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A Pragmatic Approach to Preparing Novice Doctoral Qualitative Researchers

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Abstract: Fifty percent of social science and education doctoral students in the United States fail to complete their programs. Within this context, studies addressing research methods pedagogy and qualitative methods in particular, continue to be limited. Even more limited are accounts of experiences in which students learn through individually chosen projects. This single instrumental case study sought to address these issues by: 1) using the Ready Develop Integrate Perform (RDIP) model to frame, design, and implement an immersive competency-based introductory qualitative core course and its supporting learning management system; and, 2) describing the resulting student learning experience as illustrated by assignment scores and course reviews. A sample of online and face-to-face students, representing 37% of eligible participants (n=23) developed research competences and reported a stronger sense of readiness for independent research and dissertation work. This paper adds to the qualitative methods pedagogical literature by addressing improvements to doctoral research methods education. The competency-based design may be implemented in any disciplinary setting. The detailed blueprint and implementation advice for university teachers may also add value to a variety of disciplinary contexts.

Keywords: qualitative research methods education; doctoral students; competency-based; scaffolded instructional design; authentic assessment

The value of the doctoral degree, especially in terms of knowledge generation in American academic and non-academic, has been well-discussed (Gardner, 2009; Lovitts, 2001; Walker et al., 2008). Doctoral degree holders themselves derive many personal career, economic, and lifestyle benefits (Gardner, 2009; Rigler et al., 2017). Interest and enrollment in social science and education (SSE) programs have steadily increased between 2009 and 2019 [U.S. National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES), 2020]. Access through distance education has also fostered enrollment [U.S. National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2021]. However, this increased participation in doctoral education has not resulted in increased completion rates, which continue to remain at approximately 50% with median completion times of about 8 years (NCES, 2021). Researchers (e.g., Jones, 2013; Rigler et al., 2017) found factors such as advising, socialization, personal resources, and candidate readiness have contributed to this dismal record. Further, Lovitts (2005) discussed candidate readiness in terms of transitioning away from being “good course takers to being creative, independent researchers” (p.138). This transition is usually marked by the completion of independent research, oftentimes a dissertation.

The design and structure of doctoral degree programs can inhibit this transition. Jones (2013) described a mismatch between program acceptance criteria based prior academic performance and program expectations that should prioritize “independent creative work” (p.88). Pre-candidacy coursework continues the focus on traditional academic performance, which tends to be highly structured. This requirement of students to be good course takers contrasts with the relatively unstructured post-candidacy independent research expectations (Lovitts, 2005). Much of the preparation in research methods (RM) takes place in the pre-candidacy. Related to this is inadequate RM including limited independent research experience (Golde & Dore, 2001; Rigler et al., 2017). Malakyan’s (2019) analysis of 70 multidisciplinary doctoral programs in leadership (62 American and 8 international; three online and five hybrid) found 91% had coursework requirements that mostly...
excluded room for independent research. A similar analysis of social work programs found only three had a practicum requirement and one third required a qualitative research course (Driscoll et al., 2015).

Naturalistic and mixed methods inquiries have become more prominent in SSE fields. Therefore, a lack of preparation in qualitative RM can further erode doctoral student post-candidacy readiness. Thus, programs must find ways to mitigate these structural barriers with pedagogies that increase access to independent research within existing coursework requirements, especially in qualitative RM. Jones’ (2013) analysis of 995 published papers on doctoral education found only 3% addressed teaching. Within this larger context, available research on qualitative RM pedagogy continues to be limited. Thus, this paper sought to extend the qualitative RM pedagogical literature by exploring how an immersive introductory qualitative RM experience could help to prepare novice doctoral student researchers for research independence.

Research Methods Pedagogy and Teaching Qualitative Methods

Several themes from prior syntheses of undergraduate and graduate RM teaching continue to be relevant (see Cooper et al., 2012; Earley, 2014; Kilburn et al., 2014; Wagner et al., 2011). RM teaching and learning largely occurs within decentralized disciplinary contexts, creating a need for a common RM pedagogical culture; a combination of didactic and experiential learning strategies, especially in introductory courses is essential; assessment of learning should address cognitive, affective, and experiential outcomes; and, the need to support RM instructors with limited teaching experiences. RM-specific pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) could give language and support to best practices in education, and advance research capacity across academic disciplines (Nind et al., 2015; Nind & Lewthwaite, 2018a; Nind & Lewthwaite, 2018b). RM PCK should also make instructional design considerations explicit (Bartels & Wagenaar, 2018; Lareau, 1987).

The qualitative research pedagogical literature includes individual RM PCK accounts that describe issues, challenges, and approaches to teaching. Many integrate mini projects focus on methods within data collection, data analysis, and reflexivity (e.g., Attia & Edge, 2017; Cox, 2012; Deggs & Hernandez, 2018; Delyser, 2008; Drisko, 2016b; Este et al., 1998; Hansman, 2015; Hernández-Hernández & Sancho-Gil, 2015; Hsiung, 2008; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Katz, 2015; Kawulich & D’Alba, 2019; Paulus & Bennett, 2017; Skukauskaitė & Rupsiene, 2017). There is a fairly recent account of the potential value of 3-D environments such as Second Life in RM teaching (Kawulich & D’Alba, 2019). These accounts together reflect a consensus of the importance of experiential learning in RM teaching. The prioritization of these methodological areas likely reflects the reality of program constraints. However, a fuller understanding of the research process can be gleaned by working through the mess of an entire project in which transferable RM hard and soft skills are developed (Haughton, 2019; Hopkinson & Hogg, 2004).

The Pedagogical Value and Challenges of Individual Full Projects

The experience of a self-directed project can foster a sense of ownership, independence, and an emerging researcher identity (Devos et al., 2017; Lovitts, 2001, 2005, 2008; Wenger, 1998). These affective dispositions could also support students’ transition from being good pre-candidacy course takers to post-candidacy independence. Providing each student with the opportunity to work through their own full research project within the traditional course structure can be cumbersome, especially in introductory courses. However, given the limited access to qualitative RM coursework, it is in these very courses that this experience is necessary. Moreover, explicit instructional designs that integrate experiential and didactic elements can advance RM pedagogical best practices across disciplines.
Unfortunately, few documented accounts of full project learning designs and related pedagogical blueprints exist within an already limited RM pedagogical literature.

Documented accounts of full project learning designs include: Bartels and Wagenaar (2018); Baxter and Jack (2008); Chenail (2011); Frels et al. (2011); Kuckleman, Cobb, and Hoffart (1999); Miskovic and Lyutykh (2017); and, Munn (2016). Some accounts described but did not include actual project implementation. Where implementation occurred: the context was discipline-specific; the course was not introductory; project work happened across multiple courses; students worked in assigned groups and/or did not choose their own projects. Also, assessment evidence was mostly limited to student comments, echoing a gap identified in prior syntheses. Discussions of supporting didactic elements and detailed blueprints were largely absent. Hence, further insight into supportive RM PCK may be gleaned from another competency-based pedagogical approach that addresses some the aforementioned limitations.

Research Goals

Goal 1 is to describe a competency-based approach to an introductory doctoral qualitative course. A detailed description of the competency model, course design with didactic elements and assessment system, and implementation blueprint are presented.

Goal 2 is to describe the learning experience of novice doctoral student researchers as illustrated by assignment scores and course reviews. An analysis of student assignment scores and course reviews, which by extension, further examines of the course design, is presented.

The author considers herself a pragmatist who recognizes the importance of RM competency in degree completion. Working through students’ research anxiety and fear of failure is an unwritten goal. The author believes experiences that engage students in their own research are central to effective RM pedagogy, research independence, and overcoming anxiety. She believes effective pedagogy must also “scaffold the mess” of authentic research, especially in introductory courses. Hence, her approach, which some may describe as post-positivist, establishes spaces in which learning from failure is an option. She believes learning from both failures and successes mirrors real life and promotes both confidence and resilience. However, balancing ideal learning goals within existing structures such as instructional time, class size, varying levels of student readiness, and other workload commitments are ongoing challenges. Her pedagogical approach is guided by her Ready, Develop, Integrate, Perform (RDIP) competency model.

RDIP Competency Framework

Figure 1 is an adaptation of the RDIP model proposed by the author (Haughton, 2017, 2017). The RM pedagogical model describes how learning environments can be scaffolded with experiential and didactic elements, which enables novice student researchers to explore problems of interest in multidisciplinary class settings. This exploration includes the development of communication and collaboration skills. Each competency level is aligned with its respective performance type: Having Course Prerequisites, Develop Knowledge & Understanding, Apply Knowledge & Understanding, and Making Judgments. Pedagogical decisions such as learning objectives (LOs) and assessment evidence are also integrated. Assessment outcomes are also aligned with cognitive taxonomy levels (Bloom et al., 1956).

Being Ready considers academic and non-academic prerequisites. The learning experience (course) begins at the Develop level and focuses on foundational knowledge and understanding, and mastering the lowest level LOs. Assessment is primarily at the knowledge and comprehension cognitive levels. Building on the Develop level, the Integrate level focuses on mastering mid-level LOs.
that require the cross-disciplinary application of knowledge and understanding. This builds a bridge to real-world applications. Assessment is primarily at the application and analysis cognitive levels but crosses into higher order cognitive levels. Perform is the highest competency level and focuses on mastering higher order LOs. Students demonstrate mastery by making judgments while completing authentic tasks that simulate real-world performance. Assessments are primarily at the synthesis and evaluation cognitive levels. The ability to communicate and collaborate effectively becomes more complex as mastery develops, as represented by the deepening shade. RDIP also provides the analytic framework for this case study.

Figure 1. Haughton’s RM Pedagogical Model (adaptation shown).

Methods and Procedures

This single instrumental case study sought to explore the potential role of introductory RM coursework in preparing novice doctoral students to pursue independent research. It focused on gaining insights into the current competency-based pedagogical approach and the resultant learning experiences of novice doctoral students as illustrated by learning outcomes evidence. An examination of both the quantitative and qualitative evidence provided a fuller illustration of the student learning experience (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

Site and Participants

This study took place at a public university in an American Midwestern state. The university offers terminal degrees in multiple fields including the Law, Health and Social Sciences, and Education. RM courses usually enroll doctoral students from different SSE programs. Figure 2 describes the sample of 23 course completers (37%) from four semesters (2017 to 2018; N=62), who consented to the use of their course data. The seeking of consent took place two years after the fourth sample course ended. This avoided the conflict of interest for the researcher who also taught the advanced qualitative RM
course in 2019 and 2021. This timeline also enabled the preliminary exploration of post-course capacity building.

![Figure 2](Image)

**Figure 2.** Participant characteristics (n=23): Program of study, semester, and delivery format.

**The Course**

Introduction to Qualitative Research (RM 7000) was developed and taught by the author. Its pedagogical approach is to prepare doctoral students to be researchers by providing a practical and relatively immersive introduction to both RM methodology and RM methods. The course explores the five common approaches as presented in the Creswell series – narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. It is delivered in multiple formats: 15-week (in-person); six-week (asynchronous online) summer session; and, dual synchronous in-person and remote attendance for COVID-19 protocols.

RM 7000 has four content modules: Foundations of Qualitative Research (M1); Qualitative Study Approaches (M2); Data Collection and Analysis (M3); and, Writing and Evaluating the Results (M4). The six LOs align with the modules as follows:

1. Describe the historical context of qualitative research concepts. M1
2. Describe the basic assumptions of and differences between the qualitative and quantitative research paradigms. M1
3. Describe, differentiate, and inter-relate between the major types of qualitative research methods and approaches M1, M2
4. Describe, differentiate, and inter-relate the major components of a qualitative research study. M1, M2, M3
5. Describe, differentiate, and inter-relate major activities involved with conceptualizing and conducting qualitative research. M3
6. Implement a qualitative research project. M1, M2, M3, M4
The opportunity to develop RM competences and master RM 7000's LOs is enabled by a major project, class activities, and supporting didactic elements. Students may choose their own individual projects or opt to collaborate in groups of up to three. Topics reflect the multidisciplinary composition of each class and have included absenteeism (Educational Leadership), trainee mentorship (Counselor Education), and family support (Special Education). The project is divided into components that align with each content module. Each project must include a participant interview and a second data source for triangulation. The final artifacts are a class presentation and the full written report. Two formal and written interim reports are required for the introductory and research design sections. Projects are classified as instructional and do not require university-level ethical clearance. An integrated assessment system that provides direct and indirect evidence of the student learning experience.

Direct evidence of learning is gathered from student work at each competency level. Evidence includes scores from: three optional extra-credit quizzes for M1, M2, and M3 (Develop); two concept map homework assignments, one for M1 M2 and M3 M4 (Integrate); and, the research project (Perform). The quizzes are knowledge and comprehension checks of important research methodology and methods concepts. Each quiz may be taken multiple times and has 12 to 14 multiple choice questions. Concept maps are flexible mind-tools that support knowledge base development (Jonassen, 1996). Concept maps also enable the visualization of structural knowledge in domains of interest (Jonassen & Grabowski, 1993). The two concept mapping homework assignments enable each student to represent their integrated understanding of key qualitative research methodology and methods concepts.

Two optional indirect assessments are administered during the final week of the course: a student reflection of learning is submitted with the final project and the university’s anonymous post-course evaluation questionnaire. Participation activities and informal presentations occur throughout the course. An example is the debriefing class session after the participant interview. Students receive a holistic participation score for each module.

Data Sources

The quantitative outcomes data were derived from course assignment scores from the direct assessments and the quantitative portion of the university’s post-course questionnaire. A five-point Likert-type scale to assessed instructors in terms of their: (1) experience in subject matter; (2) response to inquiries in a timely matter; (3) concern and respect for students; (4) encouragement of the expression of ideas; (5): encouragement of the construction of ideas in groups; (6): and, fair and consistent grading. A seventh overall course experience question is included. The reliability coefficients of the responses were acceptable the $\alpha > .70$ threshold: (all responses) = $\alpha = .897$ (N=40); online = $\alpha = .915$ (n=24); and, face-to-face = $\alpha = .873$ (n=16). Qualitative data were derived from two sources: the qualitative comments from 26 (65%) students, 16 (62.5%) of whom were online; and, the post-course reflections from 11 students.

The inherent variation in SSE doctoral programs makes it difficult to directly assess post-course RM readiness. Completing dissertation research remains a common requirement. Hence, the inclusion of completed qualitative dissertation research as preliminary evidence is an initial step in closing this gap.

Data Collection Procedures and Analysis

Three datasets were compiled from the sources described in Figure 3. Dataset1 contained summary assignment scores and post-course research information. The assignment scores were mined from the
learning management system (LMS) were the quizzes (Develop), the homework (Integrate), and the final project (Perform). A dissertation abstracts search for the names of participants who took the course in 2017 determined the number of qualitative-focused dissertations. Dataset2 contained the post-course questionnaire quantitative scores for the four semesters. Dataset3, a Word document, contained the qualitative evaluation comments and end of course reflections. These data sources together illustrated the student learning experience by assessing all level competency levels, addressing both cognitive and affective outcomes, providing insight into the students evolving dispositions towards the subject matter, and, providing very preliminary evidence of post-course readiness and capacity building.

Figure 3. RM 7000’s pedagogical design.

The quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 and results were presented by course delivery format – online or f2f. Reflection summaries and post-course qualitative responses were analyzed inductively using the general analysis strategies outlined in Creswell and Poth (2018). The process began with organization and preparation, followed by: reading and memoing for ideas leading to code development; classifying and reducing codes into themes; linking themes to the analytic framework; and, representing and visualizing the data.

Results

Goal 1: Competency-based Approach

Figure 3 and Figure 4 describe the course’s blueprint. Figure 3 describes the instructional design and pedagogical elements while showing connections with pre-course readiness and post-course capacity building. Orientation activities establish readiness. Students who are ready for learning can: navigate the LMS; use LMS tools for communication and collaboration; and, create concept maps. Coursework begins with RM foundations and proceeds to qualitative approaches, qualitative RM methods, and...
findings. The didactic elements help to integrate RM methodology (theory) with RM method (practice). The first formal progress report, due at the end of M2, is a draft of the introductory sections. The second report focuses on the research methods sections and includes revisions to the introductory sections.

The progress reporting and participation activities support formative assessment by scaffolding the mess of research. They also help to create a learning space in which students can reflect on their growth while learning from the inevitable mistakes and failures, which they must learn to navigate as independent researchers. These cycles also prepare students to finalize their respective final presentations and reports. Online students submit annotated PowerPoint presentations. Final reports must also include four appendices. The informed consent (Appendix A) and participant interview (Appendix B) protocols were developed and implemented on M3. Two additional evidence of research readiness were also required: a certificate completion of the Social, Behavioral, and Education Responsible Conduct of Research Basic Course (Appendix C), and a simulated Institution Review Board protocol (Appendix D).

**Supporting LMS**

The LMS course site shown in Figure 4, also shows excerpts of two scaffolds – the project checklist and a sample concept map. Links to frequently used resources such as the syllabus and schedule have one-click access. For example, blogs help to establish students’ academic and social presence, especially for online students (Garrison et al., 2003).

![Figure 4. RM 7000's learning management system design.](image-url)
Blogs also help with identifying potential collaborators. All content modules have the same layout. There are two support modules. Final Project Documentation contains all resources needed for the projects such as report templates and a link to the Appendix C basic course. Grading Criteria contains grading rubrics and checklists for all assignments. Students use these resources to work on assignments, and for self- and peer-assessment.

**Goal 2: Description of Student Learning Experiences**

*Direct Assessments from Assignment Scores*

Direct assessments scores by competency level and delivery format are presented in Figure 5. The face to face (f2f) students had higher average scores on the first homework and final project assignments. The online students had higher average scores on quiz 1 and quiz 2, and on the second homework assignment. An independent 2-tailed t-test confirmed the difference on the final project scores was significant \( t(21) = 2.851, p = .01 \). A further examination of the assignment scores revealed a moderate-to-strong positive correlation between the scores on the first homework and final project assignments \( r(21) = .66, p = .001 \).

These results make sense from the author’s teaching experience. Students across delivery formats had an adjustment period and tended to struggle most at the beginning of the course. Some online students took multiple courses during the same 6-week summer session. This added stress likely increased their course adjustment period and made them more likely to seek extra credit. The accompanying interaction with the content enabled improved performance on homework 2. Participation activities were more dynamic and seminar-like in f2f and synchronous settings. It is generally easier for all students to collaborate in real time. This contrasts with asynchronous online settings where students also have to work around different schedules. The adjustment period also coincided with foundational decisions such as choosing topics and submitting the first interim report. These results generally lend support to the notion that achieving higher order LOs and mastering higher competency levels requires achieving lower level LOs and mastering lower level competences (Haughton, 2017, 2019).

![Figure 5. Summary of direct assessment scores.](image-url)
A search of the dissertation abstracts found entries for six students from the 2017 courses. Two students, one each from f2f and online settings, wrote qualitative dissertations, representing one third of the completed dissertations. Two is a small number that is clearly not generalizable. The intention is to explore possible preliminary evidence of RM 7000's contribution to post-course readiness and capacity building. The larger story from the course-based direct assessment evidence suggests the pedagogical design of the full project and its didactic elements supported the RM learning experience of diverse novice doctoral researchers in this introductory course.

**Indirect Assessments from Quantitative Course Reviews**

Figure 6 summarizes the course evaluation scores. There were no significant differences by delivery format. Moreover, apart from the online score for concern and respect, most students in both formats reported positive experiences. Further analysis of the concern and respect scores revealed a slight majority of online students had positive experiences; five were neutral, and two students reported negative experiences.

![Online Teaching Evaluations by Delivery Format (N=40)](image)

**Figure 6. Summary of indirect assessment: Online teaching evaluation scores.**

**Indirect Assessments from Qualitative Course Reviews**

The available comments were classified as negative (5, 19%), mixed (6, 23%), and positive (16, 58%). The negative comments focused on concern and respect (2 online), unclear and inconsistent requirements (1 online, 1 f2f) and workload (3 online). Mixed comments related to the LMS navigation came from f2f students. The positive comments related to: learning environment (e.g., resources, expectations, formative assessments, and interaction); growth in RM competences, and research confidence; and, readiness for research beyond the course. Reflections from online students were not available in this sample. All reflections from the f2f students were positive (pseudonyms are used throughout). Health students John and Anna, and Carson and Hughes completed joint projects. Barrow and Patmore completed solo projects. Education students – Edith, Isobel, Mosely, Daisy, and
Violet completed solo projects. Broad themes from the qualitative data related to learning environment, growth, and readiness. They reflected a transition from novice to independent researcher, described in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Themes from evaluation comments and reflections.

**Theme 1: Learning Environment**

This theme relates to how students experienced various aspects of the course. Design elements, workload, and interaction were three inter-related sub-themes.

The *Design Elements* sub-theme relates to the course and LMS design and included assessments, resources, and performance expectations. Two f2f students found the LMS “confusing to navigate and find everything” and that “the course could be much improved with better organization of content in Blackboard and better explanation of her expectations”. One online student had a different perspective and thought “The professor had very clearly articulated expectations, with rubrics and examples to help guide the student, as well as individualized feedback that helped fulfill the requirements for the course”.

The confusion was likely related to being overwhelmed at the start of the course. These feelings generally subsided after the first grading period that included report 1 and homework 1. It was then that students had a better understanding of the formative assessment process:

> I admit, the first class I felt lost, the amount of the information was huge. Then I realize after few classes that we will be learning from each other’s, share experience, reflective thinking and do activities to practice the theory. (Edith, reflection)

M3 also marked a shift away from grading and LMS concerns to research learning. As they transitioned into the researcher space, they embraced formative design elements such as “prompt feedback and communication” (online student). One f2f shared “As time went on throughout the semester, I appreciated Dr. A and this class more and more.” They also began to recognize how the design elements connected and contributed to their RM development and professional identity beyond the course:

> Creating concept maps allowed us to master definitions in qualitative research while understanding how they connect. Likewise, working in a group setting for the final project was a worthwhile experience. As professionals in health education, collaboration with others is an essential component, especially for grant writing and research projects. While collaborating with other students, we were able to be better visionaries, learn from our partner’s strengths,
and improve in our areas of weaknesses. Working together with a classmate was an invaluable experience that was practical and educational. (John and Anna, reflection)

The Workload sub-theme reflects the challenge of workload management, especially for online students in the 6-week format. One felt “this course should be taught over a longer time span -- a full semester rather than a half semester, because there is simply too much to learn”. Another felt the discussion forums were “bogged down” by “certain students in the class that asked a ridiculous amount of questions”. As with Design Elements, online students were more accepting and comfortable after the first formative cycle. “This course was intense given the shortened timeline but once everyone figured out how to navigate the site (the instructor believes it to be straightforward and I disagree...), the course was more manageable”. Another recognized the importance of independence and shared “I figured things out. I guess that is what courses on this level require.”

The Interaction sub-theme reflects with the challenge to students’ epistemological thinking (Katz, 2015; Kuckelman et al., 1999). Thus, beyond workload, challenges to students’ thinking may have been viewed negatively with one student feeling “cut-off and ignored” (f2f) and another “discouraged from asking my own questions” (online). Nevertheless, other dimensions of interaction, such as instructor feedback and peer collaboration, fostered positive interactions while demonstrating real-world research communication skills. Further, working collaboratively through a full project also supported positive student experiences and post-course readiness:

We had a great experience working together! We found that we both have similar work ethics and organizational styles which made this process much easier. We both found the process of coding difficult, as it was tedious to review the transcript so many times and come to an agreement on themes and subthemes. We are both very thankful for this process and look forward to expanding this project in the Spring. (Carson and Hughes, reflection)

This team subsequently re-did their project after receiving university ethical clearance. Their paper was published in a peer-reviewed journal and was added to the course reading list.

Theme 2: Growth

Growth builds on the Learning Environment theme. Students described interconnections between growth in hard and soft skills, and research confidence.

The Hard and Soft Skills sub-theme reflects how students’ navigation of the research process fostered the cognitive, affective, and experiential aspects of their learning:

The opportunity afforded me to conduct research through a formative process is one of the most valuable experiences that I have had thus far in my doctoral program. While, it seemed that the goal was to get this done as perfectly as possible—there was the reminder that this was a learning process and there is as much to be learned from what went right as to what did not go so right. (Daisy, reflection)

Students appreciated the “approach to student autonomy and the celebration of learning through struggle and experimentation” (f2f student). The relative autonomy also supported resilience, independence, and researcher identity. “A consistent struggle with this course has been that it is very independent. However, this course has been enjoyable and I have gained a lot as a qualitative researcher” (f2f student).
Isobel’s reflection described “the importance of organization of time, procedures, data, and writing.” Edith reflected on her own challenges but concluded “it was a good experience to improve my problem-solving skills. Working on the project step by step with feedback from the teacher was very helpful for me to understand the work. Blackboard Collaborate was a helpful tool to communicate with both the teacher and classmates”.

The Confidence sub-theme marked navigating past the struggle. Struggling through the research process helped students to be more confident to engage in future research while realizing that research learning is an ongoing process. These dispositions bode well for success in the unstructured post-candidacy phase of doctoral programs (Lovitts 2005; 2008; Walker et al., 2008):

This qualitative research project was a challenge at times but a great learning tool. I am still learning from the project. This was my first time completing a research simulation but it contributed to my future research planning. The interview and the procedures in all the modules offered a lot of planning and reflective thinking. (Violet, reflection)

**Theme 3: Readiness**

The prior themes of Learning Environment and Growth laid a foundation for Readiness. The evidence suggests core courses like RM 7000 can support research readiness, especially in programs with limited independent research opportunities (Drisko et al., 2015; Malakyan, 2019).

The Research sub-theme supports the notion that developing RM competences supported readiness for advanced coursework, and future research (Drisko, 2016a, 2016b; Paulus & Bennett, 2017). “The course should be required of every graduate student who intends to conduct research. It was an awesome experience and I am looking forward to qual 2” (f2f student). John and Anna reflected on feeling “prepared for a future in academia” while Mosely described research competence and confidence:

After completing this case study, I feel more competent in my research skills and specifically in following the steps to create a cohesive plan to gather research. Before this class, I was overwhelmed with understanding the different components of a qualitative research study. Now, I feel confident in planning the entire process for gathering data.

Research readiness fostered dissertation readiness.

The Dissertation sub-theme is forward looking in terms of degree doctoral completion. Incomplete doctorates have both personal and institutional costs (Gardner, 2009; Lovitts, 2001, 2008; Walker et al., 2008). Hence, readiness for dissertation and professional expectations beyond coursework are essential capacity building outcomes. Success was illustrated in the following reflections:

I truly had no concept of how much I had learned until I was privileged enough to sit in on a dissertation defense this past week. The research used a phenomenological research study and as s/he was defending I was surprised because not only did I know and understand what s/he was saying but I realized that I could conduct qualitative research for my dissertation when that time comes and felt confident that I could do so successfully. (Barrow)

This research underscores the need for more research on counselor trainee impairment, gatekeeping, and the impact of trauma history on the professional functioning and wellness of counselor trainees and counselors. It was also a great opportunity to learn about qualitative research. (Patmore)
Patmore completed a qualitative dissertation on counselor trainee gatekeeping, expanding on research that began as a project in this course. This is another small nugget of evidence of post-course readiness.

**Student Learning Experiences Summary**

Results from the analysis of assignment scores and course reviews provided insight into the student learning experience, and by extension, RM 7000's competency-based framing, design and implementation. Learning experiences generally reflect positive cognitive outcomes, affective, and experiential outcomes. The Author's pedagogical model design facilitated the: development of qualitative RM knowledge and skills; integration of RM knowledge and skills within inter-disciplinary research; and, completion of a simulated full research project (Haughton, 2017, 2019). Autonomy in project choice, the integrated didactic elements, and the participation activities, provided an immersive experience for novice student researchers from different SSE fields. Students drew on good course taking skills while preparing for post-candidacy independence. Preliminary direct evidence of post-course capacity building was supported by the students’ course reflections and reviews.

**Implications for Practice**

The implementation of this model in any course context should consider: preparation needs within and beyond the course; course readiness and performance expectations; artifacts that exemplify mastery; appropriate LOs and their sequence; a balance of formal and informal, and formative and summative assessments; communication and collaboration opportunities; and, the activities that enable students to demonstrate learning in multiple ways that includes opportunities to learn from inevitable failures. For RM 7000, this meant: preparing novice student researchers to engage in independent work beyond the course (Devos et al., 2017; Lovitts, 2005); supporting RM learning with authentic project work and didactic elements; implementing a balanced system of formative and summative assessments (Early, 2014); and, creating a safe and supportive community in which students develop researcher identities (Wenger, 1998).

**Conclusion**

This single instrumental case study’s goal was to advance RM PCK through explicit pedagogical practices. The focus was an introductory qualitative core course that enrolled doctoral students from multiple SSE disciplines. Supporting the development of diverse learners in doctoral education is essential (Shulman, 1987). Also essential is the delivery of intentionally created rich learning experiences (Shulman, 2008). These learning experiences should support students’ transition from pre-candidacy course taking to post-candidacy independence and expectations (Lovitts, 2005. 2008). This study’s pedagogical model and associated LMS provided a blueprint for such an experience, a rich and immersive experience that enabled students to work through their chosen projects within a supportive community. The detailed didactic elements and participation activities further supported their RM learning. Like similar studies, this individual account was inherently limited by its small scale, small sample size, and potential researcher bias. Indirect evidence was limited to self-report sources. Evidence of post-course capacity building was preliminary at best. While these limitations should be addressed in future research, tentative insights may be drawn from this case.

This study provides a new contribution to the limited RM pedagogical literature. It advances RM PCK by addressing gaps related to teaching, design, and assessment. Further, it offers a new account of a teaching experience in which a full research project is integrated in a single course. The
broad assessment framework addresses experiential, cognitive and affective aspects of learning and competency development. A detailed description of the framework, design, and pedagogical scaffolds are provided. These details can support both instructors and learners. Lastly, this account offers strategies to expand the role of core RM courses in preparing doctoral student researchers. This expanded role is especially critical in programs in which independent research experiences are limited (Drisko et al., 2015; Malakyan, 2019). Providing independent research opportunities improves doctoral preparation in core courses and can enhance capacity building (Nind et al., 2015; Nind & Lewthwaite, 2018a, 2018b).

References


Chenail, R.J. (2011). Ten steps for conceptualizing and conducting qualitative research studies in a pragmatically curious manner. The Qualitative Report, 16 (6), 1713-1730.


Is the Syllabus Passé? Student and Faculty Perceptions

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Abstract: The syllabus is an essential learning resource for students. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of the syllabus but to date, no studies have addressed whether the syllabus needs to continue as a stand-alone document given the information contained within it can be, and often is, shared with students via the learning management system. At conference sessions focused on the syllabus, faculty have questioned the need for essential course information to be conveyed in a document format as technology has progressed. In this study, 396 students and 75 faculty members at a community college and a public university granting undergraduate and graduate degrees completed a survey. Results indicated that both students and faculty agreed that a separate syllabus document is still preferred, with faculty more strongly agreeing. No significant differences among students were found based on race or type of institution, but women as compared to men were more likely to indicate a preference for a separate syllabus. Graduate students, as compared to undergraduate students, were also more likely to prefer a separate syllabus document. No significant differences in terms of the type of institution, years teaching overall or online, or race or gender were found in the faculty sample. Suggestions for future research are provided.

Keywords: syllabus, syllabi, learning management system, student perceptions, faculty perceptions

The syllabus has long been an important document in academia. Initially, the syllabus was simply a list of topics that would be covered in a class (Synder, 2010) but today, the syllabus is a much more comprehensive resource. Based on a review of 15 college teaching resources, Doolittle and Siudzinski (2010) discovered 81 suggested components that professionals recommended be included in the syllabus, 24 of which were identified by at least 50% of the teaching resources. The researchers categorized these 24 components into the following four themes: course information, instructor information, grading information, and policy information. In addition to this core information, Harrington and Thomas (2018) have also suggested that the syllabus include additional components such as a welcome statement from the instructor, rationale for assignments, grading rubrics, resources, and tips for success. They argued that including these elements can serve to motivate and support students.

Despite numerous resources available to guide instructors on what to include in the syllabus and how to include it (Canada, 2013; Cullen & Harris, 2009; Doolittle & Siudzinski, 2010; Harrington & Thomas, 2018; Richmond et al., 2019; Stanny et al., 2015), there is a lack of consistency in what information is included in syllabi. In a descriptive study of 100 general education courses at a mid-sized, mid-western university, Eberly et al. (2001), for example, found that most but not all syllabi included basic core components such as the instructor’s name (97%), office hours (89%), required readings (86%), and grading policy (82%). In a review of over 1,000 syllabi gathered from an Internet sample of lower-level undergraduate courses, upper-level undergraduate courses, and graduate-level courses, Doolittle and Siudzinski (2010) also found that most but not all faculty included core essential information such as the course name, instructor name, and required textbook. The syllabi reviewed represented a wide array of disciplines including art and architecture, business, engineering, liberal arts, life sciences, national sciences, physical sciences, and social sciences. However, they also discovered that most syllabi did not include policy information which was another essential component of syllabi.
For example, only 20% of the syllabi reviewed included a missed or late work policy (Doolittle & Siudzinski, 2010). In a more recent study that evaluated 75 syllabi for biology courses, Gin et al. (2021) found that syllabi for upper-level and lower-enrollment courses contained less information than first-year and larger-enrollment courses. In addition, they also found that many instructors did not include content that was required by their institution. The type of information included in the syllabus and how it is presented can vary from course to course.

Recent research has illustrated the benefits of a syllabus that is more visual in nature. For example, in a study conducted by Nusbaum et al. (2021), students recruited from the Psychology Department’s research pool at a research university who viewed a visual syllabus were more likely to perceive the professor as kinder, more approachable, and more creative as compared to students who viewed a syllabus that was more text heavy. In another study, Yarosh (2021) found that students enrolled in a Social Problem class at a midsize four-year comprehensive university who viewed a visual syllabus were more likely to score higher on a syllabus quiz as compared to students who viewed a syllabus that was more traditionally formatted as primarily a text document. In this study, images, graphs, and headings of different sizes and colors were used in the visual version of the syllabus. In another interesting study conducted by Kim and Ekachai (2020), undergraduate communication students at a large university in the Midwest were more likely to engage with a course when the syllabus was posted as a website link, with different tabs, rather than being shared as a PDF document. Although faculty can convert text-heavy syllabi into more visual documents, learning management systems such as Blackboard or Canvas also make it possible to convey syllabus information in a visually appealing format.

Gin et al. (2021) noted that the syllabus can be viewed as an equity tool when norms and expectations for the course are explicitly shared on the syllabus. Transparency around expectations has been cited as an excellent way to support student success and reduce equity gaps (Harrington & Thomas, 2018; Winkelmes et al., 2019). Although all students benefit from transparency, students from historically marginalized populations often benefit the most (Winkelmes et al., 2019). When the syllabus contains information that communicates actions students need to take to meet with success, it serves as a roadmap for success (Gannon, 2016; Harrington & Thomas, 2018). These action steps can be especially important for first-year students who are learning to navigate a new academic environment and do not have the benefit of learning how to do so from their parents. Eberly et al. (2001) warned that only communicating syllabus content informally rather than in the syllabus can lead to miscommunications between faculty and students.

Transparent syllabi that contain detailed course information can often become long documents. Although some faculty may be concerned that a long syllabus may not be helpful to students, several studies have shown that students prefer a more detailed syllabus. Saville et al. (2010), for example, found that students enrolled in psychology courses at a large public research university who viewed a 6-page detailed syllabus described the instructor more positively than students who viewed a less detailed 2-page syllabus. Responses on a survey indicated that students thought the instructor of the longer 6-page syllabus was more approachable, creative, encouraging, enthusiastic, flexible, knowledgeable, and prepared. Findings also indicated that students reviewing the more detailed 6-page syllabus thought the instructor was a more effective communicator, promoted critical thinking, and was fairer. In an experimental study, Harrington and Gabert-Quillen (2015) randomly assigned community college students who were recruited from classes offered in the Department of History and Social Sciences to different syllabi conditions. In this study, the short syllabus was 6 pages, the medium-length syllabus was 9 pages, and the long syllabus was 15 pages. Students in the medium and long syllabus conditions, as compared to those in the short syllabus condition, thought the professor was more caring, more helpful, and more motivated. Sixty-six percent of the students preferred a longer syllabus with assignment details, and about a third preferred a shorter syllabus at
the start of the semester with additional information provided via the learning management system later in the semester (Harrington & Gabert-Quillen, 2015).

A common concern among faculty is whether students carefully read the syllabus, and this concern becomes more elevated with longer syllabi. Although students at a public research university have acknowledged that they may not read the syllabus in its entirety, they did report using the syllabus as a resource as needed throughout the course (Lightner & Benander, 2018). Other researchers have also found that students regularly access the syllabus, indicating its’ perceived value among students. For example, in a study by Zhang (2016), students in four different classes, two introductory and two advanced, at a research university accessed the syllabus via the learning management system between nine and 14 times per semester on average. In one of the courses, there was a significant correlation between accessing the syllabus and the final course grade, with increases in access being associated with higher final course grades (Zhang, 2016). In a study conducted by Calhoon and Becker (2008), students, who were mostly first and second-year students studying at a small university, also reported regularly referring to their syllabus, with almost half of the students indicating that they reviewed the syllabus on the same day as their class. The students’ perceived value of their syllabus was further indicated by the finding that all 112 students in the study reported still having their paper copy of the syllabus during the seventh week of the term, with most (93%) indicating that they kept the syllabus in a class-specific binder or notebook (Calhoon & Becker, 2008).

There is no doubt that the syllabus content is important, but does this content need to be communicated in a separate document or should faculty rely on conveying this critical information via modules within the learning management system instead? This is a question that is frequently asked by faculty attending teaching and learning conferences where discussions about how to use the syllabus as a learning tool take place. Learning management systems are being relied on more and more by both students and faculty (Rhode et al., 2021). Although the Quality Matters (n.d.) standards for higher education indicate the need for key course information such as objectives and assessment to be clearly communicated, the standards are silent on if there is a need for a separate syllabus document. Field (2022) offered that “it is possible to populate the LMS page for a class in such a way that it effectively supplants the syllabus as the thing students check to see what readings and assignments will be due soon” (para 8).

Learning management system platforms allow faculty to share syllabus information in smaller, more manageable chunks (Dean & Fornaciai, 2014). It might be helpful for students to have syllabus content conveyed in different modules such as an instructor welcome, assignment information, and policies rather than in one document. Consistency across courses, however, is important because students have expressed frustration with the varied ways in which faculty use the learning management system (Govender and Govender, n.d.; Steel, 2007). An online syllabus can also be interactive in nature, providing students with numerous opportunities to click on resource links (Zeytoon & Moosavian, 2017). In some cases, colleges or universities could even populate the content within the modules to ensure that essential information is communicated consistently across the college. For example, required institutional policy information could be automatically uploaded into every class learning management course shell.

There is currently no research on student and faculty perceptions on whether syllabi content should continue to be shared as a separate document given learning management system capabilities. The only study that was somewhat related to this question was the one conducted by Harrington and Gabert-Quillen (2015). In their study, approximately two-thirds of the 149 community college student participants indicated that they preferred a syllabus with assignment details rather than receiving the details later in the semester via other ways such as in the learning management system (Harrington & Gabert-Quillen, 2015).
There are several reasons why it is important to explore the continued perceived need for a separate syllabus document. First, faculty spend a significant amount of time developing or revising syllabi and then must spend even more time inputting this same information into the learning management system. Faculty time is limited, and time spent on these syllabus activities takes time away from other important planning tasks. Another concern is the errors that may occur when faculty transfer information from the syllabus to the learning management system. Many students and faculty members have discovered discrepancies with assignment descriptions or due dates on the syllabus and in the learning management system, for example. It is also time-consuming for faculty to update the essential course information in two places if adjustments are needed. When discrepancies occur, students may find this contradictory information confusing and frustrating.

Decisions about the use of important documents such as the syllabus are best made when based on data. Abbott et al. (2022) have argued for further research on the syllabus to determine best practices. One often underutilized data point is student preference. Understanding what students prefer through research studies can be helpful to faculty as they determine the best way to communicate key course information. The purpose of the current study was to investigate student and faculty perceptions about whether a separate syllabus is still needed given the tools available within learning management systems such as Blackboard and Canvas. The research questions were as follows:

- R1: Do students and faculty believe a separate syllabus is still necessary?
- R2: Do faculty and students differ in their perceptions about the need for a separate syllabus?
- R3: Do student preferences for a separate syllabus vary based on demographics?
- R4: Do faculty beliefs about the need to create a separate syllabus vary based on demographics?

**Method**

Students and faculty from two higher education institutions in the Northeast were invited to complete a survey about online learning tools and this survey included an item about preference for the syllabus to be a separate document. Details related to participants, the survey, and the procedure used in the current study are provided in the method section.

**Settings**

Two different Hispanic-Serving Institutions in the Northeast served as the setting for this study. IRB approval was granted at both institutions. Students and faculty from both institutions were invited to participate in this study. One institution was a community college located in a suburban area. This college offers over 70 associate degree academic programs and has over 10,000 students enrolled annually with most students (56%) attending part-time. The student population is diverse with 34% identifying as Hispanic, 27% as White, 16% as Asian, and 12% as Black. Over half of the student population identified as women (56%). There were approximately 140 full-time faculty and almost 500 part-time faculty employed at this college, with the majority of faculty identifying as White.

The second institution was an urban public university that grants bachelor’s and graduate degrees. This institution offers over 50 undergraduate programs and 30 graduate programs and has enrolled approximately 5,000 students each year. In terms of race, 41% of the students identified as Hispanic, 20% as White, 8% as Black, and 2% as Asian. Sixty-two percent of the student population identified as women. There were over 200 full-time faculty and over 400 part-time faculty employed at this university, most of whom identified as White.
Participants

A total of 471 individuals accessed either the faculty survey (75) or the student survey (396). The first item on the student and faculty surveys was the informed consent and a total of 465 participants (74 faculty and 391 students) consented and answered survey questions.

Student Participants

A total of 396 students clicked on the survey link and 391 (98.74%) consented to participate. Of these participants, 284 answered a question about which school they attended. Most attended a community college (211 or 74.3%) while 73 or 25.7% indicated that they attended a public university. A total of 288 students responded to a question about the type of student they were, with 230 indicating they were undergraduate students and 58 indicating they were graduate students. See Table 1 for more specific year-in-school data. As indicated in Table 2, student participants represented a wide variety of academic majors.

In terms of race, 34% were White, 28% Hispanic or Latinx, 18% Asian, 12% Black or African-American, 7% two or more races, and 1% American Indian or Alaskan Native. Of those responding to a question on gender, 70% identified as women, 27% as men, 2% as non-binary, and 1% preferred to self-describe.

Table 1. Year in School: Student Survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year in School</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First-year student</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>36.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate student</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>20.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Academic Major.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health/Allied Health</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Science</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Arts</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Science</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal Justice</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paralegal</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social work</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Faculty Participants

A total of 75 faculty members started the survey and 74 (98.6%) consented to participate. Fifty-three (77.9%) of the faculty participants worked at a community college and 15 (22.1%) worked at a public university. Most faculty reported teaching undergraduate students (82%) while 7% reported teaching graduate students and 11% reported teaching both undergraduate and graduate students.

Sixty-one faculty respondents indicated their race while 10 preferred not to answer. Of those who responded to this question, most of the faculty members were White (79%), with 10% being Latinx, 7% Asian, 3% identifying as two or more races, and 1% Black. None of the faculty who completed the survey identified as American Indian or Alaskan Native or Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander. Of the 64 faculty who responded to the question on gender, 63% identified as women, 36% as men, and 1% as non-binary.

The average number of years of teaching experience was 17.1 (SD = 10.7), with a range from 1-52 years. The average number of years of online teaching experience was 4.78 (SD = 4.52), with a range from zero to 20. Most faculty indicated a moderate (54%) or high (36%) level of proficiency with using Blackboard or Canvas tools. Faculty represented a variety of disciplines as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Faculty Discipline.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Science</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal Justice/Law</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education/Leadership</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art/Dance/Theatre</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Speaking</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 Faculty Discipline.
Procedure

After approval from the Institutional Research Board was obtained, students and faculty at two institutions were invited to participate. Email communication was used to recruit participants. At the community college, the Vice President of Academic Affairs emailed full and part-time faculty, inviting them to participate and encouraging faculty to also invite their students to participate. At the public university, the director of Online Learning emailed faculty who had recently engaged with their department and invited them to participate and encouraged them to invite their students to participate. The survey was open for over a month during the Fall 2022 semester and one reminder email was sent to faculty approximately a week after the initial email.

Survey

There were two versions of the survey, one for students and one for faculty. Qualtrics was the survey tool used. Students were asked to specify their level of agreement with the following statement using a 7-point Likert scale, with 7 indicating strongly agree: “I would prefer to have a separate syllabus document even if the content of the syllabus can be found in Blackboard or Canvas.” In addition, students were asked to respond to demographic questions on the type of college attended, year in school, race, gender, and major.

Faculty participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement on a similar question: “I believe it is important to create a syllabus document even if the components of the syllabus are infused into a Learning Management System such as Blackboard or Canvas.” Similar to the student survey, a 7-point Likert scale was used, with 7 indicating strongly agree. Faculty participants were also asked to respond to several demographic questions on the type of college, race, gender, and teaching experience.

Data Analysis

Frequency data related to demographic data for both students and faculty was compiled. Descriptive data, including the means and standard deviations, for the student and faculty survey items were also calculated. To determine if students and faculty differed in terms of their perception of the syllabus as a separate document, a t-test was conducted. Additional t-tests and an ANOVA were conducted to determine if there were differences based on student and faculty demographic variables such as race, gender, and type of college. Jamovi, an open-access statistical tool, was used to conduct these analyses.

Results

The results section is organized by research questions. The findings from descriptive and inferential statistical analyses are shared. Where helpful, tables are used to summarize findings.

R1: Do students and faculty believe a separate syllabus is still necessary?

Based on survey data, most students still preferred to have a separate syllabus. The average score for students responding to the Likert question, I would prefer to have a separate syllabus document even if the content of the syllabus can be found in Blackboard or Canvas, was 6.02 (SD = 1.28) on a 7-point scale with seven indicating strongly agree. Sixty-two percent of students who responded to this question strongly agreed, agreed, or somewhat agreed with this statement. These results are based on a total of 352 student responses.
Survey data also indicated that most faculty still believed it was important to create the syllabus as a separate document. The average score for faculty responding to the Likert question, I believe it is important to create a syllabus document even if the components of the syllabus are infused into a learning management system such as Blackboard or Canvas, was 6.48 (SD = 1.16) on a 7-point scale with seven indicating strongly agree. Ninety-four percent of faculty who responded to this question strongly agreed, agreed, or somewhat agreed with this statement. These results are based on a total of 71 faculty responses. See Table 4 for student and faculty descriptive data on this survey item about preference for the syllabus to be a separate document.

Table 4. Descriptive Data on Survey Item about Preference for Syllabus as Separate Document

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6.02</td>
<td>1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6.48</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 I would prefer to have a separate syllabus document even if the content of the syllabus can be found in Blackboard or Canvas.

2 I believe it is important to create a syllabus document even if the components of the syllabus are infused into a Learning Management System such as Blackboard or Canvas.

R2: Do faculty and students differ in their perceptions about the need for a separate syllabus?

To determine if there was a significant difference between student and faculty perceptions of the syllabus as a separate syllabus, I conducted an independent samples t-test. There was a significant difference between student and faculty perceptions about their preference for a separate syllabus, \( t(421) = 2.81, p = .005, d= .37 \). The effect size was small to moderate. Faculty were more likely (M = 6.48; SD = 1.16) than students (M= 6.02; SD = 1.28) to indicate agreement with a statement about the importance of a separate syllabus, but as indicated previously, survey data showed that both students and faculty do believe it is important to have the syllabus as a separate document.

R3: Do student preferences for a separate syllabus vary based on demographics?

I conducted an independent samples t-test to determine if community college and university students differed in terms of their preference for a separate syllabus. There was no significant difference between community college students (M = 6.02; SD = 1.24) and university students (M =6.26; SD = 1.13) in terms of their preference for a separate syllabus document, \( t(282) = -1.463, p = .145, d = - .19 \). The effect size was small.

I then conducted another independent samples t-test to determine if there was a difference in preference for a separate syllabus between undergraduate and graduate students. There was a significant difference between undergraduate students and graduate students, \( t(285) = 2.35, p = .019, d = .35 \). The effect size was small to moderate. Graduate students (M =6.42; SD = .73) were more likely than undergraduate students (M = 6.00; SD = 1.32) to agree with a statement that they preferred a separate syllabus even though the content could be incorporated into learning management systems such as Blackboard or Canvas.
To determine if student preferences for a separate syllabus varied based on gender and race, I conducted an independent samples t-test and an ANOVA. Because too few of the survey respondents indicated binary or prefer to self-describe as responses for the gender question, I only included students identifying as women and men in the statistical analysis. Results of an independent samples t-test revealed there was a significant difference between students identifying as women and students identifying as men in terms of their preference for a separate syllabus, t (282) = 2.79, p = .006, d = .37. Women (M = 6.22; SD 1.14) were more likely than men (M = 5.77; SD = 1.43) to indicate a preference for the syllabus to be a separate document. This was a small to moderate effect.

I conducted an ANOVA to determine if there were differences between students of different racial backgrounds in terms of their preference for a separate syllabus document. The following racial categories were used: Asian (M = 6.33; SD = 1.11), Black (M = 6.06; SD= 1.30), Latinx (M = 5.95; SD = 1.36), White (M = 6.08; SD = 1.10), and two or more races (M = 5.89; SD = 1.70). There was only one student who identified as American Indian or Alaskan Native so it was not statistically appropriate to include this respondent in the analysis. Results indicated there were no significant differences based on student race, F (4, 262) = .79, p = .532, $\eta^2 = .01$. The effect size was small.

R4: Do faculty beliefs about the need to create a separate syllabus vary based on demographics?

To answer this research question, I conducted an independent samples t-test to determine if faculty perceptions about the need for a separate syllabus differed based on whether they were teaching at a community college or in a university setting. Results indicated that there was no significant difference between faculty teaching in a community college (M = 6.50; SD = 1.11) and faculty teaching in a university setting (M = 6.53; SD = 1.13) on their perceptions related to creating a separate syllabus, t (65) = -0.102, p = .919, d = -.030. The effect size was small.

Next, I explored whether faculty perceptions of the syllabus varied based on overall years of teaching and experience teaching online. I grouped years of teaching and years of online teaching into the following categories: less than 5 years, 6-15 years, and 16 years or more. I then conducted two ANOVAs to determine if there were significant differences in the perceptions related to creating a separate syllabus document in terms of years of overall teaching and in terms of years of online teaching experience. There was no significant difference in faculty’s perceived need to create a separate syllabus based on overall teaching experience, F (2, 68) = 2.19, p = .12, $\eta^2 = .06$. The effect size was small. The average response was 6.67 (SD = .71) for faculty teaching 5 years or less, 6.81 (SD = .75) for faculty teaching between 6 and 15 years, and 6.32 (SD = 1.11) for faculty teaching 16 years or more. There was also no significant difference in faculty perceived need to create a separate syllabus document based on the number of years teaching online, F (2, 68) = .421, p = .658, $\eta^2 = .01$. This was a small effect size. The average responses were 6.58 (SD = .92) for faculty teaching online for 5 years or less, 6.65 (SD = 1.00) for faculty teaching online between 6 and 15 years, and 6.00 (SD = 1.41) for faculty teaching online for 16 years or more.

Finally, I conducted a series of analyses related to gender and race to determine if faculty perception of the syllabus varied based on these demographic characteristics. For the question on gender, there was only one binary response, so it was not appropriate to include this respondent in the statistical analyses. I conducted an independent samples t-test with those indicating women and men as their gender to determine if there were gender differences in terms of faculty perception about the importance of creating a separate syllabus. There was no significant difference between women (M= 6.54; SD = 1.00) and men (M = 6.17; SD = 1.53) in terms of their response to this survey item on the syllabus as a separate document, t (60) = 1.14, p = .259, d = .30. This was a small to moderate effect size. Due to the small number of faculty in all racial categories other than White, an ANOVA
was not appropriate. Instead, I re-coded faculty race as White or Faculty of Color. Faculty of color included faculty who identified as Black, Latinx, Asian, or with two or more races. None of the faculty who responded identified as Native American or Alaskan Native. I then conducted an independent samples t-test to determine if there was a difference between how White faculty (M = 6.38; SD = 1.25) and Faculty of Color (M= 6.85; SD =.56) responded to the question about if they believed it was important to create a separate syllabus. There was no significant difference found, t (59) = -1.32, p =.19, d = -.413. The effect size was small to moderate.

**Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to determine student and faculty perceptions of the need for a separate syllabus given the content could be and often is incorporated into learning management systems. Overall, both faculty and students agreed that having a separate syllabus is still important, but faculty more strongly believed this was the case. Although this is the first study exploring student and faculty perceptions about the need for the syllabus as a separate document, it is consistent with a related finding reported by Harrington and Gabert-Quillen (2015). Based on their results, 66% of community college students reported preferring to have a longer syllabus with all essential details in one place rather than a shorter syllabus with additional information shared later via the learning management system (Harrington & Gabert-Quillen, 2015).

The current research study found no significant differences in student responses based on the type of college attended or race. There were, however, significant differences in preference for a separate syllabus based on gender and type of student. Women were more likely than men to indicate a preference for the syllabus as a separate document. Graduate students, as compared to undergraduate students, were also more likely to prefer a separate syllabus document. There were no significant differences in faculty responses based on which institution they taught at, years of overall teaching, years of teaching online, gender, or race.

The findings from this study indicated that the desire for a separate syllabus was consistent across most student and faculty demographics except that women and graduate students were more likely to prefer a separate syllabus. Although previous researchers have not identified gender differences in terms of their perceptions of the syllabus, some researchers have noted that traditional and nontraditional students have viewed the syllabus differently. For example, findings from a study conducted by Becker and Calhoon (1999) indicated that nontraditional students were more likely to attend to titles and authors of readings, the kinds of assignments, and course goals and objectives as compared to traditional students. Traditional students, on the other hand, were more likely to attend to policies about late assignments and academic dishonesty in addition to holidays.

From a generational perspective, undergraduate students may be more comfortable than graduate students with accessing course material electronically. Although Lai and Hong (2015) did not find many generational differences in technology overall, they did report that digital immigrants, defined as students over 30, were less likely than generation next, those under 20, and net generation students, those 20-30, to use technology tools such as their mobile phone for university work. Only 50% of digital immigrants reported using their mobile phones for university activities, while 77% of generation next students and 76.8% of net generation students reported doing so. Thus, one potential explanation for this finding could be that graduate students may not be as comfortable accessing syllabus information electronically through the learning management system.

Undergraduate students, however, may prefer mobile friendly access to important information. It is possible that undergraduate students may not be as likely to prefer a separate syllabus document because it is often not as easy to access via their phone. Chaw and Tang (2017) found that only 23.3% of undergraduate students reported using a computer as their main device for accessing
the learning management system. In a study conducted with mostly undergraduate students, with seven of the nine courses used to recruit participants being undergraduate courses, Ng et al. (2020) found that 91.1% of students surveyed indicated that they accessed the learning management system with their mobile devices. Ng et al. (2020) did not conduct an analysis exploring potential differences between undergraduate and graduate students, so it is not known if there were significant differences between undergraduate and graduate students. Faculty often upload a PDF version of a syllabus to the learning management system and a PDF is typically not mobile-friendly. Kim and Ekachai (2020) found that undergraduate students were more likely to engage with interactive tabs as compared to a PDF document of the syllabus.

Limitations and Future Research

There are several limitations of this study that need to be considered when interpreting the findings. The main limitation relates to generalizability. A convenience sample was used. Although descriptive data illustrates there was diversity in terms of many demographic variables such as student major, faculty discipline, student race, and to some extent gender across student and faculty respondents, it is not possible to determine if the perceptions of the students and faculty in this study would be similar to students and faculty who did not participate in the study.

Another limitation of this study is the reliance on one survey question for students and one similar item for faculty. Having only limited quantitative data makes it difficult to fully understand the student and faculty perception. Future research could include a qualitative component, asking students and faculty to explain the reasons behind their preferences. Because students often receive content from the syllabus and the learning management system in different ways depending on how instructors opt to share this information, their perceptions are likely based on their prior experiences and how effectively their faculty have used these resources. Future researchers could design a study where students are shown an exemplar stand-alone syllabus and an exemplar learning management course shell where the syllabus was incorporated as modules and then asked about which they preferred and why.

Conclusion

Based on the findings from this study, the syllabus is not passé. Both student and faculty respondents indicated they preferred a separate syllabus even though the components of the syllabus could be, and often are, incorporated into modules within learning management systems. Faculty, however, had higher levels of agreement that the syllabus be a separate document than students. Women and graduate students also were more likely to prefer a separate syllabus. There were no significant differences found in terms of student perception based on the type of institution attended or race. There were also no significant differences found in terms of faculty perception based on the type of institution where they taught, race, gender, years of overall teaching, and years of teaching online.

As technology continues to advance and students access information in different ways, it will be important for this research question to be revisited. Today, these findings indicate students and faculty still prefer the syllabus to be a separate document, but this of course may change over time. The current finding that undergraduate students were less likely than graduate students to indicate a preference for the syllabus as a separate document may be evidence that perceptions are beginning to shift. Given the importance of the syllabus, further research exploring the best way to efficiently leverage this document as a teaching tool and learning resource is warranted.

Although it may not seem problematic to share essential course information with students via both a separate syllabus document and by incorporating the syllabus content into the learning
management system, this approach can be taxing on faculty time. Time spent on duplicative actions means there is less faculty time for other important teaching and learning activities. In addition, it is possible that the process of transferring information from the syllabus document to the various modules in the learning management system can lead to errors and discrepancies that students may find confusing and frustrating. Based on the findings of this current study, it seems these duplicative efforts continue to be warranted at this time, but perhaps with time and effective and consistent integration of the syllabus components into learning management systems, this may not be the case in the future.

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Pedagogy on the Fly: Faculty Experiences during a Pandemic

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Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic brought about sudden changes in pedagogical strategies in higher education. How faculty processed these changes, as well as their lived experiences during these shifts, has informed fundamental shifts in higher education that will last long into the future. The aim of this phenomenological investigation was to explore the lived experience of new and experienced faculty at one midwestern university during the COVID-19 pandemic. In a qualitative phenomenological study using a stratified purposive sample, through learning management virtual LMS tours and semi-structured interviews, investigators explored the experiences of 27 new and experienced faculty members across 20 disciplines. Findings included themes of panic and stress, teaching during quarantine (quaranteaching), innovation and technology, acknowledging loss (something lost), giving grace, and carrying new learning forward (something gained). Investigators link findings to the literature, compare and contrast faculty experiences with those of a student, and discuss implications for teaching and research. This study contributes to the literature chronicling the fundamental shifts in higher education occurring as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the impact of these shifts on faculty and students.

Keywords: COVID-19, pedagogy, innovation, flexibility

A Pandemic and Unique Challenges

The spring of 2020 brought sudden changes in higher education due to the COVID-19 pandemic. From closed university doors to sudden remote, almost instantaneously created online courses, college faculty revised their practice, essentially on the fly. In a few months’ time, with the start of academic year 2020-21, faculty were able to shift their emergency remote teaching practices to more planned pedagogy. Yet, the challenges of the pandemic were extensive and pervasive.

It is important to document changes in higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic for several reasons which include, among others, 1. The pandemic had enormous (and heretofore not yet fully understood) effects on humanity, including higher education, 2. The environments of face-to-face, online, and hybrid modalities were already common, but the pandemic led to further (and perhaps accelerated) innovations, alterations, and disruptions, and 3. Pandemics are thankfully rare in human populations, but what might be learned from them has relevance for future generations who will problem-solve in their own time. Research in this capacity is not simply looking at interesting phenomena, but rather it is a type of sincere message to and solidarity with future generations.
This research in this study is driven by a phenomenological methodology, so the individual experiences of faculty are not necessarily generalizable to the whole of collegiate teaching (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Ulin, Robinson, & Tolley, 2005; Watkins, 2012). However, given the duty and honor to document the experiences of the pandemic, these experiences can inform how faculty today and tomorrow shape their own practices. In other words, there is something to learn from this experience, and it should inform the revision of practices in future course design. We therefore triangu late our research in a way that honors the originality of the University of Indianapolis faculty while relating their experiences to the literature and to emerging practices. The express aim is to explore the lived experience of new and experienced faculty at one midwestern university during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, investigators examined the pedagogical shifts that occurred from the Fall 2019 (Semester I, 2019-2020) to emergency remote teaching in the latter half of Spring 2020 (Semester II, 2019-2020). Secondary purposes included examining how those shifts informed pedagogical choices in Fall 2020 (Semester I, 2020-2021), and how those shifts are anticipated to inform pedagogical changes in the future. Investigators also qualitatively compared responses from faculty who were new to the university (fewer than three years) compared to faculty who had been at the university for three years or more.

Higher Education and the Covid-19 Pandemic: A Survey of Literature

In the early months of 2020, a coronavirus spread rapidly through the human population; the World Health Organization labeled it a pandemic on March 11, 2020, “...the first pandemic caused by a coronavirus” (WHO, 2020, para. 9). What followed in higher education included a brief period of rapid shift to online teaching to limit or, in most cases, completely cancel in-person classroom learning (García-Morales, et al. 2021). The shift to emergency remote learning was nearly universal around the world (Ali, 2020; Crawford et al., 2020; de Oliveira Araujo et al., 2020; Kummitha et al., 2021; Mishra et al., 2020; Moralista & Oducado, 2020) and across disciplines (Connolly & Hall, 2021).

Understandably, there is an emerging body of literature examining the response of higher education to the pandemic. Existing literature has explored the shift to online learning through case-based research (Ghazi-Saidi et al., 2020; Kang & Zhang, 2020; Mishra et al., 2020); survey of faculty in higher education institutions (Kummitha et al., 2021; Moralista & Oducado, 2020); and qualitative interviews (Rapanta et al., 2020). Additionally, many authors have explored anecdotal observations of teaching and learning shifts during the pandemic (Dickson-Deane, 2021; McMurrrie, 2021; Miller, 2021; Voelker, 2021).

Multiple studies attest to the panic, stress, and concern for family members and students experienced by faculty in the early phases of the pandemic (Miller, 2021; Moralista & Oducado, 2020; Rapanta et al., 2020; Voelker, 2021). These concerns have been well-founded particularly in relation to student needs due to cultural and socioeconomic differences (Antee, 2021; Beschorner, 2021; Engerman & Otto, 2021; Jaggars et al., 2021). Moreover, students were suffering from emotional needs that required extra consideration (Kaplan-Rakowski, 2021). These factors were only compounded by the societal changes underway at this time (Bridges, 2021), particularly in issues related to social justice and racism (Powell, et al., 2021). In other words, even though the pandemic was a worldwide event with significant implications, it did not occur in a vacuum; many other stressors occurred simultaneously which contributed not only to the society-wide problems, but also the possibility of enormous change within education: “Education in its various forms is always an outgrowth of struggle...This urgency demands that educators develop a new language, vision, and politics to address the current challenges faced by educators and the wider society” (Giroux, 2021, p. 9).
Despite the proven effectiveness of online learning, it was the rapid shift itself, forced by the pandemic conditions, which caused the distress and discomfort experienced by faculty (Ghazi-Saidi et al., 2020). Some faculty had online teaching experience prior to the pandemic (Ghazi-Saidi et al., 2020), yet early indications suggested moving faculty online “overnight” exacted a “human toll,” particularly with regard to learning new skills to “keep pace with ongoing technology advancements” (Pelletier et al., 2021, p. 28; p. 16). There was serious “cognitive overload” with “multi-tasking” and “toggling” (Miller, 2021, para. 11). During this sudden change, many questions arose for those of us who study teaching and learning, since faculty and students became part of the “largest-ever nontraditional teaching experiment” (Glantz et al., 2021, para. 1). Problems with infrastructure and staff readiness only made the shift more difficult (Ali, 2020). Higher education institutions needed quick funding for training and technology (Pelletier et al., 2021). Certainly, resilience was a requirement of both faculty and students (Ghazi-Saidi et al., 2020). The opening of the academic year 2020-21 came quickly, but at least with more knowledge of the pandemic that had ravaged our society and a few months’ time to assess and refine previously-arranged emergency remote teaching practices (Curtin, R., 2021; Glantz et al., 2021; Hodges, 2021; Ilgaz, 2021).

Course redesign, under typical circumstances, has required an iterative, reflective process that is objective driven from the top down (Bennett et al., 2017). However, the pandemic forced rapid shifts without the careful consideration that occurs when employing an instructional design model (Karakaya, 2021), often without the organizational support in place needed to make these shifts (Meier, 2021; Stefaniak, 2021) or the professional development needed to understand the new technologies being employed (Curtin, 2021; Glantz et al., 2021; Istenič, 2021) or how to manage practical skill and application content (Dickson-Deane, 2021; Gamor, 2021; Iwanaga et al., 2021). Recent work in student efficacy demonstrates the important role of faculty on campus (Ferguson, 2021), but the notion of teaching and learning in online-only capacities during a pandemic complicates how real presence can be measured and understood.

Themes emerging from this growing body of research on higher education’s response to COVID-19 suggest that there was distinct rupture of practices, technologies, and assessment, to the point which they cannot return to their pre-pandemic states (Hodges, 2022; Ewing, 2021; Senior, et al., 2021). Modalities like hy-flex and other hybrid teaching and learning arrangements will be more common (Ohshima, 2021; Miller et al., 2020; Wilson & Alexander, 2021), and higher education will remain a societal nexus with reaffirmed commitment to serving students, particularly those in underserved and marginalized groups (Blankstein et al., 2020; Kose et al., 2022).

The emerging literature closely parallels the experiences of faculty in this present study in several key ways: faculty had varied experiences teaching online prior to the pandemic; they experienced a great deal of personal, professional, and emotional upheaval during the shift to emergency remote learning; and they carried out a reflective, iterative process using student feedback when preparing for teaching and employment of technology beyond the initial pandemic lockdowns. Additionally, faculty in this study echoed these concerns and indicated they often obtained their own infrastructure (digital tools and training) at the beginning of the pandemic, as they were unable to wait for organizational resources to catch up to the present needs. Although the university in this study was able to provide digital tools as time went on and even reimburse faculty for some out-of-pocket expenses, faculty did not know of this outcome at the outset, and the expenses contributed to their distress.

While unpacking the full impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on higher education are in their research infancy, the present study benefits the literature by capturing not only the technological changes and interventions, emotional impacts, and rapid pedagogical alterations (which give additional support to the existing literature), but also the nexus of student assistance during a period of rapid adaptation. That means the present study adds to the literature by describing and reflecting on an ethos.
of care shown by faculty as they sought to continue their teaching work during a tumultuous time. The nexus of student assistance and an ethos of care are furthermore represented through multiple disciplines spanning a wide array of subjects.

**Method**

This research was undertaken with a Husserlian phenomenological method to focus on the consciousness and description of experiences (Qutoshi, 2018) which “reveal lived experiences of involved individuals” (Watkins, 2012, p. 155). Such a method is common in educational research because of “its potential contribution to re-thinking our understanding of the complex phenomena we encounter in the dynamic, and sometimes confronting, world in which we find ourselves in this 21st century” (Dall’Alba, 2009, p. 7). Though this method is contentious in some quarters, and contains multitudes of methodological debate, phenomenology was selected due to the emphasis on understanding individual experiences, detailing complexities in collected experiences, and building compelling narratives based on the themes which emerged from lengthy interviews (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015).

The primary concerns were to capture what actions faculty took during the initial pandemic lockdowns, to understand the coping mechanisms with further shifts during the pandemic, and to elaborate on what motivated those changes, so the “lived experience” was of critical methodological importance. Investigators utilized a qualitative purposive sample of faculty across all Schools and Colleges at the University of Indianapolis in the midwestern United States. Data were initially collected via a demographics Google form (indicating participation interest), virtual learning management system course site tours (where faculty would make a short recording demonstrating their course(s) in the learning management system), and individual semi-structured interviews. Investigators completed coding, code comparison, and theme extraction using Dedoose 9.0.17 (2021) (Watkins, 2012). This research design was established to “explore the complex world of lived experiences” insofar as to “to study human phenomena at a deeper level of conscious[ness] to understand lived experiences” (Qutoshi, 2018, p. 220).

**Ethics**

This study was approved by the University of Indianapolis Human Research Protections Program, Study #01342, as Exempt on January 10, 2021.

**Participant Characteristics**

Investigators recruited participants through email to all current full-time faculty at the university. Participants were directed to a Google Form requesting name, email, department, length of time at the university (less than three years, or three years or greater), start date at the university, and faculty rank. The faculty were divided into two groups: those with less than three years’ experience at our institution and those with three or more years’ experience. Given that new faculty had spent the majority of their time at the university during a pandemic, investigators stratified the group, predicting their perceptions might vary. This purposive sample included faculty from all colleges across the university. Inclusion criteria were: (1) held a full-time faculty position at the university and (2) taught at the university during the fall semester of 2019 and the spring semester of 2020. Faculty were excluded if they did not complete the virtual “tour” of their learning management system course site after completing the recruitment process since the “tour” served as a basis of comparison and reflection.
Instruments

Investigators collected data through (1) virtual learning management system course site tours and (2) semi-structured interviews.

Virtual learning management system (LMS) course site tours consisted of faculty taking a video of themselves describing their course site from Fall 2019 while discussing use of the LMS’s features and tools. Faculty then contrasted this course with the same course, when possible, as taught in the Fall 2020 semester. Faculty who began at the university in the Fall of 2020 recorded a tour of the LMS from the Fall 2020 semester only. Investigators asked faculty to describe their decision-making process when introducing changes to the course for teaching during the pandemic, which was almost entirely virtual during that semester. Specifically, faculty were asked to comment on use of Lessons, Assignments, Tests and Quizzes, and any other pre-constructed course tools in the LMS. Faculty then reflected on how effective they felt their changes were for student learning. Finally, faculty were asked to comment on scholarship quality and quantity during the pandemic, and what had been the hardest and easiest things about working during the pandemic.

Faculty who completed the virtual LMS tours then took part in semi-structured interviews in which investigators asked them about their prior experiences with online education, their decision-making process when moving to emergency remote learning, and their pedagogical decisions for the Fall 2020 semester and their impression of the pandemic’s impact on student learning. For interview questions, see Appendix 1.

Data Collection

Faculty uploaded their recorded virtual LMS tours in mp4 format into Google Folders accessible only to them, for data privacy. Graduate assistants then took notes on the virtual LMS tours, based on the questions posed. These notes became part of the dataset. Next, investigators conducted semi-structured interviews with participants. Investigators used Zoom to record verbatim transcripts, and graduate assistants listened to the interviews in order to clean the transcripts and correct any errors. Investigators de-identified both the virtual tour notes and interview transcripts by assigning numbers. Those with less than three years at the university were assigned numbers in the 100’s, while those with more than three years’ experience were assigned numbers in the 200’s. Investigators kept a master list separate from the data for tracking purposes.

Data Analysis

Investigators used constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to identify concepts or features of the faculty experiences. Then, investigators used open and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) of interview transcripts and notes from the virtual LMS tours with Dedoose (2021) version 9.0.17 and multiple readings/viewings until investigators reached agreement. Investigators then extracted themes and organized, reorganized, and retitled these themes until agreement was reached between investigators (Watkins, 2012).
Findings

Participants

Forty-one faculty members completed the recruitment Google Form. Of those, 27 faculty (16 experienced, 10 new faculty, one new faculty member exempted due to the clinical nature of the course) completed the requested virtual tour of their Fall 2019 course. Investigators exempted one new faculty member from completion of the virtual tour of the Learning Management System (LMS) due to the nature of the faculty member’s role in teaching clinical education and absence of use of the LMS. Demographics of participants may be found in Appendix 2.

Mean years at the University for experienced faculty was 10.313 (Standard Deviation [S.D.] 7.952) with a median of 6.25 years and a range of 3 to 30 years. Mean years at the University for new faculty was 1.614 years (S.D. 0.517) with a median of 1.5 years and a range of 0.5 - 2 years. Mean years in higher education for experienced faculty was 12.813 years (S.D. 7.176) with a median of 10 years and a range of 3 to 30 years. Mean years in higher education for new faculty was 3.364 years (S.D. 2.55) with a median of 2 years and a range of 0.5 to 9.5 years. The 27 faculty members represented 20 different disciplines (see Appendix 2).

Themes

Figure 1 outlines the themes investigators extracted from the data. Themes emerged in a timeline fashion. Faculty discussed pre-pandemic teaching and the initial panic with moving to emergency remote teaching and learning, followed by adapting to teaching during the pandemic (termed QuaranTeaching), innovation and technology use, determining how to create engaging learning experiences online and use of technology to facilitate learning, and reflecting on losses and gains during pandemic teaching.

Figure 1. Themes extracted from the qualitative data.
Pre-Pandemic Teaching

Investigators specifically asked about teaching experiences prior to the pandemic and prior online teaching. New and experienced faculty alike spoke of experiences teaching as graduate students, adjunct instructors, and even in secondary education. Some had taught online asynchronous courses. Some reported experiences as students in online courses which helped frame their pedagogical choices. Experienced faculty talked about this topic much more frequently than new faculty, not surprisingly, since most experienced faculty had much more teaching experience than the new faculty. Regardless of the type of course or length of time teaching, faculty discussed that they were in a routine, they found what worked for them, and they were in a groove prior to the pandemic:

I was teaching three sections of [a course] that I’ve taught probably 40 or so times in my life and [another] course that I taught like six or seven times before, so [it] was all very routine, I was just doing, you know, the same things in the same ways and there was nothing notable about it. (211, lines 130-131)

In regard to prior teaching online, faculty provided a mixed response. Some had taught fully online, some hybrid, and some not at all, in both the new and experienced groups. Some had taught fully asynchronous online courses. One experienced faculty member reported having distance learning experience, but not with today’s technology:

Before coming to [this university] I taught one remote course at [another university], where I did have students in the classroom, but it was also filmed and beamed out live to remote campuses in very small towns around [the state] and then the students would mail their essays to me and I graded them. Other than that, I had no remote or online teaching experience; that's the only item. (Participant 211, lines 38-39)

Some mentioned using technology for flipped classroom experiences prior to the pandemic:

I learned my first three years where I taught previously and just through lessons and pre-recorded videos... to kind of get learners engaged in the material before actually coming to lecture; that seemed to prove effective my first three years of teaching. Then, with follow up recordings of the class, ... I've heard the first three years of teaching I heard multiple times students say... I can't listen and take notes, so I thought the recordings would be very beneficial, so that, for those that just want to sit and be the auditory learner they could take notes at a later time, so [I] utilized post class videos as well (Participant 209, lines 14-17).

One reported having a very poor experience teaching online prior to the pandemic:

Prior to this, I had taught one online course total ever, and it was a turnkey course that another faculty member had designed and basically sent me. We were using [a different LMS] at that institution. They basically sent me the entire course on [the LMS] and said, “I don't know, if you want to change something, go for it, otherwise you can just kind of set the start date and just let it run.” It was a dismal experience. I don't know who hated it more, the students or me. There were some students who were using it as a Gen. Ed. and it was very much a check-the-box type course for them. But there were some actual music majors who were taking this, sort of introductory music and
technology type course, and I just, I can't imagine they got anything out of it. You know, the textbook was really bad and it was just kind of pre-recorded PowerPoint slides that just cycled that were released every week or so. And yeah it was so impersonal and kind of cold, there was no synchronous component at all (Participant 107, lines 24-27).

One New faculty member, despite having no online teaching experience, ended up being a resource person for other faculty:

Once COVID hit I was still serving as a teacher assistant at [a different university] so I had a few labs that need to be converted to completely online format, and senior faculty that were incapable of doing that, so I got a really quick crash course in converting labs that way, but other than that all of my experience prior to that had been in person (Participant 110, lines 64-65).

The topic of LMS use generated a great deal of conversation. Most faculty reported that they had used the LMS with less organization prior to the pandemic. Course virtual LMS tours indicated that most faculty utilized the LMS as a repository to store files, but with no coherent or consistent organization style; used Assignments for due dates; and would “strip out” other LMS tools or leave tools such as Lessons, Overview, and Assignments empty. Faculty indicated that they did not see a need to use the LMS fully since their courses were entirely face-to-face. They would spend time in class telling students where to find documents, rather than organizing them well:

[My LMS use] has been primarily through just the LMS’s support to in-person activities, sometimes doing the flipped classroom approach, where I’d have students come prepared having watched a few videos or something so we could do more active learning in class, but otherwise I don’t think I taught anything online (Participant 210, Lines 25-26).

I probably did not do it very well, I had absolutely no training or understanding of how to work a learning management system and I think I just kind of, if I'm being honest, didn't take it very seriously. (Participant 101, lines 35-36)

**Panic!**

On Wednesday, March 11, 2020, the university made the difficult decision to move all classes online for emergency remote learning. Students were sent home and faculty were given 12 days to move courses to a fully online format. Faculty expressed panic, stress, and worry in regard to this shift:

After I stopped crying and…You laugh…but you know it's true. I was…I don't think I slept for the first six months, I really do. I was panicked. I was frustrated. I think I would have felt more calm had I cared less about my student outcomes, [I] had a lot of compassion for them. (Participant 202, lines 46-48)

Faculty also shared that they were overwhelmed, shocked, overworked, stressed, and worried. They worried about the health and safety of family, co-workers, and students; whether or not their pedagogical shifts would work; and about managing the significantly increased workload generated by the shift to remote learning:
I did asynchronous lectures, mostly so they couldn't see me panic in real time too often (Participant 202, lines 91-92).

I don't think anybody handled that shift. You know I mean just in terms of our labor but also just in terms of our emotional [health] (Participant 101, lines 98-99).

Worrying about people staying safe and healthy, I would say. Especially when it got to the period of time in late October [2020], I think it was when people in my class started to get sick or exposed. That is worrisome for me in terms of them, of course, [but also] for me and my family (Participant 205, lines 609-615).

It was stressful because I didn't know what to do, right, and so I read … a lot of course higher ED stuff online (Participant 211, lines 229-230).

Amidst all the worry and uncertainty, faculty began to explore how they would carry on and move forward during the pandemic and its ensuing restrictions.

**QuaranTeaching**

Over just a very short period of time, I think, just two or three days, I knew I had to just make choices and get on with it, and those are the choices I made but I found it stressful. (Participant 211, lines 229-230).

As instructors very quickly began to “get on with it” and adapt for emergency remote teaching, they found themselves rethinking almost all pedagogical choices for instructional design, content delivery, and assessment. Recent literature refers to this phenomenon as QuaranTeaching (Pace, et al., 2020; Jelińska & Paradowski, 2021). Having clear course objectives in mind facilitated this adaptation. Faculty reported various shifts for content delivery. Many opted for asynchronous, pre-recorded lectures to provide flexibility for viewing and an option to review and re-watch. This option provided the opportunity to move synchronous online sessions to interactive content and learning activities. Synchronous sessions included use of audience response activities, like Kahoot! (2022) and Google Jamboard (n.d.). In terms of student workload, faculty reported many shifts, including: Decreasing student workload by having them work in groups, or switching to individual work to avoid requiring students to meet; shifting to real-world case studies; asynchronous student interaction through Google docs and forms to allow for work and life schedules and varying internet capabilities; making homework worth more (or fewer) points; extending assignment due dates; and sharing decision-making with the students. Faculty from a variety of disciplines integrated real-life case studies into their pedagogical strategies to provide a way for students to work and learn on their own. The overarching impression indicated that faculty were rethinking every aspect of their pedagogy while teaching during quarantine in a very time-consuming process:

I think this whole process has forced me to streamline and really think through every aspect of my pedagogy. In terms of what kinds of assignments I give, how I'm going to ask students to do them, how I'm going to pace when those assignments come in, how I'm going to provide meaningful feedback on them,
because I feel like I owe them that feedback if I can't give it to them in person (Participant 101, lines 247-250).

The biggest shift was just having to do all the detail work behind that planning to make sure that all the links worked. Previously, I would have given them a hard copy hand out. So when we shifted to [online], I had to make sure things were available electronically and make sure links in the agenda were all functional and they've been shared properly and so forth (Participant 212, lines 128-129).

Faculty also reported building off earlier pedagogical design, but with an eye to greater organization, taking a “less is more” approach, and focusing on flexibility as a key element of class design.

Key to quaranteaching was a greater emphasis on designing the organization of the class. Rationale for improved organization included ease of finding content and assignments, decreasing anxiety, and making the course look nicer and easier to follow:

My rationale first, you know the first piece was the organization. I wanted it to be organized on my end. I wanted it to be organized for the student and because I thought that would help lessen the anxiety of it...So I moved everything online and tried to organize it in a lot nicer format. I really wanted to keep that in mind that, I'm sure, students' minds were as scattered as mine was so I wanted to provide more organization, more information about expectations (Participant 105, lines 60-61, 83-85).

**Innovation and Technology**

Innovation emerged as a necessary part of teaching during quarantine, as well as employing new learning technologies. Faculty reported using substantial amounts of their own time, money, and resources to create learning tools and experiences. Many instructors recounted the hours and hours of work it took to record asynchronous video lectures. One participant purchased video production equipment, a document webcam that worked similar to an old-fashioned overhead projector, and software to run it while in synchronous online sessions. Instructors also had to innovate for creating hands-on learning experiences in virtual environments. A geology instructor who normally had students examining lab specimens of fossils had students go outside and take pictures of rocks, and then identify what those rocks were. A clinical nursing instructor had students debrief after their clinical sessions not in a classroom, but in their cars on their phones using Zoom in order to facilitate social distancing and debriefing in a comfortable environment. One faculty member secured funding to send kits to each student at home for lab work. Another instructor reverse-designed labs, providing results from lab experiments from previous semesters and having students work backwards to show how those results might have been produced. For student presentations, one faculty member used Google Jamboards for display boards rather than an in-person gallery walk. For clinical classes, some content had to be delayed until in-person clinical experiences could resume, or delivered via video simulation experiences using pre-recorded content available online.

Faculty members also found that, to create interactive learning experiences, they needed to create their own materials. One instructor created “resources made over the summer...
comprehensive set of notes and videos” (Participant 108, line 200). Another designed a set of case studies:

If I’m going to use outside case studies, I’m either going to have to drastically change the content I’m teaching them so that they can do the case studies, or I’m going to have to write my own. So I decided that it was easier for me to write my own case studies, and publish them, than it was for me to try to find the perfect case studies that were out there that would overlap exactly with my learning objectives for the courses (Participant 214, lines 56-59).

Faculty described the learning curve required to employ technologies such as Zoom, greater use of the LMS, ScreenCastify, VoiceThread, Google applications such as Forms and Jamboards, and various phone apps. One instructor reported being “behind the times” and needing to catch up on technology. For LMS use, faculty built out and organized previously unused tools such as discussion forums, tests and quizzes, rubrics, attendance, lessons, resources, and assignments. Instructors also explored use of resources external to the university such as YouTube videos, embedded content, Google Drive, and virtual whiteboards. With recording lectures, one faculty member reported completely revising all course lectures:

I actually went through and redid all of my lectures, to try to make them flow more because it had been a couple of years so it’s time anyway, and I recorded all of the lectures, so that they were anywhere from 15 to 20 minute chunks of different powerpoints that I would usually cover in three hours, so that the students could watch them on their [own] time (Participant 206, lines 53-55).

Additionally, instructors considered how use of these innovative techniques and tools might impact student engagement and how they grade and provide feedback to students.

**Student Engagement and Assessment**

As faculty employed their newly redesigned courses both at mid-semester of Spring 2020 and again in the Fall of 2021, they reflected on how well their pedagogical shifts during the pandemic facilitated student learning and engagement. Faculty noted a stark shift in students’ approach to engagement in learning. Specifically, they noted that students were feeling just as overwhelmed and disconnected from the learning environment as they were. Faculty quickly began an adaptation process of trial-and-error to determine what might engage students the best. One faculty member reflected on working harder to find an engaging topic related to the course that will hold students’ interest: “People love dinosaurs. How can I use dinosaurs as a gateway for students to get into some of the geology content?” (Participant 110, lines 160-161). Use of synchronous online sessions increased active learning and had the side benefit of social contact with other students. Reflecting on this social interaction, some faculty made a point of creating more opportunities for contact between students:

[It] was initially about pedagogy, and then later it became more about them, that they had no social life other than some of these group projects they were working on. And that’s what some of my students told me: “Other than my team in your class, I don’t talk to any other human beings.” So the teamwork actually formed some sort of social net for them (Participant 214, lines 127-128).
An additional strategy was to not require class attendance, but make it in students’ best interest to attend the synchronous sessions:

My intention was then they can get practice working on problems they can ask questions that they have, which I thought sounded good because I didn’t want to be, you know, penalizing students for not attending class and students have such a variety of situations. And my thought was even if they don’t even look at the notes or the videos, if they don’t look at anything, if they come to the problem-solving sessions, I think that will be enough for them to get a sense of the material, even if they’re not doing anything else, and maybe they’ll be more inclined to be engaged if I’m helping them on homework and things like that (Participant 108, lines 81-84).

As faculty considered student needs, they considered reducing costs. However, this also meant additional work for the instructor:

We moved from about a $250 textbook and $90 online homework to a completely open source textbook, free and available all the time, no requirements for finances and about $30 a semester for the online homework... which meant I had to rewrite homework assignments (Participant 202, lines 108-110).

Pandemic strategies also required changing methods of assessment. While some instructors reduced the number of quizzes and tests, others increased weekly low-stakes quizzes to facilitate engagement with the material prior to synchronous sessions. These assessments had the additional benefit of allowing faculty to check in with students sooner and notice when students were falling behind. Another method of low-stakes or no-stakes assessment included use of polling to see if students understood the content. One instructor sought additional feedback from students using Google Forms.

With switching to online tests and quizzes, many instructors allowed students to access course resources. One faculty member noted that they had not noticed a difference in assessment scores between open and closed resources. One faculty member adapted online tests and quizzes to allow students to create one page of notes, front and back, for use during the tests and quizzes, and students had to turn in the note sheet. Another faculty member employed labor-based grading in a writing class:

If we want to grade students based on the writing process…you read something, you think about it, you brainstorm, you’re going to draft something, you get really specific feedback from a qualified expert, you think about that feedback, respond to it, revise it, then that’s all we should be grading on is whether or not they’ve gone through that process (Participant 101, lines 143-145).

One side benefit of moving to online tests and quizzes was using the metrics feature to look at question performance. A detriment was having to write more unique test questions to make sure students were not cheating.

Not everything went well with student engagement and assessment. In some synchronous sessions, students kept their cameras off and faculty felt they were not getting any feedback to know if students were understanding content. When synchronous sessions were not required, students
would not show up. Likewise, students would not always use asynchronous materials that faculty had carefully crafted:

The only issue is that if I ever looked to see how many students visited that page… I don't think they actually looked at it. What was new is that teaching has become a series of clicks, and I think [it is] totally necessary to do that right now, I mean there’s no way around it, but you know that’s a challenge (Participant 101, lines 192-194).

Faculty reflected on their pedagogical choices and changes, and their impact on students:

Going forward, a lot of these concerns still exist, pandemic or not, you know they're still juggling a lot, they're still balancing a lot, there’s still a lot of demands on their time. And I think that just the flexibility that online has offered has given me things I want to take when we're in person, how can I make in person learning more flexible. How can I think about due dates and assignments and make those more accessible right, how can I keep the things that online have really worked. You know, a lot of students, they’d like to be able to have some degree of choice, so how can I keep that (Participant 110, lines 406-413).

I think it actually makes a lot of sense now for the students, because I don't know that any of them are I don't know where any of them are doing their learning so the idea that I would assess people, according to the same standard when we're not even meeting in the same physical space doesn't seem fair to me. I don't know where students are working, I don't know what their home situations are or their dorm situations are, and so, why would, I expect that someone's going to be able to produce their best possible work right now. So I think... the pandemic, certainly, I guess did influence my decision to do this in that I’m trying to meet students where they're at a little bit (Participant 101, lines 182-186).

These reflections led faculty to consider what they had lost, and what they had gained while teaching during the pandemic.

**Something Lost**

The pandemic exacted a heavy toll in all areas of life, and college teaching was no exception. For the efforts of faculty in their immediate and long-term responses to the pandemic, it was also important to acknowledge the challenges, difficulties, and points of frustration. This is a brief engagement with academic loss in the pandemic, which can be understood in a number of personal, professional, and emotional ways.

**Life Challenges and Working from Home.**

I recorded all my lectures at night when my children were sleeping. I put all my posts up in the morning before they woke up (Participant 216, line 191).

Perhaps a common refrain from the pandemic was the difficulty in balancing work-life balance, particularly since home and work became the same domicile for many working professionals. This was also compounded by other factors like virtual homeschooling for children and caring for family
members:

I have an elementary kiddo who was at home while I was teaching, which was kind of terrible during that window of time (Participant 205, line 170).

Beyond the stressors of having days and weeks at home for all waking hours, faculty also noted that working around these constraints proved challenging. Whether designing asynchronous or synchronous classes, the shift to online instruction also meant working around schedules of other family members. Some faculty noted the difficulty in internet bandwidth (i.e. multiple people using high definition, for example) but also emotional bandwidth to manage multiple demands:

I burst my eardrum that second week...because I was wearing these headsets for so much because we were instructed to record all of our lectures because they were concerned that we would not have the bandwidth to actually do synchronous with our students (Participant 206, lines 23-24).

**Not Doing One’s Best Work**

The pandemic affected scholarship. There was a negative impact on both quality and quantity (Participant 108, virtual LMS tour notes, line 21).

With the serious stressors of working from home and managing day-to-day activities, faculty noted that their scholarship suffered as a result. They had to cut down on their expectations of what could be produced and published. The abrupt shift to remote emergency learning coupled with the other significant changes in routine meant that scholarship quality and quantity decreased. They additionally noted that this was a bandwidth issue because focusing on instruction and handling other life concerns (children and their schooling, caring for family members, etc.) simply left little or no time for scholarship. Once new routines were established, this was modified somewhat, but faculty discussed how the significant interruptions during the initial emergency remote teaching period affected scholarship.

**Fellow Colleagues and Social Isolation**

I’m an adjunct and I have literally no conversations with anybody so I’m just kind of my own island (Participant 105, line 51-52).

Many faculty value the professional relationships they have with colleagues in their departments and the university as a whole. Early pandemic lockdowns and remote teaching precluded professional relationships and friendships, as well as sharing that goes on at the departmental level (at least in a face-to-face way). Faculty noted the isolation from colleagues and the fact that this was generally unpleasant. Further, faculty noted that they were not aware of what other faculty members were doing during the emergency remote teaching, nor how they were responding to many of the same stressors of moving all instruction online in a very short timeframe. Some faculty felt that they were likely changing their pedagogies much more than other colleagues did (i.e. not just transposing instruction to hours on Zoom), but that they simply did not know. Faculty noted that being isolated from colleagues was a net negative because they value professional camaraderie.
Learning Management System Use

The lockdown browser was used for tests/quizzes to prevent cheating. It was more of a headache (Participant 109, virtual LMS tour notes, line 27).

I know that I want to prioritize [LMS use] with inclusivity, diversity, and fairness into the way that I teach and assess students; right now, I think the learning management system kind of gets in the way of that a little bit. It's not as flexible as I feel like it needed to be (Participant 101, lines 111-112).

Prior to the pandemic, faculty used the learning management system (LMS) in various ways in their courses. Some faculty conducted fully online courses (asynchronously) on it, while others utilized the LMS for different forms of hybrid (part classroom, part online) learning courses. Other faculty used the LMS for little more than a grade book and syllabus repository. Once emergency remote teaching became necessary, faculty had to quickly learn how to use the LMS for many more functions. This was not without its share of difficulty, as many faculty noted. Some of the concerns of expanded use included assessment security, prevention of academic cheating, and best practices regarding its extensive use for instruction. Some faculty also noted that the LMS was not as flexible as they would prefer, particularly when addressing the various pedagogical needs of their domain. For some faculty, this directly impacted their efforts to consciously prioritize inclusivity, fairness, and diversity in their courses.

Student Academic Misconduct

I think another big issue was academic misconduct because students were cheating up the wazoo, and so I spent a long time writing questions that are not just things they can find in other places (Participant 108, line 157-158).

While the true extent of student cheating and academic misconduct may not be known, particularly in the early days of the pandemic, faculty noted their suspicions that students were taking advantage of the rapidly changing circumstances. Faculty used tools like lockdown browsers, academic cheating detection software, and specially designed assessments which had items not easily found by an internet search. In turn, faculty noted that such additional efforts, which normally would be mitigated by proctoring an assessment in a classroom setting, took additional time and effort which detracted from other duties.

Negative Impact in Student Learning

Faculty noted that student learning was affected by the pandemic in a number of ways including curricular challenges, life challenges, and the abrupt alterations in instructional capacity that they experienced on the learning end:

I have a few other [students] that have been really needing some extra support in this time and I've had to do a little extra reaching out and encouraging and discussion with them on the side to make sure they're understanding the concepts (Participant 104, lines 222-224).

Faculty noted their willingness to help students and to schedule further small group and individual meetings to help with instruction, but like additional efforts needed to maintain assessment
security, this, too, detracted from other duties. Faculty noted poor performance indicators in classes, a general lack of focus, and emotional and motivation problems, particularly in the early days of the pandemic.

The challenges faced by faculty and students, which included a plethora of digital, physical, emotional, and motivational aspects, were not all for naught, however. There were glimmers of hope and of unexpected benefits which emerged from pandemic teaching and learning.

Something Gained

Benefits of Learning in a Pandemic

Though there were serious and life-altering circumstances in the pandemic, there were things gained which include silver linings, new opportunities, a feeling of being proud of curricular changes, giving flexibility grace to students, giving grading grace to students, and recognizing the “pastoral” role in teaching. That is to say for the negatives of the pandemic and its effects on teaching and learning, there were tangible benefits. These deserve to be explored further because they can help shape teaching and learning after the pandemic:

I just think it’s kind of an exciting time for people in my field to try to figure this stuff out because we’ve been wrestling with these questions about how do we be fair for so long and now we’re actually starting to come up with mechanisms that might work right (Participant 101, lines 220-221).

Faculty listed a number of unexpected benefits from the pandemic. For example, they listed an increased knowledge of technology for student engagement – and the impetus to learn new(er) technologies. This included increased use of the learning management system to organize class, as well as synchronous technologies like Zoom. Faculty also indicated a greater tenacity to learn newer field-specific technologies to see if they contributed to their curriculum. Faculty also discussed the lack of commute time, so they could devote more time to students, particularly in one-to-one synchronous meetings. Even if there were stressors of working at home, faculty seemed to appreciate the additional time that could be devoted to course design and student interactions. Though it may seem like quite a task, faculty also discussed how they had to rebuild their own (class) curriculum to suit online learning. Whereas prior to the pandemic, changes might have been more subtle and slower to adopt over time (particularly with good teaching evaluations), the pandemic provided the motivation to reconsider teaching practices, learning activities, and assessments.

New Opportunities

Me getting bored with myself on Zoom inspired me to try to be more creative and make the class more interactive for students (Participant 106, lines 68-69).

I was able to design the course in a way I felt like was going to be really effective (Participant 216, line 673).

The forced lockdowns of the early pandemic forced classes into online modalities. Faculty had to adapt quickly to the changes, but once they had settled into a routine, innovation became a normal part of the pedagogical process. This spurred new opportunities like pushing boundaries in teaching and learning; no longer able to concentrate learning in a physical classroom, faculty were able to take risks and chances that they likely would not have prior to the pandemic. In turn, this created additional
flexibility in the use of synchronous learning. Faculty expressed that they felt able to be creative in ways that they had either avoided in classroom teaching or simply had not occurred to them before.

**Being Proud**

I spent many, many hours putting [the classes] together and I just feel proud of how that turned out (Participant 102, line 129).

The sudden move to emergency remote teaching and then fully remote teaching compelled faculty to reconsider every element of their courses. Many indicated that they felt like they had become better teachers in the process, even though it was a difficult process. This enabled them to feel proud of their accomplishments, particularly as they learned new skills. Multiple faculty expressed happiness with their efforts put into the curriculum.

**Giving Flexibility Grace to Students**

...realizing that it really is just like mentally, emotionally exhausting for everyone (Participant 206, lines 52-53)

So I would say, like, I tried to as much as I could still hold them accountable, but make their lives a bit easier and less stressful (Participant 205, line 191).

As a society-level event, the pandemic created enormous stressors; one of the positive byproducts of that stress, arguably, was new-found grace being given to students. In other words, recognizing the ubiquity of the stress inspired faculty to cultivate attitudes of flexibility which may not have been fully realized prior to the pandemic. For example, the conscious recognition of empathy led many faculty to adopt policies of purposely ill-defined flexibility for coursework submission, timing on assessments, and other measures to decrease student stress. Such ill-defined flexibility was purposely vague because faculty said they knew their students were facing incredible stressors (for example, taking on more work hours, caring for sick faculty members, etc.) even if they didn’t know the individual circumstances.

**Giving Grading Grace to Students**

I think that's probably the biggest thing is you know, to really empathize with students and to hear where they were coming from, and I feel like sometimes that gets lost when it's like an asynchronous class or when we're only meeting once a week. But I think that's probably you know, the biggest takeaway in all honesty is you know, to maintain that flexibility and you know, to really empathize with what they're going through as well (Participant 105, lines 187-189).

As a natural extension of flexibility in grading, faculty also discussed grading grace. For faculty, they focused on concrete learning while downplaying the role of formal assessment. For example, this means faculty focused on assessing incremental skills and then performance or understanding of those skills while downplaying high-stakes assessments like final exams. Faculty recognized that students had anxieties and worries which directly interfered with their academic performance. In this case, grace means working through those anxieties and worries rather than simply penalizing students. Some faculty also modified their academic policies at the start of the lockdown to make sure all students had a fair chance in spite of the circumstances. For example, some faculty had to radically alter or do away
with synchronous meeting attendance; rather, for the early pandemic, some faculty worked with students in a completely asynchronous capacity, meeting with them virtually when needed.

*Giving Grace: The Pastoral Role in Teaching*

I have an open door policy I may not have the answers, but I can help you find that people who may have those answers and so I feel like when I’m with my students, they can see that, like they can understand that I am truly genuine about that desire to help them and to connect them and support them (Participant 206, lines 98-99).

When faculty discussed a concept like “grace,” they often emphasized the notion of taking care of their students. This type of pastoral role is intrinsic to teaching, yet prior to the pandemic it may not have been given a place of priority. The conditions of the pandemic, however, renewed the pastoral sense of care for many faculty members. They felt a real and personal responsibility to care for students not only in their academic endeavors, but also in their mental and social needs. For example, faculty would try to create a community with synchronous digital tools; this sense of connection was important in the early months of the pandemic because many students expressed stress of the lockdowns as well as social dislocation. In this way, grace extended to a form of pastoral care because many students simply needed more than academic support.

*Self-Justification?*

When analyzing the qualitative data regarding themes like grace and flexibility, an interesting trend emerged: there was a tension between new faculty (i.e. untenured) who spoke more about giving flexibility and experienced faculty (i.e. tenured) who spoke more about empathy and giving grace. It’s unclear why this tension exists, though it could be speculated that new faculty may have worried about teaching evaluations (and their subsequent effect on a tenure bid) while experienced faculty may have been more attuned to the plethora of student stressors (because they had more years working with students). This is, however, speculation. What might be said with some confidence is the need to rationalize in the face of uncertainty in lockdowns and highly unusual teaching circumstances. In other words, rapidly changing teaching methods and academic policies would cause stress and, so, it follows that rationalizing those changes makes sense. What might be said, too, is that such introspective practices could have been a form of self-justification, particularly during a time period when faculty expressed not knowing what their own departmental colleagues were doing in response to the pandemic.

*Comparing New and Experienced Faculty*

Investigators compared responses of faculty who had worked at the university for fewer than three years with those of faculty who had been at the university for three years or more. It is of note that faculty members may have been new to university but not new to teaching. Investigators compared these two groups because of an assumption that faculty new to the university may have had different perceptions of the pandemic as compared to those who had been at the university longer, with more collegial connections intra- and interdepartmentally. Investigators compared the percentage of excerpts in each code made by each group after normalizing data to provide a 50:50 ratio between groups. Findings indicated that faculty who had been at the University of Indianapolis longer than three years talked more frequently about their pre-pandemic instructional design, stress, significantly increased workload, content reorganization, making videos, organizational design with end user in
mind, and student interactions. Faculty who were newer to the university (fewer than three years) talked more about challenges, inclusivity and diversity, increased LMS use, rethinking many pedagogical choices, learning from mistakes, creating community for students, receiving grace, negatives regarding communication with students during the pandemic, LMS use negatives, and moving back to in person. See Appendix 3 for a comparison of codes in which at least 75% of the excerpts are dominated by either new or experienced faculty.

Discussion

This qualitative study with a purposive sample investigated the lived experience of faculty during the COVID-19 pandemic regarding pedagogical shifts and how those shifts are anticipated to inform pedagogical changes in the future. These findings contribute to the literature chronicling the fundamental shifts in higher education occurring as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the impact of these shifts on faculty and students. Additionally, this study documents the ethos of care which faculty at the University of Indianapolis displayed during the pandemic. This ethos was displayed in a number of ways including purposeful shifts in pedagogy, revision of assessment depending on the circumstances, and flexibility with students working remotely.

Comparison to Graduate Student Investigator Experience

As faculty investigators working with a graduate assistant (Spencer) as co-author, the faculty authors found discussions of her experiences paralleled the faculty experiences they were investigating. The authors felt it was important to include her reflections on learning experiences during the pandemic, and compare and contrast these experiences with those of faculty (see Appendix 4). Her fears and concerns at the outset of the pandemic closely mirror the theme of panic! reported by faculty. The unknown, the difficulty of creating learning experiences to replace practical skill learning, and the mental strain were all experienced by faculty as well. Faculty also experienced the social and physical isolation and ensuing distractions brought about by quarantine. By contrast, however, Spencer’s report of the student experience does not include a sense of “getting on with it,” of experiencing a sense of trying out new teaching methods (or learning methods) and going through an iterative process of resilience and future considerations. Instead, the student experienced the pandemic as “still affecting us to this day.” Although more research is indicated, Spencer’s case suggests that students may carry mental health concerns and loss of learning opportunities from this time far into their future careers. Universities and professional organizations may need to put systems in place to support students entering the working world during this time that are available far into the future.

Implications for Teaching

To translate the data into future considerations of teaching techniques and methods in online, hybrid, and face-to-face modalities, investigators recommend: 1. Recasting empathy, grace, and flexibility to help students with multiple stressors; 2. Taking less rigid responses to innovation, which includes an openness to experimentation and feedback (and, additionally, consequences to be considered in faculty evaluation and promotion), 3. Making adjustments when new technologies and resources become available, 4. Rethinking how synchronous and asynchronous modalities can be used to push the limits of both teaching and learning, and 5. Considering how social practices of teaching and learning can lead to multi-modal participatory methods in a post-pandemic world. Pelletier et al. (2021) indicated that remote work and learning, mental health issues, the widening digital divide, hybrid learning models and increased use of learning technologies are here to stay. Faculty need to prepare themselves for
these trends with faculty development, keeping in touch with both digital tools and rapidly expanding trends and demands for their disciplines and professional programs, all with an eye to shrinking budgets and uncertain economic times (Pelletier et al., 2021).

Implications for Research

Research regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on higher education continues to emerge. Further research is needed to explore the effectiveness of new trends and technologies in teaching across disciplines, including digital tools, practical skills courses, and the impact of socioeconomic and cultural factors on learning in higher education; the impact of the pandemic on student and faculty mental health and resilience; and university policies and infrastructure needed to teach and learn in a higher education environment that has experienced seismic changes since the onset of the pandemic.

Limitations

As a qualitative research study undertaken at one university, this study is inherently limited in its generalizability (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Ulin, Robinson, & Tolley, 2005; Watkins, 2012). Investigators sought to increase validity of the data through repeated readings with multiple investigators reviewing the data and discussion until consensus was reached (Watkins, 2012), as well as using virtual LMS course site tours to triangulate data. However, investigators did not use member checking with participants to further validate their findings. Additionally, a lack of diversity in the sample demographics further limits generalizability of the findings. Investigators attempted to mitigate these limitations by correlating findings to the existing literature.

Conclusion

The insights gained in this study regarding the sudden shifts to emergency remote teaching and then more purposeful teaching techniques during the mitigation efforts in the 2020-21 academic year will translate into actionable elements in the coming years. By capturing the lived experience of faculty at the University of Indianapolis, we posit that they displayed an ethos of care toward students, which can be extended into post-pandemic practices. Our research contributes to the burgeoning body of educational literature regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, while suggesting that some of the observed practices may inform new models of teaching, learning, and assessment in the next decade.

Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully acknowledge graduate students Annabelle Hearne, Tara Morey, and Megan Yingling for their assistance with data collection and transcription. This project was supported by a small internal grant from the Shaheen College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Indianapolis.
Appendix

Appendix 1. Interview Questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty who started at the University prior to Fall 2019</th>
<th>Faculty who started at the University in the fall of 2019</th>
<th>Faculty who started at the University in the Fall of 2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Please describe when you came to the University of Indianapolis and what teaching experience(s) you had prior to your appointment here.</td>
<td>1. Please describe when you came to the University of Indianapolis and what teaching experience(s) you had prior to your appointment here.</td>
<td>1. Please describe when you came to the University of Indianapolis and what teaching experience(s) you had prior to your appointment here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Please describe your experiences in teaching on-line or in any virtual spaces prior to coming to the University of Indianapolis.</td>
<td>2. Please describe your experiences in teaching on-line or in any virtual spaces prior to coming to the University of Indianapolis.</td>
<td>2. Please describe your experiences in teaching on-line or in any virtual spaces prior to coming to the University of Indianapolis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I would like to begin with the course you taught in the Fall of 2019 (i.e. the course you submitted the video on). Can you briefly summarize the teaching choices you made for that course?</td>
<td>3. I would like to begin with the course you taught in the Fall of 2019 (i.e. the course you submitted the video on). Can you briefly summarize the teaching choices you made for that course?</td>
<td>3. I would like to begin with the course you taught in the Fall of 2019 (i.e. the course you submitted the video on). Can you briefly summarize the teaching choices you made for that course?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Can you detail how you conducted class during the first half of Semester II in early 2020 (January to March), prior to the university shifting to emergency remote teaching?</td>
<td>4. Can you detail how you conducted class during the first half of Semester II in early 2020 (January to March), prior to the university shifting to emergency remote teaching?</td>
<td>4. Can you detail how you conducted class during the first half of Semester II in early 2020 (January to March), prior to the university shifting to emergency remote teaching?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. When the school shifted to emergency, remote teaching, i.e. online only, in mid-March 2020, what shifts did you have to make in your teaching?</td>
<td>5. When the school shifted to emergency, remote teaching, i.e. online only, in mid-March 2020, what shifts did you have to make in your teaching?</td>
<td>5. When the school shifted to emergency, remote teaching, i.e. online only, in mid-March 2020, what shifts did you have to make in your teaching?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7. As you began to plan for Fall 2020 in August, what elements from the springtime did you keep? Why?

8. As you began to plan for Fall 2020 in August, what elements from the springtime did you change? Why?

9. What pedagogical choices did you use in Fall 2020?

10. I’d like to discuss some specific teaching strategies you used in Fall 2020.
    a. What creative solutions did you employ?
    b. Do you think you’re doing anything differently than colleagues in your department or other departments?
    c. Do you think you’re doing anything innovative compared to colleagues in your field?

11. What was most exciting about teaching in Fall 2020?

12. What was most challenging about teaching in Fall 2020?

3. I would like to begin with the course you taught in the Fall of 2020 (i.e. the course you submitted the video on). Can you briefly summarize the teaching choices you made for that course?

4. I’d like to discuss some specific teaching strategies you used in Fall 2020.
    a. What creative solutions did you employ? How did you adapt to the learning environment caused by the pandemic?
    b. Do you think you’re doing anything differently than colleagues in your department or other departments?
    c. Do you think you’re doing anything innovative compared to colleagues in your field?

5. What was most exciting about teaching in Fall 2020?

6. What was most challenging about teaching in Fall 2020?
13. What pedagogical choices from the pandemic do you intend to continue using in future terms?

14. As you reflect on how your teaching has changed, how do you think it has impacted student learning?

**Appendix 2. Demographics.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>New Faculty (n=11, 40.74%)*</th>
<th>Experienced Faculty (n=16, 59.26%)*</th>
<th>Total (n=27) n(%)</th>
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<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
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<td>9(81.8)</td>
<td>5(31.25)</td>
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<td>40-49</td>
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<td>1(9.1)</td>
<td>7(43.75)</td>
<td>8(29.6)</td>
</tr>
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<td>50-59</td>
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<td>10(90.9)</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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<td>1(9.1)</td>
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<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
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<td>6(54.5)</td>
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<td>Male</td>
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<td>Years at the University</td>
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<td>4.71 - 30 years</td>
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<td>9(81.8)</td>
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<th>Professor</th>
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<table>
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<th>Discipline</th>
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<th>Biology</th>
<th>Business</th>
<th>Center for Service</th>
<th>Chemistry</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Engineering</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Kinesiology/ Master of Public Health</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>Music</th>
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<td>Normalized Code excerpt count**</td>
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<td>Pre-Pandemic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Panic!</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>4.4(22.5)</td>
<td>15(77.5)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>5.8(25.5)</td>
<td>17(74.5)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges</td>
<td>11.6(79.5)</td>
<td>3(20.5)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Significantly increased workload</td>
<td>5.8(25.5)</td>
<td>17(74.5)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>QuaranTeaching</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusivity and diversity</td>
<td>10.2(91.1)</td>
<td>1(8.9)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased LMS use</td>
<td>29.1(78.4)</td>
<td>8(21.6)</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* New (n=11) = Three years or fewer at the University; Experienced (n=16) = greater than 3 years at the University. May not reflect how long the person has been in higher education.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>New (n=11)</th>
<th>Experienced (n=16)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rethinking many pedagogical choices</td>
<td>23.3(76.9)</td>
<td>7(23.1)</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning from mistakes</td>
<td>7.3(100)</td>
<td>0(0)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content reorganization</td>
<td>11.6(23)</td>
<td>39(77)</td>
<td>47</td>
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<tr>
<td>Innovation &amp; Technology</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making videos</td>
<td>5.8(20.2)</td>
<td>23(79.8)</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Something Lost</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication with students negatives during pandemic</td>
<td>5.8(74.4)</td>
<td>2(25.6)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LMS use negatives</td>
<td>18.9(75.9)</td>
<td>6(24.1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Something Gained</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Moving back to in person</td>
<td>4.4(100)</td>
<td>0(0)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student interactions</td>
<td>2.9(22.6)</td>
<td>10(77.5)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create community for students</td>
<td>7.3(87.9)</td>
<td>1(12.1)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving Grace</td>
<td>5.8(74.4)</td>
<td>2(25.6)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization design with End-User (student) in mind</td>
<td>7.3(16.8)</td>
<td>36(83.2)</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Normalized Code Count: Themes and Codes by New, Experienced Faculty (n=27), Normalized to provide 50:50 ratio between groups. Number (Percent of total) of coded excerpts relating to each theme by faculty category.

**New (n=11) = 3 years or fewer at the University; Experienced (n=16) = greater than 3 years at the University. The number of years at the University may not reflect how long the person has been in higher education.

±Bold items indicate that this group made 75% or more of the comments in this code category.
Appendix 4. Graduate Student Reflections on Learning during a Pandemic.

Being a graduate student amidst a world-wide pandemic has been a tough pill to swallow, to say the least. As someone who has always had a love for learning, being a student under the circumstances we were placed in has made my graduate school experience far from easy. Let’s be honest, any graduate program is going to be challenging in its own way. However, pair that with solely virtual learning and no or very minimal in-person classes/traditional face-to-face classes, all while dealing with fear of the unknown future amongst the world we live in, you can only begin to imagine the struggles we students have faced.

I am currently a third year Master’s of Occupational Therapy student at the University of Indianapolis, set to graduate in May of 2022. When I began my journey as an OT student in January of 2019, I never would have imagined that my educational experiences would be greatly affected in such a harsh way. In March of 2020, my cohort and I began learning remotely with our classes being taught solely via zoom. This meant that our in-person and hands-on experiences as we learn to become healthcare professionals were drastically taken away from us before our eyes. Now, I am not throwing punches at the University because they did what was best and safest for the faculty, staff, and students at the time; there is no doubt about that. Speaking about the faculty in the occupational therapy department specifically, each and every one of my professors went above and beyond to make our learning experiences educational, interactive, and as enjoyable as they could be despite our given circumstances. However, learning remotely has been far from easy, personally.

I am someone who learns through interaction, being hands-on, and simply by “doing.” I have never been a student who could crack open a book and fully grasp the concepts at hand. That being said, I have still always been the student who completed the assigned readings and took detailed notes during lectures. However, I was challenged to alter my learning style as our classes shifted to all virtual classes with PowerPoint presentations and textbooks being my main educational resources instead of my preferred hands-on, interactive, discussion-based way of learning. I had to shift my way of learning, and I had to shift it fast. I dutifully attended all of my virtual classes as I sat on the floor of my living room, trying to learn how to safely transfer my patients onto their wheelchair through watching YouTube videos.

On top of all of the changes I experienced throughout my education, I saw my mental health begin to deteriorate. I was diagnosed with depression, anxiety and panic disorder many, many years ago long before this pandemic, but what seemed as a complete shift in the universe does not help anyone’s emotional health. I have always been a social butterfly. At that time, I was living alone in my apartment, with my family and boyfriend all living out of state - the state borders closing for a period of time did not help one bit. I was scared and alone for many weeks on end, cramped in my tiny one-bedroom apartment with nowhere to go other than taking outdoor walks for miles on end. By being home 24/7, I constantly found things that needed to be done in my home – the laundry was piling up, the dishes were cluttering the countertops, the trash needed to be taken out… I was very distracted while I was trying to learn, because the household things that were never on my mind at school were readily in front of me. I wanted to leave my cramped little apartment, but I had nowhere to go. I was furloughed from my part-time job at [a health and fitness club] for 3 months, with my unemployment benefits not kicking in until 2 weeks before I was able to return to work after my gym reopened. My mental health has always been a concern of mine, but I have learned to manage it over the years. However, being stuck at home, completely alone, felt like a kick to the stomach.

I think it’s safe to say that this pandemic affected us in many other ways simply than just a virus being on the loose, and it is still affecting us to this day. When will it end?
References


https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-020-09853-7


Watkins, D. C. (2012). Qualitative research: The importance of conducting research that doesn’t “count.” Health Promotion Practice, 13 (2), 153-158.


Inclusion of Online Students in a Campus-Wide Research Symposium

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Nathan J. Sammons  
Louisiana State University of Alexandria

Abstract: This article communicates a methodology for and the benefits of including online student presentations in an on-campus research symposium named Scholar Day at A (SDA). The authors outline how SDA was structured to allow participation of online students. Both quantitative and qualitative feedback were collected from student participants. Data suggest students were satisfied with the events and felt SDA accomplished the primary goal: “To highlight the scholarly work of LSUA students.” The method of including online students was refined each year to identify the most effective model of inclusion. The authors conclude that, while there are challenges to accommodating online student presentations, the benefits of their inclusion are meaningful both for the participating students and for the larger campus community.

Keywords: inclusion of online students, student research, campus symposium, online student engagement

Online learning has increased exponentially over the last decade as student demand and technological advancements have supported what could be the most extensive shift of teaching modality in the last two centuries (Kentnor, 2015). By 2015, over a third of all students and 86% of undergraduate students had taken at least one online course (Seaman et al., 2018). Although distance education has been around in various forms long before the internet, Sener (2012) contends it can be divided into two eras. The first era focused on providing access to students who otherwise could not attend college, and the second era (the current one) focuses on improving the quality of education as a whole. This paper argues for the inclusion of online students in high impact learning opportunities typically only available to on campus students and presents a methodology for including online student presentations in an on-campus research symposium named Scholar Day at A (SDA).

Although online delivery has increased in popularity, barriers remain for many degree seekers. Females tend to outperform males in both online enrollment and success (Vella et al., 2016; Cavanaugh, 2015; Hachey, 2015). Females are also more likely to feel a stronger sense of community online (Yang, 2015), though some data suggest the differences decrease with age (Vella, 2016). Nontraditional students have both a higher representation online and higher success rates than traditional students (Slover, 2018; Tanyel, 2014). Underrepresented students still face constraints in online learning similar to those their face-to-face (FTF) counterparts experience. Among these constraints are the feeling that they have a harder time establishing academic credibility as serious students (Hunn, 2014; Love, 2008) and developing a sense of belonging (Tinto, 2012). In addition, online courses that require minimal participation and engagement correlate with lower grades and reduced persistence in online degrees (Banoor, 2018; Faulconer et al., 2018).

In 2008, George Kuh changed the academic landscape with his seminal work on High-Impact practices (HIPs). High-impact practices (First Year Experiences, Common Intellectual Experiences, Learning Communities, Writing-Intensive Courses, Collaborative Assignments and Projects,
Undergraduate Research, Diversity/Global Learning, Service Learning, Internships, Capstones, and ePortfolios) are specific learning strategies and experiences that increase student engagement, retention, and persistence to graduation (Sell, 2018; Kuh, 2008). The research on these practices has been prolific over the past 10 years. An undergraduate research symposium can highlight the work being done through high impact practices such as undergraduate research and capstone projects. Much of this research has focused on traditional on-campus student population. In “High-Impact Practices in Online Learning: Research and Best Practices,” edited by Linder and Hays (2018), the need for additional research on the role HIPs have for online students is emphasized. Each chapter of this book explores strategies for transitioning these practices into the online learning environment.

Engaging online students in high-impact practices (HIPs) would help mitigate a number of the barriers they face. As many universities have implemented undergraduate research and senior capstones in their high-impact practices, there has been an increase in the number of on-campus undergraduate research symposiums being hosted. Events such as these can help students develop a sense of academic accomplishment and credibility, reduce isolation by promoting faculty and peer mentoring (Hunn, 2014), and provide social interaction, the last of which Hausmann (2007) demonstrates is particularly important for underrepresented students striving to develop a sense of belonging.

Scholar Day at A as a Model

Scholar Day at A (SDA) was hosted for the first time at Louisiana State University at Alexandria (LSUA) in April, 2019. LSUA is a regional liberal arts college recognized as the state representative in COPLAC (Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges). Like many universities across the country, LSUA had begun offering several of its degrees in a fully online format. These online programs expanded the LSUA population beyond the immediate geographic area and helped broaden the diversity and perspective of the LSUA community. With online students representing almost 28% of the total student population, the Scholar Day planning committee felt it was important to find creative ways to include online students in this campus event. The online students were referred to as “Online Scholars.”

Developing a plan for inclusion of online students in a campus symposium

During the first three years of SDA, different methods of inclusion have been attempted. In this section of the paper, we will provide a detailed account of the methods that have been implemented each year in hopes that one of the methods might be helpful to readers in their contexts. The outcomes, benefits, and limitations of each method are discussed.

Year 1: Accommodations and Inclusion

Two types of presentations were offered for Online Scholars during SDA Year 1. In one format, students were asked to prepare a brief set of PowerPoint slides that corresponded to the sections of a poster and a 2- to 3-minute summary of their work. A computer lab on campus was reserved for this breakout session. LSUA’s IET Services equipped each computer with a webcam, a headphone splitter, and the Zoom software. Each computer had a label with the student's name and topic attached to the top. Upon entering the lab, attendees, and judges were given Scholar Day headphones to use and keep. Attendees then sat in front of each computer where the Online Scholars waited, live, to present their research.
The second presentation type available to the Online Scholars was an Oral Presentation. Online students presenting in this modality joined an oral presentation session via Zoom (a relatively new technology in 2019). In this format, Online Scholars presented alongside FTF peers and were judged on the same criteria. Each presenter was given 12 minutes to present and three minutes for questions. These students presented to a room with approximately 20 attendees and four judges.

Outcomes from Year 1

Eighty-nine students presented at SDA in 2019. Seven of these presenters were Online Scholars. Four online students presented in the short poster presentation format; three online students presented their oral presentations during a concurrent session. A breakdown of student participants is provided in Table 1. In the event feedback forms, faculty members whose students presented expressed appreciation for the opportunity afforded their students, and the students stated they were very pleased to be included in this type of event, which is typically reserved for face to face (FTF) students.

Table 1. Breakdown of student participants in SDA Year 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department of Study</th>
<th>Presentation Type</th>
<th>Type of Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nursing (n = 22)</td>
<td>Poster Presentations (n = 22)</td>
<td>Online Scholar (n = 0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oral Presentations (n = 0)</td>
<td>FTF (n = 22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology (n = 28)</td>
<td>Poster Presentations (n = 27)</td>
<td>Online Scholar (n = 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oral Presentations (n = 1)</td>
<td>FTF (n = 27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts, English, Humanities (n = 15)</td>
<td>Poster Presentations (n = 0)</td>
<td>Online Scholar (n = 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oral Presentations (n = 13)</td>
<td>FTF (n = 12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Performance Presentation (n = 2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biological Sciences (n = 10)</td>
<td>Poster Presentations (n = 5)</td>
<td>Online Scholar (n = 0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oral Presentations (n = 5)</td>
<td>FTF (n = 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal Justice (n = 3)</td>
<td>Poster Presentations (n = 1)</td>
<td>Online Scholar (n = 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oral Presentations (n = 2)</td>
<td>FTF (n = 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Administration (n = 5)</td>
<td>Poster Presentations (n = 2)</td>
<td>Online Scholar (n = 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oral Presentations (n = 5)</td>
<td>FTF (n = 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math and Physical Science (n = 6)</td>
<td>Poster Presentation (n = 0)</td>
<td>Online Scholar (n = )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oral Presentation (n = 5)</td>
<td>FTF (n = 6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visual Tech Demonstration (n = 1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student presenters were given the opportunity to provide feedback on the event. The overall reactions to the event from student presenters were positive. The average ranking for overall satisfaction with the event was 4.3 out of 5 (n = 30). The objective of this event was to highlight the scholarly work of LSUA students. When asked how well this objective was met, respondents indicated a 4.3 out of 5 (n = 30).

Two of the student quotes related to the inclusion of online students are shared here:

“It was great to be able to present remotely and still feel a part of an on-campus activity;”

“I thought the option to present online provided a valuable tool for many of the LSUA students from out of town to participate in this. I feel like it was really inclusive and was representative of how things are in life after college in the advanced technological times we live in today.”

By the conclusion of this first SDA, it was clear our online students have a valued place in our academic community and that their ideas and research must be included in our scholarly activities and
Year 2: Let’s ALL go digital… Response to COVID-19

As preparations began for Scholar Day 2020, the inclusion of online students was a stated priority. The plan was to expand the opportunities for online scholars through better recruitment and advertising and to blend the concurrent presentations with online and FTF students in the same sessions. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all students were asked to present online. Thus, all 80 participants presented via Zoom on May 1, 2020. No distinction was made between 100% online students and traditional FTF students. In this strange turn of events, we switched from trying to accommodate online students in an FTF event to trying to accommodate mostly FTF students in a fully online event. As a campus community, we joined the world of our online students. In doing so, we connected with our students in a new way. We embraced technology and closed the divide between our online and FTF students and faculty.

Organization and Implementation of the event

One of the first concerns in shifting the event fully online was determining how many students would still opt to participate in the event with these changes. Students were asked to complete an online application that included a brief abstract of their work and the identification of the faculty mentor (FM) who oversaw their work. When the application period closed three weeks prior to the event, FMs were asked to approve their students’ applications. All students who had approval from their FMs were allowed to present. Eighty students from 10 different disciplines presented.

In order to accommodate the number of students, we created three concurrent sessions in five different Zoom rooms. This allowed for 15 sessions in total.

Students were given the option of presenting in one of two ways. The first option was the short option, which consisted of 3 minutes to present and 2 minutes for questions. This option was suggested for students presenting literature reviews. The second option was the long option, which consisted of a 10-minute presentation with 5 minutes for questions. Student group presentations were accommodated as needed. Each Zoom room was assigned a room moderator and co-moderator. The responsibilities of the moderator were as follows:

**Moderator Tasks**
- Start the Zoom conference about 5 minutes before the session start time.
- Assist the co-moderator in allowing people in via the waiting room if it is still enabled.
- Read script to introduce student presenters
- Give student one-minute warning and if needed cut off at the end of the time allotted.
- After Presentation read any questions to the presenter

**Co-Moderator Tasks**
- Keep all non-presenters muted.
- Field questions and refer people to IET if they are having technical issues.
- Post link to the “sign-in sheet” in the comments link when prompted

A script was provided for each moderator with the list of student presenters and directions for presenters and judges. A sample script is provided in Appendix 1.
**Practice and Preparation**

Many of the student participants, faculty mentors, room moderators, and judges expressed some apprehension about navigating the online event. In order to ease some of this anxiety, two training sessions were held. The first was held three weeks prior to the event and allowed the room moderators to practice accessing the various Zoom rooms. This training was critical because once the event launched, each room had to function independently, and the room moderators needed to feel confident in their ability to run the room.

The second training was open to all student presenters, faculty mentors, judges, and room moderators. This event took place four days prior to the event. Students were told they could drop in and make sure they felt comfortable with the technology. In particular, students were encouraged to practice accessing Zoom and sharing their screens to show their presentation slides. More than 70% of student presenters attended this training.

**Website**

The LSUA Scholar Day website was used as a launching pad for all directions and links for the event. This central location provided an easy way to communicate clearly with all parties involved in the event, including those wishing to attend the event. On the day of the event, the website contained the following information:

- Welcome and Overview of the event including schedule
- Sign in form (using Google Forms)
- Link to the opening Plenary address
- All Zoom room links with student names and room topics.
- An interactive PDF that allowed participants to move through the rooms more easily.
- Link to closing remarks and award ceremony.

After the event, this website was updated to include all of the event recordings, award winners, and press release.

**Outcomes from Year 2**

On the day of the event, 80 undergraduate students from LSUA presented their scholarly work. Of these students, 41 opted to present in the short format, and 32 opted to present in the longer format; in addition, one group of seven was granted extended time for their presentations. A breakdown of student presenters by discipline is provided in Figure 1.

![Figure 1: Number of student presentations by department of study.](image-url)
Throughout the day, approximately 200 people logged onto the event. Forty-six individuals completed the event feedback form and indicated a 4.26 rating out of 5 ($n = 45$) on overall satisfaction with the event. The objective of this event was to highlight the scholarly work of LSUA students. When asked how well this objective was met, respondents indicated a 4.82 out of 5 ($n = 45$).

A few relevant comments shared on the feedback form by student presenters are included here:

Amid these uncertain times, the fact that we were able to get together and present our research is testament to our campus’ commitment towards its students and their research.

I thought it was awesome to see everyone working together to make this event possible. It reminded me of my favorite thing about LSUA, it is a big family.

I learned a lot and was really excited to present my research. This experience will definitely help me one day in the future.

**Year 3: Finding a Balance**

When the university returned to campus in the Fall of 2020, many classes transitioned to a “HyFlex format.” This format has been used throughout the country as a way to provide live instruction with students in person and online. This format enabled LSUA students to be back in the classroom while maintaining social distance requirements: half of the students attended the lecture through Zoom while the other half was in the classroom. The Scholar Day committee decided to adapt this format for the third year of SDA. There were 109 presentations: 33 presented oral presentations and 75 presented posters. All oral and performance presentations were offered in the HyFlex format. Twenty-five of the oral presenters took advantage of the Zoom option, and 18 of these were enrolled in the 100% online programs (see Figure 2). Students enrolled in FTF programs selected the Zoom option for a number of reasons, particularly COVID-19 concerns.

![Figure 2: Presentation style at SDA Year 3.](image-url)

Throughout the event, approximately 206 people completed the sign-in form. The average ranking for overall satisfaction with the event was 4.75 out of 5 ($n = 64$). The objective of this event
was to highlight the scholarly work of LSUA students. When asked how well this objective was met, respondents indicated a 4.78 out of 5 (n = 64). These ratings were the highest achieved so far. This may reflect better organization and more experience running this event.

**Intentionality in Inclusion**

In order to ensure that the Online Scholars felt included and valued in the event, several intentional actions were taken. These items are discussed below.

**Awards**

Student were selected to receive an award for outstanding poster presentation and outstanding oral presentation based on discipline. In order to remain consistent between students presenting online and FTF, judges were asked to utilize an electronic scoring rubric. This enabled students to be considered using the same criteria and also enabled judges to join the event live via Zoom. Online students are invited to join the award ceremony via Zoom and were then mailed their awards.

**Scholar Day shirt**

Due to a generous donation from the Endowed Chair in Business, each participant, judge, faculty mentor, and room moderator was given a Scholar Day shirt. This shirt was designed specifically for the event and mailed to each online scholar prior to the event so that participants could wear their shirts while presenting. Seeing students in person and online in the same shirts helped create a strong sense of community during the event.

**Conclusion**

There are pronounced benefits to including online students in on-campus events. When online students are given the opportunity and space to participate in on-campus events, they become part of the community. When they are given the opportunity and space to participate, their voices, perspectives, and work are represented. In addition, it challenges online faculty to require students to organize their work in a meaningful manner and to practice professional presentation skills. Hosting this digital event helped broaden the perspective of online students on the digital possibilities for presenting to online audiences. Some additional benefits to hosting a digital event were a reduced cost of poster printing for presentations, the ability to include judges from other states, and the opportunity to invite alumni to attend. Finally, this event created engagement during the pandemic-related lockdown by bringing the campus together for this celebratory event. Thus, the event helped improve campus community spirit and cohesivity.

Over the past three years, the world has learned the importance of being competent in navigating the digital world and being able to deliver professional presentations over online conferencing tools. At the same time, the online student population has exploded, giving many students a reasonable way to earn a degree while working full time or living in isolated communities. As colleges continue to expand their online course work and degrees, academia needs to close the gap between the online students and the FTF students. Downing and Hultz (2018) clearly state, “Enormous attention and resources have been devoted to supporting UR [undergraduate research] in traditional settings. However, consideration of Online Undergraduate Research Experiences in STEM (OURES) is largely a vacuum in terms of concept, practice, and strategies.” Downing and Hultz (2018) provide several ways to develop strategies to engage online students in meaningful research.
opportunities; they emphasize that dissemination of research is essential to completing the research cycle and that this step is particularly important to online students who may be accommodated through a variety of methods, including online conferences. All students need to be given the opportunity to gain the benefits of presenting research and engaging in high impact practices available at their university. For universities that offer both online and traditional FTF degrees, thoughtful effort needs to be made to include online students. While there may be a temptation to host separate events for online students, such events eliminate an opportunity to build connection between these two student populations. Online students’ inclusion not only enriches their student experience but also improves and expands the richness and diversity of the entire academic community.

Appendix

Appendix A. Sample script for room moderator. Student names are redacted for privacy.

Room 1: Session 1 Script
Moderator Host Script:
Hello and Welcome to Session 1! If you have not already done so, please complete the sign-in form located in the comments of the chat feature. If you cannot locate the sign in sheet, you can also locate this form on the Scholar Day Webpage.
Before we begin, please note this session will be recorded. I am pushing the record button now. In this session we will have 5 students presenting their research from the Education Department. I will introduce each presenter and read the title of their presentation.
Presenters, please share your screen while I am introducing you. Please note, students you will have 5 minutes to present your work and 3 minutes to answer questions. I will give you a 1-minute warning.
Judges I will also be providing you with the participant id number which will go at the top of your judging form. All attendees will be muted throughout the presentations. If you have questions for the participants, please write them in the chat feature and we will read them to the presenter at the end of their presentation.
Let’s begin. First, we have __Student Name____________________ presenting their work entitled: Money and Markets. Judges, please note the participant ID number for your form is _____42______.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Name</th>
<th>Last Name</th>
<th>ID number</th>
<th>Title of Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eryn</td>
<td>Waters</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Money and Markets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaitlyn</td>
<td>Linzay</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Magnetism and Static Electricity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaci</td>
<td>Bagley</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Magnet Science Unit: Student Growth Research and Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope</td>
<td>O’Brien</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Astronomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brittney</td>
<td>Dunn</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>The Impact of Group Work on Students' Performance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After Presentation
Thank you (Erin)! Here is your first question ...
Great job (Erin).
Transition to next presenter
Next, we have __________________________ presenting their work entitled _______________________________. Judges, please note the participant ID number for your form is ____________.

Excellent job everyone! I am now turning off the recording. The next session begins at 10:30 in this same room. If you are presenting in the 10:30 session, please make sure your presentation is pulled up and ready to go.

References


A Dirty Little Secret: Studying Imagination, Imaginatively, in a Leadership Education Graduate Program

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Abstract: This article describes my tumultuous journey as a course instructor and researcher investigating imagination in an educational leadership graduate seminar. I employ an arts-based pedagogy and research methodology known as Performative Inquiry. Sharing my experiences delivering this course informs my future teaching and can support colleagues interested in exploring imagination with their students. I accepted risks associated with arts-based performances and entered a shared space of vulnerability with my students. My struggles with resistance were real, and so too was the realization of the important role vulnerability plays in imagination-focused (leadership) education. I suggest that Performative Inquiry offers other (leadership) educators a powerful pedagogy and methodology for understanding imagination in their own lives, nourishing their imaginative capacities, and inquiring into their leadership education practices. Arts-based practices allow learners to feel their own imaginations and experience possibility by accepting invitations to be vulnerable and performing learning in a range of productive and generative ways.

Keywords: imagination, leadership, performative inquiry, vulnerability, arts-based pedagogy

“Performative inquiry invites us to reflect on what is, what has been, and what has yet to be imagined” (Fels, n.d.).

The cultivation of imagination is increasingly acknowledged as a vital capacity for leadership (Curtis & Cerni, 2015; Curtis, et al., 2017; Judson, 2020, 2022, 2023; Raptis et al., 2021). However, resistance and scepticism about its value in leadership remain strong. As a scholar who has dedicated my career to exploring Imaginative Education as conceptualized by Professor Kieran Egan (1997, 2005), I have observed first-hand learners’ ambivalent feelings towards imagination. My research and teaching over the past 17 years have revealed numerous challenges when it comes to teaching adults about imagination in the post-secondary context. A primary challenge is that many of the educators and leaders with whom I have worked, connect imagination with childhood fantasies; they argue that imagination exists in the realm of make-believe, not the practical and tangible world of schools nor educational leadership. A second challenge is that many adults are not comfortable identifying themselves as imaginative. Given the general misunderstanding that exists about imagination, this reluctance comes as no surprise. If one mistakenly associates imagination with the “greats”—great artists, scientists, or world-changers—rather than a capacity all humans have the potential to cultivate, inevitably, it is easy to say I’m not imaginative. If one associates imagination with infantile or purposeless pursuits, it is safer to say I’m not imaginative.

Finally, there is confusion about what imagination is and, thus, how imagination and creativity contribute to different professional contexts. For example, in the context of leadership, there is a lack of awareness among my students, many of whom are educators in the post-secondary context, of what leadership capacities and outcomes imagination makes possible in their everyday decision-making and relationships (Judson, 2020, 2023). Many students are unable to express any particular feeling or recognition of how they engage in their work and lives through imagination; they have not explored the terrain of their own imaginative lives.
In this article, I share my learnings teaching a graduate level course on imagination’s role in leadership. With increasing research on imagination’s roles in leadership, leadership education programs would be wise to transform their pedagogical practices and content in ways that support the cultivation of imagination. This research may support other leadership educators—and even educators outside of leadership education—in creating contexts and conditions conducive to encouraging the study and *experience* of imagination in (leadership) education. My experiences teaching this course—and the resistance and renewal I felt in the process—have taught me important lessons. I now understand that the vulnerability experienced when one engages in arts-based activities, when one “goes off script” of typical graduate learning norms and patterns, is a profound space for engaging, nurturing, and remembering our imaginations—as educators of leaders and as leaders ourselves.

Throughout this paper I share my learning and some of the emotionally significant “tug-on-the-sleeve” moments (Fels, 2012) that arrested me mid-flight and taught me the most. I also include a few of my own *performances*—examples of how I shaped my understanding in poetic ways:

My pedagogical comfort zone  
slowly disappears  
in the rearview mirror.  
I'm in new terrain.  
My stomach anticipates the unknown  
the unexpected, lies ahead.  
I wonder, *how will I navigate without my trusty map?*  
(Judson, Excerpt from research memo following first class)

### On Leadership Education

Offering an overview of leadership education in the mid 1990s, Brungardt (1996) identified the main instructional strategies used in leadership education as lectures, discussion, role play, simulations, case study, modeling, sensitivity training, and mentoring. Little seems to have changed. According to Jenkins (2012) the “signature pedagogy” of leadership educators (in for-credit academic courses) is discussion (small and large group). In two additional research studies Jenkins (2018, 2019) reveals the same result: class discussion, interactive lecture/discussion, and small group discussion are the top three activities used by leadership educators. The most common assessment practices for leadership educators in these studies were research projects / presentations, short papers, and term papers. Other instructional strategies include activities like case study, role-play, story, debates, games, and simulations (Armstrong, 2008a, 2008b, 2009; Jenkins 2018, 2019).

Despite radical changes in theories of leadership learning over the past 30 years, a relatively unchanged “set” of activities are employed in education. When Brungardt did his review of leadership education practices in the mid 1990s, theories of leading were leader-centric. Trait, behavioral, charismatic, or transformational leadership theories, for example, emphasized individual competency, and performance. Reflecting the aims of dominant theories at the time, educational practices—whether discussion, role play or other activities—focused on developing those traits, skills, behaviours that were believed to support individual development. Starting in the late 1990s, a shift began to take place from a focus on individual *leaders* to the relational process of *leadership*. By 2012, leadership studies had taken a “relational turn” (Uhl-Bien & Ospina, p. xix).

Relational leadership theories focus on the contextual, emotional, and processual dimensions of leadership that exists *between* people and within community (Uhl-Bien, 2004, 2006; Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018). Under the broad umbrella of relational conceptions of leadership, one finds theories that include authentic, servant, participatory, and shared leadership. The impact on leadership
educational practices is that instructional strategies explore context, interactions, emotions, and relationships within leadership processes (Ardichvili et al., 2016; Armstrong & McCain, 2021; Eich, 2008). Programs reflecting this relational turn focus on inclusion, empowerment, and social justice. Leadership education scholars seek to expand pedagogical practices to include holistic and emotion-focused forms of learning. For example, Hobson et al. (2019) advocate an arts-based storytelling approach for transformative, introspective, culturally-relevant, and critically reflexive leadership. Nakasone Wenzler (2022) advocates a (counter-)storytelling pedagogy to support gender and racial representation in leadership. Armstrong & McCain (2021) and Bratko (2022) propose storytelling or narrative as pedagogy for leadership education (versus just the use of story or case-study).

While largely absent from conventional leadership theory and practices, imagination is increasingly identified as necessary for leadership (Ardichvili et al., 2016; Anderson, 2023; Brandon, 2023; Judson, 2020; Paxton & Van Stralen, 2015; Raptis, et al., 2021). Imagination, it has been argued, helps people to survive and thrive in a “broadly connected, rapidly changing, and radically contingent world” (Pendleton-Jullian & Brown, 2018, p. 7). Imagination is necessary for change—to envision and enact the not yet (Asma, 2017; Pendleton-Jullian & Brown, 2018). Imagination supports and enriches relationships and thus enables relational leadership practices that emphasize and promote empathy and humanization of meaning-making (Judson & Dougherty, under review). Imagination supports the creation of ethical and socially just communities (Judson, 2022; Strom, et al., 2023; Thomas & Koscheck 2023).

I wonder, are current leadership education instructional strategies multi-dimensional or multi-modal enough to cultivate leadership imagination? How well will leadership education instructional strategies support this imaginative turn in leadership theory? And importantly, what theories of learning are available to support this imaginative pedagogical turn? Often a theory of learning is missing when it comes to leadership education (Jenkins, 2018; Murphy, 2003; Paxton & Van Stralen, 2015). Performative Inquiry is explored here as a pedagogy that expands common practices in leadership education and offers a theory of learning for leadership education. As an approach that supports learner’ engagement, meaning-making, and reflection with any subject matter, Performative Inquiry offers insights that may be employed in any learning context.

Imagination: Seeking Openings in Teaching, Learning, and Leading

“Transformation in the form of aesthetic experiences or experiences which spark wonderment or novel moments are very powerful. These aesthetic moments are those that are unique and affect us in ways we perhaps can’t even verbalize” (Holland, 2021, p. 121).

I am curious about pedagogies that provide the emotional engagement that can address misunderstandings, reveal the meaning and function of imagination, and connect learners with their imaginative lives. Moreover, I seek to move leaders to invite imagination into their workplaces, to bring imagination practices that cultivate imagination into their professional lives. To support such action, leaders need to experientially feel imagination and its power for their practice. As affective neuroscientist Immordino-Yang’s (2016) research shows, knowledge alone does not move human beings to action; feeling does. And so I wondered: What if graduate students explored theoretical and practical dimensions of imagination and leadership through arts-based imaginative pedagogies? What learning opportunities would help leaders in a graduate seminar gain an understanding of what imagination is, learn how imagination contributes to leadership, and explore the terrain of their own imaginative lives? Inspired by these questions, I sought to engage learners in experiential and affective ways that would build an emotional bridge between knowledge and action (Immordino-Yang, 2016).
Holland (2021) suggests that art-based, aesthetic learning activities create wonder-full and ultimately transformative spaces. Drawing on Alva Noë’s (2015) work *Strange Tools: Art and Human Nature*, Holland describes art as a “strange [pedagogical] tool.” Unlike learning activities that logically transmit information from teacher to student, art opens up possibility, invites uniqueness, and welcomes multiplicity of meaning. Unlike pedagogical tools that aim to “make the strange familiar”, Holland argues, art is educative because it “makes the familiar strange” (p. 121). He asks: “How can we use ‘aesthetic moments’ to build even better strange tools for transformation?” (p. 121). In many ways, this course was an exploration of “strange tools” that would invite my leadership learners into spaces of imagination.

Imagination is an unsung educational hero. Although it enables the meaningful and memorable learning educators seek (Egan, 2005, 1997, 1992) and supports a range of leadership processes and capacities (Judson, 2023), outside of the context of arts-based education, imagination is rarely acknowledged as crucial for learning all curricular topics or leadership (Judson, 2020, 2023). I use the term imagination to refer to the ability to envision the possible in all things; imagination is the generative feature of mind that enables understanding of the self, and others, and that fuels creativity and innovation. This conception of imagination is rooted in the scholarship of those who sing the praises of imagination (e.g. Asma, 2017; Dewey, 1916; Egan, 2005, 1997, 1992; Greene, 1995; Stephenson, 2009; Wenger, 1999).

In education, Kieran Egan has developed a coherent theory of imagination that is paired with a detailed practice. This pedagogy is called Imaginative Education (See Egan, 2005, 1997, 1992). For Egan, imagination is a main workhorse of all learning by connecting knowledge with emotion and making knowledge more meaningful and memorable. The emotional component of imagination is key. John Dewey also acknowledges the central role played by imagination in all learning and its emotional dimensions (e.g., Dewey, 1916). For example, in *Democracy and Education*, Dewey identifies the role of imagery for conceptual understanding, for memory and for appreciating knowledge: “imagination is the medium of appreciation in every field. The engagement of the imagination is the only thing that makes any activity more than mechanical” (Dewey, 1916, p. 276). Imagination researcher Stephen Asma describes imagination as improvisational space—the emotionally-charged rehearsal space—for learning new ideas, skills. In Holland’s terms, the improvisation of imagination is a *strange tool* that opens up possibility and broad meaning. What connects a diverse field of scholarship on imagination is the common theme that imagination is a powerful learning tool because it is emotional; when we imagine, we are affected (Asma, 2017; Egan, 2005, 1997, 1992; Greene, 1995; Stephenson, 2009; Wenger, 1999).

In learning and enacting leadership, imagination provides a space for transformation and relationship. As a search for the possible supporting a sense of intellectual freedom, imagination broadens both the scope and flexibility of understanding and makes possible the transcendence of traditional ideas (Egan, 1992; Greene, 1988; Hughes, 1988). It is in our imaginative ability to transcend our personal situations and contexts and contemplate the “other” that empathy and relationality lie. As Greene (1995) famously said:

> Imagination is what, above all, makes empathy possible…imagination…permits us to give credence to alternative realities. It allows us to break with the taken for granted, to set aside familiar distinctions and definitions. (p. 3)

I design my courses to allow learners to feel imagination, I employ arts-based activities as “strange tools” to invite learners of leadership to explore possibility and be transformed. We actively engage our imaginations through the arts in a “search for openings”—as a means of exploring the gaps between the known/unknown, self/other, now/then, what is/what if (Greene, 1995).
Specifically, I employ a pedagogy called Performative Inquiry which offers educators in and outside the field of leadership studies multi-modal and multifaceted instructional activities that call forth students’ creativity and imagination.

On Performative Inquiry: A Pedagogy and Methodology


Originally conceptualized and articulated by Professor Lynn Fels (2015, 2012, 2011, 2010, Fels & Belliveau, 2008), Performative Inquiry is both an arts-based pedagogy and methodology for research. As a pedagogical approach, Performative Inquiry involves inquiry and learning through creative encounters with others, personal and shared reflection on what arrives, and arts-based expressions of understanding. It offers an embodied, creative experience that engages learners in emotionally-charged ways with content (Fels, 2015).

In Performative Inquiry, learners are encouraged to notice and attend to stop moments (Appelbaum, 1995) or what Fels (2012) calls, “tug on the sleeve” moments of emotional resonance that call them to attention. A tug on the sleeve may be a moment of hesitation, interruption, uncertainty, resistance, curiosity, joy. These moments signal an opportunity for inquiry, reflection, and meaning-making. Challenging conventional practices of graduate leadership education, such as lectures and discussion, Performative Inquiry offered me, as the course instructor, a framework for opening an attentive learning space of creative play and imagination in the class. Performative Inquiry gave me “permission to interrupt habitual engagement, to question conventional expectations, to explore ideas, contexts, and situations, to challenge the status quo, to replay possibilities of engagement” (2015, p. 2). Through its explicit cultivation and creative practices of imagination, Performative Inquiry can enrich current practices in leadership education. It explicitly invites students and their instructors to employ imagination in documenting learning and engaging with course content.

Although Performative Inquiry has been applied in many contexts, I was inspired by Nilson, Fels and Gopaul’s (2016) application of Performative Inquiry to teaching organizational theory in a leadership cohort. They suggest that Performative Inquiry offers an experiential pedagogical possibility for leaders: “Engaging in performative activities within the context of leadership and organizational theory invited metaphorical, symbolic, and lived-experience connections with the material students were learning and its application to the workplace and their lives” (2016, p. 181). And so, I shaped a course based on arts-based methods for week-to-week engagements in learning and key assignments for demonstrating understanding.

Course Context and Details

The course, entitled *Imagination’s Role in Leadership*, occurred in the fourth term of a two-year Master of Education program in Educational Leadership. The cohort had a post-secondary focus, with 15 of 16 of the students employed in higher education contexts. Due to the pandemic, the three courses in the first year of the program, and my course at the start of the second year, were conducted remotely. We worked together weekly, on a Thursday evening, synchronously using Zoom and asynchronously using a CANVAS platform which housed readings, discussion threads, and course details.
Unlike other graduate programs I have been part of, this program did not have imagination as an overarching theme. These students had not chosen to learn about, discuss, or expend imagination. Therefore, I knew I was likely going to face entrenched misunderstanding about what imagination is, resistance to being imaginative, and skepticism that “this imagination stuff matters for me.” With many years of experience conducting professional learning with educators and educational leaders, I had observed this response many times before. Never-the-less, with some trepidation, I set out my intentions in our course syllabus:

This interactive course employs arts-based and imaginative practices to explore imagination in the context of leadership/educational leadership. It aims to deepen and expand students’ understandings of imagination and how it contributes to leadership theory, practice, and pedagogy. A central feature of the course is a personal inquiry: each student will be required to employ arts-based methods to investigate, as learner and leader, their beliefs, values, assumptions, and comfort-levels in relation to imagination. Course activities will require students to critically and creatively reflect on course topics and the educational issues they provoke in relation to their own educational and leadership practice.

The emotional significance of the topic—the story—that I wanted my students to understand in this course was that imagination in leadership offers a space for self-discovery and innovation. The course was designed to be experiential; it was shaped in a way that invited learners to explore scholarship around imagination, creativity, and collaborative play. To feel this story, we played and we performed with and for each other. Using Performative Inquiry as pedagogy, I invited students to consider the course a journey into the terrain of their imaginative lives, a journey of re/membering their hearts, minds, bodies, past, present, future, play/full selves.

Weekly Learning and Assignments

Each week we had a different mode of engagement: words and poetry, images and photography, gesture and movement, drawing and sketching, metaphor, play, storytelling, story-listening, role drama and improvisation. I had framed the class as scholarly play using weekly reflections as an opportunity to explore ideas in artistic ways. In addition to encountering course content through arts-based means, students were asked to demonstrate their learning through arts-based performances, such as drawing, writing poetry, and engaging in role play.

Students’ reflections of their learning in connection to the articles read, and in-class experiences, were invited in the form of what Fels (2012) calls epostcards—a multi-modal document that includes the narrative of a tug on the sleeve moment, imagery, critical reflection, and connection to course readings. As indicated in this assignment description from the outline, this scholarly writing was intended to capture moments of emotional significance on students’ course journey:

This course will be a journey, an exploration of your imaginative life in the context of graduate learning. Your scholarly writing this term will involve writing 3 “e-postcards” that represent different points on that journey. In each e-postcard, describe what Lynn Fels refers to as a “tug on the sleeve.” Each e-postcard will have its own narrative, its own story of how a particular moment called you to attention and impacted or influenced your understanding of your learning, your leadership, and/or life. Explore these moments with reference to readings in class and other reading that applies. These e-postcards should include both text and imagery or, if you prefer, audio. Include a quote that moves you. Aim to evoke in your e-postcard the affective experience of your tug on the sleeve moment and how, in that moment, you had a
stop in which, possibly, a new space for growth and learning opened up for you. (Excerpt from Course Outline)

I also wanted students’ final performances to be an open invitation to play in whatever way they wanted to do so. I encouraged them to experiment, to let loose. I called this assignment “The Selfie” to evoke a play-full expression of learning:

Finish the course by providing us a snapshot (a “selfie”—but not of your face!) that captures a significant learning moment for you in this course or some aspect of how you have come to understand your imagination in the context of your learning, life, or leadership. Please make something—possibilities: a physical object or something audio or visual or a performance or...—you choose! Sharing this work will be the final performance of your course inquiry. Tell us: What topic, experience, or insight moved you to create? What affected you? What opening occurred for you that you aim to represent, evoke, or explore further through an arts-based, imaginative format? (Excerpt from Course Outline)

The course text was Stephen Nachmanovitch’s (1990) book entitled *Free Play: Improvisation in Art and Life*. I used this text to set a play-full tone and to indicate the power and opportunity of improvisation. Not only did I want my students to understand the value of play for adults, I wanted them to actually play in this course—with ideas, with limits, with demonstrating their learning. Nachmanovitch’s text conveyed this message powerfully. To encourage this playfulness, I made playing with concepts a central part of the course. Each week we explored a different form of artistic engagement. We played. For example, during the second week of classes, to investigate two scholarly articles about the pedagogy of Performative Inquiry, we created found poems¹ using text from the articles. I invited students to create a poem that represented something of what they were understanding or feeling in that moment. (I share my own poem later in this article). Later in that same class we created headlines—imagine you are a reporter giving the story on Performative Inquiry. What’s it about? What metaphor—visual, auditory, somatic—captures the meaning of the tug on the sleeve? These kinds of arts-based and exploratory activities continued each week. To support this playfull learning, students took an active role in evaluating their own work and I welcomed students to revise and resubmit anything, without penalty, based on our learning, feedback, or discussion.

Overall, Performative Inquiry served both as a pedagogy for teaching and a vehicle of inquiry for my own investigation of my practice. As my students accepted invitations to perform—play with arts-based methods of engagement and learning throughout the course—imagination was invited into our community of learning. We were learning in emotional ways that created the experiential space needed to address misconception, grow understanding, and come together as a community of learners.

Next, I offer the unfolding narrative of my experience teaching this course. Excerpts from my research journal are italicized and right-justified in the text that follows. Through my stories I invite readers to consider the pedagogical power of inviting imagination into leadership education through creative practices and to recognize that possible uncomfortable feelings of resistance, uncertainty, and vulnerability are central to new learning.

We begin with the first class and the pleasant level of excitement that emerged:

*Sometimes there can be a “heary” feeling during a first class, digesting what lays ahead, anticipating the work to do, silent questioning of one’s ability to succeed.*

¹ A “Found Poem” is a “literary equivalent of a collage” (https://poets.org/glossary/found-poem). The poet employs and reorganizes words, phrases, or whole sections of other texts to create a poem and evoke new meaning.
The students came to class after a week of working. 
5:30 PM.
Possibly hungry. Distracted.
When we discussed the “final selfie” the mood changed.
As soon as I introduced this final activity, the class erupted in conversation and question.
“Do our videography skills matter as much as the content?” a student asked.
“No,” I replied, “Just play!”
I paused.
People visibly digesting the possible.
The students clapped.
Yes! One exclaimed.
“Play,” I repeated.
“Be play-full.
This is a journey into the terrain of your imaginative life, so go where your heart leads you.”
“Can we make something edible?” wondered a student.
“Yes!” I exclaimed.
“Though being on Zoom will make taste-testing difficult.”
We laughed.
I sensed excitement and anticipation as we discussed The Selfie.
I wondered,
Was this the most open, the most play-full of all their course assignments to date?

My Journey: Resistance and Renewal

Right from the start, I was all butterflies, excited with the anticipation of beginning and nervous of how it would all unfold. On the evening before the first class, I wrote:

Class starts tomorrow.
I feel tense. Anxious. More than my regular first-class jitters.
How will these students respond to my invitation to play? To draw? To create?
I feel like some will resist.

I assume that post-secondary educators—even more than my colleagues in K-12 education—have deep set misconceptions about imagination.

Imagination is make-believe.

It is child’s play, and, thus, a course on imagination must be non-scholarly.

One of the feelings I immediately experienced in this course within myself was resistance. It did not help that this was my first course as a newly hired Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership and here I was going off-script. In many professional contexts, embracing imagination can be a risk (Hopkins, 2019; Judson, 2020). And curiously, 17 years of post-secondary experience and overwhelmingly positive reviews of my teaching, disappeared from my immediate memory.

Looking back through my course notes—memos I wrote detailing my feelings going into each class, my plans for the class, and my evaluation and description following class—I questioned if I was doing it right or doing enough—was I being imaginative enough? Was this course different enough to have students feel imagination? An excerpt from my notes: My inner critic whispers in my ear: How can
you lead an arts-focused class as a self-professed terrible drawer, non-painter, and generally “not an artist”? Moving from well-known scripts caused me anxiety.

My sense of vulnerability, worrying, am I (doing) enough thinking is reflected in a poem I wrote, in week two, as we studied Fels’ Performative Inquiry. Using key lines and words from her scholarship I wrote this found poem:

How will you improvise your life? (Fels, 2015, p. 1)
I ask my students this
And yet
I wonder
What do I do To push PAST
To question conventional expectations (Fels, 2015, p. 2)
To challenge the status quo (Fels, 2015, p. 2)
STOP
Which of my habits of engagement as a teacher and learner need to be Interrogated?
In that stop is also a go.
(Appelbaum, 1995, as quoted in Fels, 2012, p. 57)

My notes reveal how I doubted myself, I doubted my choice to take on this arts-based pedagogy. I was uncomfortable going off the map, exploring this new terrain of teaching, now off the script, unsure of my role in arts-based inquiry. I was concerned how seriously the students would take the course and by extension, me, as their professor. All the while, my vocal, inner critics clamored, “This isn’t what we do here! This isn’t enough! Youaren’t enough!”

Leafing through my students’ pre-course comments, I noticed they reflected the same anxious feelings. For me, teaching in this performative and unfamiliar way was emotional, and it required me to be vulnerable. My students also needed to be vulnerable, accepting risks in this unfamiliar terrain of performative learning. We were all travellers, all entering a vulnerable co-space of learning that we co-created together (Thomasson, 2017).

Would they be willing to journey with me?

I noticed that my own hope and anticipation for what was possible were reflected in my students’ pre-course writing. I resonated with their feelings of fear and excitement at the prospect of learning in unconventional ways in this imagination-focused graduate course. As the instructor, it was valuable for me to recognize that my students shared these concerns, these hesitancies, these anxieties reinforcing what I had learned about imagination through research: imagination evokes mixed emotions, both fear and reverence (Hopkins, 2019; Judson, 2020). My experience engaging imaginatively with my students reinforced the importance of creating and holding open a respectful, caring, compassionate space of learning for all students, both in how we interact, and how students are assessed on their learning. It also brought into focus how these feelings can and do impact the instructor as well as students.

Reading of students’ fears and feelings of resistance added fuel to my own. I corresponded with Lynn Fels, creator of the Performative Inquiry approach, early in this experience—was I doing it right? Perfectionism joined the dialogue in my head. Another source of resistance brought me to a space of vulnerability. Lynn responded by telling me that engaging in Performative Inquiry is about being curious and having a “beginner’s mind.” She wrote:
there is no expertise per se in engaging in performative inquiry, it’s a way of being present, of noticing what matters, of exploring metaphor, materials, body, play through artistic modes of inquiry and seeing what matters, what emerges......and, Gillian, you are uniquely bringing Performative Inquiry into being through your shared explorations of leadership, and your learning, questions, and resistance (a great place of inquiry), is more important than someone coming in as “the expert.” (Fels, 2021, personal correspondence; italics added)

Reading this email from Lynn, my feelings of self-doubt and concern were temporarily assuaged. Perfectionism sent out of the room. I felt renewed in my conviction that I was doing enough and that I should take this journey with my students.

Evidence of Learning: You’ve Got Mail!

We were three weeks into the course when the first scholarly epostcards were due. I was eager to read them (Fels 2012). Harkening back to the 1998s rom-com when email was a novelty, I asked students to send me their scholarly e-postcards with the subject heading You’ve Got Mail. How many students would be play-full with this first assignment?

The first epostcard arrived in my inbox, the subject heading reading: postcard one. Feeling a bit disappointed, even discouraged, I opened it up. A striking image of charred, black wood appeared on my screen. I saw wooden remains lying in the bottom of a fire pit. The grooves and lines of the would-be charcoal, the shades of black through grey and white filled the space. Within this pit of charred wood two vividly green plants sprouted. New life from death. Fertility. The cycle of life. Encouraged by this striking image, I anticipated the story to come.

The author of this epostcard quoted Fels: the edge of chaos where something new is created (Fels, n.d.) She spoke of improvisation and how, for her, it brings her to the edge of chaos. She noted that we are all story tellers and wondered what stories we tell ourselves, what internal narratives shape us when faced with the edge of chaos? I am drawn to the image and the narrative. It was profound. It was serious play.

But what of leadership? She doesn’t mention leadership directly. But I feel a leadership lesson, a leadership belief here. I realize that teaching with Performative Inquiry requires me to read through a metaphorical lens, to be open to the emotional moments that move my students. I realize that a student’s meaning-making, experience, and/or expression of leadership may not be explicit in the writing, but may emerge in the spaces between the words, ideas, and images. I realize that play leads to a variety of forms of writing and emotional response. As I ponder this first epostcard, I get another email.

Ping! A new email. You’ve Got Mail!, the title reads. I smile. As I open this document a collage of images, colour, and careful design appear before me. In this scholarly piece of writing the student brought me back into her experience when we discussed play in class two. She notes the uneasiness in the class—what she was feeling as we moved toward the risk of “exposure”—play? In graduate school? Play, she says, makes her think of children, specifically, the silliness and smiley-ness of her young daughter. But Nachmanovitch’s quote has tugged on her sleeve: “We have no art. Everything we do is art” (1990, p. 19). And “Play is an attitude, a spirit, a way of doing things” (1990, p. 430). Perhaps, she ponders, I, too, play?

I see images of an intricately decorated cake, the dome of a crusty loaf of bread cut in half on a board dusted with flour, and cans of preserves lined up to next to a bowl overflowing with vividly red and green tomatoes. This student shares her realization: I, too, am an artist. I, too, play. Her postcard describes this stop on her journey of discovery in which she suddenly remembers imagination
and play and investigates the implications for her leadership. I feel relief; a break from my worry that students are not engaged. I feel excited by the two epostcards I have received.

As the term went on, I noticed my students playing more, relaxing into the course structure. Student-led seminars about key concepts in the Nachmanovitch (1990) text became increasingly arts-focused and play-full as the term went on. Students engaged their peers in collaborative drawing activities, poetry writing, drawing, storytelling, and concept scavenger hunts. Students’ second and third epostcards became increasingly vivid in their stories, increasingly reflective and personal. Students’ learnings about leadership were evoked explicitly in some cases, but more often, implicitly, embedded in that interpretive space between the words, the chosen image(s), and the ideas that emerged as I read their work.

Mid-way through the term, during one of our classes, I invited the students to use our online space differently: I asked them to use a gesture to express a key idea in an article they had read on the meanings of creative leadership. As we go around the Zoom room, different groups show me coordinated movements and gestures. Hands raised over brows looking in the distance: seeking. Thumbs touching pointer finger form imaginary glasses: perspective. And then, suddenly a ball passes through time and space. Bal holds the imaginary baseball in his hand. His fingers curve around the ball, against the leather stitching. He pulls back his arm, bringing the ball-in-hand to shoulder height before launching it forcefully to his right. Across time and space, ready, waiting, anticipating the ball, Ching waits, then jumps to action, lurching forward to catch the ball: connection.

An imaginary ball breaks the time, space, Zoom continuum.

I vividly remember this small moment in time, on Zoom, when I do not see a ball, but I do see a ball, thrown across time and space. This moment stopped me in my tracks. It was play-full and it showed students accepting the invitation to take a risk, to play. Following this experience, I felt anxious excitement heading into an activity that I knew would push us all into new terrain: a role play.

Near the end of the semester our class hosted an imaginary international conference on Creativity in Leadership. My students had been previously assigned to attend in role as different creativity scholars. I was the host. I had created a Zoom background slide with the conference title, date, and name of the host, the esteemed, Dr. Lillian Hudson and invited everyone to use this slide as their Zoom background. That evening as I transformed into Dr. Lillian Hudson, I thought I was ready. My Zoom background named the conference. I had music playing. My hair was piled on my head in an unusually large bun, as gigantic earrings pulled on my ears. I wore monstrous glasses and a flashy scarf, ready to launch the conference as Dr. Lillian Hudson.

I thought I was ready.

But then, a sense of vulnerability overwhelmed me. What if the students were not in role? I panicked. I suddenly felt like that person who goes to a costume party in costume only to find it is a costume party of the un-costumed.

I was about to “open the room”. It was a moment of truth. The Super Awesome Creativity Conference was about to start. Glasses on? Glasses off? Scarf on? Scarf off?

My finger lingered on the Zoom “Admit all” button. In a moment of fear, I could not bring myself to admit my waiting room guests.

In the end, I was not the only one in costume—but it was close. Only two of the students, donned mustaches, glasses, hats. The others laughed and applauded but did not have such props themselves. About half of the students had uploaded our conference slide as their Zoom background. As class started, I felt grateful for those students with the fake mustaches. Such a small material item, with such meaning for me. Initially, I was disappointed in the other students for not taking up props and felt a pang of worry that this activity would not go well. However, as I engaged with the students present in their roles, I realized just how prepared they were, just how closely they had studied the material and practiced speaking about the ideas—their ideas. All but two of the students stayed in role
all evening. Keynote speakers included Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Chrissi Nerantzi, Keith Sawyer, Scott Barry Kauffman among others. As the night went on students relaxed into their roles. We engaged with each other by asking and answering questions in role. We all joked about meeting for drinks in the hotel bar, after the conference ended.

Doing this particular activity—feeling nerves and feeling worried I would look foolish—I felt very vulnerable, more vulnerable than any other moment in the course. I was not alone in my feelings of vulnerability doing this role-play activity. My students told me at the end of the course how much this particular activity pushed them out of their comfort zones—taking on a role, being an actor required them to really get to know the character they were playing, they said. They felt this vulnerability intensely in the moment too. There was a spotlight on each of them. Drama. They indicated that it was the activity that made them the most uncomfortable. At the same time, they identified it as the most impactful for their learning.

My notes reveal that I continued to worry beyond this role-play: Will imagination be taken seriously in my workplace? This course was my workplace and I was hyper-focused throughout our semester together on why students were so often saying they enjoyed it. As a professor I am wary of students saying what they think I want them to say, for the grades, if in the end they finish my course no closer to genuinely appreciating what imagination offers them as educational leaders.

*Are they enjoying the course because they feel it is a break from learning?*  
*Are they enjoying the course because they feel it is profound for their own learning?*

One day, I learned that I was not alone in this worry of professional credibility. One student seemed to me to be very open to learning and expanding her understanding of leadership. She shared with me a realization: though she felt she was not imaginative, her morning ritual of running through possibilities for her day showed she woke up with imagination. She learned to revel in that imaginative time and appreciate its value. But she also revealed the same worry I had: *will imagination be taken seriously in my workplace?* She described our course as a secret—a dirty little secret—that she did not (or would not? I’m not sure)—share with others. The words hit hard:

Dirty? Secret?  
I just don’t know how to process this.  
Is this a wonderful experience and/or one that might lead her to be ridiculed?  
Because we, I, feel like imposters?  
Does it tarnish the look of our professionalism somehow?

I stop.

*Does she not consider this course serious scholarship?*

**Final Assignment: Leadership in Imagination at Play**

We arrived at the end of the course. The students’ selfies—images of themselves taken with their artistic creations—demonstrated diverse examples of imagination at work. They illustrated how students played with the course’s ideas, materials, concepts, and experiences to represent their journey. There was a cake that, when cut, released a cascade of colourful candies; a painting composed of images created at the end of each class; photographic collages; free verse poetry with hidden haikus within; a conspiracy theorist’s whiteboard connecting leadership practices and concepts back to imagination; a song performed on guitar; a tiny rock garden; an altered book full of images, hidden pockets and blackout poems; a macrame representing emotional moments in the course; an Indigenous drum; and narratives. As students shared their selfies in this final class, I felt a sense of renewal. This culminating activity showed layers of meaning, personal experience, and insight I could
not have predicted. There was an intimacy to this final class, a sense of the personal mingling with the possible. My renewal—emergence from a feeling of self-doubt and worry—and confidence blossomed as I witnessed my students’ imaginations in actions. I saw that they had accepted my course offerings to risk, to explore their imaginative lives and create something from that exploration, and in turn, offered me their imagination in play.

My final stop moment of the course happened after class, when I was reviewing the students’ final feedback. While I was still enjoying the positive feelings evoked by seeing students’ final performances, two words led me to stop. I had asked students to anonymously provide some final feedback. One question asked them to describe the course in just two words. I was honestly thrilled—but not surprised given the performances I had just observed—to hear the course described in overwhelmingly positive terms: exciting, engaging; eye-opening; thought-provoking; inspiring, playful; challenging, expressive; empowering, compelling. Two students described the course emphatically as “The. Best.” and “Required. Learning.” But one student’s response stung—re-evoking my initial worry of professional credibility. They said the course was “surprisingly educational”—revealing their preconceptions of imagination. I wonder:

How much has their understanding changed?
How much have they changed?
Surprisingly educational
But then how much have I changed?

After reading those two words, my heart heavy, I created a found poem as a way to navigate my feelings of both pleasure at hearing the positive feedback and disappointment at having my ongoing worry reignited:

What two words describe this course? I ask my students.
Two students respond with
The. Best.
Another writes,
Engaging, expressive
And another,
Exciting, empowering
And another,
Challenging, engaging.
Streams of body-minds in motion through new terrain.
Play/ing, Play/FULL
Compelling, inspiring,
Meaning/FULL, Eye-opening
Thought-provoking, STRETCH/ed/ing
This course is
Fun learning, another student emphasizes.
Required learning, declares another.
Amidst all this positive feedback, however
one student’s words sting—
Surprisingly educational.
I wonder, has their understanding of imagination changed?
And then another student’s poetic response band-aids my hurt:

Imagination and creativity, this student replies,
are more than the boxes we label and put them into,
stored with children's toys.
They are power tools needed in every leader’s toolbox.

My Learnings

Through this experience I learned that Performative Inquiry inherently invites instructors and their students to traverse, together, uncharted territory. We were all travellers here. We all explored concepts through the arts. We all played with different arts-based ways of learning and demonstrating understanding. We moved away from traditional papers to scholarly writing that combined text and imagery. We role-played rather than recited. We drew and dialogued. Students had completely open criteria for showing final learning. These are all examples of arts-based practices that instructors in any context can employ to open up spaces for imaginative exploration of their course content.

My stories reveal all the resistance and self-doubt I was feeling throughout this course. I now realize that my resistance was rooted in my sense of vulnerability. Moving from assigning traditional academic papers to scholarly epostcards made me feel vulnerable—what will my colleagues think? Inviting play and playing with imagination in a graduate course of post-secondary leaders made me feel vulnerable—will these experiences result in real learning or continued misunderstanding? Will this course create new understanding or deepen misconceptions? Will students invite in or dismiss the importance of imagination from their understanding of leadership? And then performing myself made me feel vulnerable—Is it really that good? But is it a poem? Is it (creative, imaginative, scholarly) enough? Through my own performances I saw myself as struggling and hopeful. Ultimately, I was brave. I was not only employing new practices, but I was also critically engaging with the kinds of expectations—the scripts—that shape how we teach in post-secondary.

I now understand that I have misunderstood the importance of vulnerability for my teaching. Like many people, I have mostly considered vulnerability as a source of potential wounding, or pain—being exposed. But Amy Thomasson’s (2017) research on the educational value of creating spaces for vulnerability changed my outlook. She suggests a feeling of exposure is not the same as vulnerability. Whereas exposure is a weakness, vulnerability is a strength—it is the origin of community-building, of empathy, of personal growth—exposure is weakness. According to Thomasson (2017), we must accept vulnerability—we must agree to risk—as this is when vulnerability becomes a space for positive growth, learning, and change.

I have realized through this experience that vulnerability is required for imaginative learning and learning about imagination. Rather than understanding vulnerability as a problem, I now understand vulnerability to be a place of surprising educational potential. I have realized that the arts-based practices, performances on which this course was based, offered me and my students ongoing “access points for vulnerability” (Thomasson, p. 126). “Choosing to engage in performance activities is an acceptance of risk and a willingness to step into the space of vulnerability created by that risk-taking action” (Thomasson, p. 152). By accepting and allowing myself to engage differently, I entered a space of vulnerability that allowed me to deepen my understanding of my own imagination and expand my pedagogical capacities.

This is what we can do as instructors if we want to invite imagination into our courses: we can invite students to engage in ongoing access points of vulnerability which infuse imaginative learning. We can invite students to agree to risk, individually and collectively, in a learning space. We agree to vulnerability, too, as instructors, and can/must shape the learning/evaluation context so that risk-taking is encouraged and not penalized (e.g. Encouraging revisions to assignments, opening iterative
cycles of student learning and feedback from the instructor/others so each “assignment” is a work in progress until the student decides they are “done”). Employing the instructional strategies of Performative Inquiry expands what is possible for leadership education and can be employed by educators in other subject areas to support imaginative engagement with course content and growth of imaginative capacities.

My two goals for this course were to encourage self-exploration and to connect imagination to leadership in experiential ways. Based on student feedback, my intentions for the course appear to have been successful. More importantly, so has been my journey of pedagogical exploration through Performative Inquiry and my increased confidence and steadfast commitment to imagination in what I offer my students, no matter their cohort. I have realized that Performative Inquiry invites instructors and students to accept the risk and to see what is possible when we learn about imagination, imaginatively. I have come to realize the necessary journey one must take through wide spaces of vulnerability and uncomfortable resistance to get there. I finish the course with a new question: What if we cultivate creative spaces of vulnerability in leadership education so learners can explore, engage, and grow their imaginations in practice? And I invite you, reader, no matter what course or area of research you are engaged in, to consider: what if you cultivate creative spaces of vulnerability with your students? What is possible?

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Doubt and Conviction:  
The Path to Meaningful Learning and Development

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Abstract: The Covid pandemic has impacted institutions and the people who inhabit them in unprecedented ways. It is demanding a wide variety of new forms of work and relationship and has siphoned energy and commitment from those activities central to our lives. The classroom is not immune to these effects as attention and commitment to learning have been impacted for both students and faculty. This paper is an attempt to rethink and re-interpret what to do on the first day of a course to maximize the potential that exists in that pregnant moment, especially in these turbulent times. To address these dramatic changes, details of an opening talk are offered that confront the new reality and provide a way forward. This talk is intended to capture students’ curiosity and compel them to commit to the time together in the classroom. The impact of the talk is interpreted through deLuse’s (2018) three-part model and Dweck’s (2006) Fixed and Growth mindsets.

Keywords: knowledge, epistemology, pedagogy, teaching, first day, learning

The Covid-19 pandemic has had far reaching effects on virtually all people and organizations around the globe, including universities and their classrooms. Students, in particular, have suffered from disinterest and lowered motivation (Hicks, Caron, & Smilek, 2021). The use of technology mediated learning approaches have reduced engagement and increased negative learning experiences (Kutza & Cornell, 2021; Serhan, 2020). While the abrupt transition to online education brought many unexpected changes to the learning experience, the pandemic has also increased global anxiety and stress. Governmental interventions such as isolation and the accompanying risk to income-generating work has exacerbated the negative experiences for many. This is especially true for college students who are not known for their deep financial resources. All of this has generated greater fear, loneliness, depression, and anxiety which commonly rise during pandemics (DiGiovanni, Conley, Chiu, & Zaborski, 2004). Given the reduced interest and motivation of students it is natural to wonder what faculty can do to address their experience and stimulate interest and commitment to courses when all around them is turmoil, uncertainty, and confusion.

In response to the heightened challenges noted above, the first meeting of a new course is an especially ripe opportunity to prod and provoke students into being interested or seduced by the possibility of something, anything other than that which is taken-for-granted as to what should/could occur on day one. The first day is a chance to maximize students’ curiosity and interest in the course for the balance of the term. Given this reality, the central question is how we can begin a course such that students might declare “that’s interesting?” Davis (1971) said this is what people exclaim when they encounter information or ideas that conflict with what they have, for so long, accepted as truth. The new ideas are so compelling that they are unable to dismiss them without consideration. It is a reckoning moment for many.

To take advantage of this ripe moment to stimulate greater interest in the course, I began starting new terms by discussing the exciting possibility college offers students to learn what they don’t know, that they do not know they don’t know. This is, I think, the most interesting of the four quadrants of the Luft and Ingham (1955) model. The other three include, I know what I know, I know what I don’t know, and I don’t know what I know. All worthy questions but not near as interesting as
the fourth stated above. This question casts doubt on the veracity of what is known and raises another question regarding what could be known that has not been considered. Confessing our ignorance helps us doubt our convictions. This may very well be the best path toward new learning and offers a chance to reflect on taken-for-granted knowledge, often treated as given, and which stands as truth for them (and all of us). It is also a chance to stimulate their “epistemic curiosity” (Litman, 2008; Sternberg, 1994). This was defined by Litman as “the desire for knowledge that motivates individuals to learn new ideas, eliminate information-gaps, and solve intellectual problems” (2008, p. 1586). The confession creates a receptive frame for new ideas thereby reducing information gaps that could be holding students back from greater success now, and in the future.

In this paper I will discuss my first day approach and the intent to capture the potential of the moment to stimulate curiosity for the course, rather than what is often treated as a throwaway event. After the detailed description of the approach, I have included a section that reports the results of a pre/post measure of students’ change in curiosity based on Litman’s (2008) definition of epistemic curiosity above. I will then bridge this approach to deLuse’s work as an interpretive frame for the classroom and connect to Dweck’s work on growth mindset (Dweck, 2006) orientations among students in the wake of the challenges presented by the Covid pandemic. Dweck’s ideas can encourage students to focus their attention on new ideas, learning, and curiosity while reducing the emphasis on the typical performance culture so common in college classrooms.

The Problem and the Literature

By the time students reach college they have spent countless first days in classes and have likely developed reliable means by which to approach the experience. Instead of reinforcing a common student perception of this day as meaningless, where little happens and which many may even skip, what might we do to stimulate greater intrigue, participation, and engagement in the course from the very beginning (Hermann & Foster, 2008; McGinley & Jones, 2014; Shor, 2013; Wilson & Wilson, 2007)? It is common to review the syllabus on the first day and this is a worthy task. Syllabi provide rich data on the course, expectations, assignments, rules, schedules, and details. Many also include notes on participation, class and group management issues, and how to succeed in that particular course (Eves & Redd, 2014). These concerns are top of mind for faculty, which is an important part of establishing expectations, but is that enough? What about student interests? Gilboy, Heinrichs, and Pazzaglia (2015) and others (Ares, 2006; Handelsman, 2011; Watkins, 2005) found that using engagement activities can offer benefits to teachers and learners. Evidence shows that students who are motivated to learn and feel engaged and connected to the professor and the material improve their grades (Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, & Salovey, 2012).

First day activities can have a pivotal impact on student motivation. This time offers a unique opportunity to leverage that rich potential and jumpstart the course with something provocative that captures the students’ curiosities (Mancini, 2017; Robinson, 2019). Hermann, Foster, and Hardin (2010) found that what happens on day one impacts student engagement. For example, initiating learning contracts on the first day has been found to increase student engagement over the term (Chan & Wai-tong, 2000; Litchfield, Mata, & Gray, 2007). Basset and Nix (2011) observed that, along with course fundamentals, students preferred to gather professional information about the instructor, and personal information on their classmates and the instructor. Even a handshake on the first day has significant implications for student perceptions of male and female instructor skills. Of note is the positive impact a handshake had for female instructors, where male instructors were rated as less skilled (Wilson, Stadler, Schwartz, & Goff, 2012). Including something provocative, perhaps even
personal, initiates a norm that this is an exploratory space. Broad and deep discoveries are ok here and bringing all of oneself, the public and the private, to the room is encouraged.

Information about course difficulty and structure were important for those studied by Henslee, Burgess and Buskist (2006). While students are interested in learning “what the professor is like, who the other students are, how instructors and students will behave, and what climate will prevail” (Erickson & Strommer, 1991, p. 87), teachers can punctuate this by including some novel material that unexpectedly captures students’ interest. This can increase autonomy in student learning (greater emphasis on student experience and involvement in the classroom) (Cheon, Reeve, & Moon, 2012; Reeve, 2016) which can be supported by the teacher, what Hunt (1987) might call an “inside out” approach to learning. In contrast, students do not prefer course content on the first day of class, nor do they like poor use of class time (Eskine & Hamer, 2017). Activities well received by students include creating positive or negative experiences (LoSchiavo, Buckingham & Yurak, 2002; Wilson & Wilson, 2007); discussing interesting topics to stimulate their curiosity about the course, (Bartsch, 2006; Bennett, 2004; Helmy, 2016), and, engaging with their peers through interviews (Case, Bartsch, McEnery, Hall, Hermann, & Foster, 2008). Gilboy, Heinerichs, and Pazzaglia (2015) found that using a flipped classroom model helped capture student buy-in from the first day of class.

Including students in the logic of the course design and sharing the decision process for why certain elements are included helped students feel “intrinsically motivated” (Black & Deci, 2000, p. 742). Course-related information is relevant, however, it must not be actual course content. Rather, students are more intrigued when the time spent is focused on them and how they can do well. Sharing some surprising details of the field can be a worthy approach to stimulate curiosity, yet instructors would be wise to steer clear of any topics that could be seen as exam worthy. In sum, students need to understand what they are doing and why. The logic of the course, why they should care, how it is relevant to them, and initiating their engagement for shared ownership are all related to the development of epistemic curiosity in beginning a course.

From the other side of the desk, faculty concerns may include tolerating some risk regarding control of the course. The upside of this risk is that students feel considered and included, which initiates interest and engagement. In tolerating that risk Jafar (2014) has found that rather than creating unsurmountable problems, the opposite has occurred. Students rose to the challenge and freedom in meaningful ways, where they felt heard, and that they were doing important work. Roots of this idea stretch to 1996 when Shor recounted the experience of sharing power in a course with students. His book reveals an unconventional approach to teaching and resolving power issues in the classroom, while maintaining his commitment to power-sharing and radical pedagogy. In sum, the literature reviewed is informed by the fundamental assumptions of andragogy (Forrest & Peterson, 2006; Knowles, 1980, 1984; Loeng, 2018) which centers on adult learning. The assumptions include adults’ need to (1) know why need to know something, (2) value their experience in learning, (3) see solving problems as central to meaningful learning, (4) see value in what the learning provides, and (5) be treated as independent, self-directed persons who can choose to pursue learning that is most meaningful for them.

Clearly, the first day with students is an opportunity to create a unique experience that leads to engagement and course commitment. This is accomplished by creating experiences that differ from the traditional, highly structured, content intensive session where students may feel some initial pressure of encroaching performance expectations. This is particularly salient in the midst of Covid where distractions are ubiquitous and attention and energy are spread across a host of issues, both personal and professional. Exercises, provocative topics, and careful use of our power are relevant concerns if we want to set a norm that will give students reasons to attend on day two. In the battle against Covid, the following literature suggests that it must start from the beginning.
COVID: Impacts on Learning

As a result of the Covid outbreak many professors and students moved from face-to-face (F2F) instruction to online platforms through such portals as Zoom and WebEx for course delivery. This has had far-reaching impacts on students and their learning. Covid-based impacts on student learning are found in Hicks, Caron, and Smilek’s (2021) study of student affect, attention, and time perception. Their work revealed increases in anxiety and nonproductive attention-draining behaviors such as mindless tech use. These were joined by reduced motivation and productive behaviors, and a loss of students’ ability to keep track of time. Serhan (2020) discovered negative attitudes and reduced motivation to learn shortly after the transition to online education in the spring of 2020. The single benefit of Zoom was the increased flexibility in learning. Further study by Adnan and Anwar (2020) and others (Pitikoe, Ferreira-Meyers, Bhebhe, Bhebhe, & Dlamini-Zwane, 2021) found that unreliable internet access can be a significant barrier for students at the undergraduate and graduate level in tech-mediated learning environments. Additionally, these authors discovered that the learning experience was further impoverished by the absence of F2F interaction, response time to inquiries, and student socialization.

Institutionally, Covid-19 required a nimble response from universities and their academic departments. Responses ranged from the monumental challenge of converting internships into capstone courses (Shine & Heath, 2021) since F2F contact was restricted, to rapid isolation strategies and course redevelopment for a fully online presence (Crawford, et al., 2020). While these responses disclose the quick, at-the-ready mentality of faculty and administration, (Wu, 2020) it does not reveal the accompanying stress that they were suddenly experiencing with nearly half of the semester yet to complete. The Covid crisis also revealed the limited resources or preparation many universities discovered in their institutions. These challenges were in addition to learners who were disadvantaged, and had restricted access to online resources (Zhong, 2020).

That universities are now re-populating classrooms does not mean they have left Covid and all of its negative impacts behind. Many students have faced financial, relational, and occupational fallout from this with no handy remedy available. They now come back to the classroom with variations of the stress and distractions they have been experiencing in recent years. A reasonable question for academics across the globe is how best to serve these learners to maximize engagement and resilience (Greensmith, Channer, Evans, & McGrew, 2023; Rohatgi, 2021; Wilson, 2016) that will result in learning. Below, I will provide details of a specific student-focused approach that captures students’ interest and holds it in the Covid-focused environment in which we are now teaching.

Approaches to Day One

The broad assortment of feelings generated by the Covid pandemic can be a formidable opponent as we re-enter classrooms. Wisdom suggests that we consider our approach and what we are trying to accomplish as we do that. Given the work of Hicks, Caron, and Smilek (2021) we know that students may be experiencing conflicting and confusing thoughts and feelings as they try to rebuild their lives in various respects. Our support of them in this process can be informed by Reeve’s (2016) work on Autonomy Supportive (AS) classrooms. Reeve described this as “learning activities, a classroom environment, and a student-teacher relationship that will support their daily autonomy” (2016, p. 133). Lee and Reeve (2012) suggested that teachers become “in synch” with students as they form relationships that are mutually influential. Students and teachers partner in their influence of each other in the ongoing relationships that evolve, and this impacts what and how all can learn. The
following describes such an example: “the teacher makes a request, students agree but also suggest how that request might be revised or personalized, the teacher accommodates that input” (Reeve, 2016, p. 133). This is further facilitated by the teacher’s ability to offer meaningful rationales for what is happening, recognize students’ negative emotions when they arise, and reduce controlling language.

An overarching structure that helps achieve what Reeve suggests is provided by deLuse (2018) who encourages the use of activities that focus on three significant needs: content, relationship, and face needs. Content approaches are intended to help students build meaningful connections between the course material and their personal experience. Relationship focused activities reveal connections among students, and between students and the teacher. Face issues relate to the need to preserve dignity and a sense of efficacy for students. Any given activity/exercise/presentation is likely to address more than a single issue as there is some overlap between the three approaches. The activity described in this paper is intended to address all three of these needs. These three categories will be more fully explored in the context of this activity in the Discussion section below.

Doubt and Conviction in Learning – The Opening Dialogue

To combat the dynamics created by Covid, going virtual, and now returning to the classroom I have initiated a new approach to the first day. As mentioned above, I want students to be conscious of the exciting potential that awaits discovery in the classroom and be enthused by that possibility. While I am interested in exploring the content of my field, I am also, perhaps more importantly, interested in exploring what we do not know that we do not know as an avenue to that enthusiasm. By doubting the truth of our convictions, what we believe we know, we temporarily suspend that confidence so that we can ask another question; what else could be known that lies below the water line of consciousness, below the very threshold of any awareness of the question itself? Exploring this domain invites everyone in the room, including me, into a provocative new dialogue of inquiry, fundamentally predicated upon confessed ignorance.

My approach begins by reaching across disciplines to discuss findings from the field of Zoology, a field far removed from the content in a school of business. What do we really know about the animal kingdom, and to which animals have we applied the fundamental attribution principle (Ross, 1977)? By this, I am asking for which animals do we believe we understand their motivations and behaviors and perpetuate these beliefs with no empirical evidence? What would it take to doubt those convictions? Can we loosen the grip on our convictions about animals, and by corollary, topics in the field of management? How might that dislodge established knowledge, or evolutionary “truces” (Kegan, 1982, p. 108). This is what Kegan calls the established stages or balances of equilibrium in our development which are predicated upon our learning. Disrupting them may thrust us into what may feel like an epistemological freefall where what we believed we knew is no longer reliable.

For instance, consider dogs. Dogs are a common presence in society and a personal experience for many. This common experience is a handy container for consideration of what we do not know, that we do not know we don’t know. Recent research (Hart, Nováková, Malkemper, Begall, Hanzal1, Ježek, Kušta1, Němcová1, Adámková1, Benediktová, Červený & Burdain, 2013) described dogs’ sensitivity to small variations in the Earth’s magnetic field. In this article scientists discovered that under stable atmospheric conditions, dogs aligned themselves with the Earth’s north/south magnetic field prior to excretion. This behavior was abolished during unstable atmospheric conditions. People commonly understand this behavior as a dog searching for scent or some other metric suitable for completing this daily task. How does this have anything to do with management? The content, in its own right, has no relationship to management. But that is not the point. The facts of this research are, for most, so distant and foreign that they approach the unbelievable, perhaps the nonsensical. This
new knowledge presents as that which we do not know, that we do not know we don’t know. That is the point. It resides in that fourth quadrant of epistemology, and when encountered, confronts the limits of known knowledge and experience to such a degree that it risks being discarded without consideration. Indeed, this fourth quadrant is the most exciting domain of the four as it not only introduces us to new knowledge, but also to ourselves in a provocative way. The impact in the classroom is palpable. The content of the dog behavior is so novel and unexpected that we all feel a lightness in the room.

Facilitating the Opening Dialogue

Detailed description of this dialogue is provided below for delivery in the interested reader’s class. I will follow this with a discussion and connections to theory.

Materials

The article from Frontiers in Zoology and debrief questions below.

Learning goals

1. To confront the usual (for me anyway) tedium that students often bring to a new semester and invite them into a rich and participative experience.
2. To remain available to new knowledge by asking the uncomfortable question about what is missing, that we do not know is missing.
3. To be aware of the risks associated with too much confidence in what we know.
4. To learn to be comfortable with the ambiguity of being uncertain and still having to act.

Overview

a) I begin by acknowledging that here we are, again, starting yet another course. I verbally recognize and grant the challenges that this brings into students’ lives given the complexity of life in the 21st century. I meet them in that psycho-emotional space by stating that I, too, am tired and still completing grade debates with students from last term, which is met with laughter.

b) I ask students if they have problems in their lives, like I do (which I say). I assume that all of us have stuff we must deal with as a result of being adults. These are often issues we did not ask for or cause but have to manage. I suggest that if they can solve those issues in the next 2.5 hours (or however long the class lasts) that they go and do so now, no penalty. No one leaves. I then suggest that the problems I am referring to are not the type that can be reconciled in the next 2.5 hours. Many of them are larger and more complicated. Some cannot be solved and simply must be outgrown, or we must wait for them to become irrelevant in our lives. So, if the issues cannot be resolved in the next 2.5 hours, why not settle in and be present? Be mindful.

c) I discuss mindfulness as the simple notion of “Be Here Now.” That means bring all of ourselves into the present, especially since we cannot solve those issues that would take us “out of the room.” Then I discuss the opportunity that we have to be college students against the backdrop of the world where most of the earth’s population does not. I present statistics of the percent of US citizens who have completed a bachelors (23.5%) or masters (14.4%)
degree as of 2021 (US Census) and end with comments about how lucky we are to have this opportunity that most do not.

d) I open a conversation about what there is to learn in this class and others. I let this move into areas that are foreign to us and then share and discuss the 2x2 table shown below:

Table 1. Four quadrants of epistemology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1a. I know that…</th>
<th>1b. I know…</th>
<th>1c. I don’t know…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1</td>
<td>I am wearing tan pants</td>
<td>Q2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Q3               | how to play violin – it exists in my preconscious | Q4               | ????

(Spoken as: 1a 1b Q1; 1a 1c Q2; 2a 1b Q3; 2a 1c Q4)

e) To punctuate the 4th quadrant, I ask the room if they have ever heard of dogs, and, if anyone in the room has a dog. Some laughs and lots of stories about their favorite pets are shared. Many of these comments suggest that our pets have personalities, much as we do. I then ask if they walk their dogs and if they have seen their dog sniffing around before doing his business. I ask them why the dog engages in those actions. They describe what he is doing and why. I ask them on what evidence they base their explanations of the dog’s behavior. How do they know, for instance that their dog is sniffing around for the scent of other dogs, or that he is marking his territory? Crickets. I finish by asking them what dog ever told them that? Then we discuss briefly what we really know about dogs? Finally, I bridge to the specifics of the article and the results that confront what we think we know, and how fascinating it is to learn things that we did not know were learnable due to assumed nonexistence; things we did not know, we did not know.

Results

To measure any difference in students’ epistemic curiosity as a result of the event, I administered a pre/post survey using Litman’s definition of the construct. Specifically, I asked 25 students to anonymously respond to this statement: “At this exact moment I have a strong desire for knowledge that motivates me to learn new ideas, eliminate information-gaps, and solve intellectual problems.” They were asked to complete this prior to any of my comments listed above and again immediately after I concluded, and before the debrief described below. Students were asked to rate themselves on a 7-point Likert scale where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4 = neither agree nor disagree, 5 = somewhat agree, 6 = agree, 7 = strongly agree. Results of a t-test were statistically significant with t = 3.844902 and a p value of .00078. This is significant at the p < .05 level. This data suggests that there has been some statistically significant change in their epistemic curiosity as a function of this activity.

Debrief

Experience has shown that debriefing the conversation is best handled in small groups since we are meeting each other for the first time. This increases the likelihood that students will talk among themselves and initiates some relationship among them right from the start. The relationships that
develop model what I hope to create in the classroom as the term unfolds. Below are several questions that can be used to debrief their experience. I rarely use them all.

1. Where in your lives have you been surprised when you discovered what you did not know that you did not know?
2. How did it feel to learn something that conflicted with what you had taken-for-granted as solid truth?
3. What assumptions grounded what you believed to be true, that wasn’t?
4. Has this been in your personal, work, school lives?
5. What was the impact of the new knowledge?
6. What did you do differently after you gained that knowledge?
7. What has been the result of that different knowledge and action?

Is the experience provocative? I suspect so. Students’ responses have been quite varied. Some are aghast, some are grossed out, some are tickled, and some flatly deny the research results. I do not challenge them on their reactions and have provided the actual article if they believed I was tricking them.

**Theoretical Interpretation of Opening Dialogue**

The meta-question behind the dog talk is: What could we do on the first day of classes to activate the potential present in that pregnant moment and build hope and anticipation for the balance of the course? This initial class session, so often wasted, is an opportunity to stimulate student reflection on the possibility of class as something rich and meaningful, anything other than the usual, taken-for-granted nothing, which seems common. The traditional use of the first day, with little imagination regarding its potential, amounts to the natural attitude (Husserl, 1962). We do not explore the knowledge that falls within the natural attitude. We do not doubt it. Indeed, we have convictions about what we think we know that prevent us from exploring it and skeptically reacting to contravening data when learned. LeVasseur described the natural attitude as “the ordinary lack of curiosity with which most of life is lived” (2003, p. 417) which seems an apt description regarding typical first-day-of-class activities. It would be wise to take a fresh look at day one in a way that helps shake off the natural attitude and consider some alternative that is different from that to which we have become accustomed. Adopting this alternative introduces us to what Husserl called the transcendental attitude (1962). Here we can begin to see, finally, again for the first time a thing so well known that it has become invisible, never begging for re-evaluation or discernment.

Such re-evaluations can be reckoning moments for many of us as new and compelling knowledge may threaten what we have assumed to be true. Kegan (1982) suggests that this offers an intriguing possibility on our constructive-developmental horizon that does not square with our existing sense of truth, and therefore may upset our current organized epistemological construction. In that space we are likely to feel conflict, some cognitive dissonance between what we “know” and what we have just learned which reduces our confidence and hence, comfort with that “known.” Do we cling to the comfort of knowing? Or, perhaps we yield “to the motion of life” (Kegan, 1982, p. 265) and give ourselves to it, with all the disorientation and incoherence that new knowledge brings as we attempt to integrate it into our relationship with reality as we have constructed it? Confronting our historic knowledge construction, which stands as unreflective truth, through the lens of what has just been learned can open new portals for consideration of what are treated as foregone conclusions. Applied in the classroom, this can suspend confidence in what is believed to be known when we ask students: What don’t you know (about your life, work, education, relationships) that you don’t know you don’t know?
Discussion

deLuse (2018) discussed three dominant frames that were introduced above, and which may help organize the first day activity of a course to maximize interest and participation. The dog talk is just such an activity and needs to be interpreted through these three frames. deLuse’s first category addressed course content and how students relate to the course material, thereby increasing its meaningfulness. While the content of the dog research is not technically a part of the course, it helps us realize that most of us know far less than we think about many topics, including management, and opens the inquiry among the group. This creates a more honest and transparent approach to each other and the material and how it might have personal meaning for us. This realization opens us to learning from a humble frame, granting that there are likely many content areas we know little about, which could include many of the topics covered in the course.

The second frame of relationships focuses on initiating interactions between students, and between the students and the teacher to initiate some sense of community. Discussing and debriefing in small groups reduces the risk of being seen as unknowing or ignorant, and the judgment of others that may occur in the classroom. This also provides an opportunity to learn about the members in each group which serves deLuse’s relationship category. Dogs’ behavior, and our ignorance of it, may be a humbling experience that unites us in our honest quest for learning predicated on a shared realization that we all take much of what we think we know for granted. It is an opportunity to delve into our own epistemological foundations with a keen eye for re-evaluation and reconsideration. How is it we know what we know, and by what faith can we have confidence in that knowledge? The revelation of dog behavior, silly as it may be, with no disrespect to our Zoology colleagues, lays us all simultaneously bare in our shared ignorance which strangely, unites us in honest relationship.

The third frame concerns dignity and a sense of efficacy in learning which deLuse calls face needs. Realizing that few of us knew about the propensity of dogs unites us in our humility that we simply don’t know everything, and likely know far less than we think we do, about dogs and of course, what else? This public experience of shared ignorance, including the professor’s, relieves all of us of the need to “look good” in the eyes of others. It helps us let go of our human need to be right, increases the likelihood that we see the course as a learning space more than a performance space, and increases the potential for rich discovery.

The opening talk on dog’s behavior assumes the absence of this knowledge of their behavior by attendees, which has been borne out in my experience. The details of dog behavior are far removed from anything most have imagined. Hence, content is found not so much in material directly related to a course or ourselves, but to content related to nothing currently known; it is a zero/sum phenomenon - we knew nothing, we now know something. The power of this information is in how it is not related to our personal experience; that is what punctuates it and makes it poignant. Relationship needs are served by this dynamic. Due to the incredulity of the canine science, we are united in our horror-struck response to this data. It is comforting to know that while perhaps a particular student did not know this, the reality is that none of us knew and this bonds us together (Bastian, Jetten, & Ferris, 2014; Coates, Rosenthal, Schecter, 2013; MacMahon, Stenfert Kroese, Jahoda, Stimpson, Rose, Rose, Townson, Hood, & Willner, 2015). Finally, face needs are served in that no one can be embarrassed or lose their dignity if everyone is ignorant. Again, a shared and bonding experience creates a sense of relationship in the room.

The three parts of deLuse’s (2018) work highlight Dweck’s (2006; Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007; Kroeper, Fried, & Murphy, 2022) notions of fixed and growth mindsets. Fixed mindset people are characterized by the assumption that they understand what they know, and that if they do not know or understand something it is simply a physical limitation of their neural software. There is
little motivation to try to learn or understand as the person with this orientation simply believes they have reached a fundamental limit of their ability, and nothing can alter that reality. This may be characterized by the phrase often heard on campus where a student proclaims “I am just not good at math.” Growth mindsets, by comparison, react to this lack of knowledge, understanding, or ability with a fundamentally different response. Confronting what are seen as limits by the fixed mindset person, the growth mindset person believes that with additional effort, study, or practice she will be able to alter her plastic neural limits and expand her repertoire of knowledge, skills, or abilities.

Those who already maintain a growth mindset are likely more often tickled at the novelty of the dog science. Those with a more fixed orientation may feel united with growth mindset students in that they just realized that they, too, can learn things that they may have considered beyond their limits. When we feel ourselves in the presence of others who are humbled in publicly revealed ignorance, we often feel instinctively drawn to them in a shared sense of unity and that we are not alone in our own ignorance. This classroom experience is often met with smiles, and nervous but relieved laughter; relieved in how unlikely it is that others (not just us) could have known this detail about dogs as it is so far removed from the curriculum of any business student. Perhaps results would be dramatically altered were this to be demonstrated in a Zoology class or in veterinary school.

Inviting students to consider unorthodox and nontraditional ideas as relevant to the course and their personal development helps establish a norm of exploration and curiosity based on a collective and public confession of ignorance by everyone in the room, including the teacher. This helps to focus attention on learning, rather than performance. This also suggests that there are many avenues to knowledge, and exploring seemingly unrelated notions can, if managed well, be figural in our ability to understand course content. This broad approach to learning may offer novel interpretations to the course and other courses that we may be taking/teaching, and bridge to the realm of personal insight. To wit, the opening comments related to dogs reveal that we can explore many avenues, some controversial and unorthodox, in our learning. While this opening vignette may be provocative, it sets a tone of tolerance for strange and odd points that can lead to learning. In addition, the confession by the instructor that he did not know this canine detail unites the class, students, and teacher in a shared quest for learning and knowledge. From the very beginning the talk establishes a culture of curiosity, questioning, and knowledge seeking, characteristics of an andragogically focused learning space, rather than one of showboating knowledge already acquired.

References


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