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Developing Belief in Online Teaching: Efficacy and digital transformation

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ABSTRACT

Digital pedagogies, blended, hybrid, and online learning are not new, indeed discussions about their role in higher education are well documented. With some notable exceptions however, many of these discussions, and many more attempts at implementation, have been small in scale, operating at the level of a single course, or even single members of staff. Barriers at national, institutional and personal levels all contributed to slow uptake of digital learning. The summer of 2020 though saw institutions across the UK, and indeed the world, forced into rapid transition to online learning in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper examines our work supporting a school – which achieved high student satisfaction rates – within a large post-92 university in this transition. With specific attention to academic identity and efficacy, we examine the approaches that were taken in helping academics to climb over the digital hurdle towards good online teaching. We suggest that a three-pronged approach is needed to overcome these barriers and create the belief in digital that is needed for a successful online transition, and for continued growth. This is a collective 'all in it together' approach, placing curriculum, rather than technology at the heart of the work, and also ensuring solid institutional support that does not rely on early adopters.

Keywords: Identity, efficacy, blended learning, staff development, early adopters

Introduction

Following the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic declaration by the World Health Organization on March 11, 2020 (Cucinotta & Vanelli, 2020), higher education institutions (HEIs) around the world moved classes online. Despite over two decades of development/discussion across United Kingdom higher education (UK HE) about digital futures (Weller, 2020), the sector was largely unprepared for this move and had to demonstrate "extraordinary flexibility and speed of action" (QAA, 2020, p.1). At first sight, this is surprising given significant investment in digital modernisation during 2000-2015 both by universities and the UK Government through educational agencies such as Jisc, The Higher Education Academy (HEA, now AdvanceHE), the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (LFHE), and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). For example, Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) became ubiquitous in the early 2000, and while debate on their value and impact continues, they were a backbone to the move to online in many institutions (Flavin, 2020). Jisc and HEA-funded programmes from that era focused on areas such as assessment and feedback, digital literacies, work-based learning, student employability, curriculum design, and the overall student experience (e.g. Jisc's Distributed E-Learning programme, 2005-7). A range of support mechanisms promoted sharing and collaboration between universities.

Valuable lessons and approaches from these programmes were not always embedded. Universities often failed to draw on their expertise to scale-up digital learning and embed it into curricula, culture and institutional processes, such as curriculum design/review and quality assurance (QA) processes. Digital learning expertise mostly remained with a minority of academics and professional support staff. As recently as 2020, the Jisc Digital Insights Survey suggested that, despite the growth of digital, significant gaps remained in provision, support and willingness to adopt digital teaching practices (Killen & Langer-Crame, 2020), and many academics lacked belief that digital technology could enhance their teaching.

This paper analyses the experience of a school within a post-92 university during the pandemic. The school's aims were to manage a successful transformation for staff and students, learning from the historical examples mentioned above. We identify several features which enabled the school to perform better than sector norms and discuss how to hold on to what has been learned from the last year.

Theoretical basis

The social, economic and political context surrounding UK HE has significant and sometimes unrecognised consequences. For example, Johnston, Olivas, Steele, Smith and Bailey (2018) argue that HEIs' application of new technologies has been constrained by the politics of neoliberalism and offer 'ideas of critical pedagogy and openness' as a path to educational enrichment. Flavin and Quintero (2018) analyse university learning, teaching and assessment strategies in terms of different types of innovation. They conclude that UK HEIs "prioritise sustaining innovation and efficiency innovation over disruptive innovation, looking to augment and enhance technology- enhanced learning, but rarely to transform it" (Flavin & Quintero, 2018, p. 2). These constraints have led to unequal sharing of expertise across the sector and within universities themselves. Rather than take up strategies that forced people towards the digital, the models of technology adoption within higher education relied on early adopters – who typically make up just 15% of staff (Rogers, 2010; Geoghegan, 1994) – to undertake this work themselves. Despite wide ranging knowledge and understanding of what makes for good practice in digital learning, with thousands of papers published, and hundreds of reports produced, few institutions took these on wholesale; instead, individuals were left to take up new ideas and adopt them with little institutional support. While the UK Government's investment in digitising universities during the period 2000-2015 created a swell of such early adopters, it failed to prompt a wider move toward digital adoption, in which early adopters would be followed by an early majority, who are interested in experimentation, but want to watch others first. And there was even less chance of bringing along the late majority and laggards who look for certainty as a signal that they should also take up a new technology (Rogers, 2010).

Despite efforts from some quarters, this led to a pre-pandemic HE workforce in which just 31% of academics were intrinsically motivated to use digital tech in their teaching (Killen & Langer-Crame, 2020), and less than 5% of teaching staff felt like the digital provision at their institute was well developed (Meredith & Hardman, 2021). In addition, just 5.1% felt highly proficient in digitally enabled teaching (Meredith & Hardman, 2021). This further suggests the strides taken by innovators and early adopters had not been passed onto universities wholesale, and that gaps, and indeed resistance to digital teaching and learning, remained. The mismatch between the government drive to digital, and lack of leadership from university executives created many of the barriers to adoption pre-pandemic. A key concern voiced by many academic staff is being overwhelmed by too much choice, information, resources and challenges relating to learning technologies and digital pedagogies, but with thousands of good practice documents produced, and little institutional guidance, it was near impossible for most academics to engage with the process of digitising their teaching – it was not worth the time investment to sift through so many materials without knowing if institutions would support or reward such efforts.

A more intangible barrier for academics and one which is harder to address, is the psychological and social resistance to moving to online teaching. Marriott (2021), for example, has pointed to the particular way in which imposter syndrome can affect the adoption and use of digital technology in education. While Marriott shares Rogers' (2010) and Geoghegan's (1994) concerns about barriers to adoption, she also looks to factors such as self-limiting beliefs, peer pressure, isolation and media. These factors all relate to how individuals see themselves, and how they perceive others might see them, and thus link closely with their sense of identity, self-worth and teacher efficacy.

It is increasingly important to examine the growing body of work around the psychological processes involved in the development and maintenance of a teacher identity in higher education (Lankveld, Schoonenboom, Volman, Croiset & Beishuizen, 2017) in relation to digital transformation. Teaching efficacy or teaching self-efficacy is a construct that represents teachers' confidence in their ability to facilitate the development of students' knowledge, abilities, and values (Tschannen-Moran, Hoy & Hoy, 1998). Bandura (1977) found self-efficacy to be important because people with high self-efficacy, when facing negative outcome expectations, are more likely to make an effort to change their work environment and persist at their work. Educators with well-developed professional identities are more inclined to develop professionally, cope with educational change, and implement innovations in their own teaching practice (Abu-Alruz & Khasawneh, 2013). Becoming an academic teacher is a question of constructing a self-concept as a teacher in the social and professional context of the university (Laiho, Jauhiainen & Jauhiainen, 2020). The professional identity of educators is influenced by three main forces (Samuel & Stephens 2000): (1) inertial forces, emanating from educators' biographical experience of teaching and learning; (2) programmatic forces, emanating from the educator's institution's curriculum and programme (Danielewicz, 2001); and (3) contextual forces, derived from the macro-educational environment of policy (Abu-Alruz & Khasawneh, 2013: 432).

Across many pre-COVID studies, academics reported concerns related to their perceived ability to teach online successfully (Horvitz Beach, Anderson & Xia, 2015; Richter & Idleman, 2017). Where contextual forces, such as the 2000-2015 modernisation drive, do not match the programmatic forces of institutional support and leadership around change, academics are left to work on just their own inertial forces – which are reduced when isolated, which usually means sticking to what is known, and giving up on ideas such as teaching online before they gain self-efficacy in the technique (Horvitz *et. al*., 2015 p.314). Moving to online working, especially the fully remote work created by COVID is then a deeply unsettling moment for efficacy but could also have created great opportunities. For HE institutions that took the initiative to provide programmatic support that drew from macro-contextual knowledge of digital learning, there was much to be gained. How though, within this context, in which fear of technology, imposter syndrome, weariness of early adopters, and information overload are already embedded, can effective transformation happen?

Case study

The University of Westminster is primarily a provider of face-to-face taught undergraduate and postgraduate courses over a wide spectrum of subject areas and contexts. Set in the heart of London, with an additional major focus for arts and media-based subjects on the outskirts of London, the university prides itself on its practice-based, research-informed courses and diverse student body.

The global pandemic led Westminster to become a distance learning provider almost overnight. This rapid enforced shift to distance curriculum delivery inevitably led to rapid changes in staff capability in some forms of digital teaching. Before the COVID crisis, live online teaching was limited to a handful of academic staff and student users (approximately 100 per week). By the start of the second semester of the 2020/21 academic year, almost all academic staff and students were engaged in some level of synchronous online learning and teaching. For example, on one typical weekday in January 2021, over 450 separate live sessions involved over 10,000 unique attendees. These figures reflect the heavy reliance on a live online delivery model for distance online learning during the pandemic, with little overt use of asynchronous distance learning strategies.

This case study focuses on experiences of transformation within the Westminster School of Media and Communication (WSOMC, one of 12 University schools) which demonstrated a successful transition thanks to particular attention to staff training and development.

To support the move to online learning, especially regarding the initial need to round off semester 2 of the 2019/20 academic year, the university's Learning Innovation and Digital Engagement team worked with academic colleagues in the school and external critical friends to devise and deliver a six-week staff development course entitled 'Planning and Implementing an Online Course'. This covered models for learning design and best practice in online distance learning, and comprised asynchronous learning units, live sessions, and bespoke consultations with external critical friends. Other schools (eight in total) also enrolled their staff on the course, but none had the same level of engagement or co-ordination between local plans and the course as WSOMC. Through the first semester of teaching fully online, WSOMC maintained year-on-year satisfaction scores through module evaluations, and 79.5% of students within the school reported feeling engaged with their online learning, compared with just 41% nationally (Brown, 2021).

Methodology

This research draws upon two key sources of data; the responses to the 2021 Jisc Digital Insights Survey and observation by the facilitators who authored this paper. The national Jisc survey was completed by 68% of permanent staff within WSOMC, providing a representative sample (8% margin of error with 95% confidence level) and also allowing for comparisons within the wider institution. The survey allows for the additional questions specific to an institution, so to help draw out deeper understanding around identity and teaching, the following questions were added; (1) Has the last year of working mostly online changed the way you think about teaching? Do you feel that your experiences of the last year have led you or might lead you to reconsider your role as a teacher in any way? (2) How do you see your use of online learning and digital tools changing or developing in circumstances where face-to-face classes at the university are again possible? (3) When you are able to teach face-to-face again, what do you see as the barriers (personal, subject, pedagogic, institutional/organisational) to your use of digital tools and systems in your teaching? And do you have any ideas or suggestions for overcoming these? Observations made as part of the staff development process were shared between the researchers to qualify the actions taken. Data were coded and analysed through NVivo by the themes of this paper, and by sentiment, allowing for the drawing out of feelings among staff. The study design was approved by the University of Westminster's ethics committee, reference ETH2021-09.07.

Results

Forty-six permanent members of staff from WSOMC responded to the survey, giving a response rate of 68%. Of those who responded, 100% had been working fully from home, with an average class size of 17-50 students. Half of respondents had worked in their role for ten years or more, with just seven respondents employed for less than three years. To ascertain if there was an impact on the rate of adoption or sense of things working well, key qualitative questions were compared across the school and the university as a whole. These comparisons are divided into those related to support (Table 1) and those related to teaching (Table 2). At the time of writing, the sector-wide results from the survey were not available, but some comparisons can be made with other reports, such as the University Staff Experience of Digitally Enabled Learning During COVID-19 report by WonkHE (Meredith & Hardman, 2021) launched in March.

Table 1 Responses related to support. Percentage of respondents who agree, disagree or where neutral to each question numbers as percentages of respondents. Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding to one decimal.

Question		**WSOMC (n=46)**			**University-wide (n=207)**		
		Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
How much do you agree that we:	Support you to use your own digital devices	54.3	26.1	19.6	54.2	32.8	12.9
	Enable you to access online systems and services from anywhere	72.7	25	2.3	68	27.5	4.5
	Communicate effectively online	71.1	22.2	6.7	68.7	22.9	8.5
	Provide a good online environment for collaboration	51.1	37.8	11.1	50.5	34.5	15
How much do you agree that we have given you:	Support for teaching online/away from campus	73.9	19.6	6.5	71.6	17.9	10.4
	Guidance about the digital skills needed in your teaching role	67.4	23.9	8.7	64.2	25.4	10.4
	An assessment of your digital skills and training needs	26.7	42.2	31.1	27.8	46	26.3
	Time to explore new digital tools and approaches	31.2	26.7	42.2	32	30	38
	Reward and recognition for the digital skills you develop	24.4	40	35.6	15.5	35.5	49
You can access all the organisational support services you need online		44.4	42.2	13.3	49.5	33	17.5

Table 2 Responses related to identity. Percentage of respondents who agree, disagree or were neutral to each question numbers as percentages of respondents. Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding to one decimal.

Question		**WSOMC (n=46)**			**University-wide (n=207)**		
		Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
How much do you agree that we	Give you the chance to be involved in decisions about online teaching	36.4	40.9	22.7	34	31.5	34.5
How much do you agree that online teaching has:	Added significant new stress to your workload	73.3	13.3	13.3	74.3	14.9	10.9
	Changed your role as a teacher	82.2	13.3	4.4	70.8	18.8	10.4
The teaching expectations placed on you have been reasonable		28.9	42.2	28.9	32.5	29	38.5
The concerns of teaching staff and their representatives are being heard		40	35.6	24.4	25	36.5	38.5

While not fully comparable due to different methodologies and rankings, Meredith and Hardman's (2021) report suggest that only 35% of respondents (n=630) were happy with the level of support they received to work more online. This compares with scores above 60 percent at both university and school level for questions on a similar theme. Looking specifically at the single question on both Jisc and WonkHE surveys that refer to how respondents would rate overall support with moving online (Figure 1) there are some marked differences. At Westminster, the school-level response is considerably more positive than the university level, and the sector level. Meredith and Hardman (2021) report less than 45% of respondents feeling able to effectively communicate with students over the last year, compared with 71.1% (WSOMC) and 68.7% (university). In terms of workload, the figures are more comparable. Just 20% of respondents suggested they were coping with their workload; around 26% responded similarly at university and school level in our Jisc survey.

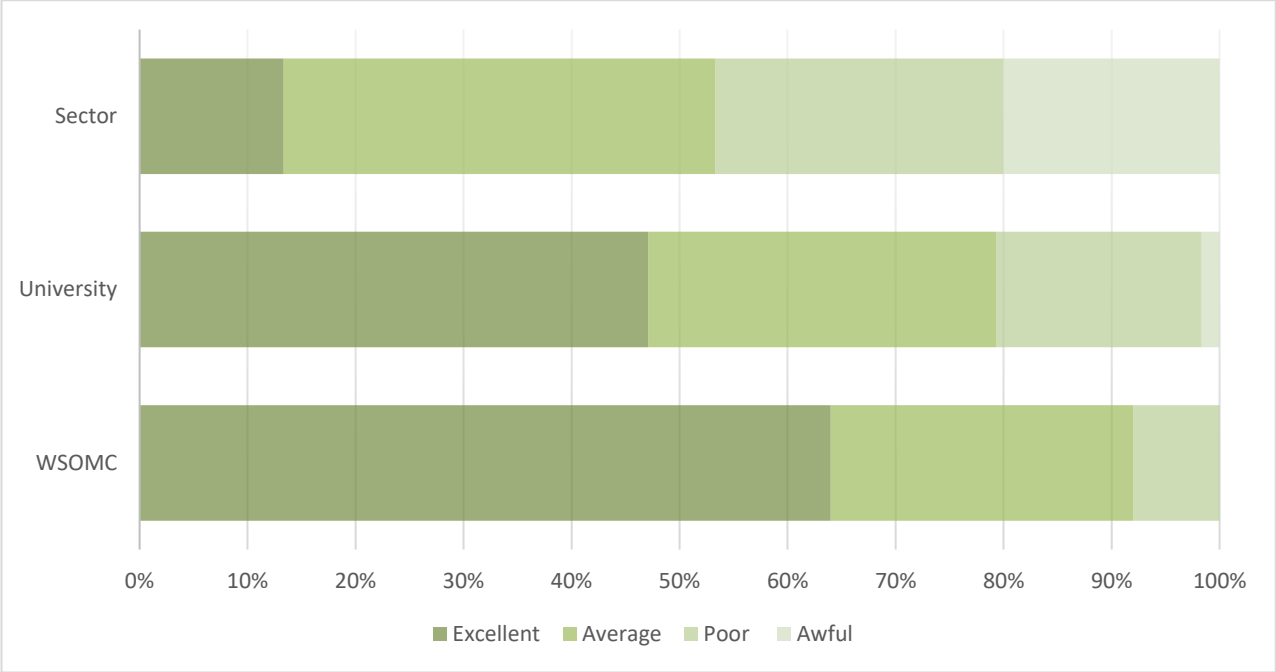

Figure 1 Overall, how well do we support you to teach online? University and WSOMC data taken from Jisc digital insights survey. Sector data from WonkHE (2021) report with equivalent question. Sector-wide Jisc data was not available at the time of writing.

Examining more comparable university and school data derived from Westminster's use of the Jisc survey, there is little to separate the findings, with the exception of three factors rated much higher within the school. These are reward and recognition (24.4 vs 15.5), changed role as a teacher (82.2 vs 70.8) and the sense of being heard and listen to by the university (20 vs 25). It is significant that these all relate to efficacy and identity, each being seen as a reinforcer of positive attitudes towards both teaching and change. These indicators are also backed up by the qualitative analysis of the open questions from the survey (Table 3).

Table 3 Percentage of responses coded as Very positive (++), Positive (+), Negative (-), very negative (--) and neutral (=). Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding to one decimal.

Question	**WSOMC**					**University-wide**				
	++	+	=	-	--	++	+	=	-	--
Has the last year of working mostly online changed the way you think about teaching? Do you feel that your experiences of the last year have led you or might lead you to reconsider your role as a teacher in any way?	32.6 (n=14)	37.2 (n=16)	0 (n=0)	16.3 (n=7)	13.9 (n=6)	10.2 (n=21)	17.4 (n=36)	53.4 (n=110)	13.6 (n=28)	9.2 (n=19)
How do you see your use of online learning and digital tools changing or developing in circumstances where face-to-face classes at the University are again possible?	37.2 (n=16)	37.2 (n=16)	7 (n=3)	16.2 (n=7)	2.3 (n=1)	10.4 (n=19)	13.7 (n=25)	62.6 (n=114)	9.3 (n=17)	3.8 (n=7)
When you are able to teach face-to-face again, what do you see as the barriers (personal, subject, pedagogic, institutional) to your use of digital tools and systems in your teaching? And do you have any ideas or suggestions for overcoming these?	15 (n=6)	12 (n=8)	27.5 (n=11)	30 (n=12)	7.5 (n=3)	7.3 (n=14)	14 (n=27)	53.9 (n=104)	14 (n=27)	10.9 (n=21)

Academics from WSOMC showed higher rates of response when asked if the last year had changed their way of thinking about teaching and being a teacher. These responses were overall more positive than those from the wider university. Many also reflected on the additional challenges they might now face if called to work in a blended manner after the pandemic, recognising that this is the optimal way of working, but that it might have additional challenges for some of the more practice-based work. What stood out though was the level of self-reflection, with one respondent suggesting that they "reinvented myself as a teacher and I'm enjoying what I've learned and will definitely keep certain things from online teaching, even when we are back to campus". Another, showing signs of having moved into a mode of thinking more akin to early adopters, suggested that it "has been a nice challenge, made me think creatively and develop more tasks and different exercises that are suitable for online classes". Others reflected that "Teaching online does not fully utilise your skills as a teacher when the student is a 2-dimensional head on a screen", which, while more negative about the process, does not indicate the 'I've always done it like this' attitude of laggers (Marriott, 2021), but rather looks more towards self-identity as a teacher, indicating higher levels of efficacy alongside concerns about online teaching.

Most WSOMC respondents framed their answers in relation to students rather than technology noting that it has benefits for "quieter" students, as not being face-to-face and asynchronous gives them time to think. Also, that the greater flexibility afforded by this way of working allows a much more diverse range of learning approaches to flourish, as well as supporting those with commitments outside of the university to access materials in a way that suits them. This was not limited to discussions about large lectures – indeed many respondents saw large lectures as least enhanced by being online – "discursive teaching to large groups is not very satisfactory", "broadcast methods of teaching are dead". Instead, many reported high levels of engagement in small groups through the use of tools such as Padlet, including in more practice-based subjects. This was heightened further in relation to pastoral and tutoring roles, where many saw online as a way to help students open up and for staff to be more accessible and approachable. On the reverse side, a minority felt a lack of face-to-face engagement made it more difficult to "read" students, build relationships, and meant it was difficult to engage all students in large groups, isolating for the tutor with online discussions not as "rich" as face-to-face. These comments were more closely aligned with respondents saying they had engaged in live teaching and were less prevalent in those who had used tools such as online discussions and quizzes.

The majority of concerns about working online were less about students and more about infrastructure and institutional-level issues, with significant concerns over the increased workload for preparing classes, and the impact this might have on research time. Concerns were also raised on behalf of students, especially in relation to access to technology at home, internet connections and potentially censorship by a student's home nation. It is also notable that mentions of needing improved support were not as prevalent as might be expected – it is easy to "blame" support – suggesting that technical support has been good and generally effective. Many of those who were more critical of online also shared solutions, suggesting that these issues were not sufficient to close off the idea of online working or future blended working, and that many more staff had moved towards considering how to implement these technologies further, rather than dismissing them – again suggesting more had moved into an early adopter mindset, and increased digital efficacy.

It is also worthwhile looking at what was not mentioned. Few mentioned capturing of best practices and peer collaboration and sharing, although 84.4% of WSOMC said they sought help from colleagues. There was also very little mention of particular pedagogic/curricula design models matched to "digital", other than highlighting (by some) the need to rethink curriculum design and being more creative. This is perhaps understandable given the circumstances, but this probably needs to be encouraged in the future.

What is clear here is that WSOMC was able to outperform in many areas of online teaching and learning, yielding high satisfaction scores from students compared with the institution and with the sector as a whole. Furthermore, the school appears to have broken through the early adoption barrier – many more academics now not only feel comfortable with educational technologies, but also have belief in them that means they have become part of their teaching toolkit. All of course is not perfect, and in many aspects members of the school rate their experiences of support and quality of infrastructure as no higher than the rest of the university. Indeed, some deeply critical points were raised, especially in relation to workloads. There does though appear to have been a shift in the way people are thinking about not only their teaching, but their place as a teacher and how this might continue to interact with or be enhanced by digital technology.

Discussion

Student and staff feedback confirms that the training and support provided in the summer of 2020 for the school was generally successful, ensuring academics were capable and confident in delivering online learning. From the data and our own observations, we suggest three key themes that helped drive this collective success and breakdown the issues of inertial, programmatic, and contextual forces that might have otherwise hindered transformation of both teaching and academic identity in relation to moving to online teaching.

All in it together

Early adopters and innovators can be intimidating. In the face of colleagues doing exciting and innovative things with technology, many academic teaching staff can fall into digital impostor syndrome, doubting their abilities and hampered by feelings of

inadequacy (Parkman, 2016). Lack of time to experiment with technology, perhaps away from the classroom, has historically made it harder for late majority or laggards to engage with digital methods (Marriott, 2021). In this respect the COVID-19 pandemic was a great leveller. All academics were forced to consider the digital in their teaching, but this alone did not guarantee successful transformation. Rather, what was required was to create a true level playing field where everyone felt able to contribute. This was done in four ways through the training we provided:

1. Ensuring a whole-school approach.
   All colleagues were expected to work through the course regardless of experience.
2. Using early adopters as 'supporters and cheerleaders' rather than simply innovators.
   Early adopters were explicitly asked to consolidate learning, rather than continue innovating. They were used to support rather than to lead change.
3. Focus on core technology.
   Where suggestions for access to different/alternative software/systems arose, these were noted but were not 'endorsed'. It was important to keep returning everyone to the core technologies available, using early adopters to help upskill others in the tools available, rather than bringing new ones to the table, which would only serve to further digital imposter syndrome. Closing down these discussions of alternative technologies without upsetting their proponents also served to reduce anxiety about there being too much of everything, a common complaint pre-pandemic (Castañeda and Selwyn, 2018), and also reduced "displacement chat", where academics would avoid looking at upskilling by chasing the ever-elusive perfect digital technology.
4. Using 'in-house' exemplars and examples as starting points.
   Wherever possible, inputs to the training course and examples for discussion were taken from existing practice across the school. For example, a VLE 'shell' was made available for everyone, and its key characteristics were explained, but there was no compulsion to use it – teaching staff were free to adapt it or use their own approach.

This approach truly created an 'all in it together' feel, reflected in the increased peer support for teaching and use of digital technology, and also the lack of expected difference in responses to the survey based on gender (Sorgner, Bode, Krieger-Boden, Aneja, Coleman, Mishra & Robb, 2017) or length of service. The collective got over the digital hurdle together, and the majority quickly moved to being adopters, with the efficacy to match.

Curriculum design leading the agenda

As Bawane and Spector (2009) noted, an academic is not a single role or identity. In moving online, they might play as many as eight roles: professional, pedagogical, social, evaluator, administrator, technologist, advisor/counsellor, and researcher. Just one of these roles relate specifically to the technology. The course to support online delivery was designed to ensure that the technology itself *was not* centre stage. The majority of staff on the course were anxious about the technology, an issue born from overwhelming contextual forces from the wider HE sector, and a lack of programmatic forces within the university. This anxiety was minimised by ensuring that the course rested on core teaching principles and through working to change inertial forces. The course team sifted relevant ideas and external reports to provide manageable context, meaning that the vast literature on digital supported the course, rather than leading it. By linking this to the familiar and safer ideas of curriculum design, a more supportive environment was created.

The course met staff halfway, following a two-step model for discussion and analysis: what works well in your class normally, and how can we help you move that online with the tools we have? This built confidence as it drew upon improving teaching efficacy and then scaffolded technology over this, leaving staff feeling more in control of their teaching. This is not to suggest there were not significant challenges involved in rethinking pedagogic design and delivery approaches to suit online and blended modes as well as rethinking the tutor role. However, the qualitative comments from the survey that point to many academics rethinking their teaching long term, and in a positive way, suggests that they did more than just learn to use online tools, but rather learned to reimagine teaching – a theme that was prominent in the staff survey.

Targeted support

Having addressed the contextual forces, the course itself was designed to model, as well as teach online curriculum and programme design, plugging the gap in prior institutional guidance, and reducing the programmatic barrier to transformation. A full six weeks set aside for this helped to create the space needed for the process of upskilling to be thoughtful and reflective, not rushed and tacked onto other thinking or workloads. This was aided by a summer of solid infrastructure and support at the university level, with daily drop-in sessions available for staff wanting to learn or check their understanding about different digital tools and develop faith in their robustness. This meant WSOMC academics could focus on pedagogy and curriculum design without getting bogged down in technology discussions – and also modelled how online learning could be successful with such infrastructure in place, helping to alleviate some worries. This design helped to further level the playing field as early adopters did not dominate conversations with technological insights, and also served to reduce displacement chat, allowing the course to

remain focused on the core competencies of teaching and learning, building on offline efficacy, while slowly building digital skills and online efficacy.

By ensuring that digital tools took a backseat to digital pedagogy, staff training and support tapped into the psychological processes that are involved in the development and maintenance of a teacher identity in higher education (Lankveld *et. al*., 2017). By linking new training to already established roles – especially pedagogical, evaluator, counsellor, and researcher – the barrier of taking on a new role (a new identity) was lowered, helped to shift inertia, and reduced concerns over how skilful someone might be in that role, allowing them to explore it and learn from their own point of strength.

Conclusion

The literature has outlined three factors that can hinder academic identity forming and development of efficacy. Previous attempts to create digital transformation within UK HEIs has failed to address these, and indeed has at times reinforced these barriers. Contextual forces for change failed to take hold because of programmatic choices at the university level, that relied too heavily on early adopters to inspire change without providing structural support. Within this environment, only those with a strong sense of efficacy moved towards using the digital, while others, in the face of digital imposter syndrome, retreated back into what was known – inertial forces. The work carried out with WSOMC had to break through all of these. By aligning the training with contextual, programmatic and inertial forces and by levelling the playing field by looking past the early adopters and to a more basic pedagogical experience, we were able to lift people over a number of technological and efficacy hurdles. Once over these barriers, sufficient time for play and experimentation before teaching began allowed for consolidation of ideas, formation of new digital teaching identities. This new, school-wide belief in how these digital tools could enhance the curriculum led to a vastly improved experience for staff and students alike.

Biographies

Doug Specht is a senior lecturer and the director of teaching and learning in the School of Media and Communication at the University of Westminster.

Peter Chatterton is a Chartered Physicist and digital innovator who supports universities in digital modernisation programmes, taking on roles such as critical friend, evaluator, change management consultant and mentor.

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