CHAPTER 3

The journey into e-learning is one of me-learning – reflection and changing pedagogical practices in an online world

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Abstract

As academics, we have become accustomed to a life of being in control – control over curriculum, pedagogical approaches and assessments. The onslaught of the global Covid-19 pandemic dramatically altered our academic spaces. Suddenly from being in control we were pushed into a virtual world where we had spent little time before. The world we knew, which offered us a semblance of control and familiarity with respect to written texts, hard copy notes, and face-to face lectures was in the past. The present means dealing and coping with the rapid speed of the change to online teaching. This, in turn, means navigating through unfamiliar unchartered waters and a drastic reversal of roles. The latter entails becoming learners in a new space, while at the same time, being lecturers trying to teach and maintain the integrity, accessibility and learning we have prided ourselves with providing in a physical space. Our online encounter has led to critical reflection and adaptation on many levels. This study highlights the reflection and adaptation of two academics teaching a scientific writing module,

covering their overlapping journeys as learners and as academics in the virtual space. It shares their formal and self-learning experiences and how these informed their pedagogical practices to cope with working in a new world. This study uses Rolfe *et al.*'s (2001) model of reflection and an adaption of SWOT analysis (Humphrey 2005) to discuss our personal reflections and pedagogical practices as academics and the measures taken to keep academic literacy alive, despite growing software assessment limitations, technical and time constraints. Rolfe *et al.*'s (2001) questions of "What?, So what? and, Now what?" guide this study of experiences encountered, the challenges faced, and the blended learning approach implemented to teach and assess academic writing in an on-line environment.

Keywords: academic writing, blended learning, online, pedagogical practices, reflection, virtual

Introduction

The onset of Covid-19 in South Africa and its impact on traditional tertiary teaching, resulted in many academics being forced to make quick and drastic changes to their pedagogical practices. This study presents by means of self-reflection and anecdotal evidence, the personal narratives and experiences of two such academics, forced to navigate through online learning in an effort to ensure they are able to cope, survive, grow and achieve their teaching and learning obligations of academic literacy. The focus on academics' responses to adjusting to an unprecedented way of being and doing in a new teaching and learning environment is likely to be shared and understood by university lecturers across various institutions locally and abroad.

Literature review

The Covid-19 pandemic and its consequential lockdown effects forced traditional, contact tertiary education institutions into online modes of teaching and learning. This changed the course of higher education and propelled some lecturers operating in traditional face-to-face classrooms, to enter the remote or distant digital e-learning space. A review of the literature reveals a proliferation of studies in higher education dealing with online learning experiences across countries, institutions, and disciplines. A study by Zalat *et al.* (2021) in an Egyptian university explored medical staff's perceptions, experiences and challenges of e-learning and factors influencing its acceptance and use as a teaching tool. In a local context, Maphalala and Adigun (2020) explored the experiences, attitudes and perceptions of academics with using e-learning to support teaching and learning at a South African university. Their study identified challenges such as a deficit in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) infrastructure, erratic internet access, low levels of technical assistance and inadequate training opportunities that affected academics' morale and enthusiasm to create interactive content for virtual learning.

Sulaiman *et al.* (2019: 430) in their study of teachers' perceptions of assessment and alternative assessment in the classroom, concluded that "[to] assess students' knowledge and skills, teachers need to implement several assessment instruments such as writing, test, project, assignment, simulation, portfolio, journal, exhibition, observation, interview, oral exam, and peer evaluation." Many university lecturers restructured their assessment practices to accommodate the online platform, which meant that it was no longer 'business as usual'. Alvarez *et al.* (2009: 322) argue that "teaching and learning in virtual

environments imply making changes to the organization of teaching and, subsequently, a change in the teacher functions" and that "online teaching and learning requirements are not limited only to a set of knowledge and experience; the challenges a teacher faces are linked closely to the particularities of interacting and communicating online."

There is currently limited local research investigating the impact of Covid-19 directly on academic literacy. Mahyoob's (2020) research on the challenges of online learning, especially for university students with English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at a university in Saudi Arabia, highlighted the difficulties in English language skills and other English courses such as writing, speaking and reading. One of Mahyoob's (2020) findings was students' lack of real English language practice with their teachers during virtual classes and this negatively affected the students' ability to learn English. As academics we were able to identify with such challenges as majority of our students are English Second Language (ESL) speakers. Lin *et al.* (2021) explored the quantitative and qualitative experiences and challenges associated with a blended English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in a course offered at a Taiwanese university. They allude to the uneven level of English proficiency within the class, which may cause some students to feel excluded and believe they are less capable than their peers. In addition, in developing and enhancing students' writing skills, there is the constant fear of students copying their work from the internet and not paraphrasing.

Methodology

This study is a personal reflection of the online teaching experiences of two academics who are the authors and participants in this study. To convey and capture our subjective narratives, we (the authors) engage

with the reader through the use of personal pronouns to reflect our own stories through our own voices. We are reflective academic practitioners and researchers who teach an academic literacy module called Communication in Science to first year students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). Our combined lecturing experience spans 35 years. Data was obtained from our personal reflective journals and insights on online teaching. Data was accumulative and extended from March 2020 until September 2021. A qualitative descriptive research design was adopted for this study. Data was thematically coded to describe and address the research questions.

Rolfe, Freshwater and Jasper's (2001) reflective model was used as a framework to explore our subjective experiences, guided by three key questions: *What?*; *So what?*; *Now what?* These questions provided the basis for describing our academic journey as we embarked in our new role as 'digital learners' and captured the nature of our sudden transition from a physical contact-learning space to virtual e-learning. The questions guided our experiences, emotions, struggles, challenges, changes and achievements. While this study presents our academic perspective, our response to students played a significant role in the way our journey was being shaped. The "*So what?*" question guided a deeper level of reflection as we learnt about ourselves - our relationships, thoughts, understanding and actions, and how we responded to and adjusted our pedagogical practices in a new world to ensure that learning objectives were achieved. The *Now what?* question served as a driving force for how we constantly reviewed our practices while adapting to new ways of teaching and learning.

Our reflective accounts are mapped against the theoretical framing of SWOT analysis (Humphrey 2005). We selected this framework alongside

Rolfe, Freshwater and Jasper's (2001) reflective model because SWOT offered an opportunity to capture strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) in a new environment, whilst providing the opportunity to consider both internal and external factors. While the concept of a SWOT originated in a business context, it has since been used across a wide variety of disciplines, including higher education. Dampson *et al.* (2020) used SWOT to investigate users' perceptions of the Learning Management Systems (LMS) at a Ghanaian university. It was also used by Hightower *et al.* (2011) as a way of assessing the effectiveness of e-learning platforms and software by identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Studies have shown that once internal factors (strengths and weaknesses) and external factors (opportunities and threats) are identified, strategies can be developed to improve strengths, eliminate weaknesses, benefit from opportunities and manage threats (Parker *et al.* 2013) which this study hopes to address.

Findings and discussion

What was our experience transitioning from face-to-face to online teaching?

Our teaching and learning experiences pre-Covid-19

Our personal narratives offer insight into our experiences and the pedagogical changes that characterised our teaching practices when we were thrust into the online teaching and e-learning platforms. Prior to Covid-19, we reflected, reviewed and revised our module content, outcomes, mode of delivery and assessment practices every semester. This was done in light of the changing student cohort, their progress and performance. By reflecting critically on our teaching methodology and student learning, we explored new ways of content delivery and

assessment practices. This was our way of measuring our learning outcomes which contributed to our professional growth and development.

Teaching academic literacy to first year students in groups of 130 was primarily conducted in the traditional face-to-face setting. Our interaction with technology could be considered limited prior to Covid-19, where we simply integrated digital media into the face-to-face classroom in the form of audio-visual aids (videos, computers, PowerPoint presentations, whiteboard, and overhead projectors). This aforementioned simplistic integration of technology was complemented with printed material and pen-and-paper for teaching and assessments. This was the status quo until the global pandemic arrived and fundamentally altered the traditional mode of university teaching and learning.

Our teaching and learning experiences during Covid-19

Online learning is defined as learning experiences in synchronous or asynchronous environments using different devices (e.g., mobile phones, laptops, etc.) with internet access (Singh and Thurman 2019) using video conferencing, Zoom, recorded lectures, webinars and Microsoft Teams. Our teaching approaches included the synchronous learning environment where students attended live online lectures, allowing for real-time interactions, with the potential of instant feedback. Despite our leaning towards real-time teaching, we were flexible and allowed for asynchronous learning environments where lecture content was made available beyond the 'live lecture' on different learning systems and forums. This was primarily due to students' own personal and educational constraints (network/device issues, time availability, geographical location, health issues and family

circumstances). The transition to online teaching and learning practices was, therefore, immensely challenging due to our digital unpreparedness, trepidation and the need to re-think teaching philosophy and pedagogy, and to revisit course content, outcomes and assessment. What worked well in the contact-teaching environment was suddenly not compatible with online teaching. There was no time to think of whether we were ready for change; change was imperative and there was no pause button. The need to adapt was urgent, critical and necessary and in order for adaption to take place reflection was key. Where previously, our reflection arose from student performance in assessments and their responses in our lectures and module evaluations, the new form of reflection was mainly focussed on us, our preparedness and competence to teach differently in a new changing space.

This need for reflective practice has been more critical during the switch to online learning platforms, a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic and the national lockdown measures. We started record keeping in journals. These were short personal and informal notes of our experiences; some of which arose from conversations with each other and colleagues in other disciplines. These conversations shone a light on how we could make significant changes to teaching online and learn from shared experiences. From the casual and formal engagements with our colleagues from different disciplines within the academic programme in which we teach, we found a common link. Each colleague might have been engaged in imparting knowledge in a unique discipline, but the anxieties and tensions of coping and adjusting to online teaching and lecturing were strikingly similar. We were constantly learning on various levels. Personally, we were becoming more aware of our emotional and mental states, and those of our

students, stemming from their frantic emails about their challenges in trying to cope and manoeuvre through online learning. We had an idea of their challenges but not having the physical contact with them to understand and help solve such challenges was distressing. Our interaction with students was largely confined to the digital and/or electronic space. As indicated in the journal entry of one of the authors (Snapshot 1), the digital screen can broadcast technology from any space, but the physical barrier is real.

These barriers impacted on us as well as our levels of control. On a personal level, we were also facing numerous challenges, more especially because we felt ill-prepared for online teaching. We attended all available webinars, seminars and short courses offered by our university in the hope of easing successfully into the digital realm. We ravenously digested the numerous wellness articles circulated by our human resources department in an effort to radiate positivity. We made the time to read up on how to de-stress, 'deskercise', sleep, breathe, meditate and laugh. We exchanged coping mechanism strategies with friends, family and colleagues to help with the rapid transitioning to a new teaching mode and the isolation from a comfortable shared physical working space that characterised our traditional tertiary careers. During the lockdown, with time, we became enthusiastic and confident in creating and recording PowerPoint lectures and narrations and it was not long thereafter that we were no more camera-shy! Zoom, skype and Microsoft Teams dominated our academic circles. However, it still felt like each of us was working in a bubble.

Professionally, we felt isolated, but also realised we were not alone; others within our department, university and in other institutions faced similar emotions. Usually in the traditional contact setting, we might

have chatted with a colleague, line manager or faculty officer with a query or idea. But with the move to online teaching, learning and engaging, we felt isolated at times - writing an email and a tap on the send button was certainly not real engagement, not if your query needed more discussion or interrogation which was previously so easily accomplished over a coffee in the faculty tea room.   Working in isolation was not the only challenge.

Many of the challenges we faced were a consequence of us having to teach a literacy module using digital technology. It is only when we exchanged discussion on challenges with colleagues that we realised that teaching and testing language and literacies on a digital platform was stressful and academics whose courses were content-based had similar difficulties. We brainstormed how best to assess essay, report writing and multiple-choice questions (MCQs) without compromising institutional standards and quality. Snapshots 1 and 2 are a personal account of one of the author's roving emotions about grappling with new ways of teaching. Our shared ideas enabled us to empathise, encourage and assist each other as we traversed the unfamiliar territory of purely online teaching and learning practices. Mathew *et al.* (2017) describe reflective diaries and journals as strategies for qualitative enquiry. Continual dialogue about teaching is valuable in the mutually cooperative environment. Collaborating, sharing and discussing one's experience with peers allows one to reframe and broaden one's own theories of practice (Brookfield 1995). We adopted the approach of shared experiences, and in the process, we were able to learn valuable lessons about ourselves, how to face and overcome difficulties and improve our teaching and learning practices for students.

Snapshot 1 of my online space... my thoughts in my journey

The online space is a unique space, like outer space. I sit behind my screen, isolated from my colleagues where useful exchanges of pedagogical practices took place. Now, I have my new students in my module, students I've never seen, or heard. Also, much like me, they are hidden behind their screens isolated from their fellow students who new to campus seek comfort in numbers and can hide away from being seen or heard. You cannot see them or intervene like in a physical face-to-face space. I would say it is a space of learning.....of adapting ... and of evolving ... it is a world where in order to survive, you need to learn and not just learn but learn quickly. (2020)

Snapshot 2 of my online space ... my thoughts in my journal

The journey to outer space, unlike our experience, is one which involves a great deal of preparation, it takes time, it takes training, it takes mental stamina, and it takes the ability to adapt....to leave behind large spaces and travel in a confined space for a length of time. The move to online was also leaving behind the world as I knew it but it was so fast, I found myself no longer in control....the only certainty was uncertainty.....as far as planning went it was a watch and see, hear and go kind of approach.....waiting to hear from the powers that be ....what will be our next step....it was a stressful time. (2020)

Snapshot 1 was the author's feeling of alienation, confusion, discomfort and tension in the early period of being forced to change. Snapshot 2 can be viewed as a time of acceptance of one's new academic path. The shift in the author's thinking and narration is indicative of embracing change. The physical closure of universities albeit temporarily - with no

real indication of a period when 'normality' might return meant that traditional teaching and lecturing had to make way for novel and innovative ways of delivery, namely the radical, drastic change to online teaching for which we were totally unprepared.

SWOT analysis

The SWOT analysis in Figure 1 captures the emerging themes of our experiences, emotions, challenges and highlights.
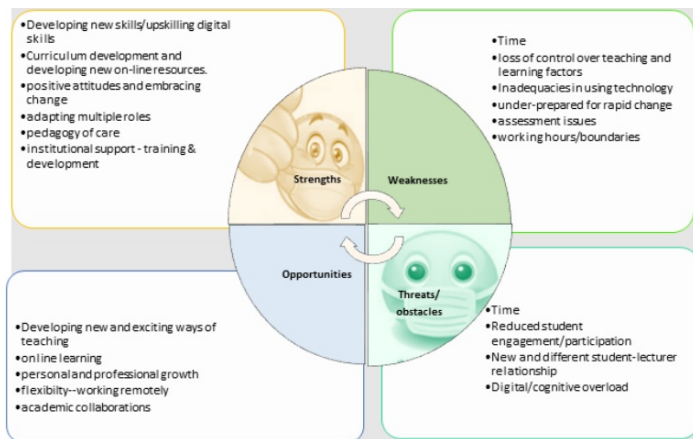

Figure 1: SWOT analysis of themes emerging from academics' reflective journals

Strengths

Fortunately, UKZN facilitated the transition to online learning by offering staff digital interventions, technical and educational support and training. Students also received a reasonable level of academic support, especially since many of them, like us, were unprepared for the digital space we found ourselves in. We eased students into this new teaching and learning space, and willingly demonstrated greater care to help them cope with and assimilate their learning; to navigate through the institutional online systems; and to achieve some measure

of academic success, despite the challenges. This pedagogy of care we demonstrated ties up with Noddings' (2012) ethics of care notion. From the perspective of care ethics, "the teacher as carer is interested in the expressed needs of the cared-for [student], not simply the needs assumed by the school as an institution and the curriculum as a prescribed course of study" (Noddings 2012: 772). As practitioners, we re-aligned our academic content and gradually inducted our students into the virtual space by means of scaffolded tasks that included digital literacy alongside academic literacy. This took the form of mock online quizzes, self-paced tests, videos, short writing pieces with feedback and guidance and the creation of chat spaces on Moodle, the university learning system.

The discourse in the academic scientific writing module is based on analysing texts from scientific journals, textbooks and reports. These are in print form and our traditional classroom spaces were spent deconstructing the content by means of skimming, scanning, highlighting, creating mind maps and annotations. Moving academic literacy tasks online meant moving our students to a visual platform and we found ourselves creating visual graphics, colour coded texts and images, and relying on YouTube videos, and hyperlinks. Google search became a reliable friend.

Weaknesses

Time, lack of control, and assessment issues

Adapting to the new digital world took time. So much was unchartered terrain. The preparation became more tedious, almost endless, especially because our traditional mode of teaching, explaining, questioning and engaging students did not apply as seamlessly. Our control and reach diminished and required more of and from us, i.e. our

time, energy and mind - as we constantly questioned: *How do I teach this differently? How do I adapt this for online teaching? How can I make it easier to understand and ensure learning occurs?* It was a journey of constantly questioning, evaluating, changing ... a journey of learning, often through trial and error.

Online teaching is not without challenges. We spent extended periods at our 'home' work stations, resulting in a sense of functioning in isolation. Even our discipline and staff meetings seemed impersonal. Online teaching required more intense lesson preparation. While teaching practices required constant revision to suit the online mode and to assimilate students' varying learning styles; assessment practices needed to be secure to curb the risks of students cheating and copying. With time and as teaching online became the norm, we realised that cheating was a reality. We had to deal with inflated test scores on MCQs and short questions in quizzes, and heavily plagiarised essays. MCQs had no institutional software programmes at the start of the transition to deter or detect student cheating. Students who wrote online essays as a test task were able to plagiarise verbatim more easily via their own online search-copy-paste options on their devices as opposed to sit-down essay writing under the scrutiny of invigilators. We were forced to create short quizzes as assessment tasks, a test technique more suitable for content-driven modules rather than academic literacy. Where previously our sit-down quizzes allowed us to ask questions that required detailed answers, shorter quizzes meant greater reliance on one-word answers, with the major drawback of students having access to the internet for help with answers. We missed marking with our red pens and its age-old impact on students. The digital cross on an on-screen assessment lacked the impact of a cross and a scribbled comment with red ink. We had to then grapple with

devising measures to address these concerns and concluded that online teaching and assessments needed frequent amendment, exposure, and dialogue across modules, disciplines and the university.

Academic literacy courses normally have focused writing tasks. These are longer formal laboratory reports and scientific essays; and short paraphrasing, summarising, paragraphing and quantitative literacy tasks. Although these were achievable as online assessments, as were quizzes and MCQ tests, there was minimal focus on formal oral assessments. Oncu and Cakir (2011) noted that because of the lack of face-to-face interaction, informal assessment could be challenging for online instructors. In their study on e-learning challenges, Zalat *et al.* (2021) reported that 44.2% of their teaching staff found exams in an online course more difficult for students. Staff perception on this might be attributed to the fact that most of the online tests are based on MCQs that allow testing a large number of students quickly, and across a vast expanse of content than that permitted by essay questions. With the switch to online teaching, our feedback on essays became more technical than personal and the element of chatting with the student/s about strengths and weaknesses of their writing took a different form. Our students were encouraged to respond to marking-feedback sessions during online lectures and tutorials, but there was a sense of participant hesitancy more especially from students whose performance was poor. Online learning did not allow us to get to know our students as well as we do in contact sessions. On Zoom platforms, most of the students chose to speak without a video and many were not keen to be transparent about the difficulties they faced with their assessment task and the feedback they received.

In the traditional face-to-face teaching mode, student essays were physically hand marked with copious written feedback and allocation of

marks. This was followed by an interactive feedback session with students individually, in groups or as a class. However, the switch to online delivery meant that essays were computer-generated and electronically marked. This affected the emotional aspect from the marking-feedback experience. There was also absence of observational and physical participatory evaluations of students' writing in the physical classroom.

In our traditional classrooms, we encouraged student participation by using the approaches of group research projects and oral presentation, peer discussions, think-pair-share and questioning. By the end of the first trimester, we knew a number of our students by name. However, with online teaching, we coaxed and coerced students to participate and engage in lessons by creating chat and discussion forums but these were not used as diligently as hoped. Student Zoom attendance was sporadic, and students were not as vocal; there was a distinct and worrying lack of active involvement and response.

Threats: The lecturer-student relationship

The switch to online and calls to reach out to students meant that lecturer response and responsibility needed to be reconsidered. Equal access to online learning for all students became a priority and we were faced with a moral responsibility and obligation to ensure our students had equal and fair access to education, so that 'no student is left behind'. The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) (2020) called for plans to save the 2020 academic year and emphasised adoption of the principle of 'no student gets left behind' to best facilitate online learning so that all students be given a fair opportunity. This entailed us offering extra and continuous support and we drew on our strengths of being caring and dedicated. We answered

emails throughout the day and often late into the night. We repeated lectures and delivered joint lectures so students could benefit from each lecturer's disciplinary strengths. We taught challenging sections repeatedly, using varying methods such as videos, audios, slides, narrations and mind maps. We uploaded numerous detailed files explaining and dealing with different sections or parts of an essay and uploaded sample essays with detailed comment boxes highlighting the *Do's* and *Don'ts* of writing an academic scientific essay. We helped students who registered late to catch up and offered multiple opportunities to access formative assessments.

Despite our own challenges of adapting to online teaching and juggling work and personal obligations, responsibility to our students often took precedence. In the unprecedented times of the pandemic, we donned more hats - overnight, we became counsellors, academic advisors, IT specialists, administrators, mentors and virtual on-screen presenters. We found ourselves investing more time assisting students, answering endless email queries and re-teaching content. These are some of the adaptations and strengths that we developed in the face of the pandemic and grew as 'digital learners' on a personal and professional level. While we were adding to our repertoire of learned abilities (in our learner mode), at the same time the very things we were learning and caring about, also became a threat to our personal space. The boundaries between work and home became blurred as work stretched beyond normal work hours, encroached on our family time and responsibilities and lead to mental fatigue. Balancing work and personal family time amidst anxiety and fear about the pandemic was a nightmare.

Reduced student engagement/participation

As practitioners with a history of teaching in traditional contact university contexts, teaching virtually meant that every lesson and assessment required detailed analysis to determine whether the mode of delivery was successful and aligned to lesson outcomes. The reflective practice we were accustomed to needed revision to suit the remote online teaching mode. One such example is where we taught a section on composing a scientific report on an experiment using yeast to aid fermentation. In the absence of a physical laboratory, we conducted the experiment in our kitchens and uploaded the home-made video. Where possible, students could replicate the experiment at home. In the absence of our watchful eye, we had to assume the students were both accurate and critical of how they conducted the experiment. In the absence of students having done the experiment, the method section of the report would have to be factually correct. So, this meant revising learning goals to suit the online mode.

Formative and summative assessments were constantly under review to ensure validity and maintain academic integrity. There were additional factors linked to student participation and response to virtual teaching and learning. These were students' personal experiences (health, home-workspace, Covid-19 impact on family, finance) and national concerns (digital divide, power outages and network connectivity). A study conducted by Landa *et al.* (2021) highlights the challenges with access to online teaching, learning platforms and resources for students from poor rural communities in South Africa. Our students can identify with many of these factors.

We were committed to assist students, but the absence of human contact made the engagement and interaction unnatural. After the first

semester, many students who chose not to use the video option in virtual lectures continued to remain faceless. The disconnectedness created by online modalities has been widely experienced at other institutions. Feldman's (2020) study at a South African university illustrates the need for connectivity and human interaction that moves beyond the systemic organisation of the institution. Similarly, Visser and Law-van Wyk (2021) conducted a study at a South African university and reported students' difficulty adjusting academically and feeling socially isolated three months into the Covid-19 lockdown. This, in all likelihood, would have escalated with the extended lockdown periods.

Opportunities

What did we learn from the situation?

The experience of online or remote teaching illustrated the significance of ongoing reflexive practice and creativity. It heightened the need to collaborate and stay connected and to focus on one's mental and physical wellbeing. As academics we learnt that the online teaching space required navigation, adjustment, hard work and evolution. We learnt that just as we were "somewhat newcomers" to the digital field, so too were our students. The online teaching space is not an easy option especially for students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds with limited exposure to the digital world, challenging personal learning constraints, and technological and infrastructural obstacles. We had very little knowledge of the extent of our students' digital literacy. With the surge in the pandemic across South Africa in early February 2021, the closure of tertiary institutions and the strict national lockdown, we were deprived of physical interaction with our students on campus. Like us, our students were thrust into an e-learning domain, for which they were ill-equipped or wholly

unprepared. On one hand, majority of the students needed more time, space and experience to navigate online learning. On the other hand, online platforms gave students' exposure to and engagement with digital technology and the option of real-time and self-paced learning.

Our teaching and learning practices need to be fluid and open to change. Social media platforms which students indulge in, like WhatsApp, YouTube, Twitter and Facebook have gained popularity as academic tools and can be utilised alongside university-wide learning platforms (Moodle, Google classroom, Microsoft Teams and Kaltura). ICT, e-learning and digital/online learning can enhance higher education learning. Academics can integrate these resources with social media platforms and together with face-to-face interaction offer knowledge using the blended learning approach. Using innovative and creative online technology to facilitate teaching and learning can work alongside traditional teaching approaches. After the initial anxiety and hesitancy of online teaching, the benefits of the creative blended learning classroom have become a viable option, especially in light of the 4th industrial revolution. With blended learning, students can acquire knowledge according to their personal pace, needs and interests.

Students need to also take charge of their own learning. As a way of developing student independence in an online space, we varied our pedagogical approaches and assessment practices to allow for greater student involvement in their learning. In the first semester, our response to students in the development of academic literacy was intensively supportive and nurturing especially because of the adjustment to online delivery. However, in the second semester as students displayed competence with online learning, we gradually

withdrew the support. Dialogic collaboration among colleagues within and across disciplines was useful for academics grappling with online platforms as a teaching/learning tool.

The way forward

Like in the fantasy film Wizard of Oz, we are all on the yellow brick road searching for answers. Introspection and reflection help us on the path to exploring, learning and navigating through this new terrain. Researching, sharing and collaborating are key in improving the teaching and learning experience for both students and ourselves. For those of us resistant to change, the pandemic forced us to adapt or be left behind.

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