# Humanising online learning through the lens of engaged pedagogy

Molloy, K., Thomson, C.

The chapter will focus on humanising with technology, learning and spaces, regardless of context. Careful consideration will be given to multiple modalities of connection with students, providing as much flexibility as possible. As learning technologists, our work focuses on inclusion, diversity and accessibility, and, whilst it is underpinned by critical digital pedagogy (Stommel, 2014) and pedagogy of care (Noddings, 1995), it is deeply rooted in practicality, ensuring care for ourselves as educators as well as for students. We will view learning design through the lens of bell hooks’ “engaged pedagogy” (1994, 2003). We have facilitated several events on ‘care’, specifically critically exploring the narratives of resilience and well-being. At the core of these events was the exploration of how educators can care for themselves and students in the face of difficulties and an increased emphasis on the “banking model” in higher education (Freire, 1970). The outputs from these discussions and contributions as well as our lived experiences are collated here under three broad categories: presence, socialisation and engagement, and digital (un)tethering and self-care. “Presence” will explore perceptions of visibility and highlight the benefits and dangers of students occupying online spaces. “Socialisation and engagement” will examine differing views of how student engagement is enacted and how designing humanistic approaches can help build a strong learner community. “Digital (un)tethering and self-care” will highlight the importance of designing in self-care and implementing activities that ensure flexibility, autonomy and social contributions to help circumvent overload and burnout.

Progressive, holistic education, “engaged pedagogy” is more demanding than conventional critical or feminist pedagogy. For, unlike these two teaching practices, it emphasises well-being. (hooks, 1994, p. 7)

## Introduction

Educators frequently come to digital learning centres with a query about a specific technology or wanting to know which is the best technology for a particular task; this ”putting the cart before the horse”, where technology comes before pedagogy, is referred to as technical determinism (Sankey, 2019). This view can be simplistic. Considering post-digital education, wherein “digital technology is something in which we are entangled in complex ways”, can be more helpful when discussing learning design and technology (Fawns, 2019, p. 142). In this chapter, the focus is on humanising with technology, learning and spaces, regardless of the situation. Careful consideration will be given to multiple modalities of connection with students, providing as much flexibility as possible. Rather than considering specific individual differences or needs, we employ widely inclusive designs.

As learning technologists, our work focuses on inclusion, diversity and accessibility, and, whilst it is underpinned by critical digital pedagogy (Stommel, 2014) and pedagogy of care (Noddings, 1995), it is deeply rooted in practicality, ensuring care for ourselves as educators as well as for students. In this chapter, we view learning design through the lens of bell hooks’ “engaged pedagogy”. The praxis of which has roots in the philosophies of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire and Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh, and aspires to empower students and teachers alike (hooks, 1994).

We have frequently collaborated on ‘care’, specifically critically exploring the narratives of resilience and well-being. This work began before the pandemic but has become ever more important since. We facilitated workshops and sessions for several conferences and events, each designed with the participants in mind. These events needed to be as inclusive as possible, and engagement and learning were not to be predicated on live interaction. At the core was the exploration of how educators can care for themselves and students in the face of difficulties and an increased emphasis on the “banking model” in higher education (Freire, 1970). These live sessions, discussion forums, Padlet, Twalk (for more on Twalks, see Middleton & Spiers, 2019), and affective, creative activities afforded several connection points with participants.

This chapter has arisen from these discussions and contributions as well as our lived experiences, and will be addressed under three broad categories: presence; socialisation and engagement; and digital (un)tethering and self-care. “Presence” will explore perceptions of visibility and highlight the benefits and dangers of students occupying online spaces. “Socialisation and engagement” will examine differing views of how student engagement is enacted and how designing humanistic approaches can help build a strong learner community. “Digital (un)tethering and self-care” will highlight the importance of designing for self-care and implementing activities that ensure flexibility, autonomy and social contributions that can help to circumvent overload and burnout. It will also challenge the myth that online learning always equates to “screen learning” (Cauthen, 2017 as cited in The Learning Counsel, 2018). Designing and implementing resources that require students to be tethered to their screens at all times negatively impacts students, especially those with privacy or internet issues or neurodiverse conditions.

### One island, two countries

Working as educational technologists in two different universities on the island of Ireland, our collaborations have highlighted the diverse and often complicated nature of higher education across the island. Living on two sides of a border having seen many years of conflict, recent peace, ongoing political turmoil following Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic, marginalised indigenous people and bilingualism provides many challenges, spoken and unspoken, for staff and students. Many of these inequalities have been foregrounded during the pandemic within our situation and beyond (Czerniewicz et al., 2020; Munck, 2021).

In the Republic of Ireland, university enrolments are rising, but students face the highest fees in Europe and an accommodation crisis in many cities. In addition to student enrolments rising, the staff-student ratio has decreased and the student population has increased in diversity (Irish Universities Association, 2018). The social and economic impact of the rise and fall of an economic boom, termed the “Celtic Tiger”, has also affected higher education and employment prospects (Ó Riain, 2014).

Whilst on the same island, Northern Ireland is a country in the United Kingdom. As with Ireland, there are also high fees and an overdemand for accommodation, with “a disproportionate number of young people choosing to move permanently, continuing the brain drain that began during the Troubles” (Noonan, 2021, para 3), a period of conflict lasting 30 years from the 1960s. Wider issues as a country include religious tension, homophobia, racism and lack of women’s rights.

### Learning design and empathy

In his 2016 Digital Pedagogy Lab keynote talk, Sean Michael Morris (2016) states: “I do my best to stay quiet because when I’m quiet, I can hear you. And it’s you I’m interested in. Your stories. Your efforts. Your insights.” He laments that there isn’t enough listening, and states that, in part, it’s the fault of instructional design. As learning technologists our work is deeply entrenched with supporting staff to ‘entangle’ technology effectively into their teaching and is concerned with navigating the complexities of institutions and the landscape more broadly (Fawns, 2019, 2022). We listen carefully to their requirements, often starting with frameworks and approaches such as ABC Curriculum Design (Young & Perović, 2016), the 7Cs of Learning Design (Conole, 2014), Universal Design for Learning (CAST, 2018). However, the actual design work done with staff cherry-picks from the best and most applicable of these approaches given the circumstances and context they arrive with. This work equips teachers to approach design through different lenses and thus foster their critical design ability.

The work of educational technologists is deeply rooted in empathy - always listening and reflecting in action.

### Author perspective: Kate Molloy

Personally, I’ve found that there’s a certain amount of mental agility involved with the work of an educational technologist or learning designer. We solve complex problems, decipher complex contexts, and are often put on the spot as the resident expert in teaching and technology. It is important to be able to adapt workshops and approaches based on behaviour as nuanced as the mood in the room. A large group can generate a bit of buzz or excitement, and activities can be more playful. If participants are stressed or distracted, the more practical elements of a workshop can be foregrounded. I pay attention to their context as we talk through their courses. In some cases, they might be teaching on a large course alongside several others and have very little room to change things. In others, they may be a course leader and want to follow up with a complete overhaul. In those extreme cases, I will pose ideas that I believe to be appropriate and manageable. In the time that I have facilitated learning design workshops, I can’t say that I’ve never run the exact same version. With each session, I listen to participants and reflect on the stories they bring to each workshop to inform my own practice, and further improve each workshop.

Often, small changes or enhancements to practice can be implemented with confidence and ease, and are more effective than lofty, ambitious goals that are too taxing for busy staff; for instance, introducing [Hypothes.is](https://web.hypothes.is/), a collaborative annotation tool, in a virtual learning environment on a pilot basis to create social reading opportunities for staff and students. The goal in this example would be to have students support each other and build community within large modules asynchronously, with a low-bandwidth activity that doesn’t necessarily need much staff intervention. Collective goals such as these help staff leverage digital tools wisely and create meaningful learning activities.

## Presence

When we practice interbeing in the classroom we are transformed not just by one individual's presence but by our collective presence. (hooks, 2003, p. 173)

When hooks speaks of presence, it isn’t in a physical sense but one of community and togetherness. She refers to the performativity of teachers as a necessary act to engage students – not in the literal sense of “spectacle”, but rather as a means to encourage dialogue and questioning. Prior to the pandemic, this largely meant that teachers spoke to students from the front of large lecture spaces. Everyone in the room was essentially being “seen at all times”. This dynamic was turned upside down when teaching moved online during the pandemic and caused significant distress to both teachers and students. The dominant discourse throughout the pandemic centred on educators’ frustration with students who did not turn their cameras on during synchronous classes. Many were disconcerted, speaking to dozens of “black boxes” on screen rather than human faces. Some responded by mandating that cameras be kept on. Whilst the issue seems binary on the surface, there is a wealth of complexity below. The students’ reasons include not wanting to have their private spaces seen by class peers or teachers, poor Wi-Fi connectivity, lack of camera hardware and the desire to remain anonymous. These factors were further exacerbated when students had never met prior to remote teaching and large classes.

Students also reported missing seeing each other’s faces, but the barriers were too high to overcome in the majority of instances (Castelli & Sarvary, 2021; Khan et al., 2022; Leigh et al., 2021). One element that worked for some courses was building trust over time with each other and the teacher. The essential message was that students should “turn it on when you are ready to” and that students being able to see the teacher is much more important. Rather than concentrating on the “spectacle” of presence and performance, we prompt teachers to rethink presence aside from the seeing of faces to a broader, richer experience. Students could be asked to add an image file to their profile, such as a photograph of themselves or something that represents them. Allowing students to share what they would like about themselves and their situations on alternative sharing platforms (Padlet, Jamboard, FlipGrid) could also be used to inspire autonomous contributions.

For students, having a short welcome video from course tutors is an effective way to bring presence to an online space. For teachers, an effective solution for the lack of on-camera presence can be creating small groups that are less threatening and allow for a small number of students to build trust with one another quicker, which usually results in more cameras being turned on.

### Anonymity and surveillance

Datafication of students is continually increasing (Lupton & Williamson, 2017; Williamson, 2017), but knowing the number of things students clicked on is not the same as knowing students. Just because they are showing as an attendee in a session, doesn’t mean that they are sitting at their computer or listening. Just because they clicked on a video and played it halfway, does not mean that they watched half of the video or that they were even in the room at the time it played. Although the interpretation of student data we have access to is a nuanced skill, it can never replace engaging in dialogue with students to truly know if they are present.

The demand that students must be present, presenteeism, is in its literal sense an act of surveillance (Macfarlane, 2016). Students have many reasons why they are not able to attend live sessions, whether on campus or online, and being attentive to that by providing alternative means of interaction and dialogue is a crucial part of the design of any session or course. Likewise, providing safe spaces as much as possible can ease the apprehension for many students, particularly those with neurodiverse needs, those whose first language is not that of the teachers, and those from minority groups who are subject to abuse. In addition to cameras being off, anonymous polling can give voice to students who would not usually raise their voices in front of others. This could be through a shared document (e.g. Google Doc, Google Slides, Microsoft Word, Microsoft OneNote), a whiteboard (e.g. Padlet, Jamboard) or a polling app (e.g. Kahoot, Menti, NearPod, Vevox).

### Lurking/observing

In the sudden shift to online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a renewed focus on student engagement and a misconception that students couldn’t possibly be engaged in online learning. In Ireland and the United Kingdom, there have been significant negative media stories about universities not teaching during the pandemic and that the online experience was of inferior quality. This perspective is lacking; in fact, “online can be the privileged mode” (Bayne et al., 2020, p. 133). Many staff take great care to balance synchronous and asynchronous activities, engage students in live sessions and create presence and community, despite the great difficulties faced both personally and professionally.

Learning in the digital space, pre- or post-COVID affords more options to students who may prefer lurking and observing. Engagement requires bandwidth, both technically and emotionally. Presence does not equal engagement: presence can be performative. Monitoring the number of clicks and posts made doesn’t necessarily provide evidence of student engagement. Those in the background, thoughtfully observing, reading and listening, can be just as engaged. As learning designers, we need to help facilitate this.

Wherever students are learning, there are ways to structure activities to provide value and engagement for all students, even lurkers. Online learning has been labelled as lesser throughout the pandemic, but it’s worth doing some self-reflection on the engagement opportunities built into both synchronous and asynchronous activities, whether they are online or face-to-face. Are students provided with meaningful discussion questions that will help them think more deeply about the course content? Do the conversations arising from these prompts help to elicit new information and ideas? If the classroom discussions closely resemble the conversations (or lack thereof) taking place in the online chat window or discussion board, then the obstacle to meaningful discussion may be the design of the activity, not the technology.

### Opt-in, not opt-out

Be inclusive. Be intentional. At all times, allow students opportunities to opt-in rather than opt-out to avoid distress and embarrassment. Pay careful attention to crafting activities, whether they are icebreakers, individual tasks or group tasks. For example, don’t ask ”what is your favourite alcoholic drink?”, rather ask “what is your favourite drink?”. The narrow question may exclude those who do not drink alcohol for reasons such as religious beliefs, health or personal preference. Rather than asking “what sport do you like to play?” use “what pastimes do you like doing outside of learning?”. Again, the narrow question may exclude those with physical barriers to sport, those who choose not to partake or those who have no means or access to facilities.

There’s nothing that strikes fear into our collective hearts like hearing, “Now we’re going to do an icebreaker”. Kate recalls encountering one during her college studies where she had to find someone with the same colour eyes, so everyone had to hesitantly wander the room and rather than speak to someone new, had to stare awkwardly into the eyes of a stranger to find another victim with matching eyes. It was uncomfortable, not very inclusive, and generally unpleasant.

Within our own work, we both use open resources as often as possible and the Community-building activities from [Equity Unbound](https://onehe.org/equity-unbound/) fulfilled many of the design requirements needed for socialisation and engagement sessions. A favourite activity was “[Story of your name](https://onehe.org/eu-activity/introductions-story-of-your-name/)”, as it could be used as an icebreaker, group task or introduction activity. In this activity, all students are given the opportunity to tell a story about their name, on their terms and from any viewpoint. Giving options such as using the chat window or allowing those who would like to volunteer to tell their story verbally ensures that no one feels obligated to share their story. It was helpful for the teacher to provide their story first. This activity safely navigates the challenge of pronouncing unfamiliar or frequently mispronounced names (especially true for Gaelic or international names) by bringing the issue up front in an informal space.

Bringing these different elements of presence back to engaged pedagogy and the aspiration to create a democratic classroom, where all voices are important and dominant voices are skillfully guided, allows space for quieter voices to be heard. However, it is not enough to declare a space safe; multiple modalities must be afforded to students so that those in the minority are ensured a safe space, enabling those feeling threatened to contribute on their own terms.

## Socialisation and engagement

There seemed to be no interest among either traditional or radical educators in discussing the role of excitement in higher education. (hooks, 1994, p. 7)

Social events within higher education primarily occur out of the class, located primarily within student-led spaces such as student societies and clubs, sports centres, and unions. These depend on the student acting and choosing to participate. These choices are not always equitable and the pandemic brought the difficulties of physical and digital access to the fore (Ndofirepi, 2020). All of which brings hooks’ observation into sharp focus and educators began to shift their perceptions of the traditional boundaries for socialisation, designing in formal activities to generate excitement (Chu, 2022; Müller et al., 2021; Rapanta et al., 2020).

### Playful activities

The poet Seamus Heaney explored the loss of playfulness at university in an address at Harvard in 1982, ending with the hopeful line “Today’s the day for intellectuals to play” (The Harvard Advocate & Kiely, 2013). Designing playful activities requires care and clear learning goals. Many hands-on activities such as [LEGO® Serious Play®](https://seriousplay.training/lego-serious-play/) work well to generate conversation, energise a session and encourage different perspectives (Hayes & Graham, 2019; James, 2015; Thomson et al., 2018). These activities can be translated into online situations with modest changes to the design, providing greater flexibility with regards to what participants use, so online participants can use what they have at hand. Once people get past the awkwardness of having something so unexpected and give themselves permission to play, there is a lot to gain by exploring topics with new perspectives (Whitton & Moseley, 2019).

In the initial phase of the move to remote learning, there were so many pressures on teachers and students that simply keeping courses going with clear communication was the priority for many. However, as online learning became a longer-term solution, feedback from students locally and beyond was that the learning was going as well as could be, but they really were missing out on the social aspects of university. Poor design can affect the mental well-being of students learning online, but interactive and collaboration activities can help “mitigate against issues such as loneliness, isolation and lack of motivation to study” (Jisc, 2021, p. 5).

### Engagement beyond clicks and didactic approaches

We both take care to point out to teachers how to use data from the virtual learning environment to identify students who hadn’t been logging in regularly – not as a surveillance and tracking approach, but as a means of flagging students who need private communication and may require additional support. We explain that data is only one small part of the story and that a student clicking on a resource is in no way indicative of whether or not they read the resource. As described above with regards to cameras being on or off, we tried to move the narrative away from control to one of dialogue.

Yet some version of engaged pedagogy is really the only type of teaching that truly generates excitement in the classroom, that enables students and professors to feel the joy of learning (hooks, 1994, p. 24)

In Teaching Community (2003), bell hooks recounts a moment with a visiting speaker while teaching at Yale, where her students “didn’t want to leave”. Everyone was “fully present in the now”. The most memorable moments can stem from learning experiences beyond traditional classroom confines.

### Author perspective: Kate Molloy

My fondest, most engaged memories of my undergraduate studies in the US aren’t of the classroom. I remember Evelyn, who taught Post-colonial and Minority Literature. She trusted and supported us to take our open-book exams online. She sat at a student desk beside us, introduced us to the writing of J.M. Coetzee and took us for Vietnamese food to celebrate our final class. I remember going for lunch during our Multicultural Education class with a panel of trans activists invited to class that day and listening intently to their stories over falafel. In these moments, our teachers were building community. They created authentic, meaningful, and engaging experiences. Most importantly, they created memories and helped us to learn in the now. The tireless hours that my advisor, Dr Curtis, spent working with me, unseen. It was the work outside of the curriculum that was so valuable. It was one of those teachers who introduced me to the writing of Freire and hooks. I can’t remember who, but I suppose that doesn’t matter now.

Enjoyment and pleasure weave through hooks’ discussions of engaged pedagogy: the joy of teaching, the joy of being in the classroom and the joy of learning. These are seen as acts of resistance against boredom and apathy within higher education. Technology affords us infinite possibilities to enliven learning. It is important to note that hooks did not experience a blanket acceptance of this; some students and teachers will perform their own acts of resistance against this and may even be angry at the inclusion of fun, or frivolity as they may see it. Being open, clear and inclusive throughout is imperative.

## Digital (un)tethering and self-care

I celebrate teaching that enables transgressions – a movement against and beyond boundaries. It is that movement which makes education the practice of freedom. (hooks, 1994, p. 12)

In this quote, hooks is not speaking specifically of technical or physical boundaries, but the parallels for these which speak to a release from the virtual Zoom gaze that has exhausted so many people since early 2020. Tasks and workshops that allow students to move around, go outside or away from the screen are important design choices to make.

### Digital (un)tethering

Before the pandemic, many higher education institutions clearly defined contact time between teachers and students as taking place in physical settings, such as a lecture, tutorial or practical. This was often a barrier for those establishing distance learning courses or programmes, as contact time in the virtual space cannot be bounded in the same ways. Communication with one another through discussion fora, commenting on blog posts, editing wikis and annotating online work provides significant contact points – not only between teachers and students, but between students and between students and the wider public. It is also pertinent to keep in mind that at the higher education level, the majority of learning takes place outside scheduled class time. Students are required to read, reflect and complete formative and summative assessments. This affords many opportunities to experiment with means of dialogue and creative engagement.

One very small prompt to care that we embedded into longer sessions was verbally telling people to get up, stand and stretch during scheduled breaks and, if possible, to walk away from the screen. If a session was long with no scheduled break, we would emphasise that slides would be available after and encourage standing and listening for a bit.

Other suggestions that we collated from our care workshops include outdoor lectures, podcasts (or other audio-only resources), reading and reflecting outdoors, using mobile devices to allow for movement, adding calendar entries especially for self-care activities, using dictation functionality for writing, using read-aloud functionality for documents, and intentional moments of breathing. These kinds of activities can be more inclusive, require less bandwidth for those in the Global South or rural areas and can be done on lower specification devices. They are also more flexible for those with caring or work responsibilities or those with health issues.

### Self-care

Teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students. (hooks, 1994, p. 15)

We can only care for students if we first care for ourselves. Responses from our sessions acknowledged the need for balancing work and the “always on” expectation. Activities such as walks, exercise classes, building puzzles, reading books, gardening, cooking, crafts, doodling, turning off notifications, and blocking out time each week in diaries to ensure sufficient breaks were suggested. Given the reality of ever-increasing student numbers and rising workload combined with reduced staff in many situations, it was imperative to design self-care into our teaching. From our experience working with and supporting teaching colleagues, learning resources, dialogue and assessment are three areas to consider.

#### Learning resources

[UNESCO](https://www.unesco.org/en/open-educational-resources) (n.d.) believes that

Universal access to high-quality education contributes to peace, sustainable social and economic development, and intercultural dialogue. Open education resources provide a strategic opportunity to improve the quality of education as well as improve policy dialogue, knowledge-sharing and capacity-building.

In the Irish context, professional bodies like the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning provide resources and support open education. It can be difficult to find materials appropriate to the Irish context and the unique institutional contexts. When learning moved online, the [Enhancing Digital Teaching and Learning](https://edtl.blog/the-edtl-approach/) (EDTL) project team worked together to outline an approach that would be supported by carefully curated open materials. It was crucial to ensure that those seeking advice were saved the time and frustration of sifting through the wider web for advice. All materials produced were openly licensed to reciprocate within a community of sharing.

In our own local work, creating and reusing open resources helps us to amplify open practice for those new to it, or those who are still tentative. The EDTL project resources provide a useful example of community-created resources that have helped support that community, and beyond. Indeed, any good quality resources can highlight the many benefits of open, including cost-saving for students, reduced workload efforts for staff, improved representation, inclusion, and even the greater good. In practising what we preach, we can initiate discussions around open even when this isn’t the main topic of a workshop or event. These informal discussions can lead to changes in practice, as we can always refer staff to new resources and workshops, or simply follow up later.

Ownership, agency and quality are, of course, other factors to consider in the creation or reuse of learning materials. In supporting staff to create engaging, thoughtfully designed curricula, discussions around ownership often arise. Creating digital resources can be time-consuming and it can be disappointing to discover that the content cannot be used elsewhere, be it because of technical or copyright issues. In this case, pragmatic approaches to supporting staff to design using tools that don’t pose technical barriers (like [H5P](http://oer19.oerconf.org/sessions/opening-the-closed-introducing-h5p-to-the-virtual-learning-environment-o-133/members/#gref))), and produce files that can be saved to be reused elsewhere or easily shared beyond the confines of the virtual learning environment, are helpful for promoting ownership and agency without sacrificing quality. Supporting and encouraging staff to adopt tools that support open education, like H5P, can also help to open discussion around the ethics of the tool providers we use.

#### Dialogue

In regards to pedagogical practices we must intervene to alter the existing pedagogical structure and to teach students how to listen, how to hear one another. (hooks, 1994, p. 150)

Once the learning resources have been identified and tailored to a course, the next thing to consider is interaction time with students. For centuries or more, much formal education consisted of a teacher decanting knowledge by speaking at the front of the classroom with students passively taking notes, known as “the sage on the stage” or the “banking model” of education. More recently, the approach in which teachers encourage students to reconstruct the decanted information to make meaning through guidance is known as “guide on the side” (King, 1993). Breaking away from this dichotomy, “meddler in the middle”, provides a third option, whereby teachers can encourage students to “experience the risks and confusion of authentic learning by allowing their students to stay in the grey of unresolvedness” (McWilliam, 2009).

Designing hands-on, affective activities can fulfil both meddling in the middle and the exploration of the messiness and not-yetness (Collier & Ross, 2017) of the learning journey, while providing care for teachers and students alike. These are best designed as democratic, inclusive activities. Whether individual or group tasks, only volunteers should be asked to come forward. Should someone not wish to speak but still want to share their story, they could nominate a class peer to share on their behalf. Examples include LEGO® Serious Play® (as previously discussed), mapping with 3D objects such as sweets, pebbles, etc., and the creation of posters or models using only objects found in your near vicinity (Thomson, 2019a, 2019b).

#### Assessment

In Ireland, university students overwhelmingly stated their preference for open book or continuous assessment (EDTL, 2021). Given that 81% of students favoured more flexible assessments than the traditional final exam, it is clear that dominant assessment practices, which in many cases were already altered to accommodate the emergency teaching in the pandemic, need to be re-examined with a similarly empathetic and flexible approach. However, reimagining continuous assessment practices is a project in and of itself. To have impact, this kind of work requires resourcing and support for staff to make small changes incrementally. For example, when designing a new assessment methodology, one should first turn to existing and supported platforms available to you and your students, thus reducing the cognitive load of learning digital skills.

Some of the alternative modes we have contributed to the academy in continued professional development, conference presentations and reports have included: a [gif-based manifesto](http://kate-molloy.net/ed-tech/a-manifesto-for-teaching-online/), a [gif-based Twitter talk](https://2020.pressedconf.org/?easyconfpr=my-mishmash-of-wordpress-spaces), a [talk using a poetry structure called a Limerick](https://www.slideshare.net/ClareThomson1/wikipedia-in-medical-education-a-subterfuge), a [meta presentation about H5P using H5P](https://oer19.oerconf.org/sessions/opening-the-closed-introducing-h5p-to-the-virtual-learning-environment-o-133/), a [fictional court case based around an open conversation](http://edc17.education.ed.ac.uk/cthomson/the-trial/). Each of these formats challenges the traditional academic textual expectation, in which “[t]ext has been troubled: many modes matter in representing academic knowledge.” (Bayne et al., 2020, p. 49). These formats may lack formal structure and tone, but each story remains an artefact of integrity and rigour.

Engaged pedagogy pushes back against notions that education is neutral and emotionless; hooks instead embraces bonding with students, in an inclusive rather than exclusive way. However, she is also highly attentive to the challenges of adhering to the tenets of engaged pedagogy at scale whilst also caring for one’s self. Making effective use of technology and student partnerships can help mitigate some of these problems by facilitating peer feedback on early drafts of assessments or regular use of breakout groups.

## Into the unknown

It is essential that we build into our teaching vision a place where spirit matters, a place where our spirits can be renewed and our souls restored. (hooks, 2003, p. 183)

Placed, as we both are, in the liminal space of academic support, balancing the care of colleagues with the care of students during the pandemic has been both exhausting and incredibly rewarding. Sharing with the wider community around the world and embedding the work shared back by others is humanity in education at its very best. The future of higher education is more uncertain than ever as we navigate contemporary inequalities and challenges of the future such as climate disasters, energy shortages and natural resource constraints. Whatever online teaching and learning journey we each find ourselves on, weaving empathy and care into the design of all interactions will ensure a smoother path and afford us the agility to adapt with hope.

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