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Two Ends of a Spectrum: 'I have no interest in getting to know other students online' versus 'It was nice to be given the chance to meet my tutor and other students in person'. Some cautionary tales from 825 Level 1 distance learning students about flexible modes of delivery.

Conference or Workshop Item

How to cite:

Roy, James (2022). Two Ends of a Spectrum: 'I have no interest in getting to know other students online' versus 'It was nice to be given the chance to meet my tutor and other students in person'. Some cautionary tales from 825 Level 1 distance learning students about flexible modes of delivery. In: Advance HE Teaching and Learning Conference 2022: Teaching in the spotlight: Where next for enhancing student success?, 5-7 Jul 2022, Northumbria University, Newcastle.

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Two ends of a spectrum: *'I have no interest getting to know other students online'* versus *'It was nice to be given the chance to meet my tutor and other students in person'*. Some cautionary tales from 825 Level 1 distance learning students about flexible modes of delivery.

James Roy, Senior Lecturer & Education Staff Tutor

AdvanceHE Teaching and Learning Conference 2022: *Teaching in the Spotlight: Where next for enhancing student success?*

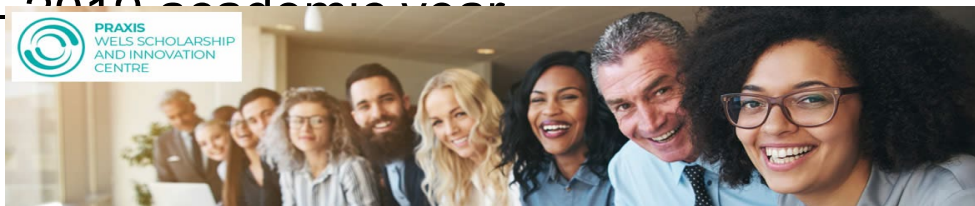
5th July 2022



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Project Team & Details

- **Project Team**: *James Roy (Principal Investigator); Lynda Griffin, Jeremy Wilcock; Isobel Shelton; Irene Wong-Gormley, Roisin McPhilemy; Sue Creed*
- Project ***funded*** by [Faculty of Wellbeing, Education & Language Studies \(WELS\) Scholarship & Innovation Centre, PRAXIS](#)
- Human Research Ethics Committee *approved*; Student Research & Scholarship Committee *approved/supplied student data for contact*
- 2018 – 2019 academic year



What we did

Research question:

What are Level 1 students' experiences of tutorial provision within a blended tuition model in a distance learning university?

Survey of students on the two largest Level 1 modules in ECYS: **E103** and **E102**

Module Code	Module Name	Total students registered March 2019	Sample size surveyed	No. of Responses	Response rate %
E102	Introduction to childhood studies and child psychology	3, 530	3052	629	20.6%
E103	Teaching and learning in the primary years	1,710	1025	196	19.1%

Total responses: 825 out of 4,077 surveyed. 20.23% response rate

Methodology in brief

Online survey (MS Forms): quantitative items; open-ended items/qualitative data. Inductive integrated mixed methods. Data generate & evolve findings/conclusions.

Complementary principle: quant & qual data -> *in parallel* not one after the other (cf. Hauck et al, 2020; Creamer, 2017).

Respondents' reported lived experience -> explain and amplify trends in quantitative/numerical data (cf. Hauck et al, 2020; Creamer, 2017).

Qualitative data add the 'oh, my goodness!' aspect

Revealed -> a *spectrum of difference*

What does 'open to people' mean?

No formal entry requirements: approx. 35% 1 x A'Level or lower

Learning for all since 1969

205, 000+ distance learning students {[Students' stories](#)}

No 'typical' age range –returning to study after a long break away from the classroom

36,400 students declaring a disability in 2020/21

Extensive diversity

Inevitable *spectrum of difference*

A bit more context ..

Supported open learning

OU module content *teaches* – *student-facing*

Tutors support, facilitate & assess student progress

Synchronous live tutorials - NOT compulsory

Asynchronous forums

Recorded ‘empty room’ summaries

2019: face-to-face & online (Adobe Connect online rooms)

And, a quote!

Hermann (2014: 591) notes that

‘Research has consistently demonstrated that students’ approaches to learning are associated with students’ perceptions of the learning environment’

Guess what! Students will always surprise us!

In this presentation, you will:

- **Hear a little about our diverse students' experiences**
- +
- **Consider the 'mix it up' principle to address the inevitable *spectrum of difference*.**
- +
- **Be able to have – and inform - a positive impact on the success of your students**

Enable student agency

PLANNING

To interact? Or, not to interact?

‘I liked not ‘having’ to interact but choosing it’

‘Lots of interaction. Death by PowerPoint is horrendous’

Agency: value of **tools**. Chat pods; polls; quizzes.

Interaction -> plan beyond ‘just’ speaking in online mode

BUT ...

**+/- 80% in employment
+ parents; carers**

Time-precious instrumental learners

Assignment, assignment, assignment!

'...time is limited I really just want to cut to the chase; tell me what I need to do for the assignment and that's it'

Anxious students?

**Synchronous
CHAT Box is a good option**

Remember fearful, anxious students!

**‘anonymity of the chat box’. More ‘comfortable’
way of asking questions & sharing**

**Asynchronous
OpenLearn Course: [Building confidence in using
online forums](#)**

Free course

**Building confidence in
using online forums**

Speaking ..?

'I found the tutorials most effective where there was a mixture of listening to the tutor and then using the chat box to raise questions or to share views and discuss with fellow students and the tutor' (E103)

That spectrum of difference ...

'collaboration' for *some* was *great*, for *others* was more of an *unnecessary distraction* ...

{Tutorials} are vital for **encouragement**, **collaboration** with **other students** and **support** from our **tutor**. More tutorials the better!

...The thing is. If I wanted to attend tutorials and make student friends etc, I'd have gone to a brick university

PowerPoint – *great* for *many/most*, but *deadly boring* for *others*

'variety' -> for *some*, variety is good, for *others*, variety is **'inconsistency'**

Face-to-face vs online?

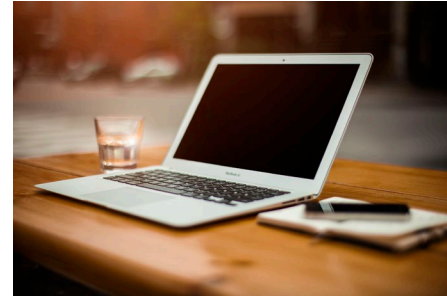
Face-to-face -> can be '**added value**' for some – tutors can be *more responsive*. *More immediate interaction*. '*I love the banter....tutor went with the flow ...went off on relevant tangents*' + '*tutor can be more responsive to what students want -adapting to the session accordingly*'

BUT:

Significant numbers preferred online – especially seen as *more convenient, less travel, fits with busy life, facilitates caring roles*

Remember: '*...time is limited I really just want to cut to the chase; tell me what I need to do for the assignment and that's it*'

What influences choice?



Most convenient **time** {work, caring, parenting, busy lives}

+

Most convenient **place** {travel, cost, location, online vs f2f}

Key Practical Recommendations: the 'mix it up' principle!

- **Mix up** your *blended*! One size will never fit all -> a *spectrum of difference is inevitable*
- Plan online timetabling around **times** that suit *most* students
- Listen to, and *respond* to, your students' voices -> enable students' agency. *Students' voices* ... **not** student voice
- *Content delivery* – which mode is most suitable?? (mix it up principle)
- *Content discussion* – which mode is most suitable? Potential 'added value' of face-to-face (mix it up principle)
- *Interaction and discussion* -> **not** always need **talking** in *online mode (chat box ...)*
- *Remember the anxious, the nervous.*
- *Mix it up principle: several sizes to fit as many as possible*

References

- Creamer, E. G. (2017). *An introduction to fully integrated mixed methods research*. Sage publications
- Hauck, M., Müller-Hartmann, A., Rienties, B., & Rogaten, J. (2020). Approaches to researching digital-pedagogical competence development in VE-based teacher education. *Journal of Virtual Exchange*, 3(SI), 5-35.
- Herrmann KJ (2014) *Learning from tutorials: a qualitative study of approaches to learning and perceptions of tutorial interaction*, Higher Education, Vol. 68, No. 4 (October 2014), pp. 591-606 Published by: Springer

Our planned article:

Exploring a spectrum of difference - seeking clarity, seeking connection, seeking confidence. What students told us about their experiences of tutorials in a blended learning context.

E: james.roy@open.ac.uk

THANK YOU!



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