

Online, Open, and Equitable Education

Lessons from Teaching and Learning
during the Global Pandemic

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Elon University Center for Engaged Learning
Elon, North Carolina
www.CenterForEngagedLearning.org

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Series editors: Jessie L. Moore and Peter Felten
Copyeditor and designer: Jennie Goforth

Cover art is *Area Broken by Perpendiculars* by Joseph Schillinger. Smithsonian American Art Museum, gift of Mrs. Joseph Schillinger.

Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Turner, Nancy K. | Baker, Nick | Hornsby, David J. | Germain-Rutherford, Aline | Graham, David | Wuetherick, Brad

Title: Online, Open, and Equitable Education / Nancy K. Turner, Nick Baker, David J. Hornsby, Aline Germain-Rutherford, David Graham, and Brad Wuetherick

Description: Elon, North Carolina : Elon University Center for Engaged Learning, [2024] | Series: Center for engaged learning open access book series | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2024938941 | ISBN (PDF) 978-1-951414-12-2 | ISBN (PBK) 978-1-951414-13-9 | DOI <https://doi.org/10.36284/celelon.oa7>

Subjects: LCSH: Distance education | Education, Higher – Computer-assisted instruction | Educational equalization

Classification: LCC LC5803.C65 O55 2024 | DDC 378.1734 On5tu

CHAPTER 1

The Importance of Online, Open, and Equitable Education during the Global Pandemic

Lessons and Implications for
Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship

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As we emerge from the global COVID-19 pandemic, this volume considers how institutions of teaching and learning in higher education responded. Much focus has been given to the notion of how the pandemic advanced the digital transformation of higher education, particularly in online or virtual teaching (Chyi 2020; Grajek 2020; Martin-Barbero 2020; Pulsipher 2020). But few contributions have sought to reflect on how the pandemic pivot impacted approaches, experiences, and understandings of online, open, and equitable education practices.

While we certainly agree with Damm's (2020) assertion that the pandemic has challenged presumptions that in-person instruction is of higher quality than online instruction, it is rarely the modality alone that impacts learners' experience; rather it is the pedagogical practices adopted in learning environments that matters most to the outcomes for learners. Focusing on questions of equity and openness in pedagogy for online learning is of particular importance. The issues of equity and openness have arisen in higher education systems across the world for decades prior to the pandemic bringing acute focus to them. This volume documents, analyzes, and shares pedagogical practices adopted in response to the pandemic that provide

new frames and advance the conversation around these challenges through the lens of practitioners who experienced the disruption first-hand. Through such reflections, we hope that inspiration is derived around how to integrate equity and openness in online learning, ensuring and enabling equitable, inclusive, and quality education going forward.

Ideas and debates of what constitutes high-quality online, open, and equitable education can be seen in the work of scholars such as Bates (2019, 478) who posits that quality education is: “teaching methods that successfully help learners develop the knowledge and skills they will require in a digital age.” Terosky and Conway (2020, 442) establish the student-teacher relationship as the primary determinant of a quality education, which is in turn driven by the ambition to bring about and instill change: “In short, a quality education prepares students for change, even as it, too, changes in seeking to meet this aim.” Felten and Lambert (2020) advance the idea of what they call relationship-rich education as a critical factor in fostering student success in university spaces.

Invariably notions of quality online, open, and equitable education intersect with ideas around what constitutes quality education. Mollenkopf et al. (2020, 69) argue that learner-centered teaching and support techniques are the basis for quality online education.

Online learning requires instructors to actively learn about their students, match delivery modes to their needs, provide resources for learning that support student autonomy, make sure assignments are meaningful, offer students opportunities to improve and master learning, and provide clear feedback and positive interactions.

Fostering inclusivity and equity within one’s learning environment is considered an important indicator of quality, as necessary as ensuring practices are evidence-based (EDUCAUSE 2021).

In defining equitable education, UNESCO (2021a, 10) describes it as “ensuring fairness, where the education of all learners is seen

as having equal importance.” Further, they note that equitable education is about recognizing the many ways knowledge can be expressed, such as through Indigenous Knowledge Systems (UNESCO, 2021b, 26). The OECD (2023, 83, 147) considers equity being achieved in education when the personal and social circumstances of students do not hinder their educational potential, by ensuring that pedagogical and curricular strategies intentionally include considerations of factors such as gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, immigration status, disability, and Indigeneity.

Equitable education aims to question and dismantle oppressive teaching and learning practices and systems that reproduce inequities caused by factors such as racism and poverty. Further, equitable and inclusive education requires acknowledging “humanity’s many forms of knowledge and expression” (OECD, 2023, 26) and valuing them equally in the educational environment and structures.

Pandemic Pedagogy: Approaches to Online, Open, and Equitable Education

With the pandemic shutdowns of early 2020, transitional pedagogies, which became referred to as emergency remote teaching (e.g., Bond et al. 2021; Bozkurt et. al. 2020), emerged as a temporary response to providing continuity of teaching and learning. The initial focus of these pedagogical adaptations was on rapidly modifying and transitioning, often within a few days, all remaining teaching and learning activities to an online approach in order to complete the term. Many instructors achieved this by using virtual classrooms and web conferencing tools that facilitated synchronous classes, while others moved to asynchronous formats to avoid potential challenges with limited bandwidth (Miller, Sellnow, and Strawser 2021). Highly accomplished and experienced teachers overnight found themselves feeling like novices again as they had to learn a whole new skillset and navigate unfamiliar systems. Many took the advice of teaching and learning centres and developed alternative assessments, planned the simplest approaches to completing the

term, and applied compassionate strategies to address the acute trauma students were experiencing.

As the weeks in isolation dragged into months, it became clear that the “temporary” pedagogical changes implemented to provide continuity and see out the end of term would not be sustainable or appropriate in the longer term, and educators globally started to explore the possibilities and challenges of the new teaching environment they found themselves in. Hodges et al. (2020) pointed out early in the pandemic response that well-designed online learning experiences are substantively different than what was possible at a mass scale within a few days, and that this should be kept in mind when the inevitable attempts to compare delivery modalities arose. Others posited that the pandemic instigated changes would spark a digital revolution that would not only last beyond the pandemic, but also trigger the evolution of higher education within a timeframe that would never normally be possible, accelerating decades worth of change in just a few months (e.g., Strielkowski 2020).

A number of challenging questions about digital equity and access to higher education rapidly emerged, however, and demanded to be addressed (Brownlee 2022). Where the digital divide could previously be largely ignored as there were usually alternatives available, the potential that social inequality and injustice would be exacerbated by emergency approaches caused the sector to confront uncomfortable realities (Bozkurt et al. 2020). Who had access to high-speed internet, unlimited data, and devices? Who gets priority in a household that shares an internet connection and screen time? Who was now excluded who had not been before, and conversely, who suddenly had access in the ways that they needed to be successful in pursuing higher education?

Many universities sought to adapt or temporarily suspend a raft of policies (e.g., Devaney et al. 2020) to open up flexibility for faculty and students to explore all the pedagogical options available to them. While most instructors were initially focused on trying to replicate their planned assessment in an online format, they were also encouraged by teaching and learning professionals and many

administrators to apply compassion and care to both their own rapid learning experience, and that of their students, and to remain empathetic as the impact of the global crisis continued to grow (Slade et al. 2022). While others found that the focus of much of the initial advice was on transitioning summative assessment to online formats, as the pandemic dragged on, many instructors also began to experiment with alternative approaches to assessment, including continuous or formative assessment, reducing volume of assessment, ungrading, offering learner choice in how they were assessed, creating oral assessments, and introducing flexibility in deadlines, pass/fail grades, and other learner-centred practices (e.g., Jankowski 2020; Johnson, Veletsianos, and Seaman 2020; Slade et al. 2022).

Authors in this volume describe similar changes made to assessment and other pedagogical practices at the course and curriculum level, and they recognize that the shift to online learning not only had the potential to enhance equity for many students, but also shone a light on the accepted inequitable access to education that so many students face in traditional higher education. Additional inequities soon surfaced during the initial stages of the pandemic, such as digital inequity (access to internet, equipment, and software), the differential impact on students in rural, remote, and low socioeconomic regions, and the impact on international students who were already isolated in many ways, but now found themselves stuck in a foreign location in lockdown conditions without access to their regular support structures.

Pedagogies of care and compassion emerged as significant responses to the pandemic (e.g., Mehrotra 2021; Elkington 2022). Bozkurt et al. (2020, 4) note that “the emotional ramifications resulting from the trauma caused by this pandemic require intentional designs and practices that embody care, inclusion, compassion, and empathy as core values.” These pedagogies likely contributed to more equitable and accessible practices that enhanced the experience of most learners.

One potentially positive outcome from the pandemic pedagogies that were applied was an opening up of access to learners

who may have traditionally been excluded from higher education through disability, caring responsibilities, cost, home location, and many other life situations. While some marginalized groups undoubtedly remained so, especially early in the pandemic (e.g., Napierala et al. 2022), others, particularly those with disabilities and caring responsibilities, suddenly had access in ways they would not normally have (e.g., Dodd et al. 2021; Rapanta et al. 2021). For many of these learners, it was the combination of newfound flexibility in teaching and assessment approaches and associated policies, coupled with use of technology to facilitate learning at home and on demand, a digital-first approach, and almost ubiquitous access to learning aids like captions that made higher education accessible for so many more learners. These changes began to lower the threshold of what Dolmage (2017) refers to as the steep steps in the climb to the ivory tower—the intentionally exclusionary practices in higher education that have kept many qualified learners with disabilities and exceptionalities out of our programs.

The broad challenge for administrators, instructors, and ultimately students whose participation was contingent on access to curricular adaptations is the sustainability of those adaptations that facilitated accessibility, particularly in more traditional or conservative institutions, once the pandemic moved away from emergency mode when COVID-19 was becoming endemic in the population (Leal Filho et al. 2022). There are resource and workload issues, along with policy implications, that must be addressed systemically if we are to maintain the level of access many became accustomed to, and that many want to maintain in the post-pandemic environment (Veletsianos 2021). Some predict that flexibility and resilience need to be intentionally developed in higher education institutions to prepare them for the uncertain future we all face, and one way to achieve that is through education models that are “responsive to learner and societal needs, available in multiple formats, through multiple delivery modes, in multiple timeframes and locations.” (Veletsianos and Houlden 2020, 849). Institutions are almost inevitably tempted to look to technology for solutions to

enhance efficiency of educational workflows if they are to open up space for the often more labour-intensive humanised educational models, and this invites the potential for further increasing technology-enabled inequality.

The pandemic period saw unprecedented rapid growth in the adoption and development of educational technologies. Gains were made in reliability, scalability, and ubiquity in higher education. It also led to a rise in technocentrism, technological solutionism, and techno-disaster-capitalism that made balancing technology and pedagogy more challenging once the initial emergency had receded (Williamson, Eynon, and Potter 2020; Gleason and Heath 2021; Rapanta et al. 2021). Outside of the institutional bounds, students found access to digital tools and supports such as Chegg and artificial intelligence, as well as communication tools that significantly heightened fears about a loss of academic integrity in online courses. This fear led to a predictable increase in the adoption of techno-surveillance pedagogies and software systems, heightened security in online learning environments, and acceleration of the abdication of some traditional teaching responsibilities to third-party companies such as publishers, all of whom promised to solve the problem of student “cheating” and rebalance power in favour of the instructor. There is a growing need for a thoughtful rebalancing of the technology-pedagogy complex in higher education, including a conversation on intentional and facilitated post-pandemic evolution and transformation, which must inevitably include technology, but which must do so with a keen eye towards equity and ethics (Moore and Tillberg-Webb 2023).

One group of technologies of considerable concern that emerged at a scale previously unseen were remote online proctoring services, which rely on human proctors, artificial intelligence (AI), or a hybrid of the two to identify behaviours that could potentially indicate academic misconduct during assessment (Flaherty 2020). These technologies have the potential to cause harm to already marginalized or vulnerable people as they frequently lead to students who are racialized (particularly Black and Brown learners for whom racist AI

models struggle to recognise faces), who have disabilities, who are gender non-conforming, or who portray a range of other diverse factors being unfairly accused of cheating (Swauger 2020). Beyond this problem, students are forced to reveal sensitive private information to corporate entities (which led to several high-profile privacy breaches) and face unrealistic demands for privacy and preferential internet access in often shared spaces. The anxiety that these systems cause has been well documented and is likely to significantly impact the performance of many students, compounding an already stressful situation (Stewart 2020). Remote online proctoring, like other systems that assume students are trying to “cheat” rather than seeing them as curious, eager learners who intend to uphold agreed-upon standards of integrity, can severely erode trust between students and faculty. While many alternatives exist, pushback against more punitive carceral and surveillance pedagogies led to calls from some faculty and higher education leaders to discard online and flexible education approaches as quickly as possible in favour of a return to on-campus activities.

In the early days of return-to-campus activities, the sheer logistical challenges of safely returning to physical classrooms led to many experimental practices that were equally, if not more, challenging than the rapid transition to online learning had been. Faculty were faced with a teaching environment that still required physical distancing and masking, with very small numbers of students able to attend in-person classes in most situations. Creative uses of class timetables such as hybrid or hyflex approaches, as well as physical distancing in large spaces allowed for some in-person teaching to resume (Nurunnabi and Almusharraf 2020). Some taught behind plexiglass shields, with the constant hum of air purifiers and ramped-up air exchange systems as the soundtrack to classes where group work was impossible and interaction was limited.

Hybrid-flexible or hyflex approaches, which were originally developed in 2005 to meet the needs of a specific cohort of students who needed the flexibility to be in-class or online at any given time in the semester (Beatty 2019), emerged as a potential solution that

many universities gravitated towards during the transition back to campus. Hyflex was seen as an approach that would enable those who wanted to teach and learn on campus to be able to have small, physically-distanced and masked cohorts of students in specially equipped rooms that allowed for broadcasting to (and hopefully, from) a second group of students who were online (Lederman 2020). Cynically, this approach allowed some institutions to advertise that they were offering on-campus teaching, when in fact there was very little capacity to have students in physical classrooms together. The other reality of the situation was that the hyflex pedagogy, especially when implemented as a one-off rather than across a program, is one of the most difficult pedagogical feats to pull off, with instructors having to design activities that intentionally include in-person and online cohorts simultaneously, constantly checking that the two groups are at the same place of understanding, all while managing the inevitable technology glitches that arise. Some institutions, however, genuinely saw this as an opportunity to redesign whole programs in a student-centred and flexible way that they predicted would serve them well in the post-pandemic environment (e.g., Harley and Long 2021). They saw success where instructors were more open to leaving behind traditional classroom structures and focusing on student-centredness, equity, accessibility, student choice, flexibility, and risk tolerance. It remains to be seen whether the majority of institutions who invested heavily in technology and classroom upgrades to enable these types of pedagogies will be able to maintain, or perhaps even expand, the hyflex approach in the future.

This volume explores the lived experiences of instructors as they charted their way through the vast array of pandemic pedagogies that emerged in a rapidly changing learning landscape, navigating difficult questions of equity and accessibility in environments and approaches that most were unfamiliar with.

Methodological Pluralism in Researching Online, Open and Equitable Education

There are many ways that online, open, and equitable education can be pursued and understood. This volume aims to capture how colleagues across the world made efforts to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic while holding true to principles of open and equitable education through online media. Such a pursuit was conceptually and methodologically varied. As such, the volume does not forward one singular conceptual model associated with addressing equity and open access in online higher education, nor does it advocate for one particular methodology. We see enormous value in the different assumptions and contextual reflections offered and adopted in individual chapters. Authors reflect on what it was like from a teaching and learning vantage point in responding to and addressing matters of online, open, and equitable education during the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, at the time of writing many of the chapters, the pandemic had not officially ended, and most were still only planning to be going back to a predominantly face-to-face learning environment in the near future, once restrictions were lifted. In that sense, the considerations offered in this volume are in no way conclusive or exhaustive of the pandemic experience. Rather they offer insight into how individual colleagues responded and were impacted, pedagogically.

Across the contributions we see an emergence of the use of similar approaches to capturing pedagogical strategies. The use of scholarly personal narrative and autoethnographic approaches are dominant in the ensuing pages, complemented by reflective pieces in which authors use survey and interview methods to explore and understand the student experience of their pedagogical innovations. This section unpacks some of those methodological approaches, as we believe it is important to share how online, open, and equitable education are understood.

Autoethnography and scholarly personal narrative are forms of qualitative research that are focused on the personal experiences and perspectives of the researcher, situated in a particular political,

social, or cultural context. These methods are often considered to be non-empirical, as they do not involve the collection of data through the use of scientific methods such as experiments or surveys. Instead, autoethnography and scholarly personal narrative rely on the researcher's own experiences and reflections as the primary data source. The researcher may also incorporate other forms of qualitative data, such as interviews or documents, to provide additional context and depth to the study.

While autoethnography and scholarly personal narrative are not empirical in the traditional sense, they are still rigorous as a research method when they are carefully planned, executed, and analyzed. For example, Ng and Carney (2017) contend that scholarly personal narrative, in particular, relies on scholarly frameworks and leverages reflective practice to understand interpersonal dynamics in learning spaces and wider academic communities.

Scholarly Personal Narrative

The use of scholarly personal narrative in the scholarship of teaching and learning has garnered attention in recent years as a way to provide rich, nuanced accounts of teaching and learning experiences. Scholarly personal narrative can be an effective way to communicate research findings to a wider audience, as it can be engaging and compelling for readers (Bochner and Ellis 2003). Ng and Carney (2017, 134) note that:

For the purposes of [the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL)], which values the methodologies of disparate fields, [scholarly personal narratives'] inclusive parameters allow for the blending of personal narrative with the author's disciplinary approaches. [Scholarly personal narrative] creates a broader critical frame than autoethnography; it incorporates socio-cultural aspects yet can emphasize pedagogical study. Offering a viable practice on its own and in concert with other disciplinary tactics, [scholarly personal narrative] can

contribute to the larger movement of cross-disciplinary dialogue to enhance SoTL inquiries.

One benefit of using personal narrative in the scholarship of teaching and learning is that it can provide a detailed understanding of teaching and learning experiences that may not be captured by more traditional forms of research. For example, personal narratives can highlight the complexities of teaching and learning and illustrate the impact of various factors, such as institutional rules or norms, on these processes. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) note that scholarly personal narrative is particularly well suited to educational writing as instructors are often storytellers. Given that scholarly personal narrative focuses on how people experience the world, such research collects stories and explores experiences (Gudmundsdottir 2001). Scholarly personal narratives allow for outsiders to reflect on and analyze teaching and learning experiences, leading to the possibility of new insights and understanding (Bochner and Ellis 2003).

To be clear, scholarly personal narrative in the context of SoTL requires researchers to reflect, consider the scholarly literature, and juxtapose that literature against the personal experience. As a method, it requires researchers to apply conceptual understandings to personal experiences. This process enables what Schön (1983, 42) calls the “swampy lowlands” of teaching and learning spaces to be infused with the informed perspective of the research and the interpersonal aspects of their practice. As Ng and Carney (2017, 143) note, “For SoTL researchers, this methodology may illuminate in fresh ways the ‘messy,’ nuanced arena of teaching and learning while simultaneously highlighting the generalizable value of findings.”

Autoethnography

According to Ellis and Bochner (2000), autoethnography is a form of qualitative research that allows the researcher to bring a unique and personal perspective to the study by using their own experiences as data. In the scholarship of teaching and learning, autoethnography can be a useful tool for exploring and understanding one’s own teaching practices and the impact they have on student learning. For

the purposes of this volume, autoethnographic approaches can help in unpacking some of the more local or contextually specific challenges faced by instructors in the process of engaging and implementing ideas stemming from the literature, whilst reflecting and linking to challenges identified in the literature around efforts to foster online, open, and equitable education environments during the pandemic (Ellis and Bochner 2000; Duarte 2007; Cook-Sather, Abbot, and Felten 2019; Felten 2013; Verwoord and Smith 2020). Through the process of reflecting on their own experiences and emotions, the researcher can provide a rich and detailed understanding of their contextualized teaching and learning experience that may not be possible through other methods (Clandinin and Connelly 2000).

Another opportunity offered by autoethnography is that it can provide a useful framework for educators to reflect on their own practice and identify areas for growth and improvement (Richardson 1997). By closely and critically examining their own experiences and beliefs about teaching and learning, educators can develop a deeper understanding of their own teaching philosophy and how it shapes their classroom practice (Denzin and Lincoln 2011).

The differences between scholarly personal narrative and autoethnography can often be difficult to demarcate. Certainly the boundaries between the two methodological approaches can be fuzzy at best, but the literature seeks to differentiate between these approaches arguing that scholarly personal narrative is more of a reflection on the personal dimensions of the author's experiences, in this case around supporting online, open, and equitable educational environments. In contrast, autoethnography seeks to connect the personal experience within a broader context of social and cultural meanings. In this volume, the autoethnographic accounts connect into scholarly debates existing within the literature around fostering online, open, and equitable teaching and learning environments. In the context of collaborative autoethnographic studies, consent to share, reflect, and critique experiences is required and thus subject to institutional ethics approval (Godbold et al. 2021).

Both approaches are often narrative in style, which can be effective in capturing the nuanced ways that open and equitable online higher education can be pursued. The narrative dimension of scholarly personal narrative and autoethnography enables storytelling and for the authors to be more vulnerable in approaching the subject matter. This vulnerability can be powerful when the goal is to capture the difficulties in pedagogical choices. As many of the chapters in the volume portray, pedagogical decisions were often guided by constraints in individual capacities, in the uniqueness of institutional contexts, and by the types of technologies available. The scholarly personal narrative and autoethnographic approaches adopted here have brought to life the unique and complex conditions available to scholars.

Interviews and Surveying

Interviews and surveys are widely-used methods in SoTL for gathering data about the perspectives, experiences, and perceptions of students and instructors. Berenson (2018) argues that in SoTL work it is important to be transparent about contexts where studies are explored and the methodologies and approaches adopted. In this sense, authors in this volume using interviews and surveys gather data on a wide range of topics, such as students' learning experiences, instructors' teaching practices, and the effectiveness of specific pedagogical strategies. The use of interviews and surveys in the ensuing chapters are useful in identifying areas for improvement and evaluating the impact of interventions or changes in instruction.

SoTL researchers have found that these methods can provide valuable insights into the complexities of the teaching-learning process (Divan et al. 2017). For example, according to Bass (1998), interviews and surveys can help to elicit the tacit knowledge of instructors and students, and to help us understand the perspectives and experiences that shape their practices. Similarly, Shulman (1986) argues that these methods can help to reveal the underlying assumptions, values, and beliefs that guide teaching and learning, and to identify the factors that influence the success or failure of educational interventions. Whilst both example articles aren't specifically focused

on interviews and surveys, the ideas expressed in them come from their examinations of teachers' knowledge and SoTL.

The chapters in this volume move between these methodologies, offering rich and authentic accounts of how colleagues across a varied set of institutions and in different higher education settings adapted, adjusted, and enabled online, open, and equitable education to take place. The methodologies engaged not only serve as a signal to how others might approach such SoTL work but also are well aligned for uncovering how notions of equity and openness are pursued under a condition of online (albeit, emergency remote) teaching.

Volume Contribution

This volume is divided into two sections addressing different foci of change/support initiatives in postsecondary institutions centered on questions of equity, access, and learner success. The first section focuses on student learning, and the second explores faculty development.

Student Learning in Online, Open, and Equitable Education

This first section includes stories, evaluations, and reflections at the level of the course, as individual educators worked to transition course design, instruction, and assessment to the remote context. In these chapters we see the centrality of creating connection and community in an online learning context, made more pressing during the pandemic when learners and instructors were isolated in many ways. The educators in these chapters share their experiences of creating evidence-based learning experiences in an online context at a time when there was a decided dearth of time for thoughtful transition to this different way of teaching and learning.

Akpojivi's chapter explores the challenges of migration to remote teaching in the face of significant existing inequalities amongst South African universities and amongst South African students, the majority of whom do not have access to the internet at home. The author asks how, in this context, one should approach ensuring all students' needs are met. This rich autoethnographic account from

media and communications studies (a discipline argued to require lecturer–student contact) considers emergency and planned transitions to remote teaching. Rather than align with the contention that educators should reduce expectations during the pandemic, Akpojivi eloquently and convincingly argues that careful and contextually relevant course and instructional design should aim to increase engagement and participation among all students, including those typically marginalized.

Miller-Young, Jamieson, and Beck use a cross-sectional multi-method survey of students in a course designed to facilitate social connection through the use of self-determination theory (SDT). Outcomes show the positive impact a SDT designed course has on students' engagement and intrinsic motivation, found to be essential during the pandemic but also of great value for online learning at any time. Miller-Young, Jamieson, and Beck explore optimizing active learning for large classes, employing asynchronous and synchronous approaches to enable student engagement and learning, and describe how tools for connection can be leveraged in post-pandemic online learning. Their findings and recommendations can valuably inform online and blended team-based learning courses in other contexts.

Arce-Trigatti and Gaulden describe their transition of a team-based activity to an online format in an introduction to sociology course at an institution serving primarily underrepresented, non-traditional, first-time-in-college students. This scholarly personal account considers the issues experienced while creating a theoretically grounded inclusive online learning environment for students, incorporating digital inclusion whilst anticipating and acting to mitigate students' lack of access and skills in using digital tools essential for online learning. The authors share the outcomes of their student success-centered strategy to address systemic challenges during the pandemic with a nod to how they may be leveraged to reduce inequities in the future.

Lachapelle, Finnis, DeMill, and Gregory discuss the rapid and responsive development and implementation of *Pandemics: Culture, Science, and Society*, a course open to all students, staff, and alumni

from across one Canadian institution during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. The course highlights the possibilities for online, open, multidisciplinary education, including elegant ways of managing teaching logistics that utilize the strengths of each member of the teaching team. This scholarly personal narrative reflects on how connection, community, and engagement were fostered in a course centered on a topic that crossed disciplines and mattered to learners across and beyond the university community. The innovative approach to course design and delivery was enabled by institutional support, allowing the authors to adapt, engage, and reflect on issues as they arose, a structure and approach that could be used to engage learners with other complex and pressing social problems.

Clobes' personal narrative explores interventions in three courses taught at a Hispanic-serving institution with over half of the student body being first-generation students. They set out to address issues of student disengagement, missed assignment submissions, and overall academically weaker course performance. The interventions included creating accountability groups, doing individual outreach, ensuring timeliness and quality of feedback, scheduling with flexibility, and taking actions to get to know students and connect them to each other in the course. Clobes' interventions resulted in improvement in attendance, assignment submission, and course performance. The author convincingly argues that, while these actions took time to complete, the desire to undertake them was driven by a dedication to students and their learning.

Kwon, Kwak, Smith, Zhang, and Carter-Rogers examine international students' mental and physical health and well-being during the pandemic. Through a survey and focus groups, the authors investigate the academic challenges of online learning, exacerbated by the pandemic, as experienced by international students in Nova Scotia. The findings identify pandemic challenges faced by international students over and above their typical challenges in transitioning and studying in a new context and culture: namely not being able to practice English, create local social networks, and

experience immersion in and exposure to Canadian culture. The authors make recommendations for targeted support to complement evidence-informed course design and broader opportunities for social connection and network creation.

Faculty Development in Online, Open, and Equitable Education

The second section in this volume highlights changes or interventions at the institutional or program level, focusing on initiatives for faculty development and associated structures and policies during the COVID-19 pandemic. From these chapters we can see stories of the innovation and resilience of colleagues that permeated our institutions and consistent themes of what was valuable in faculty development during the pandemic—namely equity-informed practices. As importantly, these chapters identify actions that sought to center equity in the teaching and learning environment and provide inclusive and accessible learning experiences for students.

Bateman and Benner conducted focus groups and interviews with teachers in several disciplines in a Quebec college about challenges faced and factors that facilitated navigation through the pandemic. The authors discuss their findings with a view to capitalize on the imperative for educational change instigated by the pandemic. The authors explore the shift to blended learning as a lever to advance change toward more equitable and learner-centered teaching, supporting teachers' professional growth through blended learning development framed by their advancement of a "blended learning mindset" in the transition back to face-to-face teaching in fall 2021.

Wright, Grain, and Black outline an approach to provide support to faculty as they "kept teaching" during the pandemic at one Canadian higher education institution. The chapter focuses on the results of an evaluation survey completed with participants in an intensive training program called transitioning to online teaching (TOT). The evaluation demonstrated that faculty valued the professional development being technology-rich, task-oriented, experiential, and relational. The authors highlight the importance of building

community with adult learners, particularly in an online context, and the importance of reminding educators they were not alone, countering the isolation and anxiety they experienced during the global pandemic. A strong sense of community fosters an inclusive, supportive, and collaborative atmosphere that helps faculty find ways to enable student success whilst taking into account unique needs and conditions faced by diverse student populations.

Driessens, Charron, Lafrance Horning, and Maher share their experiences in a small postsecondary institution that was in the early stages of establishing a formal teaching and learning center when the pandemic hit. They examine how the team fared in supporting faculty during the pandemic, given this starting point. The authors, as staff, faculty, and leadership central to the implementation of the center, engaged in an innovative dialogue to explore their lived experiences, including challenges, opportunities, and lessons learned. They describe how the unit worked to build skills, change mindsets, and establish and strengthen relationships across roles and titles, setting the stage for the center to thrive and contribute to the institution in the post-pandemic era.

Finally, **Weilandt, Marynowski, Graham, Beaudon, Dixon, Malla, and Pantazi** examine the experiences of instructors, as they transitioned and taught online from May 2020 to May 2021, through an institution-wide survey followed by select in-depth interviews, to discover what can be learned to inform post-pandemic teaching practices. The results they explore are related to the varied roles educators stepped into as online instructors, those of instructional designer, content creator, communicator, community builder, and professional learner, with recommendations on how to support post-pandemic practice in each.

Implications for Online, Open, and Equitable Education in the Post-Pandemic Era

As reflected in the diverse responses of the authors, the pandemic has taught us much about the challenges and possibilities of pursuing online, open, equitable education in our university environments.

The chapters in this volume lay out efforts taken and reflect on experiences in trying to make learning and supporting learning during the pandemic meaningful. They provide a glimpse into how educators (including professional support staff and administrators) across the disciplinary spectrum attempted to make sense of this new context and to reframe much of what they knew previously about teaching and learning to work within an environment of uncertainty and constantly changing restrictions. These lessons and experiences, whilst not exhaustive, give some sense of how institutions can support and enhance the educational experience for students with a much wider array of needs and desires going forward. These stories can help us to facilitate pedagogical innovation that dares to look past historical norms and embraces the complexity of a world where widespread disruption from pandemics, natural disasters, and climate change are common events.

Drawing on the reflections here, it is evident that institutions need to support a new and critical focus on fostering effective online, open, and equitable education environments at scale that is informed by the recent experiences. This is, in part, because the widened audience for higher education has discovered the empowering nature of choice, but also as a response to improving the resilience of our institutions as they prepare to face similar challenges in the future. We consider three broad areas where support and resources can be organized and offered: the first is focusing on pedagogical design needs; the second is investing in and maintaining enabling infrastructure; and the third is building cultures of community and research.

Supporting the Pedagogical

Supporting the pedagogical speaks to ensuring that our institutions develop the skills and strategies necessary to make reaching the potential of good online, open, and equitable education a reality. This often means centering student learning in the training and supports that are offered to faculty, creating institutional policies and processes that allow and encourage pedagogical experimentation, and actively supporting the maintenance of diverse learning

modalities and experiences that are made available to students. During the pandemic, most of our institutions invested in support systems—technological, human, and policy—to ensure university education could carry on despite the public health crisis. Pivoting to emergency remote teaching resulted in significant pedagogical shifts for many of our colleagues that demystified a modality and set of technologies and pedagogies in ways rarely experienced or even possible before. It was recognized that institutional policies needed to rapidly adapt in order to foster equity for students and faculty.

In support of students, many of our institutions created programs for loaning technology and ensuring access to the internet, introduced compassionate grading policies, encouraged authentic and continuous assessment, and attempted many other strategies to foster flexibility and ensure as many people as possible could continue to participate. There was a focus on minimizing negative academic impacts during a stressful time, and new programs were developed to promote well-being and mental health, providing these services to students, many of whom may not have previously considered seeking such support. Faculty were supported through significant investments in training and guidance on how to deliver online courses, new technology was made available and the functionality and reliability of existing systems was enhanced, tenure clocks and teaching evaluations were paused to reflect an understanding that we were in a crisis, and efforts were made to accommodate familial and other personal pressures. Coming out of the pandemic, we have the opportunity to take what we learned and experienced and do better with it, avoiding a rushed return to systems that did not serve many in our communities well before and which are unlikely to serve them well in a post-pandemic era.

Critical in this effort is for our institutions to maintain the investments in pedagogical support for faculty and to center equity in our pedagogical strategies and policies. Much of what was considered appropriate for addressing equity during the pandemic continues to be good practice for student learning post-pandemic. A consistent theme in this book is the notion of providing flexibility and

choice, with a focus on student engagement and participation, that tend to support the development of engaged learning communities. Engaging our students as partners in their learning journey through pedagogical approaches such as active learning strategies, group discussions, and collaborative projects that facilitate peer interaction and participation, we know that students are more likely to be successful. These practices were largely able to transition from an in-person to online modality, but the way we implement such approaches in online learning has not always received the priority or support necessary to make it equivalent to in-person classes. The pandemic taught everyone that it is important to explicitly plan how to engage our students in online spaces, when and how to best utilise technology, and where more experimentation is needed.

For example, asynchronous learning opportunities empower our students to engage in their learning journey in the most flexible of ways, working largely on a timeline of their own choice (within the constraints of a semester timetable), but it still requires significant pedagogical planning and support to be effective. Even in asynchronous delivery modes, students need and benefit from meaningful interaction, building relationships with faculty and amongst their peers, and they are most motivated when their assessments are contextually relevant to their lives. In this sense, we need to build pedagogical experiences that factor all these things in, which requires appropriate pedagogical training and institutional policies that emphasize flexibility, collaboration, empowerment, and ways to adopt active and experiential learning in both online and face-to-face contexts.

Similarly, one of the important pedagogical learnings for many faculty was a better understanding of the power of the internet and digital connectedness to foster deep student learning and support diverse pedagogies. Many discovered new ways of connecting with their students and that students were connecting with each other. For example, where it was once assumed that teamwork or group projects were not advisable or possible in online courses, this was revealed to be a fallacy as students used a variety of communication

media and strategies, many of which are outside the sanctioned institutional tools and invisible to faculty, to work together in online and hybrid teams. The connection to vast amounts of data and information online, and ways to actively incorporate these into pedagogy, was also revelatory to many who had previously considered learning to take place within a bounded space with resources provided by the instructor. This idea also challenged traditional understandings of assessment practice, as those approaches frequently only work in a resource-limited, artificially restricted environment that bears no resemblance to the modern world.

Coming out of the pandemic, support needs to be provided to utilise diverse assessment methods that evaluate different skills and abilities, account for student pressures on their time, and reduce the reliance on high-stakes timed exams and other inauthentic assessment strategies. Online, open, and equitable learning necessitates that we support a wide diversity of opportunities for students to demonstrate their understanding (e.g., presentations, team projects, portfolios), incorporate student choice and agency in assessment practice, and provide meaningful feedback on their work so that they can learn from their mistakes. In online learning this is no short order, but requires commitment, courage, and humility as we test out different pedagogical approaches, and demands the vocal support of institutional leaders that provides permission to experiment, and even, potentially, to fail.

Investing in Enabling Infrastructure and Design

Throughout the pandemic, universities invested in infrastructure that enabled online, open, and more equitable educational environments to emerge. Everything from injecting resources into teaching and learning centers traditionally marginalized within university budgetary priorities, to educational technologies, to incentive structures that foster pedagogical innovation at the course and curriculum levels, and to student bursaries. Such an infusion of financial and human resources has rarely been seen before in the history of our sector, with a result that demonstrated incredible possibilities.

Teaching and learning centers were central to the pandemic response at our universities and showed what could be achieved when this element of the institutional mission was appropriately supported. The capacity of teaching and learning centers to make a tangible difference in enabling faculty to adopt, experiment, and feel supported in accepting appropriate pedagogical strategies and technologies needs to continue to be recognized and appreciated. But it cannot stop there; teaching and learning centers need to embrace a more activist stance when promoting the possibilities in online, open, and equitable education. Passively waiting for faculty to reach out is no longer an option. The imperative of equity requires that more is done to advocate and embed inclusive pedagogical approaches in proactive ways, instead of patching things onto courses. And here both course- and curriculum-level interventions and incentives can be helpful.

Teaching and learning leaders across our institutions need to find mechanisms to integrate culturally responsive teaching methods and content that promote inclusivity and engagement among all students. Creating incentives for faculty and disciplinary units to value these aspects in course and curriculum design can take shape in a number of different ways, from degree-level expectations that require these principles be present in new course and degree proposals, to ensuring sufficient educational development support is available to units so as to lighten the burden of design, to internal grants available to individuals or units interested in pursuing new course or degree ideas. Positive incentives will encourage faculty to adopt a diverse and inclusive curriculum that reflects, encourages, and welcomes a wide range of perspectives and experiences. The pandemic showed us this.

As readers will see across the pages in this volume, it is critical that we maintain our pandemic-driven investments in technology, and the human infrastructure that supports it, to enable online, open, and equitable education. Indeed, online education would not be possible without a core suite of communication, collaboration, assessment, and administrative tools. Learning management systems,

audience response or polling systems, interactive whiteboards, and diverse feedback tools that foster connection with and amongst students are just a few examples of technologies that enable engagement. The use of technology in our learning environments offers great promise for enhancing student engagement, but also surfaces unique risks faced by some learners and marginalized groups. But whilst the promise of technology to even the playing field may be present, such tools can also reinforce inequities if their use is not thought through carefully or if disparities in resource conditions between universities and individuals are not recognized and addressed.

Throughout the pandemic many of our institutions found ways to ensure access to necessary technology and (high-speed) internet for faculty members and many of our students, especially those from marginalized communities. Technology loans ensured all could access devices and get online where needed and possible. Many of our institutions invested in a suite of robust educational technologies that support diverse learning preferences and needs. All of these tools came with significant licencing, onboarding, and ongoing support costs. Going forward, careful consideration is needed around how technology investments can be sustained in support of enabling more online, open, and equitable university education. The pandemic helped demystify many educational tools and practices; we need to keep using them critically and creatively, but with a keen eye to ensuring equitable access for all learners.

Building Cultures of Community and Research

Fostering online, open, and equitable educational spaces in our universities is a never-ending project. Pursuing these priorities requires an ongoing commitment to understanding one's context and how students and faculty respond to different approaches and ideas. In this vein, online, open, and equitable education requires an inherent reflexivity as institutions constantly evaluate and re-evaluate their efforts. To do this, building cultures of community and research around teaching and learning are more important than ever.

Lave and Wenger (1991) contend that all learning is situated in relation to social context, in addition to time and space. They forward the idea that adults learn from and with others and engage with tools and activities in a social context known as a “community of practice.” Community of practice offers a good organizing tool for how to think about the institutional spaces for developing and supporting equity-forward approaches to teaching. Communities of practice enable participants to learn as they become involved with a community or culture of learning, interacting with the community and learning to understand and participate in its history, assumptions, cultural values and rules (Hansman 2001). We contend that such an approach can be particularly helpful to supporting online, open, and equitable education, given that they are often “characterised by mutual engagement of the participants, binding them into a social entity, joint enterprise resulting from the collective process of negotiations, and a shared repertoire of communal resources, including routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions, or concepts that the community has produced or adopted in the course of its existence” (Osman and Hornsby 2016). Lachapelle et al. (chapter 5) reinforce the value of such communities and how they can foster interdisciplinarity as well. Communities of practice can help advance online, open, and equitable education as participants share or coordinate resources, but also construct knowledge while working towards the shared goal of equity-forward approaches to teaching.

An equity-forward approach to teaching at universities refers to a deliberate and proactive focus on promoting equity, inclusivity, and fairness for all students throughout the educational experience. The goal of this approach is to address systemic barriers, eliminate disparities, and create an environment where every student has an equal opportunity to succeed, regardless of their background, identity, or individual circumstances. By adopting an equity-forward approach, universities can create an inclusive and empowering educational experience that supports the success of all students, fosters a sense of belonging, and prepares students to be active,

informed, and responsible global citizens. It requires a commitment from all stakeholders, including faculty, administrators, students, and the broader community, to work together in dismantling barriers and promoting equitable outcomes for everyone involved in the educational process.

Embracing reflexivity in online, open, and equitable education inherently means engaging in research to understand the impacts of our practices. This means conducting research on ourselves but also engaging with the robust and significant literature on equity in teaching and learning. The scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) needs to form a normal part of how we engage with online, open, and equitable education in universities. The SoTL framework proposed by Boyer (1990) was a response to bridging the research-teaching divide that often predominates university education. Boyer (1990) identified four domains or types of scholarship: Discovery, Integration, Application, and Teaching. The major principles underpinning SoTL (the fourth domain) in higher education are that the academic investigates their own practices of teaching and/or the student's practices of learning, and that the outcomes of such researched investigation are open for inspection and validation by colleagues and peers.

Despite the many complexities that may be associated with supporting online, open, and equitable education in a university, a SoTL frame and community of practice ethos provide useful ways of thinking about how to support colleagues as they engage with equity-forward approaches. Also, encouraging a scholarly approach to online, open, and equitable education makes it an attractive option for academics in higher education as they combine two core imperatives of their work.

Institutional support for research-informed teaching practices often works well when policies and internal funding incentives exist and encourage SoTL. Recognizing SoTL research as legitimate disciplinary research activity is important, as understanding our teaching environments and how are disciplines are taught is critical to disciplinary advancement (Hornsby and Grant 2021). Similarly,

making grants available for the scholarship of teaching and learning helps foster a culture of reflexive practice that improves student success (Osman and Hornsby 2016).

Advancing online, open, and equitable university education in the post-pandemic era requires that explicit attention continue to be paid within institutions to our teaching and learning environments. Supporting the pedagogical, investing in enabling infrastructure and design, and building cultures of community and research allow academic leaders and colleagues to think about ways to ensure the investments made and learnings accrued as a result of the innovations and experiences across the COVID-19 pandemic are not lost.

Conclusions

As noted earlier, the richness of this volume is seen in the geographic, institutional, and disciplinary diversity of the authors, and how they each approached pandemic teaching and learning in their context. Each chapter provides unique insights into approaches that enable open and equitable online education, enhancing our understanding of pandemic pedagogy and the potential for persistence of elements of those pedagogies in a post-pandemic world.

With this diversity acknowledged, in addition to the methodological connections between these chapters, we saw clear themes threaded through them, more powerful for their trajectory in connecting experiences across such varied contexts.

The significance of relationships across and between students, faculty, and staff was central in all chapters, positioned as a means to counter pandemic-related isolation and connect individuals to build community. As noted in the opening of this chapter, this is not a new theme in higher education teaching and learning, but one that was necessarily amplified by the global disruption of the pandemic. What is newly demonstrated here is the centrality and level of significance personal connection played so consistently in diverse learning environments around the globe. Intentional and evidence-informed action to build those relationships is an essential component of open, equitable education in all modes of delivery,

particularly online where these relationships are harder to establish through informal means.

Also apparent is how the pandemic provided an opportunity for educators to expand understanding, build skill sets, and see the value of evidence-informed teaching and assessment practices where these may have previously been less central to their academic practice. This speaks to the hope many hold for this experience to catalyze a transition to more learning-centered practices as pandemic restrictions are lifted and we have the opportunity to determine the direction of teaching and learning in a post-pandemic context. Do we return to a “business as usual” approach, ignoring much of what was learned and gained during the pandemic, or do we take an evidence-based approach and retain those gains, tweak elements that were challenging, and continue to move towards an equity-forward approach? The hope of the authors and editors of this volume is the latter, with the documented evidence provided here as a starting point for the larger conversation.

Finally, the spotlight the pandemic shone on equity, mental health, and accessibility of educational programming is one that we hope will be difficult to dim in the years ahead. As Arce-Trigatti and Gaulden remind us in their chapter, our education systems have long replicated societal inequity, and the pandemic served to reveal and deepen, rather than create, the inequities seen in educational experiences. This examination has led to a broader call for open, equitable education in all its forms and certainly sparked the creation of this volume. We hope the chapters here can serve as inspiration and catalysts for further and ongoing action.

And as we conclude this introduction, we wish to note that the process of creating this volume paralleled much of what we heard in the stories contained within it. There were delays, urgent issues that took precedence, and a need for flexibility as the circumstances of authors and editors changed, rapidly and without warning. As in our classrooms and institutions, there was a need for compassion and understanding throughout the process of creating this book. We are grateful to the authors who persevered with us, and to those

who were wise in stepping back when they knew contributing was too big a challenge in an already challenging time.

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