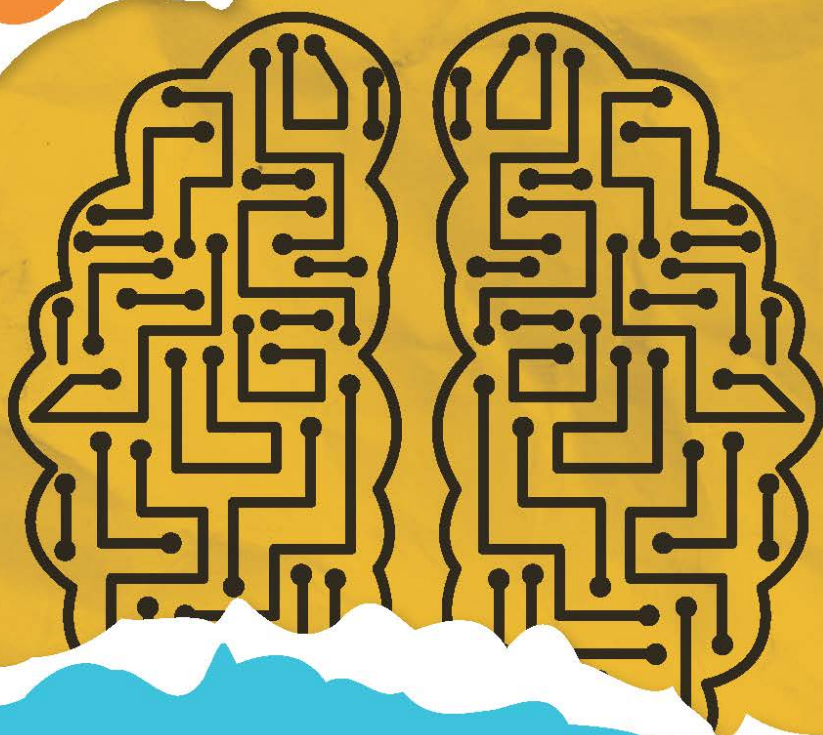


Reimagining South African Higher Education

Towards a Student-Centred
Learning and Teaching Future



Editors: Danie de Klerk, Greig Krull, Tshepiso Maleswena, Fiona MacAlister

CHAPTER 7

WHEN PANDEMIC PEDAGOGY MEETS ASSESSMENT FOR STUDENT LEARNING: REFLECTIONS ON POSSIBILITIES

Laura Dison

School of Education

University of the Witwatersrand

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1626-4954>

Lynn Hewlett

School of Education

University of the Witwatersrand

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9931-7806>

Abstract

During Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning (ERTL), the course lecturers of a large third-year course for pre-service education students had to rapidly find workable teaching strategies for putting a course on the topic of Assessment online. The course introduced students to the purposes and forms of assessment underpinned by a perspective on assessment for learning. This chapter is a critical reflection on why we think we were able to respond rapidly to re-design and teach a “successful” (under the circumstances) course that modelled reflective teaching and learning principles and practices. Much of the support available to others and us at the time of ERTL was of a technical nature. Useful as this was, it was not this focus on technology that enabled us to deliver this course in the way we did. We were equipped to respond because we individually and collectively have built up a pedagogy that is deeply rooted in learning and educational theories for enhancing epistemological access to adult students from vastly diverse educational backgrounds and enabling high levels of student engagement. In this study, we reflect on what knowledge and expertise each of these underpinning prior fields gave us for imagining a way forward under ERTL and operationalising it under difficult conditions. We reflect on the teaching approaches we adopted, the principles and assumptions that guided our approaches to pedagogy, and how this enduring pedagogic knowledge can be reconfigured for blended/online futures. We consider implications for working with lecturers and tutors to strengthen their capacity to respond creatively during disruptions.

Keywords: assessment for learning; curriculum design; disruption; pandemic pedagogy; responsive pedagogies; reflective practice

1. Introduction

The novelist Elif Shafak (2020), in her essay “How to stay sane in an age of division”, critiques the prevalence of groupthink and social echo chambers that constrain possibilities for creative and forward-thinking. She argues that we should not go back to the way things were before the pandemic and suggests that we use our new technological tools to develop socially just ways of thinking and practising in our societies. This chapter critically reflects on the processes and principles for transitioning this large undergraduate course. We consider the implications of our modelling of reflective learning and teaching principles and practices (Ashwin et al., 2015), to mitigate the temptation to go back to pre-COVID “normality” and build on the strengths and affordances of our teaching approaches for students to thrive in a post-COVID higher education future.

In higher education institutions, the sudden onset of the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated rapidly developed emergency remote modes of delivery requiring many lecturers to instantly convert courses designed for face-to-face delivery to fully online ones. As designers and implementers of a course on assessment for third-year Education students at the University of the Witwatersrand, we were now faced with the rapid adoption of a “pandemic pedagogy”. In this chapter, we engage in a critically reflective process of questioning and analysing our theoretical and pedagogical underpinnings to re-conceptualise the course during COVID-19. It uncovers our thinking about how we were able to respond rapidly to teach a “successful under the circumstances” emergency course. This chapter is a critical reflection on the intended curriculum rather than an evaluation of the course and curriculum.

Much of the support available to us and others at the time of ERTL was initially of a technical nature. Useful and necessary as this was, the focus on technology was not the driver that enabled us to deliver this course in the way we did. In this chapter, we argue that it was theoretical underpinnings and praxis – based on resources accumulated through our shared and individual teaching histories – that most strongly informed our ability to offer a rapidly developed and strongly student-centred online course. In making explicit some of the principles that underpin our practice, we hope to contribute to discussion and debate about what could/should underpin online/blended course design. This could inform the approach to preparing future lecturers for designing blended and online courses.

2. Pedagogic History, the Course, and the Intervention

In the course we discuss in this chapter, third-year Bachelor of Education (BEd) students are introduced to the principles of classroom assessment for learning. In its original face-to-face mode, the design of the course was already underpinned by some of the pedagogic, and assessment for learning principles that were key to being able to transition suddenly to an almost totally asynchronous online mode when COVID-19 struck. We were fortunate to work with a course that

already came from a tradition of ongoing re-imaginings by and with colleagues¹ in response to changing student needs, diversity, massification, and instability in South African higher education. As two of the members of the original team teaching the course, we became responsible for the rapid transition online. The process of doing so provoked considerable reflection on our assumptions about effective teaching, particularly in relation to inclusion, epistemic access, and optimal support for students. It also provoked dialogic reflection on the collective resources (intellectual and practical) that we could draw on rapidly from both our shared and varied pedagogic histories.

We present several intellectual and practical teaching traditions over decades of adult-centred teaching experience, course design, and development of teaching materials. We both have educational experiences with diverse groups of students to enhance the quality of their teaching and assessment practices. Our “practitioner-researcher” (Jacobs, 2015) response to ERT was informed by the principles of reflexive practice, transformational learning, academic literacies, attention to language and modes of communication, explicit pedagogies, and dialogical feedback. We were able to re-imagine alternatives strongly informed by overarching principles of enabling epistemological access and providing supportive environments. We use epistemological access (Morrow, 2009) in its broadest sense of an intention to move “beyond physical or formal access to *meaningful* access to the ‘goods’ of the university” (Muller, 2014, p. 255). For us, these meaningful “goods” are the theories and scholarly positions that underpin the “subject” (or discipline) and the ways of speaking, writing, and demonstrating “being” in the subject – both the “know that” and “know how” of the subject in Winch’s (2013) terms.

Working within this context of increasing numbers of undergraduate students we have played a role² in working collaboratively with lecturers to develop responsive pedagogies and approaches for use in lectures and tutorials. We argue that this was possible because we were informed by sound higher educational principles that have underpinned our engagements with adult learners throughout our teaching careers.

We have identified the key intellectual constructs we discuss in the next section for analysing the changes we made to the course in an online, predominantly asynchronous, mode.

3. Redesigning the Course: Our Theoretical Underpinnings and Praxis-Based Resources

3.1. Assessment for learning as a social practice

This assessment course has been informed by a view of assessment as a social activity that considers the cultural, economic, and political contexts in which

1 Dr Carola Steinberg, Ms Bronwen Wilson Thompson, Dr Preya Pillay, and Dr Tanya Bekker.

2 Dison in her capacity as Assistant Dean: Teaching and Learning, and both Dison and Hewlett as part of teaching and learning committees.

it operates (Gipps, 1999). We have challenged the dominance of standardised testing within schools and promote the principles of the Assessment for Learning movement that emerged in the late 1990s. From this perspective, assessment is used to help learners to progress as part of the learning process rather than only satisfying the demands of accountability (Carless, 2015). Formative processes including feedback have been effective in shifting the role of assessment away from something being done to students by teachers, to assessment as a collective activity (Winstone & Boud, 2019).

In shifting to an ERT course we built on the broad principles of constructive alignment that underpinned the face-to-face course. We outline the key theoretical concepts of these underpinning ideas in the next section and then go on to explain course and activity design in the transition to online delivery.

3.2. Constructive alignment

The principle of balancing appropriate learning and how this is translated into support and intellectual challenge to accommodate the needs of students from diverse backgrounds, has underpinned our approach to designing an aligned system of teaching, course design, and assessment. The premise that underpins our use and understanding of “alignment”, is that without a clear connection or alignment between what we want students to know and be able to do by the end of the course (the outcomes or curriculum objectives) and the teaching methods and assessment tasks that are used to reach this goal, learning and epistemological access is compromised for many learners. In using constructive alignment, we draw particularly on the early work of Biggs (1996, 1999) prior to its “claiming” and “repurposing” as an audit and quality assurance tool for teachers to demonstrate alignment in defending their outcomes-based education courses (Loughlin et al., 2021). In its early usage in higher education, constructive alignment was strongly focused on designing appropriate activities to promote optimal learning and it is in this sense that we use it in informing the design of learning tasks and activities that are aligned to overall course objectives and assessment tasks and criteria.

3.3. Approaches to writing and reading

As with many face-to-face undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in higher education, the entrance to the “goods” of higher education is predominantly through engagement with written texts and displays of academic literacy are mainly through essayist writing. Drawing on our disciplinary exposures to applied linguistics, approaches to teaching writing (Ballard & Clanchy, 1988; Cope & Kalantzis, 1993) and debates about academic literacies (Street, 1994) we take an understanding of academic reading and writing as involving specific cultural and social practices rather than being exclusively individual and cognitive (Lea, 2017). This informs thinking about students as novices when they start to engage with academic discourses in disciplines and disciplinary fields (Thesen & van Pletzen, 2006) and as academic literacy best being approached by being contextualised in disciplinary practices rather than teaching reading, writing, and language skills in discrete ways.

These broad debates about academic literacies and writing provided a frame for the development of this curriculum and the pedagogic approaches we employed, particularly in relation to how we embedded writing in the tutorial tasks, what we selected to focus on and highlight in the texts we prescribed, what we prioritised in giving feedback on written work, and how we approached the demands of different written genres such as descriptions and reflections. From these perspectives, we addressed the obstacles to epistemological access by finding ways of closing the gap between student and lecturer expectations of what constitutes understanding of texts and appropriate demonstration of that understanding in writing, illustrated in the examples below. We argue that the emphasis on writing for learning throughout the course strengthened students' understanding of the course concepts and developed their assessment literacy.

3.4. Transformative learning

As one of the foundational theories of adult learning (Merriam, 2017), transformative learning considers and informs approaches to learning that focus on the individual growth or development (learning) that emerges from reflecting on experience. In Mezirow's (2000) conception of individual development, it is through questioning and unsettling the assumptions and values that make up the filter or lens that adult learners use to make sense of experiences. The goal of this reflexive process is the development of more independent and critical thinking. Having adopted this approach while working with adults in formal and informal education, we drew on the possibilities afforded for enabling students to interrogate significant critical incidents and to make new meanings from different perspectives.

3.5. Critical reflective practice

We have consistently foregrounded the principle of critical reflective practice as a key thread in our pedagogical approach. Drawing on reflection scholars (Brockbank & McGill, 1998; Ashwin et al., 2015) the fundamental goal of instilling critical reflective practice needs to be consciously and explicitly integrated into the course pedagogy and assessment. We have encouraged the team of lecturers and tutors in weekly planning sessions to think more deeply about what we are trying to achieve, how our course is designed and what assumptions and values underpin our thinking about assessment and transformative learning. As discussed by Mavroudi and Papanikolaou (2022), the transition to online teaching was stressful for tutors' self-efficacy and capacity to engage meaningfully with students. They required further opportunities to explore ways of enhancing their online communication with students and to understand online pedagogical strategies.

After outlining the context and the course in the next section we explain how we drew on these intellectual traditions and theoretical framings to inform the specific strategies we used to make changes to the course and the learning materials. We focus on the enduring principles of explicitness, going "meta" (promoting reflective thinking) and feedback that allowed us to facilitate the social aspect of teaching and learning during ERT and that will enable us to work in new learning spaces beyond the pandemic.

4. The Context and the Course

The course on *Assessment* to which we refer is one module (seven weeks) of a full year-long course, the other components being *Curriculum* and *Pedagogy*. This course aims to introduce students to some of the key concepts for understanding assessment and to distinguish between assessment **for** learning and the more globally dominant theoretical tradition of assessment **of** learning (Carless, 2015). It examines using assessment tasks for assessing outcomes and for helping to promote and improve learning. What makes this particular course interesting is that it aims to introduce students to the purposes and forms of assessment and also has to assess their progress i.e., perform the “double duty” (Boud & Falchikov, 2007) of assessment as both measurement and as learning oriented. At the same time, there is pressure on the lecturers and tutors to model pedagogically sound assessment practices that develop students’ capacity for evaluative judgment (Carless, 2015).

The course has run in contact mode following the structure of an “anchoring” weekly lecture for the whole cohort of 500 students, (1) designed and delivered by the full-time lecturers (2) with accompanying tutorial tasks provided in a consolidated booklet. The large numbers in the cohort means tutorial classes are large (50) and are mostly taught by postgraduate student tutors (10) with limited experience. These numbers and staffing remained the same for ERT.

The assessment structure and tasks before and during ERT (2020 and 2021) are briefly summarised in Table 7.1. The shifts will be unpacked later in the chapter.

Assessment tasks	Before ERT	ERT Year 1 (2020)	ERT Year 2 (2021)	Nature of feedback on assessment task
Coursework task 1 (formative and graded)	Description of an assessment critical incident (about assessment) observed during workplace Teaching Experience while in a school.	As per <i>Before ERT</i>	Description of an assessment critical incident experienced during Senior Phase when in school (students had no in school practical during the previous year under COVID conditions).	Individual feedback comments with rubric. Generic, formative feedback to whole group based on patterns in student submissions. Feedback aimed at enabling students to write a better description that would form part of the exam/take home assessment.

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Assessment tasks	Before ERT	ERT Year 1 (2020)	ERT Year 2 (2021)	Nature of feedback on assessment task
Coursework task 2 (formative and graded)	6 x tutorial tasks. Completed and submitted as a small group portfolio.	4 x tutorial tasks. Completed and submitted individually. Short non graded tasks submitted for individual feedback.	Class test based on tutorial tasks 1-4. MCQ, short answer and paragraph questions. Limited time to complete from start time.	Generic written and oral feedback based on common patterns
Optional task for individual, formative feedback	N/A	Short non-graded tasks submitted for individual feedback.	N/A	Feedback to individuals and generic feedback to all who submitted.
Examination/ Take home assessment (summative and graded)	Critical reflection on assessment incident described in coursework task 1 (F2F exam).	Critical reflection on assessment incident described in coursework task 1 – submitted assignment – 6 days to complete and submit.	Critical reflection on assessment incident described in coursework task 1 – submitted assignment – 6 days to complete and submit.	No feedback unless queried/ disputed marks. Marking rubric given to students prior to submission.

Table 7.1: Summary of Assessment tasks before and during ERT (Authors’ generated summary of the course)

In the first year of ERT delivery (April 2020) we were faced with two weeks to prepare the online course for a large class of students distributed around the country with limited connectivity, difficulties in accessing sufficient data, ongoing power outages, and variable access to laptops/computers or tablets (many were relying solely on smartphones). In the second year more students had access to laptops/tablets, but the connectivity, data, power, and distance issues remained. In 2020, lectures were asynchronous pre-recorded videos but uploaded at the same times as scheduled lectures would have taken place to try and reinforce the stability provided by familiar sequencing and pacing. Revised tutorial tasks on the Learning Management System were redesigned to be completed individually and discussion forums replaced face-to-face tutorials (we tried both synchronous and asynchronous delivery). Examinations shifted from face-to-face to a take-home assessment with six days to complete and submit online.

5. Key Shifts in the Course Materials and Methods

In line with our understanding of constructive alignment, we questioned our processes of selecting and designing materials and assessment tasks to inform our reflection on how to change the course in light of a changed mode of delivery. Working with these broad considerations we focused on prioritising only the most key concepts, reducing the scope and number of tutorial tasks and improving the scaffolding of assessment tasks. Drawing on the intellectual traditions we outlined previously and how we operationalised them through principles of explicitness, going meta and attention to feedback, we use examples from the revised course to illustrate and justify some of the learning-focused changes we made.

5.1. Explicitness

Our understanding of explicitness in relation to this course draws on Bernstein's conceptualisation (Bernstein, 1977) of visible pedagogies and how their use presents difficulties for students who struggle to decode or recognise the expectations and implicit rules for performance encoded in the pedagogy and realised through assessment demands. In Bernstein's work, invisible pedagogic practices make it particularly difficult for some students "to be able to 'see' what is being asked of them" (Barrett & McPhail, 2021, p. 2). We draw this insight together with insights from genre theory to inform our approach to making more explicit the features of texts (both written and oral, such as lectures), their organisation and expectations for, and in, academic writing. We realised that this "visibility" became even more important when working online where the presence of the tutors as mediators of texts and expectations in face-to-face modes were not able to be replaced in the synchronous or asynchronous online discussions. We discuss how we approached this explicitness in relation to lectures and in the main, written assessment task.

5.1.1. *Explicitness in asynchronous lectures*

There is considerable debate about the role, relevance, and value of the lecture (French & Kennedy, 2017) and the changed purpose of the lecture in post-ERT modes of delivery (Brodie et al., 2022). Before COVID-19, face-to-face mode lectures were one activity in a course with greater attention given to careful design and scaffolding of accompanying tutorial activities and assessment tasks. During ERT, we strengthened the lecture as³ the central organising device of the course for several reasons. In recognition of the disruption characterising many students' lives and their lack of preparedness for online learning, the pre-recorded narrated online lecture⁴ provided a "familiar" structure to the week, and an opportunity for modelling how to work in intertextual ways with the readings, tutorial tasks and the key content. The final course lecture exemplifies this approach where tutors and lecturers critically analysed key components and concepts of the course under the imposed constraints at the time. In so doing we demonstrated reflective

3 With ongoing guidance from online/ blended learning specialists on how to develop interactive PowerPoint slides.

4 Low resolution videos of voiceovers with minimalist PowerPoint slides due to student download and data constraints.

and critical engagement with assessment practices and an “assessment literate” approach expected of students in the final take-home assessment task.

The need for greater explicitness in a context of reduced interactions with students resulted in the creation of shorter and more directive lectures that dealt with only the key concepts and theories. The lecture established both cognitive and social presence (Garrison et al., 1999) – a sympathetic and welcoming voice, reassurance and “holding of anxiety” that others have also argued was important in the rapid transition to ERT (Moorhouse & Tiet, 2021).

In contrast to the preference for “chunked” short instructional videos evident in instructional design advice, we saw the value of using the lecture to demonstrate the building of a sustained argument – modelling the behaviour we expect in longer assignments. Without being able to take “live” questions from students, interaction was structured dialogically within the lecture through reflective questions and providing prompts for discussion in tutorials (synchronous and asynchronous). In doing so we drew on strategies we had developed when writing distance education materials from a design perspective (Mavroudi & Papanikolaou, 2022). This experience allowed us to pre-empt conceptual misunderstandings and reading difficulties through explicit modelling of interactive reading and writing practices. Engagement with the readings became even more important than in face-to-face mode as this is where the key course content was located.

These changes in our approach to lecturing left us with a stronger awareness of interrogating the purpose and value of the lecture rather than the business-as-usual, face-to-face lecturing. In particular it heightened our focus on careful selection, pacing, and scaffolding as well as explicitness in instructions and the development of a structured learning path through a series of lectures.

5.1.2. Explicitness in critical incident task to promote transformative learning through reflection

The assignment below enabled students to reflect on their acquisition of assessment literacy in relation to a key critical incident on assessment practices at school. Students were required to describe the critical incident that they would later analyse and reflect on (see Figure 7.1) after getting feedback on the first part. In the instructions we explicitly modelled the criteria for selecting a generative, critical incident; for writing a description and the beginnings of moving into reflecting (that were taken further in the second, main part of the assignment). We demonstrated the importance of appropriate scaffolding to develop the capacity to analyse the incident using a theoretical and critical lens.

When reconfigured for ERT delivery we drew on genre theory (Hyland, 2004) more explicitly to distinguish between descriptive, analytical, and reflective genres, their intentions, and their features. The first step was for students to describe a critical incident that they would later analyse and reflect on (see Figure 7.1) and examine it carefully by being guided through a set of steps moving from a descriptive genre

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to an analytic genre through to a critical reflection. Our experience of developing critical reflective practice is that it needs to be explicitly integrated into the course pedagogy and assessment, as students at this level are not always proficient at “doing reflection” and tend to conflate description and analysis. It became even more important to communicate and convey expectations clearly in an online mode. This task was incorporated into the final take-home assessment to validate reflective practice and to give students a powerful entry point into theoretical work (Brookfield, 1995).

Course assignment 1: Describing a critical incident related to assessment

Think about a learning experience when you were in High School, related to assessment, which was a significant turning point or change in your life. This turning point could be a change in the way you think, feel or act (or all three). It could be a positive or negative experience, but not neutral. In other words, the incident must have some personal meaning or significance to you.

Write a page to one and a half pages (*no more*) describing the incident.

Include in your description what actually happened, who was involved, and the setting or context. What was your immediate emotional or physical response? What did you learn from the incident?

You do not need to refer to prescribed readings at this stage as this is a personal reflection that will form the foundation of further discussion later. In the discussion you may explain your concerns but at this point you must focus on a clear description rather than making a judgement about what you observed.

Here are some questions to guide your thinking. Do not simply answer the question in point form but use them to think deeply about the assessment. They may not all apply to the incident that you are describing.

1. What was the context of the assessment? E.g., which subject or level, was the work done in class or at home, who was involved, etc.
2. What was the major purpose of the assessment?
3. Was it a good or poor assessment?
4. Did the incident have anything to do with:
 - Communication
 - Marking,
 - Feedback
 - Promotion (to the next grade, or class or level)?
5. As a teacher in training why is incident important/significant for you now? Why is it ‘critical’ in the sense that it makes you think?
6. Has the incident changed the way you see assessment?

Figure 7.1: Part 1 of reflective task

5.2. Going meta – promoting reflective thinking

In this course, we have always favoured more authentic activities which allow for student engagement during assessment, and the involvement of teachers in the assessment process. An important assessment principle (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007) is that assessment should encourage metacognition and promote thinking about the learning process and the learning outcomes. Many of the tutorial tasks

have required critical reflection to develop in students a second order of thinking through a variety of self-awareness and self-questioning strategies. A Tutorial Task (Figure 7.2) required students to analyse their own question design by using the revised Bloom's hierarchy of learning outcomes (Anderson et al., 2001) which they had worked on the previous week. This strategy took students through the process of developing assessment questions and evaluating their effectiveness, preferably with others. As this was challenging to achieve under lockdown conditions, students were referred to a support guideline developed during this time to assist them with giving and receiving feedback on their task design.

Self-Analysis of assessment task (see document Guidelines on how to work with giving and receiving feedback).

1. What level of the taxonomy table does this task fall under?
2. Do you think the learners will understand what is expected of them in the question, i.e., is it clearly expressed? Please explain by referring to the taxonomy.
3. If it is possible, you can ask someone in your group for some feedback on your question and include their feedback here.

How would you re-design the question? Explain these changes by referring to the material on assessment criteria.

Figure 7.2: Tutorial task

The online materials strengthened this reflective element as in some cases it was the only way of providing opportunities for students to assess their own understandings. As the isolation worsened for students, we introduced additional free-writing activities that required them to articulate their experiences of receiving feedback as university students before connecting these ideas to those in the theory on effective feedback principles and practices. Figure 7.3 provides an example of such a task.

Free write [max 200 words]

Share your experiences of receiving formative assessment feedback as students at the School of Education.

- a) Identify 2 positive experiences of feedback and explain what made them positive.
- b) Identify 2 negative experiences of feedback and explain what made them negative.

Figure 7.3: Tutorial task

We emphasised the importance of self-regulation for improving the quality of understanding and written work. As mentioned above, students were constantly reminded of the value of assessment criteria in making explicit how they would be assessed.

5.3. Attention to feedback

A key approach to developing criticality and the capacity to self-regulate is dialogic feedback (Winstone & Carless, 2020). Our intention was for online feedback to play a strongly formative role and for the course to model many of the

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core feedback principles in achieving student success. Amongst these is Hattie's feedback loop (2012) which focuses on how students are approaching the activity, the processes they used to achieve the task and their self-evaluation of the task as well as the distinction between descriptive and evaluative feedback. A key text was Brookhart's (2008) framework for giving effective feedback to students. There was a strong emphasis on applying these frameworks to case studies presented to students in the tutorial materials as in Figure 7.4 below.

Effective feedback practices

Use the criteria for good quality feedback as presented by Brookhart (2008) on page 6 to:

- a) Analyse the quality of the feedback given below by the teacher Tim.
- b) Discuss one good aspect of the feedback and one bad aspect of the feedback given by the teacher in relation to Brookhart's framework.

[max 200 words]

Figure 7.4: *Tutorial task*

Our ultimate goal was for students to become more adept and confident in making informed judgments about their own and others' work. After students were exposed to the principles used to formulate sound assessment criteria and design rubrics (e.g., Biggs's (1999) SOLO taxonomy), they were required to evaluate the effectiveness of a range of rubrics for providing explicit criteria for evaluation and for assessing a student's piece of writing. The questions modelled a framework for them to reflect critically on the affordances and limitations of the rubrics for enhancing student understanding. Figure 7.5 provides an example of such a task.

The differences between the three rubrics (mark memos):

Analyse the three rubrics by answering the following questions. There is no one correct answer – you need to justify your answers.

- a) Compare your marks using the three rubrics. Which version of the criteria gave higher marks? Why do you think that happened? [max 200 words]
- b) Which version describes the range of ability within each criterion? [max 200 words]
- c) What does the weighting of marks tell you about which criteria are more highly valued than others for each version? [max 200 words]
- d) Which version do you think is the best? Give reasons for your answer, e.g., consider about how the range of ability is assessed. [max 200 words]

Figure 7.5: *Tutorial task*

This process-oriented approach is underpinned by a sociocultural view and requires the design and integration of student dialogue into feedback. This was a limitation of the course because of the reduced capacity for training of tutors (who would be giving formative feedback online) and some of the practical obstacles in creating dialogue involving interaction between students and tutors, students and students, and students and the content (Mavroudi & Papanikolaou, 2022). Students were invited to work with their peers but the feedback we received was

that less than half the class could do so. We introduced a self-reflective activity (Figure 7.6) for students to submit alongside their final take-home assessment to give them an opportunity to consider their strengths and areas for development (interaction between students and content).

- What do you think the best aspect of this take-home assessment is?
 - What (if anything) did you struggle with in this assessment?
 - What would you expect your mark to be for this assessment?
 - What do you think might have helped you to get a higher mark?
 - If you'd had another two hours, what might you have improved?

Figure 7.6: Self-reflective task that forms part of the final course assessment

Despite the limited opportunities to evaluate the impact of our pedagogical shifts in the course during COVID-19, we could ascertain that the online tutorial materials succeeded in eliciting some high-level reflective and analytical responses by students in the final assessment task in 2020 and 2021. This was encouraging given the absence of face-to-face activities for enhancing the quality of meaningful conversations and developing language to discuss assessment issues with peers and tutors. The positive outcome however suggests that the sequential and scaffolded activities described above resulted in academic and professional growth for most students who were able to connect to Wi-Fi and who had functioning devices for participating in the course in an online mode of delivery.

7. Critically Reflecting on Change: Discussion and Concluding Thoughts

The sudden transition to ERT forced us to interrogate our teaching approaches and practices and the principles and assumptions that guided our course design and delivery as we did what we could do best under those conditions. This chapter is an attempt not to lose some of the learning and assessment gains and to demonstrate and argue for the principles that should underpin technology-enhanced learning. We argue that our approach, built on solid theories of learning and teaching, has the potential to enable transformative learning experiences for students in virtual and real contexts. Weller (2016) proposes that we need to “think critically about how we prepare and scaffold these activities, both technically and socially, in ways that ensure students are participating in constructive, challenging, and productive learning experiences” (p.179).

It is evident from this self-analysis of our changing materials and methods that we will continue to use many of the metacognitive, dialogic, and explicit strategies described above to engage with students. Our reflections on the process and learning outcomes of the learning materials in an online mode have shed light on possibilities for expanding our repertoire of in-person and online teaching resources within a blended learning approach. This approach involves blending traditional face-to-face teaching/tutorials and synchronous and asynchronous modes of learning. Decisions are based on learning affordances about which

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elements of the course should remain online and which can move in and out of contact mode. Although we have argued that our assessment for learning purposes enabled greater flexibility in line with our changed practices, we have identified many constraints, especially in relation to dialogic and collaborative group activities. Some activities like tutorials and seminars also work better face-to-face because of extended dialogic peer and group learning. Contact amongst peers and between peers and tutors will be re-introduced as part of the blended learning approach adopted by the university going forward. We have also concluded that re-formulated interactive and narrated lectures work better online as students have more time to engage actively with the slides and supplementary material.

The shifts emphasised in this chapter are also part of the move towards authentic assessment principles adopted during ERT as they represent the way information is synthesised and applied in real-life situations and encourage the development of evaluative judgment.

In our attempt to retain the benefits of the strategies used during COVID-19, we have identified a few key practices that need to be refined and bolstered within the parameters of a blended learning philosophy.

Firstly, we need to find ways to support independent study and interaction by engaging students in collaborative tasks, asynchronously and synchronously online. This requires substantial effort on our part to create a more effective online social presence and to include a range of modes for assessment that encourage students to engage with ideas from their peers, the lecture material, and the readings. We support Laurillard's (2002) contention that it is more effective to use online spaces to facilitate conversations and high-quality learning. She argues that students can develop and integrate complex concepts and practices through different types of learning (acquisition, inquiry, discussion, collaboration, practice, and production).

Secondly, we need to strengthen dialogical processes of feedback, even with large classes of undergraduate students. As mentioned previously, the purpose of freewriting activities was to guide students through various thinking processes and expression of ideas without focusing on error correction. Students were seen to participate in the feedback process itself rather than being on the receiving end of a one-way transmission of ideas. Winstone and Carless (2020, p. 25) make a strong case for developing a deeper understanding of students' "sensemaking" of feedback both for knowledge and process improvement purposes or as a "learning device in its own right". The challenge of developing feedback literacy in students who are future teachers requires an in depth understanding of feedback (on knowing **how** their understanding is developing) and feedback **for knowing** (further developing their knowledge and skills) (ibid, 26). This necessitates the explicit design of feedback literacy within the curriculum and legitimising peer feedback as a common practice. The implications for the development of lecturers and course tutors is a priority if we wish to develop sustainable self-regulating practices.

Thirdly, we realised that in large courses which rely almost entirely on tutors as mediators of both the course content and the online experience, explicitness, and communication with tutors was as important as with students. Prioritising ongoing education and training of constantly changing (annually) teams of tutors who mediate the course in terms of the educational principles and practices underpinning the course is key. While this was the case in face-to-face modes the ERT experience highlighted how important constant communication, explicitness about objectives across the course, methodologies, assessment rationales, and key messaging about content were and how this needs to be built in explicitly as an aspect of course planning, design, and delivery. While the role of the e-tutor is similar in some ways to the face-to-face tutor, ongoing professional development is also needed to engage with the Learning Platform and needs of the students (Goold et al., 2010) as well as the common teaching skills that are needed for both face-to-face and online modes of delivery.

7.1. Allowing for the affordances of online learning

How we were able to respond under extraordinary circumstances to produce something that worked under ERT conditions should not be conflated with the time and process needed to develop *quality* offerings for better use of blended and online modes of delivery. We worked with a course that was strongly informed by educational and design principles. The technology cannot be assumed to be the driver for developing better courses either designed for, or adjusted during, ERT conditions. Arguments for the primacy of the educational rationale over technology are not new (see Salomon, 2016 for example). Similarly, we argue that for quality blended courses, educational theory might enable future transitions in a re-imagined higher education future to enhance learning experiences for all students. In addition, in paying greater attention to the research that is now being published on diverse student experiences during ERT in South Africa and elsewhere (e.g., Cranfield, 2021; Czerniewicz et al., 2020; Marquard et al., 2020) we need more attention to the student experience in designing for blended learning within the constraints in a South African context of unreliable power supply, limited access to data, fiscal and educational instability, and inequitable student access. How we find productive ways of working within this may come to define the nature of our re-imagined higher education future.

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