Towards holistic and multivoiced pedagogy in online learning contexts in higher education

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Outline

- Background & research aims
- Methodology
- Findings
- Discussion and implications for practice

Background – why online learning

- Widespread development of blended & online programmes in HE.

- Rise in the enrolment of learners in online programmes (Garrett et al., 2023, Eurostat, 2024).

- COVID-19 pandemic further catalysed this move to digitally-mediated learning, 'forcing' educators to adapt rapidly to emergency remote teaching (Rapanta et al., 2022; Littlejohn, 2022).

- Educators working in isolation → direct transfer of structure, content and learning activities from face-to-face teaching to the digital medium (e.g., Saltmarsh & Sutherland, 2010; Baldwin, 2019; Tzirides et al., 2023).

- However, 'digital education reshapes its subjects' (p. 146) and should be approached on its own merits with attention paid to its unique social, cultural and technological contexts and novel possibilities (Bayne & Gallagher 2021).

Background – why collaborative design

- **Provision of sustained support** by bringing interdisciplinary digital learning professionals to work in partnership with educators → an effective strategy for accelerating the application of pedagogically sound approaches (Burrell et al., 2015; Richardson et al., 2019; Sharpe et al., 2022) → focus of this study.

- Existing literature has also revealed inconsistencies in the quality of online degrees and there is currently limited comprehensive research on deliberately designed online learning practices beyond pandemic-focused studies (e.g., Howard & Tondeur, 2023; Dexter, 2023).

- This study's aim was to understand the pedagogical reasoning behind decisions in deliberate online learning contexts and support educational enhancement and innovation efforts.

Research aims & question

Collaborative design

Educator learning

Quality online learning /Educational enhancement

Guiding research question for this presentation:
-What are the pedagogical decisions educators and digital learning professionals make when designing for credit-bearing online learning and the rationale behind them?

Conceptual framings

- **Design approaches** and processes coming from disciplines including architecture, product and professional design that emphasise the systemic and holistic nature of design (e.g., Manzini, 2015; Nelson & Stolterman, 2014; Dorst, 2011; Razzouk & Shute, 2012).

- **Ecological** conceptualisations in education (e.g., Ellis & Goodyear, 2019; Barnett & Jackson, 2020; Kinchin, 2022).

- **Postdigital** perspectives in education (e.g., Jandrić et al., 2018; Fawns, 2019; Macgilchrist, 2021).

See detailed accounts in:

- Papageorgiou, V., Meyer, E., & Ntonia, I. (2024). Designing Holistic and Multivoiced Online Learning: Higher Education Actors' Pedagogical Decisions and Perspectives. *Education Sciences*, 14(5), 504. **https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14050504**

- Papageorgiou, V. (2022). *Online learning design in Higher Education: A holistic investigation of people, processes and pedagogy*. PhD thesis. Imperial College London, London, UK. **https://doi.org/10.25560/107390**

Methodology

Multiple Case Study — Yin (2009, 2014)
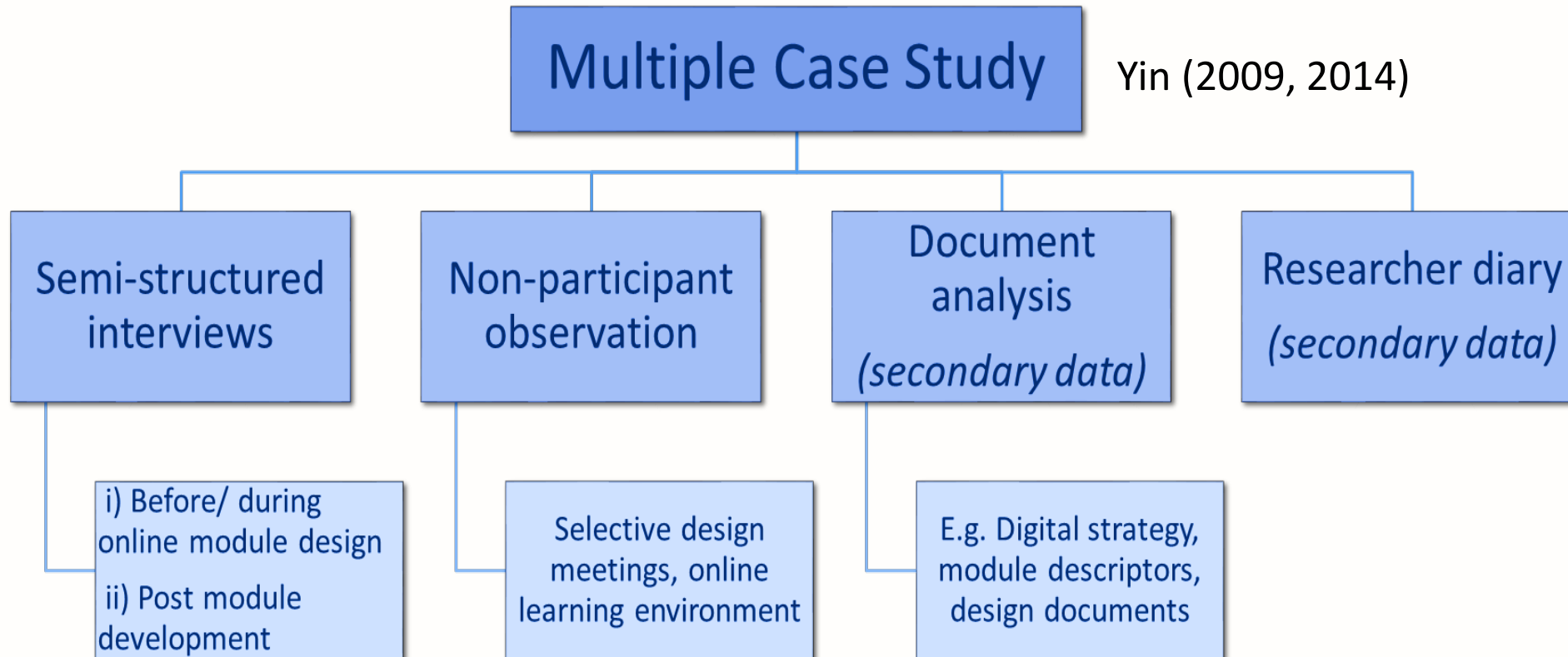
- ✓ Holistic view
- ✓ Fine-grained details
- ✓ Naturally-occurring phenomena
- ✓ Authentic contexts
- ✓ Multiple sources of evidence

Semi-structured interviews
- i) Before/ during online module design
- ii) Post module development

Non-participant observation
- Selective design meetings, online learning environment

Document analysis *(secondary data)*
- E.g. Digital strategy, module descriptors, design documents

Researcher diary *(secondary data)*

Data analysis: reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019, 2020)

Study context and participants

- 7 interdisciplinary design teams across 6 UK universities
- 17 participants – 10 educators and 7 digital learning professionals
- Data collection period: June 2019- November 2020

Case Study	Pseudonym	Participant Role	On-Campus Teaching Experience	Online Learning Design and/or Teaching Experience	Disciplinary Cluster and Area of the Online Module	University Type
1	Anna	Module leader	6–10 years	1 year	Social Sciences (Education)	Teaching-focused
	Alex	Media producer	11–15 years	3 years		
2	John	Module leader and degree director	11–15 years	0–1 years	STEM (Computing)	Research-intensive
3	Maria	Module leader and degree co-director	6–10 years	1st time	Health and Social Care (Social Policy)	Research-intensive
	Alicia	Module co-leader	6–10 years	1st time		
	Matteo	Learning designer	n/a	4 years		
	Harry	Learning technologist	n/a	4 years		
4	Mark	Module leader and deputy degree director	0–5 years	0–1 years	Social Sciences (Business)	Research-intensive
	Nancy	Learning designer	n/a	6 years		
5	Oliver	Module leader	6–10 years	0–1 years	Social Sciences (Business)	Research-intensive
	Nadia	Learning designer	n/a	2–3 years		
6	Leonardo	Module leader and degree director	11–15 years	0–1 years	Health and Social Care (Medicine)	Research-intensive
	Valeria	Co-module leader	0–5 years	0–1 years		
	Karen	Learning technologist	n/a	10 years		
7	Ethan	Module leader	0–5 years	1 year	Health and Social Care (Medicine)	Research-intensive (same university as in case 5)
	Florence	Module contributor	0–5 years	1 year		
	Sophia	Learning designer	6–10 years	3 years		

Findings

Theme 1: embracing a multi-level view of student learning journeys

Theme 2: embedding multiple and diverse 'voices'

Theme 3: creating a web of social learning opportunities and 'spaces'

1. Embracing a multi-level view of student learning journeys

- Crafting module-level narrative threads (module level)

'The online experience made it really clear for me that I need to improve and create my content with a story flow…It's like a movie. There is a bigger plot that you need to tell the student. And you need to give the series, like from week one that could be another inner story in the big one, but it should connect at the bigger part in the end…It is better for students to learn in this way, instead of providing separate contents.' (Mark)

'Before there was no overall picture of why you need to learn all these things. Now the way the module is structured, overall, has two large examples. I've chosen what I think are quite motivating examples and that I hope that they will enjoy working on those and understand how a bigger programme is written.' (John)

1. Embracing a multi-level view of student learning journeys

- Adopting an integrated approach to activities' design and assessments (activity level)

'The first thing is for them to get themselves into a place where they think about how they would respond intuitively if someone disclosed something, or they noticed something. Then, I give them the principles of how to respond and then, to get them to re-reflect on it if they change any of their behaviour. So, it's that sort of iteration of thinking.' (Maria)

'*…instead of writing text all the time, I try to have one paragraph of text, then a video or a picture or visual, then some type of interactive assignment that are connected.*' (Mark)

'*I want the students to be doing lots of programming throughout the term. So, something they're developing a deeper learning over time, rather than intensively trying to do something at the end.*' (John)

1. Embracing a multi-level view of student learning journeys

- Considering the 'degree' learning journey (degree level)

'In terms of the whole programme design, the core modules build the foundations for the optional modules that come next. There's a real overarching design in how things are arranged so that they speak to each other.' (Maria)

'…this is not only one module that lives in isolation, but this is a whole programme of study. So, adopting good practices from other modules and ensuring a good range of activities was key.' (Matteo)

2. Embedding multiple and diverse 'voices'

'*We've gone off and interviewed, grant making bodies, editors of key journals, brand managers […] We've involved the ethics office, the research coordination office at our institution, and the graduate school who came and did some videos and developed some materials around grant applications and things like that. We've worked with the patient experience research group at our institution to do patient and public participation materials. We invite previous students to come in to present their work.*' (Ethan)

'*We have a constant group of people, who are reflecting throughout, and you can follow their journey.*' (Anna)

'*Instead of just providing all the American or European examples, we are now trying to enrich it and provide more inclusive examples and cases from different parts of the world. And it's really important for our programme because more than half of people are coming from Asia or the Middle East.*' (Mark)
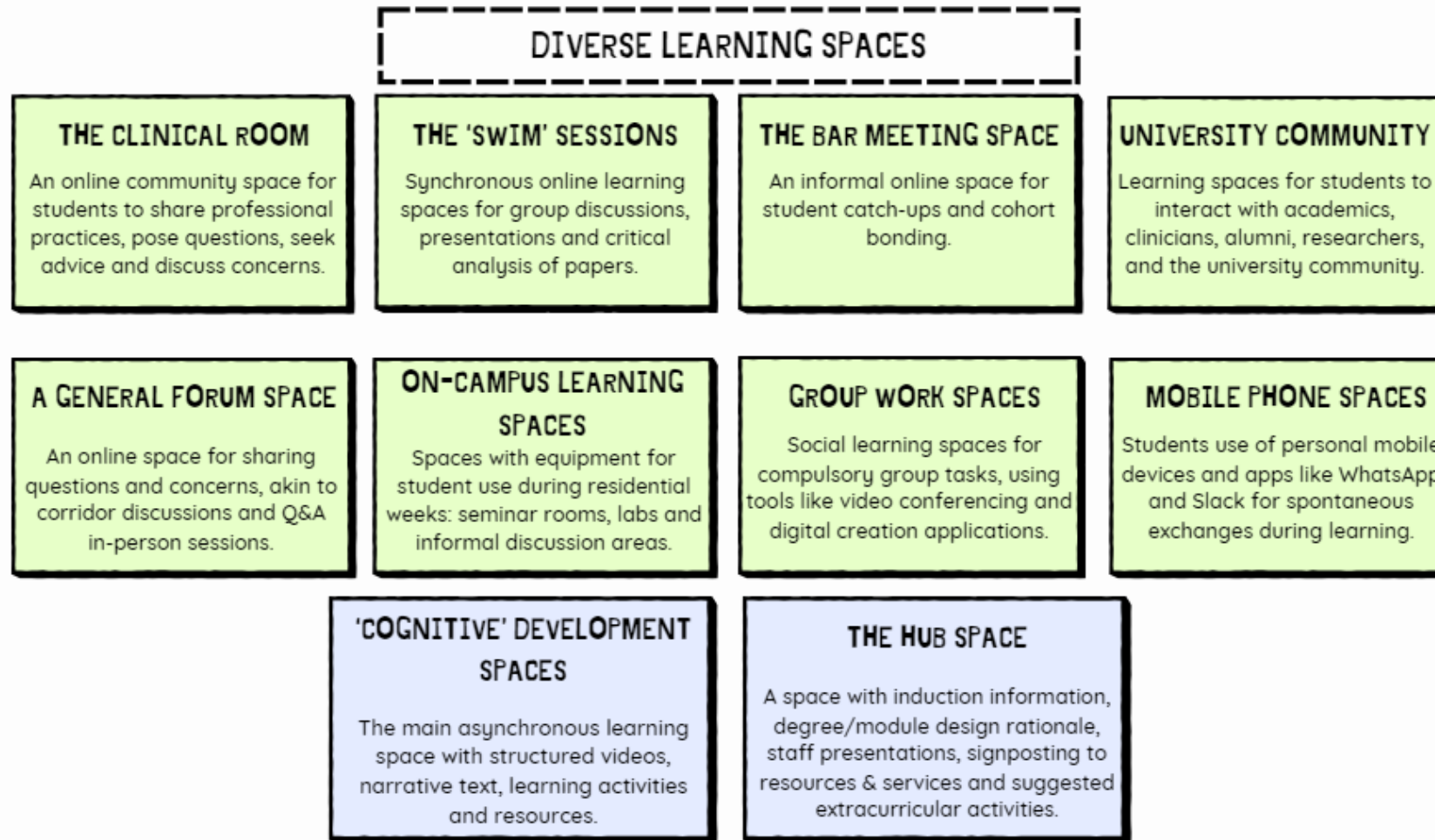
3. Creating a web of social learning opportunities and 'spaces'

'*I really wanted to create a culture which was mutually supportive and there was some peer support…Part of that two hours, we'll have different discussion activities, because they will want to create an informal cafe culture space within the online environment. It's community building. It's checking in with information, but I want very strongly that to be understanding that this is available, and they can talk to each other about their concerns, interests and passion for Mental Health*'. (Maria)

'*…making sure that learning is taking place across the entire cohort. So, it is not all about their group work, they will be paired and teamed up with different partners to get that fresh perspective, that different discipline perspective, experience…Also, asking them to talk to people outside of this environment online, to access other networks and they can actually spread that knowledge around*'. (Anna)

'*…there are some informal spaces, the sort of discussion page, the more seminar-based spaces. But I also have made a huge effort to think about the online environment and its feel and the online community*.' (Maria)

3. Creating a web of social learning opportunities and 'spaces'

DIVERSE LEARNING SPACES

THE CLINICAL ROOM
An online community space for students to share professional practices, pose questions, seek advice and discuss concerns.

THE 'SWIM' SESSIONS
Synchronous online learning spaces for group discussions, presentations and critical analysis of papers.

THE BAR MEETING SPACE
An informal online space for student catch-ups and cohort bonding.

UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY
Learning spaces for students to interact with academics, clinicians, alumni, researchers, and the university community.

A GENERAL FORUM SPACE
An online space for sharing questions and concerns, akin to corridor discussions and Q&A in-person sessions.

ON-CAMPUS LEARNING SPACES
Spaces with equipment for student use during residential weeks: seminar rooms, labs and informal discussion areas.

GROUP WORK SPACES
Social learning spaces for compulsory group tasks, using tools like video conferencing and digital creation applications.

MOBILE PHONE SPACES
Students use of personal mobile devices and apps like WhatsApp and Slack for spontaneous exchanges during learning.

'COGNITIVE' DEVELOPMENT SPACES
The main asynchronous learning space with structured videos, narrative text, learning activities and resources.

THE HUB SPACE
A space with induction information, degree/module design rationale, staff presentations, signposting to resources & services and suggested extracurricular activities.

Example of learning spaces designed by participants in case 6 (the green squares represent social learning spaces while the blue squares individual learning spaces).

Discussion

➢ Connections through narrative threads

➢ Connections between the module and the degree experience

➢ Seamless connection between assessment and the module learning journey (authentic, continuous, connected)

➢ Connections with people across diverse spaces: multivoiced learning and educators' multifaceted roles
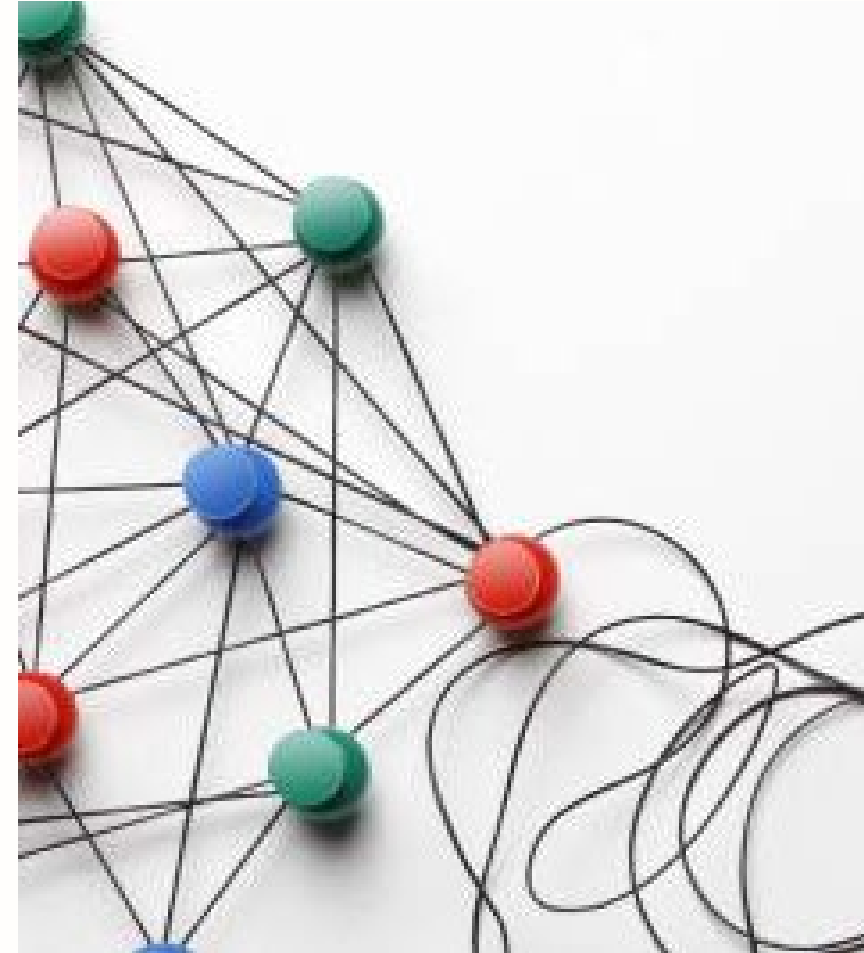
Further details about the research presented can be found in the works below:

- Papageorgiou, V., Meyer, E., & Ntonia, I. (2024). Designing Holistic and Multivoiced Online Learning: Higher Education Actors' Pedagogical Decisions and Perspectives. *Education Sciences*, 14(5), 504. **https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14050504**

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