

**“YOU MAKE YOURSELF ENTIRELY AVAILABLE”:**

**EMOTIONAL LABOUR IN A CARING APPROACH TO ONLINE**

**TEACHING**

**“TI RENDI COMPLETAMENTE DISPONIBILE”:** IL LAVORO

**EMOTIVO IN UN APPROCCIO DI CURA NELL’INSEGNAMENTO**

**ONLINE**

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**ABSTRACT** This study examines the challenges experienced, and the pedagogy adopted, by university teachers as they transferred their teaching online during the Covid-19 pandemic. Thematic analysis of survey and interview data show that teachers engaged regularly in emotional support of students, and a pedagogy of care was discernible in the ways teachers described seeking out signals that the students’ needs were being met online. However, technology mediated communication made this more difficult in online teaching than face-to-face, increasing teachers’ emotional labour. Teachers’ efforts to achieve interaction with, and feedback from, students to inform their teaching approach, incurred a heavy burden of emotional labour that is insufficiently recognised or rewarded. This study has implications for the debate around the justification of equivalent fees for online teaching, since it reveals more emotional labour is involved. Universities risk burnout of experienced educators unless the emotional labour in online teaching is acknowledged and supported. Moreover, since emotional labour is often borne by the least privileged sections of the university workforce, this study uncovers uncomfortable questions about the persistence of systemic problems causing staff inequalities that cannot afford to be ignored.

**KEYWORDS** Pandemic; Teachers; Higher Education; Pedagogy; Technology.

**SOMMARIO** Questo studio esamina le sfide vissute e la pedagogia adottata dai docenti universitari nel trasferire online la loro attività di insegnamento durante la pandemia di Covid-19. L'analisi tematica dei dati di un questionario e delle interviste mostra che i docenti si sono regolarmente impegnati nell'offrire supporto emotivo agli studenti e che era riconoscibile una pedagogia della cura nei modi in cui gli insegnanti hanno descritto la ricerca di segnali dei bisogni degli studenti che venivano soddisfatti online. Tuttavia, la comunicazione mediata dalla tecnologia ha reso questo più difficile nell'insegnamento online rispetto a quello faccia a faccia, aumentando il lavoro emotivo degli insegnanti. Gli sforzi degli insegnanti per ottenere l'interazione con gli studenti e il loro feedback per informare il loro approccio di insegnamento sono stati costretti ad un pesante carico di lavoro emotivo che non è sufficientemente riconosciuto o premiato. Questo studio ha implicazioni per il dibattito intorno alla giustificazione dei costi di tutoring equivalenti per l'insegnamento online, poiché rivela che è coinvolto più lavoro emotivo. Le università rischiano il burnout degli educatori esperti a meno che il lavoro emotivo nell'insegnamento online non sia riconosciuto e sostenuto. Inoltre, poiché il lavoro emotivo è spesso sostenuto dalle sezioni meno privilegiate della forza lavoro universitaria, questo studio pone domande scomode sulla persistenza di problemi sistemici che causano disuguaglianze nel personale e che non possono permettersi di essere ignorati.

**PAROLE CHIAVE** Pandemia; Insegnanti; Istruzione Superiore; Pedagogia; Tecnologia.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

What does it take to adopt a pedagogy of care in online learning? The purpose of this study is to examine the challenges experienced, and the pedagogy adopted, by university teachers as they transferred their teaching online during the COVID-19 pandemic. We situate our analysis within the discussion of pedagogies of care (Noddings, 2012) and emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983). While we do not claim to reveal issues that were unknown before the pandemic, our analysis focuses renewed attention on the often overlooked emotional labour involved in caring pedagogy, that is often borne by the least privileged segments of the academic workforce (Motta & Bennett, 2018). We develop our argument by demonstrating that the pandemic has made this more visible and extended it into the terrain of online teaching and learning. The analysis presented here forms an original contribution to the literature on online teaching and learning by demonstrating, perhaps surprisingly, that the majority of teaching staff in our study are committed to a pedagogy of care, and attempted to achieve this online, but that the personal and professional impact of this labour was not acknowledged. Our discussion and conclusion explores the significance of highlighting the emotional labour involved in the commitment to a pedagogy of care online for a number of pressing debates in higher education, including whether online teaching justifies student tuition fees equivalent to face-to-face, classroom teaching.

## 2. A PEDAGOGY OF CARE IN ONLINE LEARNING

Discussions of care often trace back to embodied moments, such as mother-child interactions or therapy (Held, 2006). Since pedagogic care draws from this same tradition, our research questions explore:

- What happens when pedagogy has to take place remotely?
- How are the caring aspects of pedagogy enacted and sustained when education moves online?

Noddings describes a pedagogy of care as a set of relationships built on trust, respect and reciprocity (Noddings, 1992), with teachers being engrossed in their students (Noddings, 1984). The idea of a pedagogy of care draws in several different but related elements, including attention to power, culture, and resources, alongside a commitment to make the pedagogic relationships reciprocal and justice-oriented (Zygmunt et al., 2018). Achieving this is always challenging, but becomes even more difficult when teachers and students are separated, relying purely on technologies that they may not be familiar with to interact. This was the situation educators in some countries were placed in while working under enforced “lockdown” conditions during the Covid-19 pandemic. As Walker & Gleaves have noted (2016), incorporating care into teacher-student relationships can be intensely complex and problematic when policies and environments change. This makes the pandemic situation – in which the educational environment changed rapidly, and policies were re-worked constantly – an important and rich environment in which this “*critically important agenda for further research in higher education*” (Walker & Gleaves, 2016, p. 75) can be pursued.

There are important historical inequalities and injustices that can influence both the quality of a caring, pedagogic relationship and the needs of the student. Racism, for example, produces well-documented structural inequalities, such as poverty that both create needs and also limits students’ access to educational opportunities (Lipsitz, 2011). It also works more subtly, for example in the ways that staff and parents explain away White privilege under the guise of meritocracy, or the way in which actions to “help” students of color entrench deficit narratives about their homes, families or school districts (Rolón-Dow, 2005). There are also well-documented gendered inequalities, and inevitably intersections that compound these structural injustices for individuals. For example, Cardozo (2017, p. 412) has warned that the rise of “*teaching only*” academics “*should alert us to the longstanding history in which women, and women of color in particular, have been ‘forced to care.’*” Again, the Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated existing inequalities, in areas including health, education, and financial impact (Blundell, Costa Dias, Joyce, & Xu, 2020).

Other inequalities in care arise because of the limited way in which teachers conceive of their relationships with their students. Some are primarily concerned with formal responsibilities, focusing on ideas and concepts, which Nodding referred to as *aesthetical care* (1984, p. 21). In an educational context, this might be enacted by attending to policies, procedures, and other abstracted principles that are intended to improve attainment. In contrast, Noddings argues, care should involve an open relationship with another (pp. 4-5). Rolón-Dow (2005) developed this idea, extending Noddings’ distinction using Critical Race Theory and Latino/a critical race theory. She recognises the distinction between the way some teachers focused on “*technical aspects of teaching and learning such as standardized curricula, goals, and teaching strategies*” (p. 86) and those who pursued a fuller, authentic relational form of care for the student, which includes their lived experience. However, Rolón-Dow argues that even approaches oriented towards interpersonal relationships do not go far enough; unless they consider the racialized contextual factors surrounding such relationships, these acts of care can reinforce rather than address the injustices that students face, both as individuals but also as members of a community.

The central role that emotion plays in pedagogy has been highlighted by authors influenced by the “affective turn” (Zembylas, 2014). These researchers seek to critique overly-rationalist accounts of teaching that have come to

dominate the “audit culture” of contemporary higher education with its emphasis on hierarchy, rankings and competition (Motta & Bennett, 2018). Re-examining higher education teaching in relation to the concept of “emotional labour” reframes this (often excessive) labour in productive and original ways (Hochschild, 1983). In this paper we analyse the experiences of educators in higher education, using the concept of emotional labour to make sense of the way pedagogies of care were sustained through the challenges that the Covid-19 pandemic posed.

### 3. THE EMOTIONAL LABOUR OF A CARING PEDAGOGY

Emotional labour is work that “*requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others*” (Hochschild, 1983, p. 7). In teaching, conveying interest in students’ contributions to the academic debate is central to creating a supportive environment for learning, and needs to be maintained despite personal and professional distractions. This may, therefore, require higher education staff to induce or suppress other feelings. Hochschild (1983) observed that this management of emotions happens routinely in one’s personal life and plays an important role in relationships, often involving a “gift exchange”, where one person allows leeway for offending behaviour in return for equivalent indulgence in return. When it is required at work, however, the “*transmutation*” of a private act into a public act occurs” (Hochschild, 1983, p. 19).

Emotional labour involved in supporting and teaching students incurs considerable psychological cost to the teacher (Laws, & Fiedler., 2012), which may not be sufficiently acknowledged or rewarded. This situation is compounded by gender inequality, since traditionally “*emotion management has been better understood and more often used by women as one of the offerings they trade for economic support*” (Hochschild, 1983, p. 20). Emotional labour can be seen as a joyful aspect of the job and as such has the potential to be “*both alienating and liberating*” (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006, p. 132). However, failure to manage one’s own and others’ emotions sufficiently according to organisational expectations is associated with “*burnout*” (Copp, 1998). Teachers who suffer burnout are often experienced teachers succumbing to the accumulated effects of emotional exhaustion or who are confronting changes to the way that they teach (Bodenheimer & Shuster, 2020).

Adopting an emotionally engaged, caring approach to teaching has long been conceived as fundamental to a feminist engagement with teaching (e.g. Boler, 1999; Chubbuck & Zembylas, 2008). For example, Noddings (1999) advanced a feminist pedagogy based on caring which involves “*for the one caring, a ‘feeling with’ the other*” (p. 46). This feeling is distinguishable from empathy. It is the capacity to take on board the other’s perspective – “*stepping out of one’s own personal frame of reference into the other’s*” (Noddings, 1999, p. 51) – which, when it happens, can never afterwards be disregarded.

For Noddings, the caring relation needs to be completed by being acknowledged by the cared-for. Such mutualistic caring relations have a better chance of being formed over the long term. In teaching, the caring relation is to be attentive to the student, listening out for their expressed needs, rather than assuming what their needs are (Noddings, 2012). Emotional labour in these contexts is not a bad thing – indeed, it is a key component of a caring approach to teaching (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006). However, sometimes it is not possible to meet students’ needs – teachers may lack resources or disapprove of the needs expressed. These situations (which may, in Hochschild’s 1983 terms, involve the management of emotions) necessitate keeping communication channels open, so that “*the carer’s objective is to maintain the caring relation*” (Noddings, 2012, p. 772). Within this relation, the role of the cared-for is to show that the caring has been received – not necessarily with gratitude, but

with some kind of response. Noddings (2012) underscores the importance of this for the caring relation to exist, remarking that teachers “*sometimes forget how dependent they are on the response of our students*” (pp. 772-3). Two distinct facets of emotional labour were visible during the Covid-19 pandemic. The first of these was caused by the shift from working in a defined workplace, where work and home responsibilities are physically distanced, to working from home. Integrating work and home makes it difficult to separate the emotional labour associated with home (e.g. childcare, eldercare, housework, etc) from work. The second facet has been an intensity in the emotional labour required at work, such as supporting a colleague or a student who experienced anxiety or some form of difficulty during the pandemic.

Because emotional labour is typically gendered, women were disproportionately affected. The evidence shows that the Covid-19 crisis slowed progress towards greater gender equality, with women’s jobs being 1.8 times more vulnerable to the crisis than men’s jobs (Mahajan, White, Madgavkar, & Krishnan, 2020). Although women account for 39% of the global workforce, from January to May 2020, women made up 54% of job losses worldwide due to the pandemic (ibid). At the same time, the burden of unpaid care, which increased during the pandemic, fell disproportionately on women (Craig & Churchill, 2020). This aligns with evidence from past economic crises indicating that the differential impact on men's and women's employment is influenced by expectations related to gender and the duty of care both through work and at home (Del Boca, Oggero, Profeta, & Rossi, 2020).

#### **4. INEQUALITY, TECHNOLOGY AND EMOTIONAL BURNOUT**

Caring labour has traditionally impacted female academics, and this was exacerbated by Covid-19. By having to work from home during the pandemic, women academics, particularly those with caring responsibilities, appear to have paid a steep career price. There is evidence that they were not able to carry out work at the same intensity as their male counterparts, because of continual disruption from children or others in their care (Authors, 2020). Such disruptions led some women academics to reduce the time they spend on activities that lead to promotion, such as research and publication (ibid). Studies show that women scientists had to reduce their research time by an average of 17%, with those with young children having to make the greatest cuts (Myers et al., 2020). A regression analysis of medical journal publications exposed a sharp reduction in women scientists as first authors on Covid-19 papers (Andersen, Nielsen, Simone, Lewiss, & Jagsi, 2020). Analysis of social science journals similarly showed a sharp drop in submissions from female academics (Cui, Ding, & Zhu, 2020). These findings are consistent with the idea that the research productivity of women academics was affected more than the research productivity of men. There is general agreement that without adequate care services, the careers of women with caring responsibilities may continue to be affected even after the pandemic (Blaskó, Papadimitriou, & Manca, 2020). However, even where childcare activities were equally shared within a household while working from home, there was evidence that the additional burden of housework often fell on women (Del Boca et al, 2020). Despite these setbacks, some women reported positive effects of working remotely, citing the ability to manage competing priorities and make connections with colleagues in new ways (Pimentel, 2020).

There is an assumption that women academics who do not have caring responsibilities at home may have been more able to engage in activities that lead to promotion (see for example, Minello, 2020). However, there is longstanding evidence that women academics who are approached directly or indirectly by students experiencing significant levels of distress tend to prioritise giving advice and counselling over activities that would advance their own careers (Bagilhole, 1993). Even though it has been known for almost three decades that women have taken greater responsibility for emotional labour through work, caring for students has not been prioritised and

rewarded through the job appraisal processes compared with other forms of academic labour such as research. Bagihole argues that the reason some women academics have prioritised pastoral care is because women tend to have different perceptions of their job compared to their male colleagues (Bagihole, 1993, p. 267).

During Covid-19, technology necessarily mediated the capacity of teachers to seek out and respond to the expressed needs of their students – in other words, to enact a caring pedagogy. Commentators have noted that digitisation is partly responsible for an increase in the “*purposeful work*” of academic staff in relation to the three principal areas of academic labour: research, teaching, and administration (Woodcock, 2018). The rapid shift to online teaching as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic accelerated this trend still further, particularly in relation to teaching. During the pandemic, students who were remote from the campus, and separated from their teachers and their peers, experienced the world with heightened emotions and needed reassurance. Simultaneously, teaching online meant that staff found it difficult to interpret how students are feeling and whether their support was having a positive effect (Littlejohn & Kennedy, 2020). In response, teachers tried to compensate for the inadequacy of the technological tools they were using by increasing their emotional labour. This situation thereby created the precise environment most likely to cause emotional burnout in experienced educators.

The next section delineates the research methodology employed to make sense of teachers’ experiences of moving online during Covid-19.

## 5. RESEARCH METHODS

### 5.1. Context of the study

The research presented here was undertaken at a university in the UK during the period of March to August 2020, following the move to remote work caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. The data collected and analysed here was part of a wider project to explore how staff experienced this transition<sup>1</sup>. Two sources of data were collected: survey and interview data. The data we present is valuable because of the historical period in which we collected it (i.e. the first period of the pandemic), and its scale. We conducted the survey at a time when university teachers were moving their teaching online, often for the very first time, and doing it *en masse*. We asked them to reflect on this critical moment as they were entering the “*hermeneutic circle*” (Geertz 1983, p. 69) of online learning for the first time. By producing qualitative reflexive accounts at such a critical point, our participants had highly tuned awareness of their experiences, akin to ethnographers entering the field for the first time. Participants’ reflections recorded “*the significance and intricacies of [their] presuppositions*” (Chughtai & Myers 2017, p. 800) about teaching, bringing prior knowledge, assumptions, and expectations to interpret their experiences. For example, many participants opted to judge online learning against their experience of face-to-face teaching. This revealed as much about what they were doing before as what they were trying to do online.

### 5.2. Data collection

Survey data consisted of 412 responses to a short series of open questions that invited staff to share their experiences of the transition to working remotely. Specific questions prompted them to share their experiences in

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1 The authors wish to acknowledge the contributions of other members of the research team: Lesley Gourlay, Kit Logan, Tim Neumann, John Potter and Jennifer A. Rode

relation to teaching, research and management duties that they held. Drawing on the methodology laid out by Gourlay and Oliver (2018), respondents were asked to submit an image, which they could either find or create themselves, that they felt represented some aspect of their experience, and were invited to share an explanation of what this meant to them. Demographic information was also collected as part of the survey, as was information about their contract type and employment status. 32 follow-up interviews were conducted with selected academic and professional staff who agreed to be contacted to gain in-depth insight into their responses. These interviews took place online using Skype or MS Teams, lasting 40 minutes to 1 hour. The interviews focused around the experiences of working from home under “lockdown” restrictions (when travel and interaction with others was restricted), and adaptation of teaching, research, and administration to online settings. The project received ethical approval from the institution, and followed the guidelines developed by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018). Participants were invited to opt-in to each part of the study, were informed of their right to withdraw at any time, and their anonymity and confidentiality were assured.

### **5.3. Analysis**

The data were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. First, descriptive statistics were used to characterise the quantitative survey responses, and to identify broad patterns that might warrant further analysis. Then, a reflexive thematic analysis was undertaken of the open text survey responses and interview transcripts using Nvivo and similar to that described by Braun & Clarke (2019). This involved reading the responses; noting themes that characterised either the whole or part of each; reviewing and grouping the themes into categories; and developing codes to name each category, before extracting vivid examples to convey effectively what the data was telling us. This reflexive approach to analysis requires us to acknowledge our positionality within the research and embrace our subjectivity. Although the authors have a range of backgrounds, we share the following similarities: experience of teaching face-to-face and online; a commitment to caring through teaching and to online learning; caring responsibilities; and managerial responsibilities with an acknowledged duty to address issues of inequality at institutional level. These subjectivities inevitably influence our coding (Braun & Clarke, 2020). However, we also adopted measures to ensure the trustworthiness of our conclusions, including sharing our coded Nvivo files amongst the team and discussing the coding strategy during regular meetings throughout the project to highlight inconsistency and ensure rigor of analysis.

Interview data was coded separately from survey data and produced codes that were highly compatible. This paper addresses the subset of codes that related to online teaching that were found in both data sets. These codes were “*Emotional challenges*”, “*Interaction with students*”, “*Lack of time, resource or support*”, “*Practices and routines*”, and “*Opportunities*”. Table 1 presents the themes and subthemes that were developed in both survey and interview data with example quotations, which show the applicability of the codes across the data set.

Theme	Sub themes: surveys	Sub themes: interviews	Example quotes (surveys)	Example quotes (interviews)
<b>Emotional challenges</b>	Anxieties (impact on job, inequality, online safety, students' needs); emotional labour	Focus; isolation; anxiety; trauma; coping; workload	"I am extremely worried about moving to online teaching on a more permanent basis." (Freda)	"I said to my other half, this isn't working, I can't manage this" (Amy)
<b>Interaction with students</b>		Diminished experience	"Little interaction - students say a lot less. Like a weird Facebook conversation" (Harry)	"...then I had a large group with nobody's cameras on, which was really hard work." (Ella)
<b>Lack of time, resource or support</b>	Impact on other work; marking; development needs; technology; tired/exhausted.	Overwhelmed; development needs; university guidelines; adaptations	"It takes much longer to explain anything, and material sharing is cumbersome online. Internet connections lag." (Suzana)	"I end up working really long hours and other people just go no, too much, I can't do it". (Fenella)
<b>Practices and routines</b>	Work space (domestic responsibilities; part-time work; personal space; physical health)	Work space, personal technology, changed role, domestic responsibilities, university technology.	"students are now seeing inside the very private space of my home." (Tim)	"I need a bigger table. Homes are not set up" (Alice)
<b>Opportunities</b>	Interpersonal connection; positive impact on pedagogy; preference for home-based working; solidarity.	Support from colleagues	"It is about time that [the university] moved out of the stone ages." (William)	"there was this kind of excitement about the fact that we're finally gonna have some movement here" (Cole)

**Table 1.** Themes, sub themes and illustrations.

The themes are discussed in the findings section that follows, with a summary of the range of responses and illustrative quotes to provide examples. Finally, vignettes are provided that add to this analysis by drawing on interview data to provide narrative cases. These add further depth to the themes that are reported, but also illustrate how these came together in the lived experience of participants.

## 6. FINDINGS

### 6.1. Overview of survey responses

Among the 412 responses to the survey between March 26 and August 30, 2020, 72% of respondents were academics and 28% from professional services (e.g. administrators, learning technologists, or other). 80% were full-time, 19% were part-time, and 1% were on "as and when" contracts. 75% of respondents identified as female, 23% as male, and 2% preferred not to say. Respondents' ages were evenly distributed between 26 and 65, with some responses from older staff and a small number from staff under 25. Most respondents (87%) identified as White, with 5% identifying as Asian, 5% as mixed/multiple or other ethnic groups and 2% preferring not to say. We were concerned that only 0.6% identified as Black but were unable to find a reason for this either in the data or in subsequent discussions about the work. Although the number of survey responses is small compared with the total number of staff at the institution (circa 13,000) and is not representative of all minority groups (particularly Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic), the survey provided in-depth accounts illustrating the experiences of a substantial number of staff.

Among the respondents, 50% had caring responsibilities: 37% cared for children, 9.5% had elder care responsibilities, 7.5% had other caring responsibilities and 3.5% had multiple caring responsibilities. More females than males reported childcare responsibilities (39.3% versus 28.9%), but this was not statistically significant.

Participants were asked how many people they lived with, how many rooms suitable for working they had available to them, and about whether their experiences of teaching and of researching from home were negative or positive. Most respondents lived with one other adult (54%); 17% were the only adult and the rest lived with two or more other adults. Reported satisfaction was not significantly affected by gender or childcare responsibilities, but having more rooms was associated with positive experiences of trying to teach from home ( $\chi^2=62.887$ , 28 d.f.,  $p<0.01$ ).

## 6.2. Teachers' need for interaction

Participants' concerns about the impact of poor-quality internet (on their own or their students' work) and the resources available to them at home were grouped with the theme of "*lack of time, resource or support*". These were perhaps predictable given the enormous disruption they faced. However, the central focus of these complaints was communication with students during online teaching. This was revealing because it illuminated what teachers were used to achieving in face-to-face sessions, and what they now wanted to achieve via technological mediation. From analysing survey participants' comments about teaching online, it became evident that they had interpreted the shift to online teaching fairly narrowly as teaching synchronously through video conferencing apps such as Zoom, Teams and Blackboard Collaborate. The term "difficult" was used repeatedly in describing this kind of teaching online, because it did not achieve the same level of interaction and engagement from students as face-to-face teaching. "Interaction with students" emerged as a separate theme, in which the lack of response from students, both verbally and non-verbally, made teaching "*exhausting emotionally*" (Hal):

*"It was also extremely difficult talking into the ether, and not being able to read the body language of the students to see when they have understood and when they needed more clarity or when I needed to move on"* (Teresa).

*"It was challenging not being able to see the student's faces to see how the lecture was being received"* (Rose).

These messages indicate that participants were actively seeking feedback from students about their responses to the teaching and their additional needs. The comparisons between face-to-face and online teaching confirmed this. Participants underscored that in face-to-face teaching they were constantly monitoring students' body language for subtle clues to their understanding. Participants' attention to the signals that students were giving is evidence of emotional labour, but labour that they enjoyed in a face-to-face environment. Online, the same labour requires much more work to perform:

*"One of the joys of teaching is to interact with people and share ideas dynamically... often the internet makes meetings difficult ... it's difficult to get a 'feel' for what others think (are they nodding, frowning? what do they think?)"* (Cassie).

*"I can't see the students' reactions to what others are saying, or to what I say, I don't know who's ready to speak and who is gazing out the window. Some students say that this kind of interaction is so stressful that they do not attend class"* (Kate).

The desire to seek out signs of students' needs indicates that staff were endeavouring to engage a pedagogy of caring. As Noddings (1999) observed, in order for students (the ones cared-for) to receive the act of caring, the ones caring (the teachers) need to be present to the students. This does not mean simply to be physically present, but to make oneself entirely available to the students, to be engrossed in them and their learning. Moreover, the response of the students to the teacher's attitude of "*disposability*" (Noddings, 1999, p. 46) is critical: "*Without it, there is no caring relation — o matter how hard the carer has tried to care*" (Noddings, 2012, p. 773). How that was achieved in face-to-face environments was to engage in a constant search for explicit and implicit signs of students' interior thoughts and feelings. Online, this was made more difficult, or impossible, because teachers could not "*read the room*" (Deborah) in the same way. For Noddings, this authentic search for students' expressed needs (rather than assumed needs) is what distinguishes the "*relational carer*" from the "*virtue carer*", whose "*efforts to care often misfire, and the students who most need to be part of a caring relation suffer most*" (Noddings, 2012, p. 773).

### **6.3. Opportunities for experienced online educators**

It is salient to note that seasoned online teachers had a very different experience with the "online pivot" during the pandemic, with many commenting that engagement was good, or sometimes better, than in face-to-face classes, and that it had been easy to make the shift. These responses were coded under the theme of "*Opportunities*". Experienced online teachers' familiarity with techniques for maintaining social presence online (Biocca, Harms, & Burgoon, 2003), usually developed in asynchronous, text-based learning, may have been their advantage here. During a period dominated by web-based video conferencing and live video streaming services, it may be counterintuitive for many to use asynchronous platforms to mediate the caring relation, but a volume of research and practice has been devoted to achieving exactly this (e.g. Gao, Zhang, & Franklin, 2013; Weidlich & Bastiaens, 2019; Yoon et al., 2020). Teachers' anxiety about not being able to communicate their engrossment in the students or feel their response may be the result of their lack of experience in mediating social presence online. Other participants had developed strategies of managing interaction in synchronous sessions:

*"The experience is still relatively interactive as students are able to put their hands up to ask questions as normal"* (Lillian).

As a result, these participants had better experiences, and were more positively oriented to teaching online. They were excited about the possibilities, and anticipated that the university would begin "*to take online learning seriously*"

*"As being able to make a significant contribution to the quality and inclusivity of the education we offer"* (Laura).

These varied staff experiences indicate that professional development and online teaching experience can make a difference. However, in general, the findings from the research indicate that, despite there being a widespread commitment to a caring pedagogy, this was not supported effectively by technology and there was a personal cost involved in enacting a caring pedagogy online. The personal impact of attempting to reach out to students during the Covid-19 pandemic could be significant, as the following quotation exemplifies:

*“When it became clear that we would likely be teaching online in future, I had the most significant mood collapse I have experienced since the start of covid” (Dana).*

The data from this project is unique in soliciting teachers’ experiences at the moment of their engagement with online learning, thereby capturing teachers’ reflections on what it feels like to become a caring online educator. The next section further explores the emotional labour entailed in teachers’ commitment to a caring pedagogy.

#### **6.4. Emotions and labour**

As a result of these and other experiences, many participants described the move online as *“exhausting”* and *“highly demanding”*, and regularly referenced the additional time that it takes to prepare and conduct online teaching. In addition to describing the extra time and resource demands, participants regularly communicated heightened emotional states as they worked during the pandemic. Within the *“Emotional challenges”* theme, participants described the impact of the conditions of homeworking on their teaching in emotive terms such as the experience of *“loneliness”* (Wanda) and as a *“stressful transition”* (Sarah). For example:

*“I also have a difficult domestic situation and I need to homeschool a child to prepare for important exams. It is a huge challenge and mental strain” (Bronwen).*

Many participants expressed anxieties for themselves, for colleagues or students. Personal anxieties concerned their own or their families’ health, the challenges of work, their lack of productivity, or how long the situation would last:

*“I don’t seem to be very productive, I am not sleeping very well, feeling tired and anxious” (Jenny).*

*“I am worried this will become the future” (Alexa).*

These feelings were sometimes mixed with a kind of guilt or cognisance of personal good fortune, showing an awareness of privilege and inequality, and were often focused on other people:

*“I am super conscious that we are well off, have a big house... I feel for any colleagues who are alone, living in accommodation without outdoor space or who do not have, and can't afford, the technology that we have in our home” (Jacqui).*

Many teaching staff expressed anxieties about advice and resources that were available to students, such as the quality of their internet connections, but also about the lack of face-to-face communication on their wellbeing and experience:

*“It divides [the] student population into those who have and those who don't have” (Bronwen).*

*“I am concerned about ... long term effects of online learning, ability to form communities of learning and interest” (Bob).*

It was unclear whether teaching staff had direct knowledge of the challenges facing their students, or whether they were anticipating problems they may have - something that could indicate a deficit orientation, but which seem here to indicate attentiveness. Rather than being a presumption, understanding the specific situation of their students was a predominant concern in their reflections.

Concern for students’ welfare was something that participants also felt that they needed to attend to. Many participants mentioned that tutorials (tuition sessions with individual students) were taking much longer, since they needed to provide emotional support in addition to academic advice:

*“I have found it a real challenge to liaise with students. The pastoral side of teaching is very difficult” (Anna).*

*“The interactions felt more like the offer of emotional support... difficult to decide what is a reasonable level of additional support I can provide” (Penny).*

It was evident that teaching staff were having to manage their own feelings, and those of students (as well as family and colleagues). Responses grouped under the theme of “Practices and routines” showed that working from home presented additional challenges for some that made it harder to present a professional face and preserve privacy when *“giving students an entirely unacceptable view into one’s home”* (Wade). The presence of others in the household made this especially difficult. For example:

*“I live in a small flat with my elderly mother. The carer comes every day. I have no privacy. There is no appropriate space to do my work. It is very difficult to have online meetings or record lectures because there will be background noise” (Oksana).*

The evidence presented here of the emotional dimensions involved in the labour of teaching, which are more pronounced for staff with fewer resources, such as teaching space at home, indicates what is at stake for teachers who adopt a caring pedagogy in the move online. To show how these issues manifest themselves within teaching practice, the following section presents selected vignettes drawn from interview data.

## **7. VIGNETTES**

Three vignettes demonstrate ways in which the themes identified in the analysis of the survey responses were given more detail and depth within the interview responses, and how the themes discussed individually in the previous section combined in peoples’ lived experience to shape teachers’ pedagogies of care. Our intention here is to show how the importance of feedback, the emotional labour of teaching, and the costs of this on teachers coexisted within individual participants’ narratives.

## 7.1. Sophia's catch-ups

Sophia works full-time as an academic and was trying to undertake teaching and research from home; she also had childcare responsibilities. She explained that:

*“Normally when I teach there is a lot of communication around the lecture and what the lecture is doing [...] I take the students on a step by step sort of process [...] and I explain everything because [...] It’s a very diverse group”.*

Although Sophia was supporting students as carefully as she could, she explained,

*“I felt very responsible. [...] I felt a little bit guilty for not being there. [...] Because I said I’m in my country and they all said, ah, you’re lucky in a way, and I felt that I had somehow left them”.*

This could, in part, be understood as a deficit orientation, since it suggests that Sophia has assumed her students are in a less privileged position than hers, and that she ought to be able to help. However, Sophia discussed it primarily as an impediment to enacting a caring pedagogy.

*“I’m usually in my office and [...] they know that they can come and just knock on the door and we’ll go for a coffee... So, I see education as an ongoing discussion. [...].*

Sophia was able to recreate her caring pedagogy after moving online, but at a personal cost in terms of the concern she felt for students and the efforts she took to provide opportunities for them.

## 7.2. Amy’s ‘really horrible’ question and answer session

Amy worked part-time as a researcher but provided occasional teaching on areas linked to her specialism. She also had childcare responsibilities. Like Sophia, her established pedagogy relied on attending to students and learning about their backgrounds and needs.

*“But it was also to a bunch of students I didn’t know, so again, if I’d been at [the hospital] I knew them all, I could’ve watched them on Zoom call and picked them out and said Karen what do you think. But this was a bunch of students I didn’t know, never met, they were all a real variety of people, some were doctors, some had PhDs, some were very young MSc students”.*

Also, like Sophia, Amy worked to recreate her pedagogy online, but the technology made this difficult to achieve.

*“It all had to be done online, I had really rubbish internet at the time. So, what I did was I had to record it; [...] then I did a live Q and A a week after ...”*

Amy wanted to be engrossed in her students, but struggled with the lack of visual cues:

*“Doing the Q and A, it was really stressful because none of the students put their video on, so, I was talking to a picture of myself on the screen. There was this list of names and they would go ping and then they would have their hand up and a lot of them had difficult names to pronounce and because I didn’t know them I wasn’t experienced at pronouncing their names. So, I had to try and muddle through live saying oh, Juliet, you’ve got a question and then the sound would be corrupted or they would type it into the chat box. And I was having to just field this dialogue*

*except nobody was visible, it was really, really horrible. It was only an hour and I remember just looking at the clock going please let this finish”.*

As Noddings argued, some kind of response is needed from the cared-for to show that caring has been received. Without this feedback, during the session, Amy’s pedagogy of care led her to pour more and more emotional energy into the situation. On reflection, Amy believed that students’ experience of the session “wouldn’t be too bad”, but this outcome was only achieved at the cost of her own emotional labour.

### **7.3. Lawrence’s heartbreak**

Lawrence was a full-time academic, with both research and teaching responsibilities, who also had childcare responsibilities. He described how he had to attend to and help students deal with their fears about the pandemic. *“As course directors and as module coordinators, we... I felt we were in a position where we had to, sort of, calm that panic”.*

His response was grounded in an appreciation of the difficulties his students experienced. *“For these students it’s especially traumatic, they had to bury all their plans”.*

Again, Lawrence described the efforts made to be present to students, and like Amy, referred to the demands of sustaining this.

*“Of course, it was draining on all the staff, but that’s, you know, part of the role. We don’t expect these things to happen very often, when it does, you know, you make yourself entirely available. So, we did a lot of, we [taught] online, we had extra tutorials...but you can’t maintain that level of presence, it’s, you know, it’s too much for us, for members of staff”.*

Lawrence described the distinctive pedagogy used in his discipline; like Sophia and Amy, this emphasised communication, but also focused on making things.

*“We are a practice-oriented Master’s program, and we’ve invested a lot this year. We’ve invested a lot in, in two things, I’d say, in... One is, um, building a group spirit and having a really strong sense of a cohort spirit. Um, and the other one is model making [...] to build the confidence in expressing themselves in, you know, three-dimensionally, um, with their hands”.*

The workshops supporting these practices took place in specialist facilities that the national lockdown meant were inaccessible. Lawrence’s emotional labour involved maintaining professional composure whilst anticipating students’ sense of loss.

*“Much as I’d like to, sort of, say to them, you know, it’s okay ...you can express yourselves in other ways, it’s not the same. [...] To have that taken away from you and say, okay, there is no possibility of you doing any model making. We won’t, we won’t even be showing that in a show, ‘cause the show won’t exist. [...] So that, [...] was particularly heart-breaking. For the senior students, or even, all the (name of discipline) students at the faculty [...] that is really hard for them. Because the summer show is, is, you know, especially finals years, that’s the culmination of their, the massive input they, they’ve done over the years of their, of their, their degree”.*

Lawrence's established pedagogy could not be sustained, but what replaced it was nevertheless a pedagogy of care, grounded in the inequalities this cohort would experience compared to those who proceeded and would follow them.

The discussion below explores how the experiences of staff like Lawrence, Amy and Sophia can inform an understanding of what is involved in adopting a caring pedagogy online, the role of technology, and the implications of this for university leadership of teaching.

## 8. DISCUSSION

The responses to the survey and interview extracts presented here provide insight into online teaching practices during lockdown, and also into the face-to-face teaching that preceded it, and which most participants were attempting to recreate. Data shows that a principal characteristic of academics' intentions within both teaching modes is: to create opportunities for interaction; to discover the extent to which their teaching is being understood; and to find out what further needs students may have. This corresponds precisely with Noddings' concept of engrossment in the other – "*desire for the others' wellbeing*" (Noddings, 1999, p. 46). Moreover, Lawrence articulates exactly the meaning of Noddings' term *disposability* when he describes making himself, as an educator, entirely available to the students. This Noddings (1999) sees as fundamental to a caring relation in education.

The findings also show, however, the demands on teachers to maintain a pedagogy of caring online. By capturing the experience of teachers unused to online teaching, and asking them to describe their feelings, the data communicates the toll on teachers from their encounters with technology. Participants in the study improvised solutions to digital communication challenges and human responses to technology (for example, students not turning cameras on) with the aim of creating meaningful interactions to help them teach better through this new medium. Their needs for interaction were not reducible to the functionality of the system, but instead amounted to a pedagogical ambition to be caring educators.

A caring approach to online teaching requires a great deal of labour, much of which is emotional labour. This labour – and its costs – need to be taken into account by university leadership when considering workload and promotion criteria. The next section explores the practical implications of doing this for universities.

## 9. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

There is a long-held misconception that online teaching and learning must be a cheaper option than face-to-face teaching (Koenig, 2011). For example, the UK government minister responsible for education recently warned universities not to use online learning "*as a cost-cutting measure*" (Williamson, 2021, para 43). These myths persist, despite research that shows digital education can cost more than traditional methods (Bates, 2001; Laurillard, 2006). This is largely due to the prevailing instructivist pedagogy at the heart of our neo-managerial and market-driven global education system (Amory, 2012). Privileging the acquisition of content knowledge, and conceiving of online learning as the presentation of content to students, flies in the face of what "[e]ducators have long known"; that is "*that people learn better when they are actively involved in the learning process*" (Parker, Maor, & Herrington, 2013, p. 227). As we move online, the costs of teacher support for learning (not just content creation) are insufficiently understood by universities, policy makers and the wider public, leading to headlines such as, "*UK students want tuition fees refunded as they face third year online*" (Hall, 2021), mistaking the lack

of in-person contact for a lack of education, of quality or of care. This situation endures because the labour of caring pedagogy is neither acknowledged nor rewarded by universities themselves.

This is especially worrying since it has been nearly 30 years since Bagilhole (1993) reported the disproportionate role that female academics play in student personal support, where emotional labour is most clearly evident. Undervaluing the nature and extent of the labour involved in personal and emotional support, or in teaching more generally, can compound these structural inequalities in higher education.

The shift online increased the emotional labour of the teachers in the study, partly because of the circumstances (the crisis being experienced by students and staff) but also because communication and interaction were mediated by digital technology. Poor technical infrastructure, maladapted software or undeveloped technical skills made this worse. Teaching staff need simple and accessible digital applications for interactions with students in order to support them in their emotional labour.

Most of the tools that staff used for teaching during lockdown (e.g. Zoom or Teams) were not originally designed or procured for teaching. Because teachers' motivations are to achieve a caring relation with students, their focus is less on technology than the communication it can support. Teachers will use what tools they find most effective and some level of improvisation is inevitable. This often means they avoid the university's official digital provision. Universities need to find more responsive ways of supporting this – as, in fact, they were sometimes forced to do during the pandemic (e.g. buying institutional Zoom licences because of staff demand - UCL, 2020). The need to take into account the way teachers use technology, the motivations behind this and the substantial labour involved (including emotional labour) is paramount. Universities' decisions about what technology to invest in should not take place without meaningful consideration of what teachers are using in practice.

The findings of this study highlight a number of important issues related to systemic problems that need to be addressed urgently through new structures of authority and decision-making in universities. For example, IT procurement decisions should take less account of the functionality of hardware and software than teachers' ability and disposition to use specific tools that enable them to provide emotionally rich support for teaching and learning. Universities' reliance on commercial business software to provide learning benefits only the software companies. Together, universities represent an enormous market for software companies, which includes the opportunity to capture their students' business for their lifetime after graduation. Yet, the demands universities make on these companies tend to be restricted to operational issues such as cyber security and value for money. While these issues are important, decisions about software systems should include the cost of "invisible" caring labour and recognise the importance of social systems that allow for caring support as a central part of what universities offer. There needs to be a transformation of the sector's approach to technology development and procurement that prioritises the affective dimensions of teaching and learning, rather than forcing caring to be generated as a "workaround" solution. Universities must start by bringing together academics and professional service colleagues in ways that allow everyone involved in teaching to co-participate in decision-making.

Related to this, universities need to adopt new approaches to costing online learning, which take into account not only upfront, one-off costs of content development, but the ongoing, critical support of students' engagement with learning content (Kennedy, Laurillard, Horan, & Charlton, 2015).

The caring labour of teaching needs to be rewarded, and criteria identified that could form the basis of promotion. Only by making visible the emotional labour of teaching can the staff (often women) who bear the main responsibility for caring both in the home and at work, be supported, valued and encouraged. While our research did not gather the data needed to define these structures, we recommend exploring this further as a continuation of this present study.

## 10. CONCLUSIONS

Emotional labour is key to a pedagogy of care and online this can be even more difficult and demanding. However, emotional labour is rarely recognised, rewarded, or supported by universities. By not acknowledging the role of emotional labour in teaching online, structural inequalities in higher education are likely to become further entrenched. This is because of the traditional gendering of emotional labour, and the ways that a lack of resources (e.g. available space and technology) compound the challenges teachers face in performing it. Moreover, unless we acknowledge the role emotional labour plays in teaching in these times of change, we risk experienced educators facing burnout.

It is in the interest of universities to highlight and celebrate the important and challenging emotional labour of teaching staff committed to a pedagogy of care. Currently, many universities are facing challenges from the media, parents, and students for the decision not to reduce fees following the closure of campuses, on the assumption that students are now missing out on something important (Tidman, 2020). Yet, the work of teaching staff has both increased and become more complex during the pandemic. This is because a pedagogy of care is more difficult to achieve online. Nevertheless, teachers remain committed to maintaining a caring relation with students and are struggling with digital technologies in order to achieve this. This presents a compelling counter-narrative to the discourse of student “*mistreatment*” during the pandemic (Tidman, 2020, para 1), one that celebrates the efforts teachers have gone to in order to make themselves ‘entirely available’. This study uncovered questions around systemic problems causing staff inequalities within universities. We cannot afford to hide from these questions any longer.

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