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Citation

Havemann, Leo and Roberts, Verena (2021). Pivoting Open? Pandemic Pedagogy and the Search for Openness in the Viral Learning Environment. *Journal of Interactive Media in Education*, 2021(1), article no. 27.

URL

<https://oro.open.ac.uk/81148/>

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Pivoting Open? Pandemic Pedagogy and the Search for Openness in the Viral Learning Environment

SPECIAL COLLECTION:
GO-GN

ARTICLE

LEO HAVEMANN 

VERENA ROBERTS 

**Author affiliations can be found in the back matter of this article*

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ABSTRACT

This paper is based on the authors' experiences and reflections working in educational technology and design support roles in higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic. We retrace our lived experience from the beginning of the pandemic in the spring (from our vantage points in the UK and Canada) and the associated 'pivot online' enacted in education around the world, through to the autumn of 2020, when we appeared to be transitioning into a so-called 'new normal' of the mid-pandemic. As digital education practitioners, who are also educators, researchers, and also simply as humans and friends living through a global pandemic, we had turned to each other initially for support in terms of work, wellness, and sharing news, information and sense-making, during which we began to consider researching under-examined dimensions of the evolving situation. The experiences and issues we reference are drawn from our own work, as well as from our responses to popular narratives advanced by key voices who have encouraged certain interpretations of the pandemic and its educational effects. Using Schön's (1983) reflection-in-action lens, we examine these experiences and narratives of pandemic pedagogy through the frame of our multiple identities. In particular, from our perspective as researchers and advocates of open education, we noted calls for openness (such as the use of open educational resources) in response to the online pivot, which did not appear to be cutting through the noise of the sudden deluge of information, advice and broadly negative coverage of online teaching. However, through our reflective narrative and synthesis, we offer an alternative interpretation, which is that openness was nonetheless flourishing, but that the 'pivot open' was to practices rather than resources. Open exchange, community building and support amongst educators were apparent in multiple contexts. While pandemic profiteering has highlighted the need for open resources and infrastructures, and we anticipate this case continuing to be made more strongly as we emerge from the emergency, it is the turn to open practices which has met the immediate needs of educators and learners through community, interactions, sharing and care.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Leo Havemann

University College London/
Open University, GB

leo.havemann@open.ac.uk

KEYWORDS:

Open educational practices;
pandemic pedagogy; pivot
online; learning design;
COVID-19

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Havemann, L and Roberts,
V. 2021. Pivoting Open?
Pandemic Pedagogy and the
Search for Openness in the
Viral Learning Environment.
*Journal of Interactive Media
in Education*, 2021(1): 27,
pp. 1–11. DOI: [https://doi.
org/10.5334/jime.676](https://doi.org/10.5334/jime.676)

This paper was almost unwritten due to the ongoing demands of the ‘pivot online’ in higher education in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Precisely because the move to online teaching, learning and assessment or ‘Emergency Remote Teaching’ (Hodges et al. 2020) occurred so rapidly throughout the educational sectors of much of the world, many of us who work (usually) in the support and development of primarily campus-based, blended-mode education had, during the initial several months following the suspension of classroom teaching, spent more waking hours web conferencing from any available quieter spaces within our homes than we might previously have believed humanly possible. The increased workload associated with the early pandemic, during which days sometimes seemed to last weeks, was also accompanied by a deluge of online advice from both renowned, and also rather more newly-minted, online learning experts, as well as from vendors of various digital products and services. This messaging ranged from the helpful through the mundane to the damaging, and its volume was challenging to keep up with, let alone respond to. However, we suggest that it is vital for those in positions like ours, who have been at the screenface, doing this work with our colleagues and students, to tell our pandemic stories, to reflect upon what has been learned, and what this all might mean going forward into the post-pandemic future, or so-called ‘new normal’.

Already at the time of writing, in the year since the impacts of the pandemic began to be felt across education sectors around the globe, a large volume of scholarly writing has been published about many of its aspects (e.g., Bozkurt et al. 2020). We are sure that when the opportunity arises to review and synthesise this (still rapidly expanding) body of research there will be many significant findings that will assist in the shaping of future pedagogies and policies to support post-pandemic education (Reeves & Lin 2020). However, our aim here is not to perform such a review or synthesis, but rather to examine the pandemic through the lens of our positions and perspectives, first as digital education support and design staff working in higher education during the crisis, and secondly, as engaged researchers and advocates of open education and members of the Global OER Graduate Network (GO-GN). From this particular vantage point, we have found ourselves observing and often critiquing the explanatory narratives emerging from various quarters during the pandemic, in parallel with doing the challenging work of supporting the transition of previously campus-based education online at scale. All the while, we also found ourselves asking: *where is ‘open’ in the pivot online?* In the reflective narrative which follows, we explore the interrelationship of these threads of practices and perspectives, ultimately with a focus on locating openness in higher education’s online pandemic.

REFLECTIVE NARRATIVE AS METHOD

Academic writing often ‘falls silent’ on the topic of the making of research prior to turning down the well-trodden paths of literature reviewed and method employed – the factors driving the formulation of research questions, the questioning, comparing and selection of methods, or how a collaboration came about. As educational researcher-practitioners in the context of the pandemic, we have experienced major transformations of our working lives and of the organisations in which we work, and indeed, been active agents involved in driving those transformations. Yet, we noted that the voices of ‘people like us’ were seemingly, if not absent, then less prominent in the cacophony of commentary narrating and interpreting the pandemic and already, from the first moments of the pivot online, confidently predicting educational futures. In seeking to gain and relate a deeper understanding of our own recent lived reality through this paper, we realised we must move these issues into the foreground, to put our multiple identities to work as instruments to make sense of our data – our ‘pandemic pedagogy’ narrative – a necessarily situated, partial and idiosyncratic telling of the higher education pandemic.

The reflective practice underlying this article can be described as reflection-in-action (Schön, 1983), by which we mean that, in order to produce the narrative and arguments of this paper we reviewed, evaluated and analysed our contextual reactions to the pandemic online learning response as educators, learning designers, and most importantly human beings with families, friends, colleagues, students. In doing so we found ourselves better able to recognise our

implicit knowledge base as higher education ‘third space professionals’ (Whitchurch 2018) – in our case, as experienced digital education specialists – because “the entire process of reflection-in action ... is central to the “art” by which practitioners sometimes deal well with situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness and value conflict” (Schön 1983: 50). As a result of the unprecedented and previously inconceivable reality of the pandemic, our collaborative reflections on our pandemic learning experiences as they happened helped us transform our experience into recognisable tacit and practical knowledge that had positive implications in our professional experiences, practices and wellbeing.

The sections which follow are in the format of our pandemic pedagogy narrative, telling our story of researching the pandemic as we were living it, beginning as a means of emotional support and evolving into a means to survive and thrive. Our method is located in the thoughts and discussions that became our negotiated, collaborative reflective practice, but also in the telling, in “using storytelling [as] a critical analytical strategy” (Macgilchrist 2021: 388), through the interweaving of our experiences with our curation of sources of commentary, and leading to the invention of imaginary ‘avian identities’ to represent recurring narratives. Rather than a linear process of research design, data collection and analysis, this is the story of how our research questions, methods and findings emerged through an organic and iterative process.

YOU NEVER FORGET WHERE YOU WERE WHEN THE PANDEMIC STARTED

To establish some relevant context for this discussion, we are friends who share research interests in open education as well as personal links to Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. We already knew each other (in the manner of open educators) via overlapping social media networks, prior to actually meeting at the 2018 GO-GN Seminar and OEGlobal18 conference in Delft, Netherlands. At the time of this initial meeting, Leo had worked for several years supporting digital education at Birkbeck, an institution which primarily teaches face-to-face in the evening, to enable study for those who are busy (usually working) during the day (Havemann 2020), while Verena had been researching the impact of an open learning design intervention (OLDI) to make the boundary between classroom and ‘real world’ more porous (Roberts 2019). During the week we spent in Delft, outside of the scheduled activities, we had many conversations discussing our shared interest in a version of open education considered, first of all, as a set of practices which seek to promote educational access, participation and equity, rather than as a collection of content. And while we were both digital education practitioners, due to the nature of our prior research and work experiences, we were both also interested in the linkages and parallels between digital and analogue ‘opening’ practices. For these reasons we had both taken great interest in evolving debates about the relationship between open educational resources (OER), open educational practices (OEP), and the concept of the open educator (Tur et al. 2020), as well as the messy complexity that arises from researching openness having abandoned certainty about what counts as open.

Actually, when the emergence of a novel coronavirus initially became a news item in Europe and North America, we had not been paying much attention. We were focused on business as usual and looking forward to meeting at an upcoming conference in the UK. Sometime in February 2020 we began to have a creeping awareness that an alarming new illness had prompted a lockdown in China and was coming our way. Still this all seemed rather unreal until, all of a sudden, it wasn’t. The sudden decision by many higher education institutions to ‘pivot online’ in order to avert mass infections would prove impossible to ignore.

In mid-March 2020, Leo had just received news that he had passed his postgraduate upgrade process and was now a PhD candidate. Meanwhile, at his workplace, UCL, preparations for teaching continuity were underway, in case the need for campus closure arose. Within days, a sudden email announcement on a Friday afternoon declared that the university would be operating online as of Monday – pivoting over the weekend, just like that. The next weeks and months were a seeming continuous blur of Teams meetings, taken up first with the pivot, and then planning for an online-first 20–21 academic year, including working on a revision of the institutional guidelines for online and blended education (indeed, merging these previously distinct sets of guidance), and working with colleagues to rapidly co-create a staff development course to induct staff into online teaching.

As the pandemic commenced in Canada, Verena was on leave from her job at a local school district, having completed her dissertation the year before, and was looking for new professional experiences. She had been teaching graduate online courses as a sessional instructor since January at the University of Victoria and the University of Calgary. She was part of a Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) grant research project that was examining the potential of co-designing an open educational resource (a pressbook) through participatory co-design (Roberts et al. 2020). Verena was eager to help support her K-12 colleagues in the early days of the pandemic, as her dissertation research directly connected with the situation and context; however, she soon discovered that there were more job opportunities in higher education learning design contexts than in K-12 environments. By May 2020, Verena also started working with the University of British Columbia as a learning designer to support faculty in designing their online courses for the spring and summer, in addition to other consulting work.

During these early weeks of the pivot we were often in touch via Twitter direct messages, and we would sometimes meet in Zoom to discuss what was happening in our suddenly-smaller worlds. These reflective check-ins were an essential element in our wellbeing, ensuring that we were not losing our identities as open education advocates and researchers in the context of a pivot which seemed to have no time for such concerns. Our ongoing iterative sense-making also helped us to support others professionally throughout the pandemic, acting as a source of mutual support in our conviction that supporting and connecting people must come first in a time of crisis. We noted that in addition to the saturation media coverage of the pandemic itself, there was a huge volume of commentary and advice for educators, students and institutions hitting our timelines (mostly, we should note, from North America and Europe) which by now, we were struggling to find time to even read, let alone to add our own voices into the mix, as noted at the time by Lamb (2020).

The long pandemic months continued, and as we intermittently collected links from the ‘commentsphere’ and developed our thoughts, we found ourselves returning to the question of what form of research this was, or whether it was even research that we were doing. Published literature on the pandemic’s effects in education had started emerging seemingly from the very moment we went into lockdown, meanwhile we felt we were just stealing moments to try and make sense of the emerging situation, making us question whether we had the capacity (in both time and mental bandwidth) to research. Nonetheless, once we decided that this was, after all, research of a sort, we submitted a conference abstract in which we focused on the emerging narratives of the higher education pandemic.

We began meeting semi-regularly at weekends (usually at 7 am Calgary time, before Verena’s children woke up, and when Leo probably should have been working on his PhD). Our discussions were more free-ranging than task-focused, taking in our recent experiences at work, the latest pandemic news, the latest articles and blog posts that we had been seeing or discussing with colleagues or in our extended networks, and general checking in. Sometimes we would make copious notes of our conversation, while sometimes the main outcome was simply – current status: hanging in there. The consistent aspect of this method of data collection and analysis was that we met regularly, gave each other time to reflect and verbalize our current contexts and concerns, and to practice a form of appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider & Srivastva 1987) by making space to notice what was going well, as well as what didn’t seem to be. During these meetings we noted related and recurring lines of argument coming through in the commentary, and came up with the idea of using the metaphor of avian identities to playfully describe these contrasting positions.

Our first resulting presentation on the topic in August 2020 touched on the idea of open education as ‘missing in action’ from the pandemic, noting its potential significance; but it was as we wrote the abstract for a subsequent presentation that we decided to approach the topic directly from this angle instead – the search for ‘open’ in the viral learning environment. In the sections which follow, we consider first the narratives of the pandemic, and then the results of our search for openness.

AVIAN IDENTITIES OF PANDEMIC PEDAGOGY

As we were confronted by professional demands and narratives that sometimes came into conflict with our pedagogical values and experiences, we reflected upon the “appreciations”

which we and others brought to the situation by playfully reframing the problem of practice (as discussed by Schön 1983: 63), as a set of ‘pandemic pedagogy narratives’ associated with a range of invented ‘avian identities’. In narrative, certain animals, including some species of birds, often stand in for particular human attributes, and the use of these fictional identities allowed us to literally ‘characterise’ lines of argument emerging from these positions. By addressing a group of commentators collectively (rather than singling out specific individuals) under the guise of an avian identity, our hope was to use humour to effect a pivot from negative feelings and frustrations into positive action, while at the same time, highlighting areas of concern, and calling for greater reflexivity and care.

The abrupt transition to online learning over one weekend around much of the world precipitated chaos, confusion and, for educators, overwhelming expectations to transform themselves immediately into digital pedagogues. Online learning, while well-understood and effectively designed in the hands of experienced practitioners, has often been associated with non-traditional student groups rather than the ‘premium’ campus experience often promised by elite and, indeed also, ordinary universities. Perhaps not coincidentally, it has often been discussed as an inferior, remedial or cheaper mode of study, a reputational issue which would not simply melt away when suddenly, resolutely campus-based institutions were forced into reliance on digital media in previously inconceivable ways (Hodges et al. 2020).

Bias against online learning was also compounded by the lack of preparation for pivoting. Despite the best efforts of teaching and support staff to effect a seamless transition, the rapid timing of the initial pivot did not provide much opportunity for universities to support educators in growing their pedagogic repertoires for meaningful online learning design (Bozkurt et al. 2020; Hodges et al. 2020; Schwartzman 2020), with practitioners often stating that ‘this isn’t online learning’. While manifestly this was indeed a version of online learning, the pivot has instead been characterized by new descriptions like remote access learning, or emergency remote teaching (Hodges et al. 2020), emphasising that it was essentially a ‘workaround’ to overcome remoteness, rather than a pedagogic approach that had evolved in the online environment. Some teaching staff described this experience as like building a plane while you are flying it, due to limited digital literacy skills, time, competences and confidence in online learning design and technology (Selwyn 2020). Given the lack of time to prepare, many educators therefore focused initially on using digital tools to replicate the practices found in face-to-face classes, rather than redesign, as had been seen previously in South Africa during the #feesmustfall crisis (Czerniewicz, Trotter & Haupt 2019). However, this represented a short-term solution for a longer-term pedagogical problem (Fernandez & Shaw 2020; Johnson, Veletsianos & Seaman 2020).

In addition to what was going on ‘on the ground’ (or rather, on the screens of educators and students) in the months following the initial pivot, the commentsphere at this time was erupting with opinions, advice, and more hot (and half-baked) takes than the most assiduous followers of the topic could keep up with. In our attempts to relate our lived experiences of the pandemic (and its effects on our workplaces, colleagues and students) to the explanatory narratives entering circulation via news, social media and blogs, we noted that a range of different actors were interpreting the situation back to us in different, but not entirely individual or unique ways. We characterised these as falling into three broad identity categories or ‘archetypes’ which we decided to refer to as the owls, ostriches, and vultures. Each of these identities was associated with expression of a particular kind of narrative.

Ostriches, broadly speaking, are the category of those who espoused that the crisis, though serious, was a temporary glitch. As such, it would be necessary to get through it and cope with the short-term disruption caused by working from home and being online (these being the features assumed to be the main ‘inconveniences’ of the crisis). Ostriches tended to look forward to a not-too-distant future of things going ‘back to normal’ which understandably seemed to strike a chord with many colleagues.

If ostriches were burying their heads in the sand, the sandpit was surely located somewhere on-campus. The ostrich or ‘back to normal’ narrative is founded on an assumption that online learning is fundamentally second-class, and that it was the delivery and reception of this inferior and unfamiliar experience that was the fundamental problem affecting education in the context of the pandemic. It also suggested that happily, this aberrant state of affairs would

soon enough to be over, and normal classroom excellence would soon be resumed at the now-valourised, apparently unproblematic campus. This narrative did not enter the commentsphere simply as wish-fulfilment, though it was sometimes taken up and enthusiastically repeated by those who simply desired the return of normality. Rather, in some cases, it also represented the carefully calibrated messaging of institutions to their student-customers, downplaying the need to panic as ‘business as usual’ would soon resume, and therefore, there also need be no interruption to enrolment, attendance, assessment, fees, or accommodation.

This messaging was sometimes at odds with internal institutional discussions which indicated that staff must continue operating in ‘emergency mode’ in order to prepare a high quality online experience for students returning in the northern autumn, as well as a sudden interest in hybrid or ‘hyflex’ teaching modes that would theoretically allow a lone educator to cater simultaneously for the students in the room, as well as on Zoom. However, in deriding online education as second-class and stressing its ephemeral nature, ostriches and their adherents did little to support the arguments of those like us, working to encourage educators to consider and revise learning designs in line with established principles of good practice and pedagogies of care. Many students reported that their lectures were simply replaced with ‘Zoom lectures’ and the commentsphere was awash with discussions of ‘Zoom fatigue’ (Ramachandran 2021). The suspicion that online learning is fundamentally unpleasant often therefore became self-fulfilling, and the reiteration of this perspective by senior figures within institutions as well as in media commentary served to fuel a backlash from the same students that staff were exhausting themselves to support and engage. Furthermore, in presenting a desired back-to-normal future as always just around the corner, the ostrich narrative, while ostensibly technophobic, nonetheless opened the way for band-aid techno-solutionism, as proffered by the vultures of our tale, to be touted as appropriate substitution for campus-based practices.

Vultures were those vendors in educational technology and publishing who immediately understood the crisis as opportunity, and as the sector began to pivot, cannily introduced what we came to refer to as the ‘free for five minutes’ narrative. According to this narrative, moved to ostensible generosity in a moment of crisis, vendors would (temporarily) make the premium version of their service freely available, or unblock access to huge hidden vistas of paywalled content. Operating in emergency remote (with an edge of panic) mode, and with an assist from the ostriches promising this would soon end, educators and institutions took up these offers gratefully, but then found while their free trials were too-soon expiring, the pandemic was nonetheless continuing. What had been free for five minutes was suddenly, in some cases, now more than full price, as evidenced by the #ebookSOS campaign by academic librarians in the UK who have been calling for an investigation into exploitative practices in the academic ebook market (Bickley 2021; Fazackerley 2021).

Institutions with deep enough pockets were faced with pressure to purchase access to additional services to help ride out the pandemic wave; others simply could not afford to pay. Such cases of pandemic profiteering have presented an additional financial hurdle for struggling institutions (Teräs et al. 2020), but other forms of substitution were even more alarming. Only a year before the pandemic, Macgilchrist (2019) and Regan and Jesse (2019) had described the potential perils of intentional and unintentional data collection in educational contexts. The pandemic saw a rush to install edtech solutions to institutional problems which sometimes came at the expense of creating or amplifying, rather than solving, the versions of the problems experienced by students, particularly those affected by inequalities of access to learning infrastructure, connectivity and quality learning resources (Czerniewicz et al. 2020; Williamson et al. 2020), and those for whom, in the absence of in-person exams, online proctoring services were ‘provided’ as assurance of academic integrity ([againstsurveillance.net](https://www.againstsurveillance.net) 2020).

Meanwhile, for our third avian group, the wise owls of pandemic pedagogy, the self-declared thought leaders as well as legitimate experts in online education, the crisis was also viewed, at least to some degree, as an opportunity. We summarised the message of the owl narrative as ‘this is our moment’. This can be seen as the higher education variant of the ‘live your best life’ narrative that had flared up more broadly, according to which, supposedly having nothing to do in lockdown, people should recognise the perfect time to go on a diet, get fit, and learn a musical instrument. In the educational context, there was more recognition from owls of the pressures staff were under, but also a sense that despite huge workloads, lockdowns, illnesses,

home schooling and generalised trauma of the moment, good practices should be understood and taken up rather more rapidly than has ever been seen before. While the intention was often to promote well-established practices and thereby mitigate the dislocating effects of learning in lockdown, some seemed to believe it was also their moment to shine while 'digitally transforming' higher education forever.

It was tempting, nonetheless, to be caught up in the 'this is our moment' narrative – despite discomfort with framing the pandemic in terms of opportunity and as the moment to sell more ebooks, edtech, or leading thoughts. For staff supporting online learning such as ourselves, it was not unreasonable to hope we could recruit academic staff to the cause, to be recognised for our expertise, to help stave off disaster in the short term, but also make lasting improvements to teaching and learning through increased engagement and baseline knowledge. But such optimism had also already been tempered by the relentlessness of the daily video conferencing, the distant movement of the goal posts, the volume of the what-ifs, the scale of the mountain still to be climbed.

This was also said, by a particular subspecies of owls, to be 'the moment' for open education, which again posed great appeal for us, given that we believed the moment for open education had preceded the pandemic. But while there were calls for the open education community to rally around and demonstrate the power of openness in the face of the pandemic, most members of that community seemed, like ourselves, to be at capacity or overwhelmed in the work of supporting the move online. While many of us were attempting to monitor the flow of owl advice and employ it strategically as appropriate, it seemed to us that most educators were becoming frustrated with the volume and detail of the information from owls and even from institutional support services, and were simply trying to get through one week, or one day, at a time.

SEARCHING FOR OPEN IN THE VIRAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

We approach this discussion from the perspective that higher education, as a collection of people and practices, has much to gain from digital pedagogies, and in particular, a turn towards greater openness. The current pandemic represents the latest, most extreme scenario in which open educational practices (OEP) could usefully play a much larger role. But such calls also beg the question of what version of openness is being invoked.

The concept of openness in education remains somewhat contested. Specific 'products' of openness such as OER, open access publications and open data are typically understood as open due to free digital access and permissive licensing which additionally allows some degree of reuse and repurposing. Linked to this idea of openness, there has been much discussion of practices which are closely connected to the creation and (re)use of OER (see Ehlers 2011; Paskevicius 2017; Wiley & Hilton 2018). However, we would note that other open education or open learning practices and relevant learning theories precede (and co-exist alongside) OER, and do not necessarily have a direct association with it. Cronin (2017) outlines these strands of OEP as comprising:

collaborative practices that include the creation, use, and reuse of OER... as well as pedagogical practices employing participatory technologies, and social networks for interaction, peer-learning, knowledge creation, and empowerment of learners. (p. 18)

OEP, thought of as practices that act to open education, are also often regarded as practices which intentionally provide participants with the opportunity for equitable, safe and human-centred learning experiences and which aim to enable socially just education, as well as collective and collaborative approaches to knowledge production.

As already noted, the pandemic pivot provided instructors with a previously inconceivable opportunity to experience the possibilities of online learning. The initial pivot to emergency remote teaching was an emergency solution. As we have transitioned into exploring the possibilities of online pedagogy, there has been an unsurprising eagerness from those who sell digital solutions to expand their markets, and from those who advocate for, support and design digital learning for their guidance to be heard. As members of that latter category ourselves, we came to realise that although our advice might be both good and desired, educators often

preferred (or needed) to experience teaching online for themselves, in order to be able to reflect and iterate upon the learning design process.

The vast numbers of courses needing to be moved online tended to preclude the option of fully supported co-design of courses with experienced learning designers that might normally be possible in online education. Therefore we surmised that, as educators were often during this period learning experientially and incrementally advancing their practice, they were going to be less likely to adopt more ‘advanced’ digital and open practices such as the sourcing, use and remixing of OER, which though in our view highly desirable, tend to require negotiation of a steep learning curve that educators simply didn’t have the time for.

However, we also realised that unexpectedly, in the connections forming between educators, openness was taking hold after all. It wasn’t the licensed openness of OER, or the massive openness of MOOCs, but instead a simpler, humbler form of openness, located within the iterative process of design, reflection, and sharing. Our colleagues were talking to each other, and just like us, looking to each other for support and guidance. Of course, there is a group of academic staff who have always enthusiastically shared ideas about teaching, but whereas all researchers must share and present the fruits of their research labours, the discussion of teaching practices is often regarded as more of a niche interest. The pandemic emergency interrupted normal practices and mores, taking precedence over other activities and priorities. Many staff now found themselves unsure whether they were doing things right and curious to know how others were handling it. Perhaps empowered by the sense that no one was ‘judging’, staff were suddenly revealing their doubts, their concerns, their experiments, their discoveries in the strange new digital land.

In meetings with colleagues, despite the long lockdowns, home schooling challenges, the dark days of winter, spiking rates of infection and new virus variants, discussions of recent teaching successes and technical mishaps were enthusiastically offered and received like gifts with smiles, laughter and sympathy. Our observations were echoed by the findings of THE Campus Digital Teaching Survey Special Report 2021, which noted that such sharing practices had become more widespread; almost 60 per cent of respondents agreed that the pandemic had made them more open to sharing what they know, and nearly 80 per cent had benefited from learning how peers at other institutions had shifted to online teaching (Jump 2021).

Consequently, we have come to understand that the open pivot we had hoped for, feared lost, but ultimately found in pandemic pedagogy, was a shift towards interdependence in pedagogic choices and strategies. By reflecting upon and taking the time to share ideas and connect about learning design experiences, educators were able to work towards flexibility, responsiveness, social presence and interaction. Teaching staff have shared their experiences through open and closed feedback loops that included multiple people, spaces, perspectives, and environments, from social media to ‘show up and share’ workshops. The boundary between formal and informal professional learning has been blurred as the pandemic challenged humans to ‘socially distance’ themselves in physical spaces and increase social interaction in online spaces. Cronin (2017) refers to such willingness to share with others as *open readiness*, a state that requires an intentional balancing of privacy and openness, typically in the use of social and participatory technologies. Within the constraints of the pandemic, the acceptable balance between privacy and openness for our colleagues was sometimes found within the faculty or institution – not necessarily reaching beyond the online campus walls. Although some could question how open such practice therefore is, we would suggest that openness is better understood as a continuum than as half of a binary.

CONCLUSION

When we originally decided to describe the rapid pivot online (and its subsequent evolution into more intentional forms of online practice) as ‘pandemic pedagogy’, the intention was really just to prompt a discussion of how we might, or should, successfully teach online in the context of the pandemic. However, much like the methods and findings of this paper, an alternative meaning of pandemic pedagogy has been more emergent: what is the pandemic teaching us? At the beginning of this we didn’t realise we would have so much to learn. As time went on we would see how fragile normal is, as lockdowns and an ever-shifting array of restrictions swept

predictability aside. We were reminded how hollow of meaning the invocation of the ‘normal’ really is, as the pandemic exposed and magnified existing inequalities (Bozkurt et al. 2020; Costello et al. 2020; Czerniewicz et al. 2020; Gourlay et al. 2021; Schwartzman 2020).

As Nerantzi (2017) has argued, willingness and readiness to participate in professional learning with colleagues is fundamental to teaching quality enhancement, and perhaps more so than official quality assurance processes. In the pandemic context, in our view (and despite the efforts of the owls, vultures and ostriches), ultimately this opening up of practice to shared reflection seems to have provided the most vital source of support and succour. Perhaps this should not have come as a great surprise. The need for interaction, connection and networking in online spaces has long been recognised as a key component in online learning design, although its icebreakers and community-building activities have tended to be viewed with suspicion by traditional academia. However perhaps the sense that such activities might not be ‘rigorous’ enough is at last giving way to a recognition that design, especially in an emergency setting, must centre sharing and caring in order to make space for learning.

Most importantly, open learning emphasized the learning process (over the product) in order to build upon and share community knowledge. OEP was integrated through a focus on human-centred learning and an intentional desire to consider student personas, needs, and to promote equity in terms of access and infrastructure. Human-centred learning was also emphasized with the rise of focus on academic integrity and the tension between traditional and alternative forms of assessment, especially when considering online exam proctoring. Human-centred learning also emphasizes a need for promoting sustainable learning opportunities that promote personal/professional learning networks (PLNs) that highlight and emphasize the importance that no one needs to learn in isolation (Imad 2021).

As Cronin (2017) found in her study of OEP, educators who employ aspects of OEP may not have any awareness, let alone use of OER; she proposed that, contrary to the prevailing narrative that OER use should lead to OEP, it may be the converse that is more likely. Therefore, we would also note that while we applaud the steps in OEP many educators have now taken in the course of responding to the pandemic, it is also true that they are baby steps. If and when the ostriches get their way and higher education goes ‘back to normal’ as they have long predicted, there is a danger that these steps will falter, and the newly gained awareness of possibilities, digital skills and practice of sharing could easily be lost. And from our point of view, returning to the old normal is for the birds.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

AUTHOR AFFILIATIONS

Leo Havemann  orcid.org/0000-0003-1843-4483
University College London/Open University, GB

Verena Roberts  orcid.org/0000-0003-3336-7805
Thompson Rivers University/University of Calgary, CA

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TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Havemann, L and Roberts, V. 2021. Pivoting Open? Pandemic Pedagogy and the Search for Openness in the Viral Learning Environment. *Journal of Interactive Media in Education*, 2021(1): 27, pp. 1–11. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5334/jime.676>

Submitted: 13 April 2021

Accepted: 28 September 2021

Published: 13 December 2021

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Journal of Interactive Media in Education is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Ubiquity Press.