then it's because nobody put it there. (Bjork 2019)

Two common views about online learning are that communication and relationships are inherently poorer online; and that online learning can be scaled up without significant additional cost. Online learning has been identified as a key growth area for

[2] This paper was originally published as Fawns et al. (2019).

the higher education sector, often without a realistic consideration of resource requirements, or an appreciation of the transformative value that online education can have for students.

In our context of taught postgraduate programmes, 'online' is a place where meaningful relationships, based on trust, can develop. Our students, through dialogue with an interdisciplinary and international online community, have developed critical and analytical ways of thinking that have extended their capacity to influence practice and policy in their local settings (Aitken et al. 2019). However, building an academic community takes time, and becomes increasingly difficult amidst a global, market-led, neoliberal drive for Universities to dramatically increase numbers of students (Jones 2019). This puts considerable pressure on teaching staff, and poses risks for the quality of education. In this commentary, we take a critical postdigital perspective (Fawns 2019), in which all forms of education must account for a complex integration of digital, social and material elements, to reject reductionist approaches to growth in online learning.

We challenge the perception that the experiences of online learners are limited by distance or technology. Rather, we argue, the limiting factors are time, policy, infrastructure and pedagogy. The blunt depiction of online learning as a unified concept, with inherent properties, can be seen in policies, advertisements, blog posts, social media comments, and even in educational research. Take this statement from Bergstrand and Savage on why, according to them, online tutors treat students with less respect: '…by separating students from teachers in space, online classes prevent the face-to-face interactions critical to the student-teacher relationship' (Bergstrand and Savage 2013: 303).

We are aware of many cases in our programme (the MSc Clinical Education), and others, where face-to-face interactions are absent, yet there are still strong and trusting student-teacher relationships. We have developed practices over time that make use of our technologies, and their accumulation of digital traces (email trails, online discussion postings, printed lists of student names, photos, occupations, locations, websites and search engines, etc.), to support social presence, communication, and understanding of our students.

On the other hand, the assumption that face-to-face is inherently social and supportive is easily refuted by cases where on-campus students have *not* managed to build meaningful relationships with their teachers. We suspect that everyone reading this can imagine many such cases. Of course, even the claim that there are no face-to-face interactions in online learning is problematic, since communication through videoconferencing, Skype, FaceTime, etc., could be described as face-to-face, even if the faces are not present in a shared physical space (Fawns 2019). Where then does the material boundary lie between meaningful and meaningless interactions? We suggest that there is no boundary.

We would *not* argue that teaching online is the same as teaching face-to-face. Published literature (Kebritchi et al. 2017; Ryan et al. 2005), and our own interviews with staff new to teaching online (Aitken and Loads 2019), shows that there is a significant adjustment and learning curve involved. However, the differences are often oversimplified. The primary challenge is in adapting principles and practices

of teaching to encompass new and multiple contexts, rather than because online is a separate domain, or because it is inherently more socially-impoverished, isolating, or flexible than face-to-face teaching. For us, the instrumental views highlighted above signal a need for the development of a wider repertoire of approaches and practices, and a more critical conception of teaching. We see teaching, not in terms of crudely categorised approaches such as 'traditional', 'problem-based learning' or 'online learning', but as a potentially unbounded mix of diverse, subversive, and unpredictable, digital and non-digital interactions. This is as true for a face-to-face, lecture-based, 'traditional' course as it is for a 'fully-online' course (Fawns 2019).

Just as our online teaching is not temporally or spatially bounded, 'online learning' is not a separate domain, because learning does not really happen *online*. True, some of our students may sit alone at a desk with a computer in a room that is thousands of kilometres from the nearest physical campus of our institution, but their learning is still physical and embodied. Furthermore, our students do not do all of their learning at such desks. Learning carries on, away from the virtual learning environments of the programme (Fawns and O'Shea 2019). It filters into the physical settings of home, cafes, and workplaces, and in transit between them. For example, it is not unusual for some of our students to engage with materials whilst on call in an emergency department, or during family dinner time.

The material aspects of education are easily forgotten (Fenwick 2015; Hetherington and Wegerif 2018), even in face-to-face classrooms, and so it is not surprising that online learning is often discussed as if it is a disembodied experience that happens in a separate reality. Yet material objects and environments make significant contributions to online learning. There are, for example, many subtle acts of material configuration that play an important role in how students learn. In our video tutorials, we can see some of the ways in which students do this: positioning a fan nearby to cool the air, the pre-tutorial ritual of making a cup of tea, the closing of doors to mute the sounds of children or pets, the moving from one device to another to work around technological constraints. Others can see and react to these material elements, even if the view of them is limited (e.g. by two-dimensional video, photos or, in some cases, textual descriptions). These experiences make it clear that online learning happens in physical spaces (Bayne et al. 2014), and understanding the contribution of both social and material elements of online learning will help our students get the most out of their programme (e.g. by engaging in discussion with peers, learning to configure their technologies, etc.).

The assumption that online learning can be unproblematically scaled up without significant additional cost or increased pressure on staff is implicit (or, sometimes, explicit) in a number of policies and initiatives in higher education (Selwyn 2007, 2010). In our experience, such instrumental conceptions of teaching do not fit many of the practices that happen in online learning. Whilst the same applies to face-to-face teaching, policies relating to workload, 'contact time', or appraisal, often based on a traditional, lecture-based timetable, can significantly misrepresent online teaching activity (Tynan et al. 2015). Whilst online courses are likely to feature a timetable, teaching is often not structured in such formal, scheduled terms; as either *happening* or *not happening* at a particular time. Online teaching is *potentially*

always happening, in the sense that teachers can dip in and out of fora, respond to emails, and post guidance or prompts that can be engaged with at any point in time.

The astute observer might argue that this has always been the case; teachers have always had to communicate with students about some aspect of their studying outside of scheduled teaching hours and formal communication channels. Perhaps this is just part of the job, for which teachers do not get much credit. Indeed, the thinking that we have to do as we develop online spaces prompts us to reconsider issues that have, in fact, always been there, surfacing largely hidden practices of teaching. Perhaps most importantly, this includes foregrounding the extent to which teaching involves activities of preparation and pre-configuration before scheduled activities (*design*), and of reaction, reconfiguration and subversion during them (*orchestration*) (Fawns 2019). However, pedagogical approaches that have developed alongside the evolution of technology in education shift the balance of the formal and informal (McWilliam 2008) such that elements that do not fit neatly into the official record may actually constitute the majority of an academic's teaching activity.

If the current success of our programme is to be maintained, our teaching must respond as much to the contexts of our students as to the online spaces in which our interactions take place. We must give them opportunities, and appropriate support, to adapt their learning practices to suit the constraints of their settings (e.g. internet bandwidth, working environments, job demands, time zones). Elements of infrastructure can help or hinder, by changing teachers' and students' capacity to act effectively with the social and material resources available to them. As such, inflexible systems and tools, and standardised policies that do not account for the different needs of a diverse range of part-time, mature, professional or international students, compromise our ability to develop meaningful relationships and communities.

In our view, successful online programmes are the result of students, teachers and administrators learning to work effectively within and around the constraints of infrastructure and policy. It follows that these collaborators should be supported to develop practices that work for them, both individually and collectively. The effective running of programmes requires a range of complementary expertise, and so the support and development of staff, along with the time requirement for that development, needs to be taken seriously. As such, evaluations of teaching, or of courses or programmes, should not only include, but foreground, developmental aspects (Fawns et al. 2020a). Further, evaluation should not just be focused on individuals and their particular performances, but also on how different people, technologies, resources, environments and structures come together in social, material and digital activity. On our programme, we work hard to engage in regular, ongoing dialogue to reflect on emerging ideas, discuss approaches and practices, support each team member's development, and develop a shared vision and values. All of this takes considerable time and expertise.

In online learning, just as in any other context, shared histories of practice foster emotive interdependence (Sutton 2018). Through a rich constellation of past encounters, a learning community is established in which embodied, emotive experiences take place and teachers transcend the mode of delivery, becoming 'authentic' (Kreber et al. 2007) through meaningful dialogue with students. This kind of

online learning cannot be scaled up without significant additional cost because, while, technology can replicate resources and provide rich (or poor) possibilities for communication, it cannot solve the fundamental requirement of skilled staff spending time on, and with, each student.

Taking a view of all education as consisting of experiences in which material and digital activity combines in social and embodied encounters (Fawns 2019), we can guard against attempts to position online learning as a 'cash cow' (Feenberg 2019), where technology is seen as the solution to problems of scalability (Selwyn 2007), and where human meaning is incompatible with the logic of efficiency (Feenberg 1999). A critical postdigital perspective helps us to make judgements, not about 'online learning' in general, but about the particular combinations and configurations of diverse elements that make up an online learning programme. By understanding how these configurations create rich or impoverished communication and relationships, we can see how increasing student numbers might change the parameters of design and influence our capacity to respond to the situated practices of students.

What's New?

The above commentary reflected on our collective experience of running a large, well-established, online postgraduate programme in health professions education: the MSc Clinical Education at the University of Edinburgh. The commentary received a warm reception from the higher education community, with thousands of downloads in the first few weeks and plenty of attention on social media. This was pleasing to see, because we felt at the time that our approach to online learning was radically at odds with the dominant narratives we read and heard from colleagues, within and beyond our University. Postgraduate online learning was poorly understood and seen as something that existed in a separate reality from traditional and on campus education, even though it was obvious to us that digital technology had already permeated the physical classrooms and study environments of all forms of higher education. Our postdigital perspective (see Fawns 2019 for an in-depth discussion) made accounting for such entanglements relatively straightforward.

Fast forward to 2021, and online learning has become mainstream, perhaps even the dominant form of higher education at this moment of writing. Suddenly, formerly fringe online postgraduate educationalists like us have become sought-after experts, as lecturers frantically look for advice on how to teach online because of the Covid-19 pandemic. The reception to our earlier commentary and a number of other publications and blog posts has demonstrated a rise in visibility of online learning specialists—the newly-discovered experts who had been hiding in plain sight all along. Yet there is an important reason that online education specialists like us had been largely ignored by the majority of teachers up to that point: some of what we have to say is uncomfortable and inconvenient. Challenging, not just to

teachers, but to University leaders in our questioning of current academic practices and regulations.

Perhaps it seemed strange to those lecturers who sought our help as they adjusted to a new model of education, to hear us say that 'a "course" cannot be moved online, because it is not a simple static, portable, thing' (Fawns et al. 2020b: 2). Those who were primarily seeking technical insights might have been frustrated by our explanations that they should not attempt to use technology to re-create the kind of teaching in which they were experienced, and that their approach should not focus on what they, the teachers, would do but on what the students would do. They might have been alarmed to hear us say that teachers have very little control over what students do, and that the teacher's role is primarily to configure environments that are conducive to community and relationship building, and that allow students agency in determining what and how they learn. It might have been even more unsettling as we gently tried to persuade them that much of this had also been true for their on campus teaching all along, and that tradition and culture had made these principles invisible. The novelty of designing for online education simply shines a light on some assumptions and fundamental principles that apply to all teaching, whether online or not.

As challenging as this change in mindset is, it should also be liberating. As we also explained, whenever we got the chance: online teaching can be used primarily as a springboard from which students can depart the virtual learning environment and learn in physical settings, with physical as well as digital materials. The reverse is also true for on campus teaching—it is a catalyst for learning as students depart the classroom and learn in dispersed locations, often with diverse technological devices and software. For us, separating the digital from the material (by thinking that the learning in online programmes happens in a computer, or that the learning in on campus programmes happens in the classroom) constrains the possibilities of what teaching can be, and neglects how it can set students up for flexible and idiosyncratic ways of learning that fit with their lives, preferences, learned habits and preferred social groupings. The assumption that what happens while the teacher is present is the most important part of any given course is, for us, the great mistake of much higher education, whether on campus or online. This insight is particularly important in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, as the ability of students to connect at specific times in particular ways (e.g., high-bandwidth, on camera, at specific times) is even more constrained than usual. Using contact time as a means of providing signposts and clarification to students makes much more sense to us than attempting to deliver content that can easily be pre-recorded.

The embodied and social aspects of online education are more important and pronounced than ever, and the pandemic has demonstrated the need to interrogate our assumptions about students. The chapters of this book do just that, considering a range of important and interrelated facets of online postgraduate education, teasing out themes that can help us to understand how quality is constituted and enacted in this domain.

What's in the Book?

In chapter "Moving Beyond 'You Said, We Did': Extending an Ethic of Hospitality to the Student Feedback Process", Charles Marley, Arfang Faye, Jeremy Moeller, Angi Pinkerton and Elizabeth Hurst give us insights into the diverse conditions and challenges of online postgraduate education from the student perspective. They show the impossibility of predicting which students will show up or what they will need, and the relevance of an ethic of hospitality (Derrida 2000; Ruitenberg 2011), where programmes do not just cater to different needs but actively make space for each student to make contributions to the course on the basis of the differences they bring. It is through such a position that diversity becomes a positive principle, not a deficit to be overcome (see also chapter "Improving Student Retention and Success Within the Context of Complex Lives and Diverse Circumstances" by Stone, Dyment and Downing).

In chapter "Taking Time to Get Messy Outside the Online Classroom", Sharon Boyd considers examples of place-based pedagogy and forms of assessment focused on each student's location in order to reclaim the embodied and materially situated aspect of online postgraduate education. Boyd's consideration of how the land and ecosystems to which students are connected can positively contribute to courses based elsewhere, and how they might help teachers and peers attune to the local conditions and elements of others. For us, there is a broader lesson in Boyd's work that is relevant to the book more generally, which is that online learning happens in material settings, and those settings matter emotionally, socially, materially and pedagogically.

In chapter "Feedback in Postgraduate Online Learning: Perspectives and Practices", Dai Hounsell takes up the considerable challenge of marshalling some key studies from the disparate field of feedback and formative assessment in online postgraduate education. Beyond the direct contribution of pulling together these dispersed yet valuable studies, Hounsell synthesises and draws out valuable lessons and considerations for online postgraduate study, and highlights ways in which these differ from on campus and undergraduate, in terms of practices and goals.

In chapter "Embracing Authenticity and Vulnerability in Online PhD Studies: The Self and a Community", Kyungmee Lee presents her own autoethnographic narrative as teacher of a module on an online Doctoral programme, to convey her emotional journey, and how it relates to those made by her students as they develop authentic ways of being in a shared online space. She highlights the value of mutual vulnerability, in promoting trust and community in online, professional programmes.

In chapter "Towards Ecological Evaluation of Online Courses: Aiming for Thick Description", Tim Fawns and Christine Sinclair discuss the limitations of standardised evaluation practices that focus on student satisfaction surveys and outcome measures. Arguing for an ecological perspective in which all aspects of education (e.g., technologies, methods, resources, systems, policies) are entangled, and responsibility is distributed between teachers, students, and the institution and its infrastructures and environments, they propose developing thick descriptions of

practice and purpose. These descriptions convey not only the details of what happens on a course, but embedded ways of interpreting those details that relate to the purpose and context of the course.

In chapter "Inclusivity in Online Postgraduate Teaching", Sonia Bussey considers the ways in which online teachers can be marginalised, particularly those with caring responsibilities, health conditions and disabilities. As Sonia notes, 'online teachers are still acting in physical, embodied ways, even when they conduct their work outside of the university classroom' (PAGE). Thus, teachers deserve the same attention in relation to diversity and disability as do students, yet this is often neglected in online education. In the online postgraduate context, teaching often takes place outside of normal work hours in order to fit with the busy lives of working postgraduate students.

In chapter "Networked Professional Learning in the Postdigital Age: Asking Critical Questions of Postgraduate Education", Rachel Buchanan uses postdigital theory to highlight some ways in which Twitter use in education is entangled in economics, politics, and other contextual elements. Buchanan critically examines her own practice of using social media within her teaching, raising a number of concerns in relation to the perpetuation of problematic practices. She concludes that such technology should not be used uncritically within education, but that it can also not be ignored, particularly in an online learning context, and particularly at postgraduate level where engagement with technology and digital media are increasingly part of professional development.

In chapter "Online Postgraduate Teaching: Re-Discovering Human Agency", Gill Aitken and Sarah Hayes review policy and strategy documents relating to online postgraduate education to highlight a marginalisation, within the discourses of online and digital education, of the value and labour of teachers. They argue that beyond demotivating and devaluing teachers, such rhetoric impedes faculty and pedagogical development, and leads to an administrative emphasis on solutionism and investment in the procurement of technological systems at the expense of investment in programme staff. They conclude that re-finding the teacher in institutional and wider discourse is necessary to preserving and improving the quality at course, programmes and institutional level.

In chapter "Improving Student Retention and Success Within the Context of Complex Lives and Diverse Circumstances", Cathy Stone, Jill Downing and Janet Dyment reflect on issues of diversity within online education. They argue that online postgraduate education must take account of, and adjust in relation to, the busy and complex contexts of the lives of the cohorts of students on those programmes. Arguing for a whole-of-institution approach in which practitioners at all levels understand the diverse needs of online postgraduate students, and attune their practices accordingly, Stone and colleagues offer useful recommendations for those involved in teaching, design, administration, student support, infrastructure, and policymaking.

In chapter "Postgraduate Education in a Postcurriculum Context", Derek Jones argues that we are now in a 'postcurriculum context', in which multiple, competing conceptions of the purpose and structure of education co-exist. The absence of a

consensus around what a curriculum is or how it should be organised, allows educators space for interpretation and negotiation of the complex interrelations and overlap between different ideas about education and its outcomes. At the same time, Jones proposes that acknowledging this ambiguity is crucial to understanding the implications of the different approaches. At a programme level, thinking about the tension between those approaches helps us to see the options we have for responding.

In chapter "Institutional Contexts in Supporting Quality Online Postgraduate Education: Lessons Learned from Two Initiatives at The University of Edinburgh", Tim Fawns, Michael Gallagher and Siân Bayne examine what would be necessary for a whole-of-institution approach to improving the quality of online postgraduate education. Analysing two different initiatives at the University of Edinburgh aimed at developing digital education at an institutional level, they ask 'who is the institution?' By articulating decision-making and policy-making structures in terms of the negotiation of centralised and localised practices, they argue that coherent approaches to improving postgraduate education must involve both policy and culture that aligns central and local aims and values, while retaining sufficient ambiguity to allow appropriate, but not free-range, discretion of programme-level educators.

As a whole, the book conveys valuable theoretical and practical insights into how various stakeholders of online postgraduate education might develop practices that contribute—directly or indirectly—to better quality experiences for students. We editors—Tim Fawns, Gill Aitken and Derek Jones—ourselves teachers and leaders of an online MSc in Clinical Education, have found that our postdigital position has both shaped and been shaped by the chapters of this book, and our work with the chapter authors has been valuable to us in several ways that we return to in the concluding chapter. In addition, the staff and students of two online PGT programmes, in particular, have had a significant influence on the book and on a number of the authors. The MSc Digital Education, on which a number of authors have taught (Bayne, Fawns, Gallagher, Hounsell, Sinclair), is recognised worldwide for its quality of design, community and the critical perspective of its educators. The MSc Clinical Education, on which all editors currently teach, serves as a case study and inspiration for much of the content of this book. The planning and teaching of this programme has significantly shaped the development of the positionality we share here. For us, good online postgraduate education is a collaborative activity, and while we hope that the ongoing development of our practice does benefit our students and colleagues, we must also acknowledge the benefit that they have on our practice.

During the production of this book, our colleagues from the Centre for Research in Digital Education at the University of Edinburgh released their book of *The Manifesto for Teaching Online* (Bayne et al. 2020). As the authors of that book note in the opening pages, '[i]t is relatively rare for large teaching teams to come together to define and agree on a shared political and pedagogical stance on the act of teaching' (xiii). What counts as a large team is debatable, but, as a team, we have developed (and, indeed, must continue to develop and renegotiate) a shared philosophy and a 'shared political and pedagogical stance'. We can attest to the value this has in driving our practice forward on our own online PGT programme, in ways that we believe are of benefit to our students and to the wider networks of which they are a

part. However, as the chapters of this book show, we must not simply impose our own ideals, aims and intended outcomes upon our students and colleagues, but also allow our practices, courses and, indeed, our political and pedagogical positions, to be influenced by their voices. In what follows, a range of valuable examples are presented that attend in different ways to the complex considerations of online postgraduate students, teachers, administrators, learning technologists, managers, and institutions, all of whom contribute in crucial ways to this diverse form of education.

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