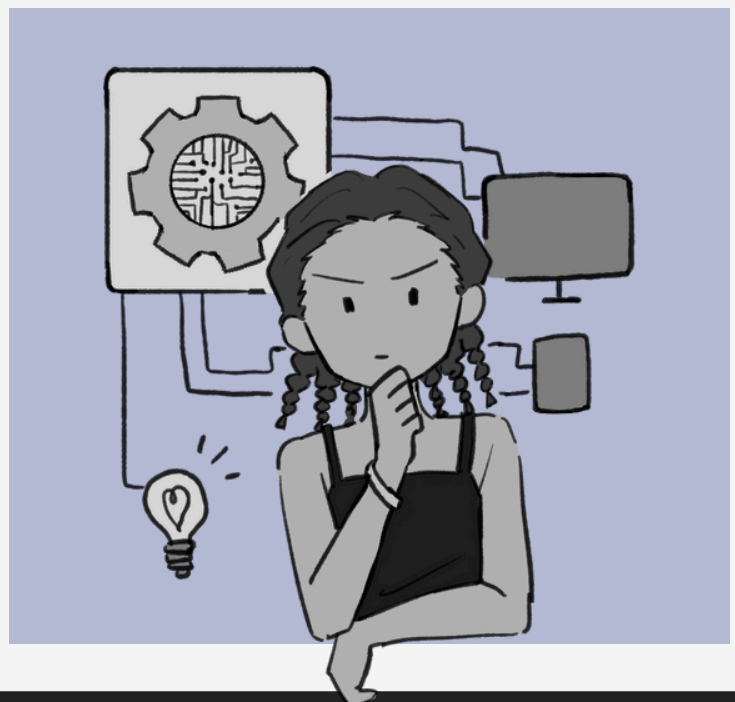


DIGITAL PEDAGOGIES TOOLKIT

Sussex Proposals for
Doing Digital Teaching
and Learning Differently

US
UNIVERSITY
OF SUSSEX



DIGITAL PEDAGOGIES TOOLKIT



Sussex Proposals for Doing Digital Teaching and Learning Differently

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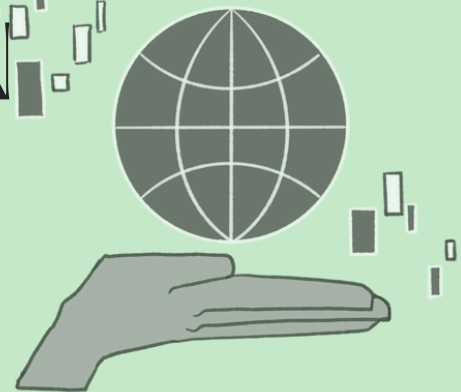
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INTRODUCTION



'Impossible until it's done'

– Nelson Mandela; University of
Sussex [strapline](#), 2023

What is the toolkit?

This toolkit aims to conceptualise new ways to think through online and digital teaching and learning, gathering data from members of the University of Sussex community who shared their **thoughts**, **fears** and **hopes** about digital pedagogy.

It has a dual purpose:

1. To share findings from a series of **workshops** with members of the University of Sussex teaching and learning community.
2. To encourage **further exploration** on the use of digitally informed teaching practices from a critical and ethical perspective, for the classroom and beyond.

How is it different?

This toolkit is different from other toolkits in that it has been created **collaboratively** by a staff-student research team and uses material from a series of online workshops with members of the Sussex community, representing a range of staff and student positions, including **faculty**, **professional services** and **students**. Those who took part will be introduced as 'participants' to emphasise their subjectivity and active participation in knowledge production for this project (Craddock, 2020).

What is digital pedagogy?

In order to gain a mutual understanding of the definition of digital pedagogy, we asked participants to choose their preferred definition of digital pedagogies. Surprisingly, all participants agreed on one definition:

A technique for working and learning with technologies, generating new, flexible, rich, quality learning experiences (Dangwal & Srivastava, 2016).

This is quite a broad approach to digital pedagogy and participants commended its prioritisation of flexibility and embrace of new technology and practices without a loss of quality or richness. Ultimately, the importance of digital pedagogies lies in creating **innovative digital learning frameworks** and enhancing teachers' **digital competencies** to provide interactive, meaningful learning experiences.

Who is it for?

It is for teachers, broadly conceived as **those who teach others** including group facilitators or curators, with an aim to de-emphasise any implicit position of teacher authority (Donovan and Anderberg, 2020). Furthermore, it is for those who manage teaching at department, faculty and institutional level.

Why has it been created?

It has been created because there are very few toolkits or guidance for teachers that teach on digital platforms or who use digital tools (for an example, see: [Exploring the Digital Toolkit](#)).

INTRODUCTION



How and when should you use it?

If you have 5-10 minutes:

Jump straight to the **Toolkit Summary** for a selection of actions you can apply in your own practice now.

If you have 30 minutes:

You could read the toolkit from the beginning or start from the section most relevant to you. The toolkit is separated into three sections.

Section 1: Roles and Responsibilities

- This section covers the role of the **teacher** and **student** and how teacher and student roles are being, or could be, problematised.

Section 2: Space and Dynamics

- This section looks at **format**, **accessibility** and **cultural considerations** in learning environments and should be reviewed before teaching begins.

Section 3: Activities and Practices

- This section looks at ways to build **engagement**, **critical digital literacy** and **learning communities** which can be accessed alongside teaching sessions.

The toolkit then concludes with a critical reflection on the **possibilities for transformative change** for digital pedagogy in higher education for the future.

These sections are roughly placed in chronological order but do not need to be read in a linear fashion. We encourage users to jump into any section that interests them. Each subsection gives an overview on contemporary **challenges** of teaching and learning, proposes some **solutions**, and finishes with **questions** for users to consider and **resources**.

If you have more time:

Use the **reflective questions** at the end of each section to shape your Continuing Professional Development journey.

You could create your own **learning journal** and set yourself goals based on your reflection. If you are training teachers or leading a department, faculty or institution, you could use these questions to shape **teaching and learning sessions** with your colleagues.

The toolkit is also designed to be an ongoing reference, so you can dip into it at any time when you are searching for ways to **refine and reflect on digital pedagogies**.

Contribute

This Toolkit is designed to start changing practice, so we'd love to hear more about how to implement it and how it inspires you to take other directions with digital pedagogies. **Contribute to the conversation** and **share your personal or group reflections** via the Sussex [Educational Enhancement Team's](#) blog '[Learning Matters](#)! The blog welcomes contributions from Sussex staff as well as external guests.

TOOLKIT SUMMARY



For Teachers

1 Teacher Practice

Frame learning **in-relation** to real world scenarios. Work with live or simulated material which exposes students to the types of digital (and non-digital) environments they might use in the contemporary **workplace**; involve more **project-based, hybrid** forms of assessment; use collaborative online platforms (such as Google Docs, Miro, Padlet) which allow **real-time review** of work-in-progress and regular **feedback** between teachers and students.

2 Student Agency

Create **digital spaces** where students can reflect on their **learning journey**. This might include reflecting on what they've learnt, struggled with; a space to upload their **favourite readings** and written notes; a view of their own engagement **metrics**, with the scope to narrativise and respond to this. These spaces could be related to a contribution grade and teachers could be given **access to review**, with the students' consent.

3 Curriculum Design

When designing curriculum, think critically about where digital technologies are relevant. Neither use digital tools for the sake of it nor use them to replicate activities that could be done in-person. Start with the **learning objectives** (goals), then fill your plan with the **content**, then consider the **best pedagogies** (digital and/or non-digital), including the best **learning spaces** (a lecture theatre, seminar, outdoors, a particular digital platform etc.,) for these.

4 Format

Prioritise **in-person** and/or **online synchronous** sessions for **discussion**, then consider how other approaches and tools can complement this, e.g., spaces for **content delivery**, continuing discussion asynchronously, or reflection. Adopt a **flipped learning model** which ensures that students can see the value in attending social, educative spaces and feel prepared to be there.

5 Accessibility & Culture

Retain the qualities of **humanness** in digital learning spaces that shape our in-person encounters. Plan **accessibility** into digital learning experiences from the outset; consider the **impact of surveillance** on certain groups and how your chosen platforms may or may not risk their safety; and be **transparent** about surveillance tools in learning spaces. Most importantly, students should be given the ability to **opt out** of any surveillance that makes them feel at risk.

6 Building Community

Disregard the timetable for the first few weeks of the academic year and bring students together, across cohorts and disciplines to engage in **project-based learning inductions** which embed critical digital pedagogies and other skills that help them **prepare for university life and learning**. Adopt **cohort-based learning**, where students work outside of their formal sessions in small communities to support each other's learning and build a community of trust.

TOOLKIT SUMMARY



For University Management

1 Infrastructure & Accessibility

Ensure staff have the **infrastructure** to support an approach to digital (and non-digital) **accessibility** that is built into curriculum by design, e.g., audio description, braille, closed captions facilities are made available. Embed critical digital pedagogies at an **institutional level**.

2 Digital Learning Platforms

Create fora that bring staff and students together to **evaluate existing and potential digital learning platforms** and tools. Co-create and **co-design** possible **digital futures** with the wider teaching, learning and support communities within the university.

3 Format & Group Sizes

Allow scope for teaching staff to **challenge** the idea that **online learning** automatically means learning **at scale**, and to plan learning journeys without the limitations of timetabling and physical space allocation: How could space be used for **1-2-1 experiences** and to create smaller learning communities? How could **hybrid learning design** move us beyond timetabling and space challenges?

4 Student Provision

If there is an expectation that learning involves substantial digital engagement, provide students with **appropriate laptops**, access to relevant **software** and **free printing**.

5 Streamlining and Flexibility

Reduce the range of **IT systems** staff and students navigate so it is clear what information is authoritative. Have one **central hub** where everything can be accessed. Make all courses available for **flexible** and **hybrid** learning, with the potential to drop in and out of learning, and move across physical and digital spaces as necessary to the needs of the student. This would involve reimagining the university as a **networked space** which allows for **personalised learning**.

6 Engagement Data

Rethink the **quantitative approaches** to measuring '**engagement**' which disadvantage those who can't **attend** or don't always appear to be '**present**' in learning spaces. Adopt a more human approach to measuring engagement that allows space for **self-reflection**, supporting students regularly in their learning journey, and **narrative reporting** on ideas, thoughts, and contributions.

CONTEXT



‘Something we have lost is the ability to make mistakes – privately and publicly.’ – workshop participant

Before exploring digital pedagogical tools and strategies, the broader context from which the Sussex community is approaching teaching and learning is important to briefly explore. Participants shared their reliance, habitual use, and **difficulty negotiating with boundaries** (big screen/little screen; home/work; personal/public; online/offline personas) in their digital engagement, reflecting upon questions of attention economy (Davenport and Beck, 2001). Students shared that they found it difficult to learn online in their own private domestic space, rather than in academic spaces. The **personal and the academic blurred**, for students and teachers alike, and this affected concentration for online teaching and learning. The ethical implications of using certain platforms (like Twitter/X) were raised, especially as this came into conflict with expectations to have an online presence in job applications.

Participants felt that there was less leniency regarding failure in digital environments, both in terms of the use of digital technology and what may be said in digital teaching environments. Participants identified that in both physical and digital classroom environments, they felt **fearful of saying something ‘stupid’** and receiving a lacklustre response from the classroom. In synchronous digital classrooms, people were less aware of how others might be responding to their contributions, due to others having their cameras and mics turned off. They felt like praise or admiration was lacking in digital contexts, which they found more accessible in the physical classroom. The fear of appearing ‘stupid’ was heightened when **trying new technologies**. Others shared the importance of trying new things and embracing possible failure as a productive way to learn new things.

Surveillance was a topic that came up frequently, reflecting fears of loss of privacy and advances in technology (Zuboff, 2019). Participants shared their fears of a constant gathering of data, including personal health information, which could fall into the wrong hands, and surveillance in school contexts reporting behaviour and detention statistics, which does not necessarily translate to better outcomes for students (Taylor, 2012). Participants variously engage with university platforms like Panopto which record lectures, but were fearful of how these recordings could be used against them. Participants were fearful of the influence of deepfakes which can convincingly replicate people’s voice and image.

Participants noted fears of **online cancellations or attacks** and how these might potentially affect them (Ng, 2022). Attacks can come from across the political spectrum, even from those who presumably share similar values, for political infractions in a context of online cancellations. On the other hand, an imminent fear was that certain political leanings expressed online might lead to direct **repercussions from institutions** who share a different political outlook. Participants specifically noted academics, students and groups who had been suspended by their institutions for expressing support for Palestine, as well as staff being attacked online for promoting Holocaust-related research after October 7th. There was a dichotomy between being politically radical online and fearing facing repercussions from institutions, and being perceived as saying or doing the ‘wrong thing’ online, and therefore being cancelled and attacked.

TEACHER PRACTICE

'That magical blend of humility and authority.'
– workshop participant



1 Challenges

Discussions amongst participants took place on the role of a teacher as a 'facilitator' or 'curator' to **de-emphasise any hierarchical position** over learners as passive recipients of knowledge (Friere, 1970; Castrillo, 2014). Some participants, however, reflected that 'not all teachers are made equal' in which a teacher's humanness is not automatically assumed, with evidence suggesting that **students see white men as having more authority in the classroom** (hooks, 1994). Participants note that those who teach critical race studies or gender studies are those most likely to receive complaints from students. The pressures of working in Higher Education (HE) were shared, with people feeling they didn't have time to reflect upon teaching practice or explore possibilities of new technologies.

Participants shared that, when learning about something, a teacher who is interested in their subject gets them '**excited**' and '**passionate**' and makes them want to learn. Building more **personal relationships** with students by sharing their background or experiences was generally preferred (Henry and Thorsen, 2018), although some felt like teachers could have '**main character syndrome**' if they showed off, made excuses for being unprepared or shared things that went off-topic! It is a difficult balancing act between a teacher **taking up too much space and not taking up enough**, especially in online distance learning (ODL) contexts where students share a desire for more teaching presence.

2 Proposals

It is important for teachers to be **flexible** and recognise when learners are struggling to keep up and **adapt** accordingly. Teachers were commended for being able to frame learning **in-relation**, both to real-world scenarios and to the learning objectives and assessments. A teacher being knowledgeable but '*confident to say when they don't know the answer to a question*' breeds **trust** and reflects human fallibility.

Knowing and demonstrating how learners are assessed using digital technology was highlighted as promoting **transparency** in the expectations of the course and the kinds of support that the teacher will provide. Giving appropriate, supportive **feedback** at regular intervals against the learning objectives was recognised as very important. Participants discussed making assessments more **personal** and **creative** to think outside the box of conventional ways of teaching and assessing.

3 Reflective Questions

How might you share personal experiences, and passion for the topic? How could you reflect upon pedagogical practice with other teachers and students? How can you set – and reassess – boundaries and expectations? How might you embed flexibility?

4 Resources

1. How faculty can map their own boundaries
2. The transformative potential of creative assignments in higher education

STUDENT AGENCY



'Students don't have any autonomy in their learning journey.' – workshop participant

1 Challenges

When considering digital pedagogies, the role of the student in the classroom is vital: how might students be more critical or involved in their learning and education? Participants noted a certain amount of **passivity** in students. This passivity was not necessarily in terms of engagement or class participation, but rather something that arose from the structure and content of student's education, which is often entirely **reliant on the teacher**. The student is usually only assessed through **quantitative data**, such as attendance and grades. Yet it was pointed out that this method of recording data does not actually reflect students' **own academic and personal journey at university**. The quantitative data produced primarily serves the needs of the university and the teacher as opposed to the student.

2 Proposals

Participants suggested a range of solutions to re-engage students and encourage them to reclaim agency in their education. Participants felt it was important to place students in an active role, where they would be able to take agency in recording their own learning journey (Gibson et al., 2016). A digital model was suggested as a space where students could explore their learning journey. Students could:

- Write **week to week academic reflections** about what they have learnt or struggled with.
- Upload a selection of their favourite work or readings, and then **reflect** and self-report on these.
- Have access to their own metrical data, for example how many readings they have downloaded and how many seminars they have attended. Students would be able to see their different engagements and **narrativise** these experiences.
- Access their learning journey **without institutional or teacher oversight**. It was debated if this could be marked, with suggestions that it could be built into part of a contributory grade.

Participants raised concerns that this kind of student learning journey tool might be difficult in some ways for students. Looking at data that confirms low attendance or difficulties can further isolate and demotivate students. Therefore, this kind of tool needs to be promoted alongside confirmation that it is **okay to make mistakes**, as part of a broader process of community building. This kind of community building might look like autonomous chat groups in student cohorts, as they provide spaces for students to talk freely.

3 Reflective Questions

What role does the teacher play in sessions? How much space do they take up? What role does the student play in sessions? How much space are they invited to take up? How could students be more empowered to take ownership over their learning journey?

4 Resources

1. [Structuring Effective Learning Journeys](#)
2. [Integrating digital learning hubs to support the student learning journey and build community](#)

FORMAT

'What does the digital or a platform offer specifically?' – workshop participant



Participants reflected upon the difficulties and possibilities produced by the Covid-19 pandemic. Expectations were to **migrate in-person teaching to online settings**, with limited provisions or training on how to do so. This meant that the experiences of both those teaching and learning in online settings was particularly challenging, with limited acknowledgement of the difficulties of getting to grips with new technologies and the stresses of living through a pandemic, along with the unknown distinctions and possibilities that online learning could offer in comparison with in-person.

1 Pros of online learning

- The need driven by Covid-19 meant people were able to explore technological solutions in ways that were previously unimaginable.
- Online learning means that people can take part from **all over the world**.
- Only the space in front of the camera needs to be presentable!
- There is a comforting sense of **anonymity** if you want to engage more passively with the camera and mic off.
- At the same time, being able to see people's names online helps teachers to keep track of who is talking in a way that is more difficult in person.
- Historically, teaching was written like textbooks. Online tools allow the creation of **non-linear, differentiated journeys** to (re)think how teaching takes place.

2 Cons of online learning

- Participants discussed the difficulties of meeting students' needs with online learning, with students indicating they prefer an **in-class or in-person 'presence'**.
- Online videos produced by teachers can feel like a textbook for some students.
- Those who teach online expressed the difficulties of being unable to see or hear students with cameras and mics off, with a lost sense of atmosphere.
- It is more difficult to **maintain students' attention** or gauge engagement on Zoom.
- In Zoom, only one person can talk at a time which can sometimes mean people talking over each other, affecting the confidence of speakers.
- Chats with neighbours during small or large group sessions to check understandings – what one participant called '**liminal spaces**' – are missing.

3 Reflective Questions

What is distinct that can be done in-person and what can be done online? How might you share reflections with students around how/why the space is being used? How can clear expectations be set on how the online space of teaching should be navigated and can this be co-created and adjusted if necessary?

4 Resources

1. Pedagogical Best Practices: Residential, Blended and Online
2. Nine steps to quality online learning

ACCESSIBILITY AND CULTURE



'We forget that we are actually dealing with people.' - workshop participant

1 Challenges

Participants shared that groups from certain backgrounds, contexts or countries may be more susceptible to **surveillance**, especially racialised groups, and may be subject to further marginalisation as a result. Considering the context from which students originate is a useful way to safeguard students. One participant shared that, instead of creating safe spaces, they talk to their students about creating 'accountable' spaces, in which people are invited to **share freely** but can be **challenged for the things they say** that might harm others.

Making online sessions **accessible** was discussed, both from the perspective of including those with financial issues (who may struggle to access a laptop or have problems with reliable Wi-Fi connection) and those who are neurodivergent, disabled or have a mental health condition. Students should ideally be **involved in any modifications** to ensure specific adjustments are beneficial for the student, but the time implications of managing multiple, sometimes conflicting, needs and complicated technological interventions can be overwhelming for staff.

The intersection of disability and racial politics coincides in the use of **attendance records**: the home office usually sets attendance as a condition of international students' visas and attendance records are typically lower for disabled and neurodivergent students, which typically leads to further intervention from the university. Although this data gathering can be useful for staff to reach out to students to offer further support, these structures of oversight can have the opposite effect for students who can feel **policed and ashamed** for their low attendance (Macfarlane, 2013).

2 Proposals

A key component of teaching involves **caring for students**, which is often an unpaid and underappreciated part of supporting students, made particularly challenging during the Covid-19 pandemic (Gray, 2022). Some participants noted that it is useful to consider small details in a student's day, such as how they **travelled to campus**, to discuss how even the journey to the classroom (how far students travel, the disruptions to the flow of their day, how hungry they might be) locates how they are able to learn. It is important to **humanise these day-to-day practices** in the classroom, to check in and connect with students to build community amongst students and teachers. These tend to be lost in both synchronous and asynchronous digital learning environments, but this does not need to be the case.

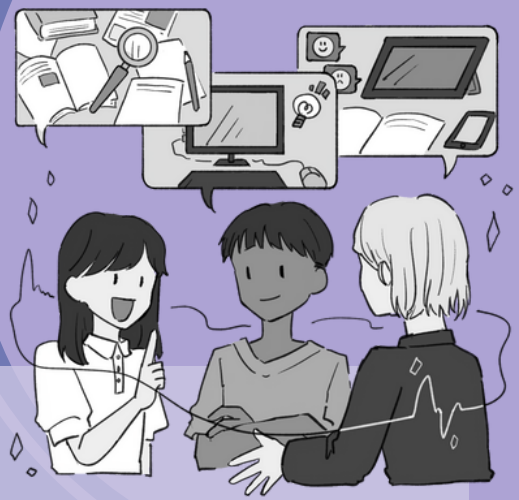
3 Reflective Questions

How might students' needs be better assessed? How can content/format/structure be modified to support disabled students? How can this be managed at an institutional level to remove the burden from teaching staff? Which (racialised, non-UK) students are more likely to be surveilled by university structures? How can surveillance practices be shared with students?

4 Resources

1. Accessibility Lessons for Higher Education
2. Safe and Brave Spaces Don't Work (and what you can do instead)

ENGAGEMENT



'Engagement is not just about surveying people.' – workshop participant

1 Challenges

Despite 'interactivity' being a buzzword linked to the digital, a lot of **loneliness** and **disconnection** was observed by teachers in online contexts, with the teacher feeling like they had to carry the discussions. How do teachers disrupt the likelihood of passivity in online settings?

Participants shared how they learn best, and discussed how various aspects (**setting, content, emotions**, etc.) affect their engagement levels (Boler, 2015). One opinion was that content and passion affects learning outcomes, alongside if the learning arose internally (from curiosity) or externally (they were told to do so). Space and engagement have a close relation, and people are more likely to be **passive** in **bigger settings** such as large meetings, webinars, or lectures.

While these opinions were based on the individual's ability to learn, clear expectations set by the teacher were a big factor in enabling confidence. For example, **clear expectations** of interactivity using a chat function or speaking aloud increases engagement in online lectures.

Participants felt that there was a lack of emphasis on the **differentiation** of each learner. Some learn well reading alone rather than collaborating in classrooms: 'Sometimes it's best when I'm left completely alone to investigate and explore.' This was a heightened difficulty with digital technology, which demands significant adaptation and attention from both teachers and students (Haleem et al., 2022). Therefore, there is a need to recognise these differences and create an environment which is **attentive to each students' needs**.

Managing limitations to one's attention was particularly challenging with online learning, where individuals are overwhelmed with a variety of notifications and content, and their attention tends to be **dispersed**. Participants agreed that how we learn is dependent on too many cultural/social factors, and although useful for self-reflection, a **set learning style cannot be applied all the time**. Adapting content and format for a set learning style in a classroom or online setting increased pressure on staff to figure out what works for the majority.

2 Reflective Questions

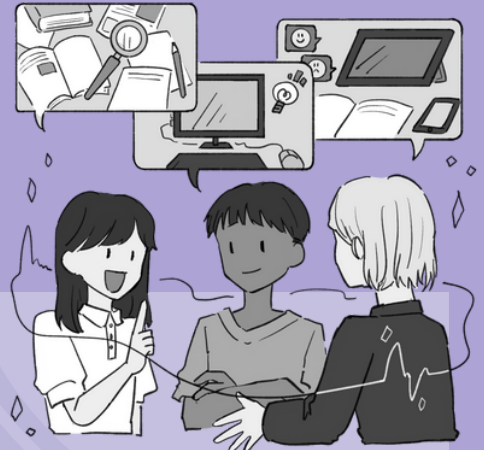
How is your students' attention and engagement impacted by their use of digital technologies? Can you provide a variety of different activities that appeal to different learning styles? Can you collaborate with students when setting expectations and intentions of certain spaces and invite them to share experiences of their engagement (anonymously, in one to ones, small groups)?

3 Resources

1. [How to Increase Student Engagement in Online Learning](#)
2. [5 Ultimate Ways To Ensure Learner Engagement In Online Learning](#)

ENGAGEMENT

'How could engagement be recorded differently?' – workshop participant



4 Connection and flexibility

Throughout the workshops, participants came up with two solutions: ways to promote more **connection and flexibility**; and a call to change the existing mindset about how passivity and engagement is **measured and recorded**.

One of the participants shared a successful case from their own experience that disrupted the passive student role. 'I found a huge shift in engagement from students when I shared tasks that I could see happening and students could collaborate on'. Creating online tasks where the teacher can see work happening in **real time**, or where students can **collaborate together**, is usually one of the best ways to promote interactivity in online spaces. Traditional learning formats should be challenged; lectures could be more **dynamic and interactive**, rather than a passive space where students sit and listen.

Instead of creating a set learning style for each individual, it is best to be **flexible** and create **opportunities and choices** for students and teachers to figure out what works for them in different contexts and situations.

5 Measuring Engagement

Participants identified a difference between passive and active engagement, with teachers noting that when students didn't seem to engage actively, teachers didn't feel seen. The notion of **active engagement** should be **problematised** for ignoring that of more passive learners.

A more welcoming mode of measuring and recording engagement should be created, assessed in a more human way, with one to ones or small group meetings, rather than focusing on current engagement data as the only appropriate mode of engagement. Three approaches to measuring engagement that could work in tandem:

- **Data collection:** statistics such as attendance, library data and grades.
- **Self reflection:** give the space for students to self reflect on their research journey based on the data collected as well as their personal experiences.
- **Human intervention:** create a space of support to keep students on track. Statistics can have a negative impact on students, and they need a place of contact and adaptable support.

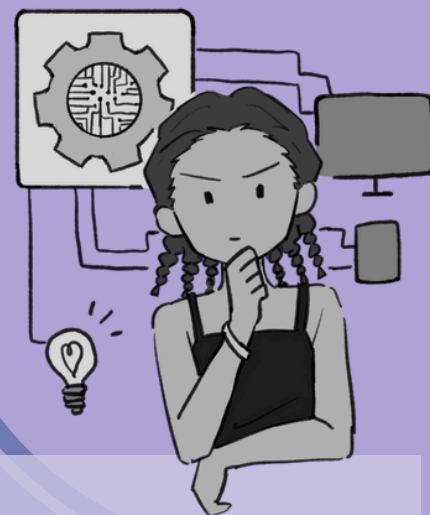
6 Reflective Questions

How is engagement measured and recorded in your teaching and learning setting? How is your teaching and learning setting supportive to those who might be passive rather than active engagers?

7 Further Resources

1. [Differentiating in the Online Classroom](#)
2. [Measuring Student Engagement in Higher Education](#)

CRITICAL DIGITAL LITERACY



'I don't use things critically/strategically - I just adopt it.' - workshop participant

1 Challenges

There was a mix of responses in terms of participant confidence with using technology and critically accessing information online. Some participants acknowledged a sense of being **uninformed** when they access and collect information online. Participants feared that digital tools were already available that might make their life easier but that they haven't yet found them or had the time to try them. Others indicate an awareness that they tend to see information that 'the internet chooses to show' them so they try to **vary their sources**. Some felt more confident about their use of technological tools and shared an 'obsessive' tendency to read technology blogs and **play with different software and tools**.

2 Use of AI

People were particularly fearful of the ways in which academia was being automated, with the rise of software like **ChatGPT** and how AI produced content is received as 'fact' (Hasanein and Sobaih, 2023). Participants shared a need to try new things, as well as being **critical** and **challenging sources** that come from certain places. They also discussed how students can be encouraged to question sources and build their own sense of digital literacy: **Where** did a source/data come from? **Who** wrote it? Is the author/source **reliable**? What have **others** said about the topic?

3 Proposals

Incorporating critical digital literacy was acknowledged as an important part of creating a broader introduction to **life at university**. Frequently considered difficult to pin down (Pangrazio et al., 2020), digital literacy is defined as '**socially situated practices**' which are 'supported by skills, strategies and stances that enable the representation and understanding of ideas using a range of modalities enabled by digital tools' (O'Brien and Scharber, 2008: 67). An **induction module**, that students can receive credit for, was discussed, where students could engage in activities across year groups on how to navigate university, on topics like: developing their **critical digital literacy**; how to engage in **university-style learning**; how to **conduct research**; and how to **write academically**, in a project-based environment.

4 Reflective Questions

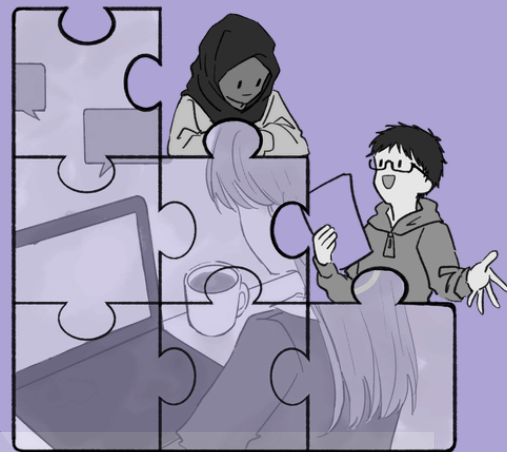
How do you question the platforms you use and the sources you find? How could you try new things using online and digital tools? How can you promote critical digital literacy in students? How could you induct students into university structures and practices?

5 Resources

1. [What are reliable sources?](#)
2. [Critical Digital Literacy Guide](#)

BUILDING COMMUNITY

'Pedagogy is about human relationships.' – workshop participant



1 Challenges

Throughout the workshops, participants shared that the humanness of learning is often lost within digital environments. **Lower passion** and **attendance** was recognised in Zoom lectures, with an example from Covid that online learning took away all the good aspects of School. 'I hadn't heard a teenager laugh in 8 weeks! Covid and online schooling **took all the joy away** and given them only Shakespeare.'

In this section, we will explore how digital pedagogies can change when we set the **personal**, the **human**, and the **emotional** as fundamental aspects of digital teaching.

2 Digital Logics

Breakout rooms were criticised as a failure in copying the aspects of seminars onto a digital platform. People tend to **engage variably** in breakout spaces.

Furthermore, Bates (2015) calls for the renovation of teaching models and a change in mindset regarding tools are used within learning. The core component of teaching, whether online in synchronous sessions or in person, should be about **facilitating discussions**, and teaching materials should be used to supplement this. However, currently the value is on the materials, and discussions, especially online, are seen as '**extra work**'.

There is a need to move towards a pedagogy based on **digital logics**. One step towards achieving this is to have open conversations on the platforms currently used in lectures. An example was raised about online classes, with an indication that students' turning off their cameras has become a norm. **Why use an audio visual setting** when many students don't want to be seen online?

3 Group Work

Student feedback suggests that students are rarely enthusiastic about group work. There have been issues reported by students about the struggles of finding a time to meet and a member not showing up, resulting in **uneven workloads and stress**.

Whilst assessed group work might be common across the university, there is a need to think about how we can create a setting for people to **want to work with each other**. A topic that should be discussed is the obligatory nature or willingness to do group work.

Cohort based learning was raised as a successful example of working in small groups. It is a new trend in online learning, where cohorts are built within communities which **enables people to learn together** and **build a community of trust**. Cohorts not only help individuals within their community, but have access to wider areas of interaction with other cohorts. It has proven valuable with consumers of online learning and is expanding its influence.

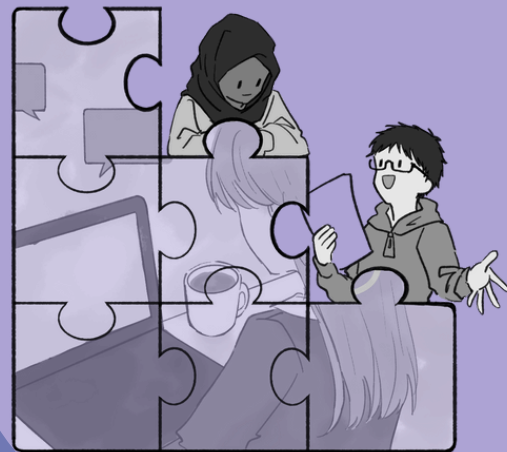
4 Reflective Questions

How could you avoid simply replicating in-person logics onto online platforms? How could group work be embedded more consistently?

5 Resources

1. The Power of Relationships
2. A guide to effective digital course design and delivery from four online learning experts

BUILDING COMMUNITY



'The community is structured to help each other.'
– workshop participant

6

Existing Tools

The creation of new tools is costly and time consuming. Therefore, there is a need to **utilise existing tools**, as well as train and share information around **digital literacy**. A range of digital tools were suggested to build community and interactivity in digital learning environments.

Gather Town

A creative virtual space where you **navigate different areas** as an **avatar**. This gives more options for liminal spaces and asynchronous interactivity than Zoom, which has become the norm since the Pandemic.

Talis Elevate

A **collaborative reading tool** embeddable into Canvas, which allows annotations on articles uploaded onto the interface. This enables students to add and respond to questions posted on the article, and helps them to **understand difficult texts together** online.

Loom

An asynchronous alternative to Zoom. Loom enables **screen/camera capture** with a chat room underneath. Presentations can be recorded, and it enables room for **specific discussions** associated with the topic.

Panopto

A tool which many teachers are familiar with, mainly used for recording lectures. In addition to screen and presentation capture, Panopto also has a **space for collaborative discussion**.

Padlet

A tool that offers opportunities for **sharing ideas in a group** and **comparing work across groups**. It works well in both synchronous and asynchronous environments, and across them e.g., students who are absent from a synchronous session can still contribute later.

There is a need to find a midway point between having too many and too few platforms used for online learning, which relates to **setting clear boundaries** between digital platforms used for **personal use** and for **educational/work purposes**. A solution suggested was creating a "My Sussex" platform used for all University related work.

7

Reflective Questions

How are relationships and communities built during teaching? What do students want from their online teaching? What tools and practices might help to build more community and liminal spaces in online environments?

8

Further Resources

1. [6 Strategies for Building Community in Online Courses](#)
2. [16+ Best Tools for Online Teaching for Digital Classroom Experience in 2024](#)

CONCLUSION

To conclude, we want to share **radical ideas** from participants that consider **provision, community, streamlining** and **flexibility**, and how **curricula, format** and **assessments** could be reimagined. While some of these ideas may feel far away from our current state of affairs, others might be more **possible** to enact in negotiation with **schools, departments** and the **institution** itself.

1 Provision

- 'Universities would provide every student with a decent **laptop**. **Printing** would be **free** so people can print out as many readings as they desire!'
- 'Using digital tools to actively help students in the **cost of living crisis** without getting rid of all face-to-face teaching.'
- 'Getting institutions to take on **radical digital pedagogies** at an **institutional level** rather than individual levels.'
- 'People could be involved in **co-designing learning technologies** rather than just adapt themselves to existing tools and their in-built affordances.'

2 Streamlining and Flexibility

- 'I would **reduce** the number of **IT systems** we have, so that everything is on one platform rather than students and staff having to navigate between them, never truly certain that they're on the authoritative one.'
- 'Make it easier to **adapt course content and assessment**, especially in response to changes (AI) in the wider world.'
- 'Make all courses available for **flexible learning**, with longer gaps between units.'

3 Community

- 'I envision a place where everyone is engaged and there is a really strong sense of **scholarly community**. A place **free of worries** about **commercialisation, high fees, underpaid teachers**.'
- 'I often think the size of communities in universities are too big. We need a **close knit supportive community** with different cohorts.'
- 'A **networked university space**, where students can move across digital and physical learning spaces, routes and opportunities in ways that are **personalised**, but created and managed internally – **free of surveillance** of staff and student data.'

4 Rethink curricula, format, assessment

- 'What **journey** do we want students to take in their learning? What are the **best approaches** to get them there? Each course should be **uniquely designed** to its requirements.'
- 'Rethink the **architecture** and **timetabling restraints** of the university – do all courses need 'lectures' and 'seminars'? What **other digital or physical spaces** and **formats** might be appropriate for learning?'
- 'How can we make the best use of the **digital tools** that students encounter through assessments? How can our assessments **prepare students** best for employment, post-university life (online and offline)?'

Teaching and learning using digital tools and logics is, in many ways, still in its infancy. There are many more digital pedagogical possibilities yet to be explored. These ideas may only feel impossible because they haven't been tried yet.

This toolkit provides an overview of the context in which the Sussex community are working and proposes possible **solutions** to **digital teaching and learning in higher education**. This covers the role of the student and the teacher; space and group dynamics; and activities to build critical digital literacy, community and engagement.

Continue the conversation with your ideas and examples of doing digital pedagogy differently by contributing to the **Educational Enhancement [blog](#)**.

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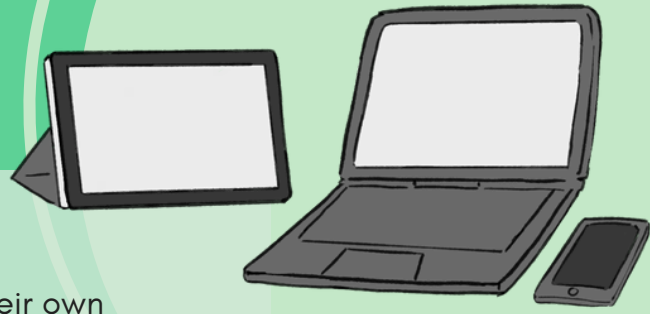
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RESOURCES



Teacher Practice

- [How faculty can map their own boundaries](#)
- [The transformative potential of creative assignments in higher education](#)

Student Agency

- [Structuring Effective Learning Journeys](#)
- [Integrating digital learning hubs to support the student learning journey and build community](#)

Format

- [Pedagogical Best Practices: Residential, Blended and Online](#)
- [Nine steps to quality online learning](#)

Accessibility and Culture

- [Accessibility Lessons for Higher Education](#)
- [Safe and Brave Spaces Don't Work \(and what you can do instead\)](#)

Engagement

- [How to Increase Student Engagement in Online Learning](#)
- [5 Ultimate Ways To Ensure Learner Engagement In Online Learning](#)
- [Differentiating in the Online Classroom](#)
- [Measuring Student Engagement in Higher Education](#)

Critical Digital Literacy

- [What are reliable sources?](#)
- [Critical Digital Literacy Guide](#)

Building Community

- [The Power of Relationships](#)
- [A guide to effective digital course design and delivery from four online learning experts](#)
- [6 Strategies for Building Community in Online Courses](#)
- [16+ Best Tools for Online Teaching for Digital Classroom Experience in 2024](#)

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Teacher Practice

How might you share personal experiences and passion for the topic? How could you reflect upon pedagogical practice with other teachers and students? How can you set – and reassess – boundaries and expectations? How might you embed flexibility?

Student Agency

What role does the teacher play in sessions? How much space do they take up? What role does the student play in sessions? How much space are they invited to take up? How could students be more empowered to take ownership over their learning journey?

Format

What is distinct that can be done in-person and what can be done online? How might you share reflections with students around how/why the space is being used? How can clear expectations be set on how the online space of teaching should be navigated and can this be co-created and adjusted if necessary?

Accessibility

How might students' needs be better assessed? How can content/format/structure be modified to support disabled students? How can this be managed at an institutional level to remove the burden from teaching staff? Which (racialised, non-UK) students are more likely to be surveilled by university structures? How can surveillance practices be shared with students?

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Engagement

How is your students' attention and engagement impacted by their use of digital technologies? Can you collaborate with students when setting expectations and intentions of certain spaces and invite them to share experiences of their engagement (anonymously, in one to ones, small groups)?

How is engagement measured and recorded in your teaching and learning setting? How is your teaching and learning setting supportive to those who might be passive rather than active engagers?

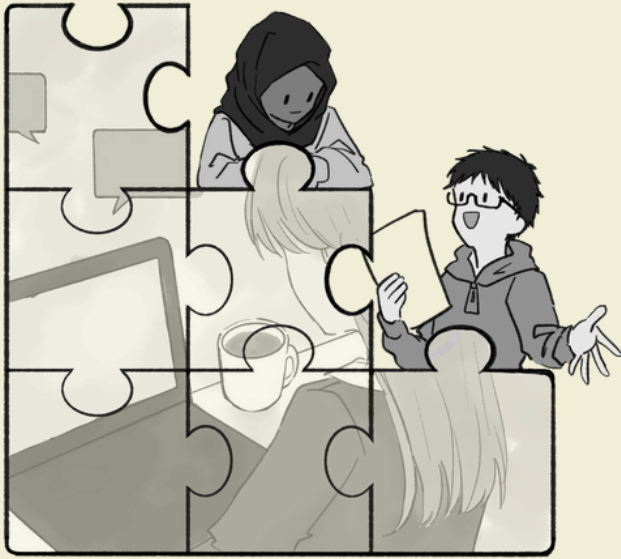
Critical Digital Literacy

How do you question the platforms you use and the sources you find? How could you try new things using online and digital tools? How can you promote critical digital literacy in students? How could you induct students into university structures and practices?

Building Community

How could you avoid simply replicating in-person logics onto online platforms? How could group work be embedded more consistently?

How are relationships and communities built during teaching? What do students want from their online teaching? What tools and practices might help to build more community and liminal spaces in online environments?



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