

Contents

Preface	5
#FEResearchMeet: a movement	6
Remembering and documenting working and living in FE during the COVID-19 pandemic	10
Carol Baker.....	13
Heather Booth-Martin.....	16
Kelly Casey.....	19
Christine Challen	22
Joyce I-Hui Chen	25
Fey Cole.....	28
Amy Creech.....	31
Beth Curtis	35
Bryony Evett-Hackfort.....	38
Jo Fletcher-Saxon	41
Isla Flood	44
Jan Hanson	47
Sam Jones.....	50
Jen Lindsell.....	53
Jane Martin.....	56
Craig McCauley	59
Becky Moden.....	62
Annie Pendrey.....	65
Kathryn Pogson	68
Jodie Rees.....	71
Kerry Scattergood.....	74
Alistair Smith	77
Lynne Taylerson	83
Amanda Turner	86
Kevin Williams.....	90
Amy Woodrow.....	93
Themes which emerged from our writers' reflections	96
Shockwaves	97
Can I do it?	97
Supporting students	97
Supporting each other	98

Home, work and workload.....	98
Riding the Coronacoaster	98
Learning about learning technology	99
Torn between responsibilities	100
The new normal	100
Making connections	101
Technology as a catalyst for collaboration and sharing	101
Ways of working and thinking	102
Envisioning a hopeful, better future for FE and the wider community	102
There are still major challenges	103
Final thoughts for a kinder, more trusting FE sector.....	103
FE Stories in Covid times – Conclusion.....	105
Coda	107
Appendix.....	108
Methodology.....	109
References	111
The Editors	113

Preface

It has been acknowledged that research is not promoted well enough in the FE sector, and it gives me great pleasure to introduce the following impactful and thoughtful contributions from many colleagues in the sector.

It would have been so easy and perhaps understandable if we allowed the pandemic to thwart our efforts and pause research. Practitioners faced so many new challenges with little or no notice and had to find innovative new ways and learn new skills to keep students on track and engaged. I am particularly drawn to the honesty and candid way in which staff put the learners first, their fears and reservations second and got on with it.

An attribute so common in FE and so often overlooked but if we needed any reminder of the sector's resilience and the amazing staff then I hope like me, you can draw inspiration from the many examples in this edition. The pandemic has accelerated the development of our collective online offers and through necessity many colleges have come on leaps and bounds in this area.

Teachers often did not wait for management direction but instead took brave and innovative decisions to adapt their lessons to suit their students. Future research on the effectiveness of online learning and the impact of the pandemic on people will be essential in planning our future blended learning offer so we differentiate delivery to suit the subjects and students and pay particular attention to mental health and wellbeing.

John Callaghan
Principal of Solihull College

#FEResearchMeet: a movement

By Sam Jones, #FEResearchMeet founder, and Kerry Scattergood, a #FEResearchMeet organiser

#FEResearchMeet is more than a hash tag; more than a conference; more than even a series of events. It is a movement. What's more, it is a movement created for further education practitioners by further education practitioners.

Back in November 2016, during a Learning and Skills Network Meeting, Sam Jones (advanced practitioner and Tes FE teacher of the year 2019) pondered aloud why there were so few opportunities for researchers in the FE sector to come together and share their research. In Sam's words, "#FEResearchMeet were a direct response to a conversation between myself and Norman Crowther of the National Education Union. I was just finishing my masters and serendipitously said that there was a real need for a space for researchers and lecturers from the FE sector to come together and share their research and ideas, he countered that if I felt like that I should create one, and as I can be rather 'jump first think later' I agreed to do just that! In June 2017 we ran the first ever #FEResearchMeet at Bedford College with two keynotes, five presenters, and thirty plus sector staff in attendance."

#FEResearchMeet aim to give a voice and a space to those in the sector who are interested in developing their practice, others' practice, or the practice of a department, organisation or sector as a whole. Anyone can run a #FEResearchMeet and there's now quite a group of enthusiasts ready to support you.

As Kerry Scattergood explains, "I hadn't even shared my own action research within my own staff team, and yet it had been one of the most powerful and informative professional learning opportunities of my career. When I heard of a colleague whose master's research was on her course area, a course in intensive care, but that she hadn't had the opportunity to share either, I started to realise this wasn't a team-wide problem or even a college-wide problem, but a sector-wide issue. I was so inspired by witnessing first Sam's, then Jo Fletcher-Saxon's, events from afar that I got in touch and tentatively organised a 'mini' #FEResearchMeet in the summer of 2019 at my college. We planned to go larger the following summer, but had no idea that COVID-19 was about to change our plans completely."

The summer event was unable to go ahead and college teams were now working from home. A team of dedicated professionals, who believe in #FEResearchMeet as giving a voice to the sector, came together to overcome the challenge. Once Kerry put the feelers out about making it a 'virtual' event, Jo, Sam and Kerry, were joined by many others from across the sector and country to make the event happen. With three consecutive mornings planned, three key note speakers booked, and so many wonderful presenters, the event welcomed delegates not just from all over England, but from all over the UK.

#FEResearchMeet has not only stood the test of time, but has demonstrated time and time again that the passion, commitment and professionalism of the further education sector has created a movement.

‘I have become a lot braver and am much more likely to experiment when using technology.’

‘I told myself that I was going to make this work.’

‘My own children’s education fell on my shoulders with my husband working a variety of shift patterns. Quickly, I had to reorganise my work timetable to try to balance my roles as parent and teacher.’

‘Suddenly, I hit a massive wall, realising the pace I had set for myself was unsustainable for the duration of the lockdown.’

‘Used to working in an embodied way, we felt our bodies disappearing as we spent all day sitting still; disembodied heads on screens.’

'I was working so many hours and was just too tired to do anything else but work and respond to students who needed support and sleep.'

'The digital poverty that so many students experience is crippling.'

'I could be a better teacher if I had time...the lockdown has finally bought about the time.'

'I believe that when learning new information, even technology, if you have an open mind and feel safe to question then it is amazing what you can achieve and who you can learn from.'

Remembering and documenting working and living in FE during the COVID-19 pandemic

‘what happens there remains unseen’ (Shukie, 2020, online)

FE is an ‘important but invisible sector’ (Hodgson, Bailey, and Lucas, 2015, p.1). This invisibility has been partly political - it educates “other people’s children” and adults (Galley in Hodgson, Bailey and Lucas, *ibid*) – and partly a result of ignorance of the sector. Frank Coffield tells a story about Boris Johnson, who was shadow spokesperson on Education at the time, speaking at a conference of FE Principals and senior staff at Homerton College, Cambridge in 2009. Frank, who was due to follow Johnson, picks up the story:

Johnson suddenly stopped and said: ‘Sorry everybody, but I don’t know whom I’m speaking to. You see, Central Office collect me by car and whisk me off to speak at various events. Who are you all?’ More laughter. One man in the middle of the room informed Johnson and he replied: ‘FE Principals from FE Colleges? What is that? No, don’t tell me. Yes, I remember...you used to be called Secondary Moderns.’ The audience fell silent. The questioning began and it was clear that Johnson knew nothing about the sector and cared less. Johnson lost the audience as quickly as he had won them over, cut his session short and fled. (F. Coffield, personal communication, 9 October 2020).

It is for reasons like this, compared to the other education sectors, that so little is known about FE and it is so poorly understood. Metaphorically speaking, if you were to draw a map of the sector, there would be some large blank spaces on it because to date relatively few people have researched and mapped it (Petrie, 2015). Yet “every map tells a story” (Sobel in Garfield, 2012, p.13), and FE’s story needs to be told. Beattie (2021) observes that “...so much of our public discourse is about facts and figures, but it’s the lives, not the numbers, which give us a sense of reality and meaning about the world...It’s stories, not statistics, which humanise [us]...and enable us to discover our place of belonging...” So, this project seeks to remember, tell and map the stories of FE-based practitioners living and working during the first lockdown of the COVID-19 pandemic. Like other education sectors, the pandemic has had a significant impact on the sector, its students and staff. To date, the accounts of living and working within the sector during the pandemic have been available in the FE section of the Times Education Supplement, through #JoyFE’s

publications, Henderson's (2020) *Learning from Lockdown: Staff Voices* and through social media. As Spinney (2017p.4) observed, pandemics and the people they affect are mostly "remembered" at a personal level, not a collective one. This project responds to Spinney's observation and seeks to create a collective memory of FE-based practitioners' experience during the pandemic. To achieve this, we invited the 40 or so FE-based practitioners attending the #FEResearchMeet on 13th July 2020 to contribute to a prospography, a study of a group of people, about their lives and work during COVID-19 time. 27 responded. Chris Killip, a photographer who captured the impact of de-industrialisation on the lives of those living in the north-east, observed that the people he photographed would not normally 'appear in history books because ordinary people don't. History is done to them. It is not acknowledged they make history' (Killip quoted by O'Hagan, 2020, p.10). By publishing these 25 practitioners' stories we are remembering, 'recording...[and] valuing their lives' (ibid), recognising that they are making history and contributing to the sector's history, too.

During her keynote at a #FEResearchMeet, Sam Jones (2020), the founder of the #FEResearchMeet movement and an FE-based researcher, cited Peter Shukie, another FE-based researcher, to make the point that it is FE-based researchers who are best placed to illuminate what goes on in 'the shadows' of the sector (Shukie, 2020, online). So, borrowing an approach used by Peter Lorst, of HU University of Applied Sciences Utrecht, and Anja Swennen, of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, to narrate the autobiographies of the lives and work of teacher educators (Lorst and Swennen, 2016), we asked our 27 FE-based story tellers to write a 750-word account of their lives and work during COVID-19 time. To create a collective voice, we asked them to respond to the following four prompt questions when doing this:

1. What's been messy (hard) about teaching during COVID-19 time?
2. What has been refreshing (or 'good') about your work as a practitioner during the COVID-19 time? For example, new practices? New professional learning?
3. What's enabling/constraining your practice (including research) during COVID-19 time?
4. Upon reflection, what have you learned is necessary in terms of Teaching, Learning and Assessment and what is unnecessary?

These stories may be read as standalone, personal accounts of the pandemic or together as an overarching narrative, a collective memory, of what has happened. A more detailed account of the methodology, method and analysis we employed is provided in the appendix.

Thus, this FE-based research adds four “bricks” to the “wall” of FE-based research (Wellington, 2000, p.137) by:

1. Presenting what is known about practitioners’ lives and work during COVID-19 time.
2. Providing a collective memory of what it has been like to be an FE-based practitioner living and working during COVID-19 time.
3. Contributing to what is known of the FE “map” (Petrie, 2015) during COVID-19 time, though we acknowledge it is only part of the map.
4. Illustrating for the sector how to research and document aspects of practice and experience.

Lorna Unwin (2015), a former FE teacher who moved into HE and became a professor, tells a powerful story about why research on FE is so rare in her Foreword to *The Coming of Age for FE*. “One of my new colleagues, a professor of education, said to me: ‘Ah. Further education. That’s where hairdressers go to get qualifications isn’t it? If I were you, I’d forget about that and do research on proper education.’” (Unwin, 2010, p.XV). Lorna ignored her colleague’s advice, and we have too, as, in our view, ‘no research is insignificant’ (Wormald et al. 2016, p.85). It is our credo that ‘the act of writing about FE is to struggle and resist...[and] to draw a map’ of the sector (Petrie, 2015, p.7). Kilip reminds us that ‘history is what’s written’ (Killip quoted by O’Hagan, 2020, p.11). As such, these 24 are personal histories that contribute to the sector’s history during COVID-19 time.

Carol Baker

Care Centre Co-ordinator Health and Social Care at Solihull College & University Centre



‘I believe that when learning new information, even technology, if you have an open mind and feel safe to question then it is amazing what you can achieve and who you can learn from.’

‘Working within FE is not limited to the time that you are contracted for and consists of many hours beyond this to provide high quality education.’

My name is Carol Baker and I was privileged to have worked in the NHS supporting individuals who have a comorbidity of a learning disability and behaviours that challenge, mental health, and complex epilepsy. During this time, I supported patients, families and staff clinically and used training to promote effective management and implementation of

best practice. This gave me confidence to influence the care individuals receive by providing robust training for carers. I have worked in FE for fifteen years and enjoy seeing the “lightbulb” moment when learners link theory to practice and how this improves the quality of life for all parties.

Working within FE is not limited to the time that you are contracted for and consists of many hours beyond this to provide high quality education. At the beginning of lockdown priorities were supporting existing learners to continue their educational journeys without having a negative impact on quality. Initially this was difficult as there was no transition period. Having a sound understanding of the subject area and the individual learners was vital and proved to be a lifeline. This basis helped me to use virtual methods of communication to engage learners and respond to their unique circumstances. The art of stretch and challenge and knowing individuals support needs helped me to support learners to succeed and reach their potential. It has not been stress-free as there have been technical difficulties including connection issues and technological abilities. I admit I am not the most technical of people but have a positive approach. I set myself an action plan to learn the wealth of technology possible in the limited time frame.

Being based at home and having other roles in life was not easy but was necessary and with the support of everyone it has worked. I believe that when learning new information, even technology, if you have an open mind and feel safe to question then it is amazing what you can achieve and who you can learn from. A principle I tell my students all the time! In fact, there have been many aspects I encourage learners to develop which I have implemented during lockdown, including schedules, checklists and ensuring some family time. All of these are important to our well-being and I feel that if the balance is not correct then all aspects of life suffer. Work-life balance is always difficult within education. I do not think I have found the correct balance yet and value experiential learning!

I teach within various locations as part of my role including apprentices, many of whom had to suspend their learning during this time and were needed on the “front line”. May I take a moment to say how proud I am of those apprentices who put into play what they have learnt on programme. It is since they have resumed learning that I have applied the technology I learnt and have supported learners and my team to utilise this further to advance learning. Technology is available 24/7 but this does not mean the lecturer has to be. I have found a work life balance that enables me to respond outside of the usual time

parameters where able to or if the learner need arises. Difficulties can arise within this as the boundaries between being at work and homelife merge. Managing this is not an innate skill but something we learn as we progress through life and which is clearly influenced by our dedication to support learners and promote their well-being. We must be mindful it cannot be at the cost of our own. I value a partnership model and this period has helped to develop this amongst students. It is important to give timely feedback and this was problematic in the early days, using open dialogue is crucial.

Overall, the pandemic has impacted on work life balance and shows how flexible remote learning can be if it is done with the same vigour and robustness as it deserves. FE has not progressed as much as it can within the virtual arena. Whilst the pandemic has forced the issue it has demonstrated that for the educational experience to be effective there needs to be recognition of lecturers as experts in their field. It is important to meet qualification requirements but alongside this to develop employability and life skills. Partnership working is crucial if we are to support students to develop into independent and questioning learners and adults that we are proud of.

Heather Booth-Martin

Teacher Educator at Craven College, Skipton and Shipley College

I have taught in FE for over thirty years following a career in hospitality management. After many years teaching business related subjects, I moved into teacher education and now deliver teacher education programmes at two FE colleges. I combine this work with my passion for coaching – I completed the inaugural Subject Learning Coach programme and more recently the ETF's Advanced Practitioner Development Programme. I love the opportunity my work gives me to support teachers develop their practice. Alongside this, I am undertaking an EdD (professional doctorate), researching how FE-based teacher educators model values in their practice.

During the pandemic, I have developed my confidence in the use of technology. Prior to lockdown, I used technology to a certain extent but I was always constrained by fears that it would not work, so it was a challenge moving to online teaching without any preparation and having to adapt in such a short space of time. I had used Zoom at one college to hold tutorials so did not fear being online. However, my colleges used different platforms - Microsoft Teams, which I had no experience of, and Google Classroom, where I had limited experience. I was teaching five different courses; it was very intense. I had to learn rapidly how to use the platforms, teach the students how to use them and then teach staff at one of the colleges. It took time to get into a rhythm with the classes, to plan effectively for breaks and to adapt all my planning for online. I have found the length of time in front of the screen to be very challenging. I stand up when teaching in a classroom, so have found being sedentary difficult and tiring. Additionally, I really missed the interaction with students and colleagues. Having said that, I have become a lot braver and am much more likely to experiment when using technology. I have also been able to build community online and been pleasantly surprised by the good attendance at classes.

Something messy during the pandemic was our awarding body changing its mind about the micro teach requirement for the Award in Education and Training. Initially, they insisted it could not take place online - students accepted this and the expected delay to their qualification until we could return to the college premises - then, as the courses were drawing to a close, the guidance changed to permitting online micro teaches. This meant rapid adaptations for the students.

‘I have become a lot braver and am much more likely to experiment when using technology.’

‘Building relationships and community is key and this is possible using Thinking Environment principles.’



I have noticed different values at play during the pandemic, with an increased concern for wellbeing, humanity and kindness. I have also seen greater trust in me as a teacher, for example, there was no requirement for registers during the lockdown and work colleagues have been supportive in sharing ideas for teaching. I have also been able to engage in a wide variety of CPD, which has increased due to its online availability.

There has been increased sharing of ideas amongst teachers and greater connections online. Without doubt, the most significant enabler for me has been #JoyFE, an online community started on Twitter by Lou Mycroft and Stef Wilkinson. I started to follow their daily 7am broadcasts, which inspired me for the day, and I joined the first Ideas Room on 8th April. This thinking space has been incredible and out of this came the #JoyFE digital magazine, which was put together in one week. We have now produced five editions. The Ideas Room works on Thinking Environment principles and I was able to replicate many ideas from it in my own online teaching. This experience definitely helped me to build community in my own classes. Lou Mycroft also facilitated an Easter Bower writing room for a week beginning 8th April, which helped to focus my attention on writing for my EdD.

I have learned that you need to start again when planning to teach online and that everything has to be restructured. Building relationships and community is key and this is possible using Thinking Environment principles. Planning best use of time is crucial, for example, break times and optimum length of sessions. It is really important to build in times for informal interactions so start the session early and be available afterwards for support. What is missing from online teaching and learning is all the small conversations before a class starts, with students who stay behind at break time and after the class. I believe it is important to try to build these into online sessions, too.

Heather is now the Centre Manager for Initial Teacher Education at Shipley College

Kelly Casey

Lecturer in Performing Arts, Solihull College

‘To be ejected from the workplace mid-project and wait for further instruction was foreign territory.’

‘I told myself that I was going to make this work.’



My name is Kelly Casey and I have worked as an educator, artist and performer in various countries for the past twenty years. I have been a lecturer in Performing Arts in Further Education for the past decade.

Lecturing in a FE setting calls upon us as lecturers to manage the balancing act of imparting vocational knowledge alongside all the monitoring and supporting the learning, wellbeing and the educational and emotional needs of our students. We are used to

having to be adaptable in our practice, to read the signs, achieve the learning outcome, to nudge accordingly: to **stretch** and **challenge**. There is nothing that we cannot handle, right?

Yet nothing could have remotely prepared us for this COVID-19 time.

This was my experience.

To be ejected from the workplace mid-project and wait for further instruction was foreign territory.

I jumped into action organising at home in an attempt to regain some form of control. I set up my Teams/Zoom 'Station' at the front of the house facing a window into the street to ensure I got plenty of sunlight in order to keep my mood optimistic. 'Sunlight Station'. I told myself that I was going to make this work.

Aiming to achieve the reassuring creative intimacy and freedoms of the studio with anxious learners through media devices required a level of performance. I was aware that they were looking to me for reassurance in maintaining routine and normalcy in order to help them adjust to the new reality. In amongst this I was also now responsible for simultaneously homeschooling my two young children whom both also had many of the same questions and anxieties of my learners. The physical wrench of 'Home' and 'Work' pulled me in different directions and called upon my judgement as both an educator and a mother in terms of which one required the **stretch**.

My Sunlight Station was drastically dimmed over the course of a fortnight early into Lockdown. Whilst on video calls and performing my reassuring 'dance' I witnessed a harsh reminder of what was going on in the world. A series of ambulances and masked key workers arrived at the house directly across the road. After a period of time they all left.

Then the undertaker arrived and brought out a body bag.

I then watched the exact same series of events unfold the following week at the house next door to that one resulting in another body bag.

Keeping this away from my learners and children and also maintaining enough personal mental distance from it became the new **challenge**. I suddenly started struggling to cope. The enormity of what was happening hit me and I didn't know what to do.

I began to write. To read. To immerse myself in healthy practice that would elevate me to a place where I knew I could use this tragic circumstance and uncertainty for good. I participated in daily Feldenkrais Method sessions and attended a conference event on 'Awareness Through Movement' in order to further this understanding and to incorporate this into my practice when Lockdown was over.

I wrote a play. I read about philosophies of life and being. I made art. I FINALLY applied to do my Masters!

I danced with my children. A lot.

This was a revolution for me. I embraced every second and didn't waste a moment. I was making this work, right?

Yet despite this outlook I was losing connection with my learners. They were less and less available as their own lives and realisations took over. If I was finding this situation overwhelming, how on Earth were they coping? I felt an acute sense of guilt. I felt that despite being in regular contact with them, I had somehow abandoned them. Not having physical meeting with them to 'check in' and engage was constraining.

This made me look at what we provide as educators in FE and reminded me just how important that role is. Our consistent presence and considered support and encouragement enables our learners to function better. Face to face in the Arts is more often than not necessary. However, this will only work if learners engage, if they are able to. From home. Blended learning can only work with engaged students? Communication must be possible.

COVID-19 has forced everyone to reimagine and reevaluate their capacity and worth. My hope is that we use this for good moving forward and don't lose sight of what we have discovered.

Let's make this work.

Christine Challen

Supply teacher

Hello I am Dr Christine Challen, I have over 23 years' research experience in the field of cancer research. I have taught in higher education, further education and as a supply teacher in secondary schools. I am currently on furlough and have been using the time to enhance professional collaborations, writing both blogs, educational opinion pieces and a book, as well as contributing to and attending "virtual" CPD events including #BrewEd and #FEResearchMeet. While I have not been teaching *per se* in lockdown I have used the time to reflect on the impact of Covid 19, and its effects, good and bad, on teaching and learning and whether it may be a very small influential catalyst for change.

The unexpected arrival of Covid 19 resulting in lockdown and schools, colleges and universities having to be closed has led to swapping classroom from "real" to "virtual."

While there has always been the option of a digital component it was very much the alternative rather than the "norm."

This has not only been a huge uphill challenge for teachers and educators although it has to be said that many have stepped up to the plate with great resilience and creative prowess. Nonetheless while there are advantages to "learning technology" there are many shortfalls as well. While most of us take the internet for granted, it's hard to realise that not all families have this facility, and it can lead to inequalities and divisions in providing all with the IT equipment and internet access that this requires. In particular, the use of technology has in many ways highlighted the importance and much needed "social" aspect of education. There is a need for that connection between teacher and student, including the importance of being able to read body language to "truly" assess learning as well as the peer student interactions you get in the classroom environment.

However, that said, some of the benefits of Covid 19 have been the resilience and creative innovation that teachers have shown, especially initially while trying to get to grips with "virtual learning"

Further, it has enabled time to reflect not only on our teaching practices but the whole creative side of education e.g. art, cooking, board games, gardening and how these

significantly and positively impact on families and communities as well as inclusively engage all. More importantly, how they impact on a holistic/spiritual side of education and the resulting wellbeing benefits imparted.

‘...some of the benefits of Covid 19 have been the resilience and creative innovation that teachers have shown’

‘...I am hoping that Covid19 will be in even a minute way a catalyst for change not just for education as a whole but for curriculums and attitudes towards education.’



Covid 19 has consumed much teacher time preparing work online, as well as assessments and keeping in touch with phone calls to families and children that are struggling. For many this, together with managing their own children’s homeschooling, has directly affected teacher wellbeing and time for research and self-professional development.

In stark contrast, however, some have found that they have built new connections through Twitter as well as collaborative professional ventures. It has also led to a greater increase in professional autonomy and agency through “virtual” CPD events that have enabled sharing practice strategies as well as providing a platform to share the challenges and joys of teaching in lockdown.

From my own reflection, I am hoping that Covid19 will be, even a minute way, a catalyst for change, not just for education as a whole but for curriculums and attitudes towards education. In particular, the need to embed within the curriculum not just subject knowledge but a holistic journey of transient progression of being, becoming and thriving towards self-actualisation.

As Paul Kalanithi so eloquently puts it "*Human knowledge is never contained in one person. It grows from the relationships we create between each other and the world, and still it is never complete.*"

There is also the moment of becoming, the immersion of our body, mind, soul and senses, which we gain from real, lived experiences in our rich diverse world, making us "*never so wise as when we live this moment*" Kalanithi (2016).

Joyce I-Hui Chen

Learning and Quality Practitioner at College of West Anglia, Norfolk

‘...it is important to model ourselves in strengthening our mind, body and soul so that we can look after each other better in the long term.’

‘Communities of practice have also become communities of love, care, empathy, creativity and curiosity’



I am Joyce I-Hui Chen. I am from Taiwan and have settled in the UK since 2003. My official job title is Learning and Quality Practitioner, but I see myself as an educator and a lifelong learner. My role involves quality and organisational development in teaching, learning and assessment in a general further education (FE) college. I am also a lecturer and a course director on the teacher education courses. I have been working in different educational sectors for more than 20 years, from primary education to higher education. I am also an MPhil student through the Practitioner Research Programme (PRP) supported by the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) and delivered by the University of Sunderland’s Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training (SUNCETT).

A narrative about and related to the COVID-19 pandemic to date

To my surprise, at the beginning of the COVID-19 lockdown, teaching was swiftly adapted from face-to-face to online delivery both synchronously and asynchronously. Although there were some technical issues, my students and I quite enjoyed the experiences of teaching and learning online via Zoom. We loved the opportunity to create and cultivate

our informal space on Teams Chat and were able to support each other at a professional and personal level. However, the situation slowly became more challenging. Looking back and upon reflection, I believe there are three key factors that can explain why it became difficult and complex.

Firstly, space for growth has become really limited due to the blurring boundary between work and personal life. I am a person who likes to differentiate work, home and study life into defined spaces so that I can manage my own mental and physical capacity and health. This is not the same for everyone but when discussing this with my students and colleagues, it seems to resonate with most people. This is even more prominent when having childcare or other caring responsibilities at home. 'Struggling', 'overwhelming' and 'only hanging on' have been used to describe the situation we have been in.

The second factor is the drastic change of the 'normal' ways of working. For many educators, we have been working 'at' home, not working 'from' home. Rather than welcoming and talking with our students and colleagues face-to-face, we are now in a world of endless virtual conferences and meetings. I miss the non-verbal communication such as the subtle movement of body language, facial expressions and changing tones of voice that help each other to really feel, understand and enhance our experiences, understanding and learning. Instead, it is 'muting your sound' and 'turning off your video' so that we can get on with 'business as usual'. 'Anxiety', 'frustration' and 'uncertainty' are emotive words that frequently come out of teaching and training sessions from students, educators and colleagues.

Well, you ask, "Is there and will there be any joy, opportunities or positivity during and after the COVID-19 pandemic?" Of course, there is. In fact, plenty. Around my local community, neighbours and residents have become even more supportive of each other. This is also the case in the educational communities online and offline. It is interesting that we have somehow become more familiar with each other. We share our feelings more and discuss better ways of working and living our lives. Communities of practice have also become communities of love, care, empathy, creativity and curiosity. I really do hope that this positivity will continue when COVID-19 eventually diminishes (or perhaps this is my hopeful thinking). Another observation is something that has existed for a while but I did not really pay attention to before - the vast amount of resources and events which are now offered online for free and only a few clicks away. There are plenty of professional learning

opportunities online but again, it is down to individuals to choose and put them into practice. I have benefitted a lot from investing time autonomously in online sessions. My colleagues and I have jointly planned, researched, created resources and provided support to colleagues and students who need them. In return, we have received the encouragement to continue sharing and developing more resources and to support each other. Events such as #FEResearchMeet and webinars by ETF have been excellent places to be inspired and motivated.

Finally, the third factor lies within us. Human beings are adaptable and resilient. Our minds and bodies have an amazing design that enables us to face challenges and fight off illnesses. In this difficult time, I have learnt to try to stay present and force myself to look after myself more. This also impacts positively on people around me; my family, my students and the wider community. I believe that it is important to model ourselves in strengthening our mind, body and soul so that we can look after each other better in the long term.

Fey Cole

Early Years Lecturer and Teaching and Learning Advisor, South West College, Dungannon, Northern Ireland

‘This period has brought an opportunity to focus on the values important to us and reflect on what the key priorities are for our students’ learning.’

‘There was a clear shift in how working hours were throughout the week and I had more time to dedicate to a different type of creativity.’



I have been working within the Early Years sector for the past twenty years. Initially I trained as a Nursery Nurse, not expecting that I would end up teaching in Northern Ireland. For the past nine years, I have worked at my college, surrounded by a committed, kind and professional team who I take great pride of being a part of. Alongside my Early Years

Lecturer role, I also work as a teaching and learning advisor. My main responsibility here is to mentor and support teachers who come to work with us from China.

As we started to lockdown in March, I looked at small-scale projects and ways we could extend our work online. It seemed to run smoothly, although it was more difficult to plan for community learning. Nearly all students engaged and we were keeping on top of checking in on each other. Students were also moving from part-time to full-time keyworker roles and I tried to absorb any worries they had on completing coursework. Suddenly, I hit a massive wall, realising the pace I had set for myself was unsustainable for the duration of the lockdown. My own children's education fell on my shoulders with my husband working a variety of shift patterns. Quickly, I had to reorganise my work timetable to try to balance my roles as parent and teacher.

As routines started to settle, I found a lot of joy in my surroundings. There was a clear shift in how working hours were throughout the week and I had more time to dedicate to a different type of creativity. Although I feel quite confident with technology, I will be prioritising this area for my professional development in the future, as my skills have been largely self-taught. However, it was beneficial to spend time developing virtual learning spaces further, alongside students, so that we could ensure it was accessible and purposeful for all using it. The biggest shift I have seen has been more collaboration across the profession. I have shared my online classroom with not only UK-based lecturers, but also from as far afield as Hong Kong. Communities of practice, such as #JoyFE, #BrewEdFE, #UKFEChat and the #EYTwittertagteam, have emerged to respond quickly to support individuals and bring them together. There have been many people not only sharing their expertise, but also offering friendship, joy and reassurance throughout. This has been encouraging in a time where it is easy to feel isolated. Being in Northern Ireland, I have also seen more connections across the Home Nations and opportunities for learning opened up. It has been hugely valuable to reflect with a diverse range of professionals from the FE sector from both home and further afield.

My eleven year old has a quick response now if I ask her if all her school tasks are complete: 'Mum, we are living in a pandemic'. It comes with a twinkle in her eye that she knows will make me chuckle and let her off not getting her tasks finished. However, even the fact she uses this phrase has helped me reflect on how priorities have changed, stress has been refocussed on new areas, and diaries have emptied of my usual connections

and activities. This period has brought an opportunity to focus on the values important to us and reflect on what the key priorities are for our students' learning. The research I had been working on prior to the March lockdown focussed on intergenerational learning and it was challenging both professionally and emotionally when we had to pause the project. Therefore, it was professionally rewarding and a lift to my spirits when the project made the finals of the Association of Colleges Beacon Awards for student engagement and social action in June.

A surprise to me was how easily the community we had built within the college transitioned online. I was so reassured to hear students working together and sharing new ideas. How we adapted and kept people as the focus of our work gives me a lot of hope. We need to reflect on what we have learned and not rush back into the same routines. Now is the time to evaluate all the new ideas and innovations that have taken place in order to create an even stronger sector. There needs to be a trust in staff to play and be creative, valuing each individual within the team and appreciating all that they bring to our FE community.

Amy Creech

Programme Lead for a Foundation degree in Creative Arts Therapy Studies, City of Bristol College

I am programme lead for a Foundation degree in Creative Arts Therapy Studies at City of Bristol College. The course explores the impact that creativity in its many forms can have on health and wellbeing. It is a highly experiential and creative programme, where the students learn through working together and reflecting on a shared group experience, and through placements in care, health and education settings. So, COVID 19 lockdown presented a huge challenge for us.

When we were told to go home and stay there, it seemed almost impossible to imagine how we would find a way forward. Placements that students had put a huge amount of work and effort into were cancelled overnight, with no chance to say 'goodbye' or do a 'good ending' with participants. We were all separated from each other and there was a huge wave of loss as we all faced up to the idea that this was not going to change back any time soon. This was compounded by the need to wait for answers from the university about safety net policies. It was an upsetting and anxious time for many students.

In particular, it was challenging for those students already managing complex situations. Single parents found themselves at home non-stop with their children, the expectations of 'home schooling' and no time to themselves to join classes or write assignments. Those with mental health needs found their conditions exacerbated by isolation and the risks of the pandemic. Some students lived on their own and so were lonely. Those in shared houses were in competition for physical space and bandwidth. Inequalities were amplified. One student was stuck overseas, in a guesthouse in Morocco, with nothing but her computer and intermittent WIFI. No paper, no art materials. Conversely, those students who had been furloughed found that when they had the economic possibility to do a 'full time' course full time, rather than study in between shifts, their marks soared.

‘Used to working in an embodied way, we felt our bodies disappearing as we spent all day sitting still; disembodied heads on screens.’

‘We instituted regular breaks, we danced together, we made art with whatever we had to hand, we got creative.’



Overnight we moved online and began to learn together via video link. However, the disappearance of any clear boundaries was disorientating. As a tutor I worked longer hours than usual, not sure when or how to switch off, worried about my students. There

was so much to hold, so many threads of learning and living, interwoven and fraying. Used to working in an embodied way, I felt my body disappearing as I spent all day sitting still; lots of tiny disembodied heads on screens. I got backaches and headaches. I experienced 'Zoom fatigue', hypervigilance of monitoring all the tiny squares. Students started limiting their time on video calls, or turning the camera off.

As staff and students, together we discussed and responded. We instituted regular breaks, we danced together, we made art with whatever we had to hand at home, we got creative. We saw all around us the evidence of the value of the arts to support people through a crisis like this, and whilst it was difficult to learn online, the material of the course was thrown into a new light. Hospital arts co-ordinators got in touch with requests for boredom busting activities that could be emailed to wards now devoid of visitors -printable, A4, black and white. Students revelled in the challenge and were creative within tight boundaries. We explored what creative facilitation looked like online and learned how to do it together.

Relationships have strengthened in a way. I have focussed more on each individual, on their needs, on what works for them, and it has become clear to me that relationships are at the heart of learning. I have been able to experiment, no one expected me to have it all worked out and packaged neatly, and this has brought a richness to my practice. I prioritised depth over breadth, and let some things go.

The students and I have missed the informal space, the discussions that happen over a cup of tea. Having said that, we have seen inside each other's homes and shared a little more of ourselves than we might have before and somehow it feels like there is less of a hierarchy when teaching online – perhaps because the teacher is no longer in control of the physical space. It reminds me of my time as a detached youth worker – I was going into their territory, I was the interloper, and so they retained more power and were able to bring more of themselves. (And they could always have 'internet problems' if it was getting boring...).

Figure 1: A student facilitated creative activity by Amy's students



Beth Curtis

A Level Drama and Teacher Education Lecturer, Exeter College.



‘we had to grieve with students for experiences lost, for the lack of conclusion to the story’

‘When lockdown happened and I was suddenly thrust into the virtual world of online teaching, I initially felt overwhelmed. I missed the finite boundaries of the college timetable, my carefully sequenced scheme of work and the sense of independence and fulfilment gained through my work as a teacher.’

I teach Drama in a large FE college in the South-West of England. I am passionate about the Arts and its power to bring people together through the act of sharing stories and experiences. The creative subjects provide a rich seedbed to nurture learners who are curious, empathetic and resourceful, promoting critical thinking and problem-solving within a supportive and democratic space. Alongside my teaching practice, I am also engaged in research, exploring how dialogic pedagogies can be used to bridge the theory-practice divide in A Level Drama.

My second-year students had just finished their final practical performances in the week before lockdown. 'Phew', I thought, 'at least we got those out of the way before college had to close'. Little did I know that a few weeks later, we'd be re-marking their work to calculate a grade for the summer exams that would no longer happen. I think that was one of the hardest things about teaching during lockdown. Not the awarding of marks per se (although, don't get me wrong, that was hard!), but that we had to grieve with students for experiences lost, for the lack of conclusion to the story.

I don't mind admitting that I am a person who likes to be in control. When lockdown happened and I was suddenly thrust into the virtual world of online teaching, I initially felt overwhelmed. I missed the finite boundaries of the college timetable, my carefully sequenced scheme of work and the sense of independence and fulfilment gained through my work as a teacher. For me, home-working has not been a walk in the park. Whilst I've enjoyed a more leisurely start to the day and have loved being able to be a more present, less-stressed-out parent, I realise that I need to go *to* work. I've learnt that the physical separation between home and work is important and the blurring of those lines has felt tricky. Lockdown often saw me working late into the evening, trying to catch up on emails that had been elbowed to one side by home-schooling, online teaching and responding to my children's unending calls for 'snacks!'.

Perhaps it's the drama teacher in me that explains my yearning for the tangible nature of working in the studio, or maybe it's because teaching is in itself an act, a practice, something that has a corporeality to it. When I asked my students what they were missing most during lockdown it was also the loss of human connection, of face-face interaction

and physical togetherness that is an intrinsic part of working within the performing arts. With newspaper headlines reporting of 'UK theatres in 'high jeopardy', the future of the industry feels increasingly uncertain. So too does the A Level Drama curriculum. With specifications that emphasise assessment through practical performance work in groups, how will the teaching of Drama work in a socially-distanced world?

Fears aside, I have been amazed by the resilience and creativity of my students during Covid-19 Time. We have embraced the digital world and taken our dialogues online, have critically appraised theatre over the airwaves, written plays collaboratively, and experimented with performance through the medium of film and radio. If anything, coronavirus has enabled us to diversify our methods – not just as teachers and students, but as performers and audience members too. By being forced to break down these conventional barriers, we have been able to explore how to share our stories in new ways and in a more democratic environment than is usually afforded by the 'teacher at the front' traditions of the past.

So, have I enjoyed teaching in lockdown? Not particularly. Has my research been disrupted? Absolutely. But, in amongst all the upheaval and uncertainty I have also found reinvigoration, a fresh sense of purpose and extensions to my study. I have learnt that my students are capable of more creativity and deeper critical thinking than standardised teaching and learning often afford. Going forward, I hope to hold tight to these discoveries and explore new ways of embedding technology and blended learning in the curriculum. After all, as Brecht teaches us, 'art is not a mirror held up to reality but a hammer with which to shape it'. Covid-19 Time offers us the opportunity to shake things up, to rethink and renew, and the Arts have a significant part to play in the writing of that future.

Bryony Evett-Hackfort

Teaching and Learning manager for Coleg Sir Gar and Coleg Ceredigion

‘Almost immediately, I knew the process of developing a response to COVID-19 would challenge and test these natural instincts. I feared the chaos and messiness of an upheaval unlike anything I have experienced before.’

‘As our leadership boldly and bravely navigated the unfamiliar waters, my colleagues and I became the digital enablers.’



I am the Teaching and Learning manager for Coleg Sir Gar and Coleg Ceredigion, a multi campus institution in South West Wales. As well as leading the courses in the Faculty of

Education, the other foci of my work are leading our college wide approaches to Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Professional Learning and the coaching of staff to support the development of their practice.

At 9 a.m. on Monday 16th of March, our college was finalising its preparations for an imminent Estyn Inspection (HMI). By 10 a.m., the inspection was cancelled. By midday, a team was formed to prepare our college for lockdown and the move to teaching online; our central team was given the task of designing a digital strategy for the college by 4:30 p.m. that day. Work began. My brain likes structure. A nice neat plan with a clear and logical sense of direction. It thrives on colour coding, organised post-it notes and 'to do' lists. Almost immediately, I knew the process of developing a response to COVID-19 would challenge and test these natural instincts. I feared the chaos and messiness of an upheaval unlike anything I have experienced before.

By the Thursday, I was juggling the roll out of the strategy, supporting staff to move their teaching online and home schooling a five year old who did not understand why mummy just needed him to complete the letter formation worksheet as quickly as he could. That evening, when I realised that I was no longer physically able to be in the room strategising with my colleagues, I hit a wall. A big wall. I felt utterly lost with no sense of how I would move forward. I started to doubt my ability to contribute to the team. I wanted to make a difference and immediately I started looking at exciting online projects that I could do: a big conference here, a massive collaboration project there, the icing on the top of the cake. But we needed the cake. We needed the foundation, the stability from which the exciting projects could organically grow. In order to manage my own sense of chaos and messiness, I needed to help our staff through theirs. As our leadership boldly and bravely navigated the unfamiliar waters, my colleagues and I became the digital enablers.

I had to re-define my work and my own skill set to ensure I could contribute to make this experience better for others. I needed to become comfortable with only being one-step ahead of those I was helping whilst learning new skills in between panicked emails from staff and supervising a craft activity for a frustrated yet over-excited five-year-old. It became a thrill; a serious adrenaline rush like no other. The ability to redefine my work came from my usual support networks within college that I normally draw upon. In addition, opportunities to become part of the wider national shared experience proved to be also

fundamental in developing my confidence to challenge and consolidate my thinking. The generosity of these networks to share not only their victories but also their losses meant that I developed a new safety net that enhanced my ability to support the staff that I was working with. I genuinely feel a deep connection to my online peers. There is a language spoken that is so wholeheartedly about mutual respect and the collective development of the sector. I felt inspired and enabled to embrace the challenges of the pandemic and recognise the potential of this new way of working.

Frequently I have been asked what I have learnt about my work and myself during the pandemic. Honestly, the first thing that jumps to mind is that I have clearly established that I am not a very good teacher of a five year old and have a newfound respect for the Early Years Educator. My desperate, pained and repetitive pleas of 'just write it down' are not conducive to an effective learning environment. But when I do reflect, I realise that I have learnt to enjoy and celebrate the chaos and not feel intimidated by it. Recognising that I can use it to strengthen my work has opened up a skill set that I did not realise I possessed. I have learnt not to be afraid of the unknown and have recognised more than anything the phenomenal capabilities of the FE sector. A sector that is built by practitioners who start every day with the grit and determination to say 'what's next'. #FESpeaks.

Bryony has been promoted to Director of Learning, Teaching, Technology and Skills at Coleg Sir Gar and Coleg Ceredigion since she wrote this profile.

Jo Fletcher-Saxon

Assistant Principal, Ashton 6th Form College, Manchester

I lead on the college's higher and adult education and some of the vocational programmes for 16-19 year olds. My own teaching is with PGCE students. I am also the college's practitioner research lead.

Approaching lockdown, as a member of the senior leadership team, much attention was consumed by health and safety and safeguarding. Approaches to teaching and learning varied within the college. Live online teaching was deemed inappropriate for 16-19 vocational and A level students initially because of safeguarding concerns, so they were supported asynchronously at first until decisions were made about CAGs (centre assessed grades). In later lockdowns, this changed. For post 19 students, my core area, this was not the concern and so the team was able to flip to online teaching immediately. Microsoft Teams was not ready for use, so Zoom and a conference and chat area on the college's VLE (virtual learning environment) were deployed as we geared up. Technological innovation was rife. The students rose to the challenge though a few experienced problems with technology, shining a light on digital poverty.

I set up a desk at home and spent many hours in front of the screen talking to colleagues and students and writing and planning. This became mentally exhausting. I benefited from not having to travel but I felt drained. I realised I get my energy from being around people and I felt adrift. At home, I had a 12-year-old who I was home schooling. He was supposed to be accessing school materials on the school's VLE. However, our WiFi would not allow two people online at the same time. Stress levels rose. The solution was a new internet provider. Life became a little easier after that.

I took advantage of internal and external professional learning, using my new and developing skills with my PGCE trainees, posting materials on Loom, teaching using Zoom and later Teams, setting up a You Tube channel and even hosting an online coffee afternoon. I engaged in professional learning about leadership.

Unexpectedly our university partner, responding to a cap on HE places, removed a number of the college's courses just before the end of the summer term. Immediately, my adult and HE team had to contact students to tell them the news and discuss alternatives, dealing with any anger and frustration. It was a real test of the team's patience and endurance, and my leadership. I had to look at implications for staff contracts and course

income, responding rapidly to plan new programmes to ensure students and staff were not disadvantaged come the autumn term. A crisis fosters ingenuity, I learned.

‘I also found that I had inadvertently fallen upon a new way (for me at least) of viewing the potential of narrative inquiry.’

‘I have had the privilege of being part of a wider web of professional learning in lockdown that I feel is changing discourses around professional learning and FE research.’



I began my summer holiday grateful for a break. I had been on a huge learning curve without knowing it. I had accessed a rich seam of professional learning, some practical, some more philosophical. I had been witness to the building of community in online digital spaces. I was delighted to have the experience of chairing a panel at the Working Class Academics (online) Conference. It was also a thrill to receive the Edufuturists award acknowledging my championing of FE research. It was a privilege to be one of the team behind the #FEResearchMeet events. I am drawn to documenting our stories. Early in lockdown I curated a selection of vlogs for #BrewEdFE which documented people's early

lockdown experiences and offered ideas of ways of working (and living). I run a podcast with a colleague and we continued to record these in lockdown; documenting the stories of researchers in FE. The routine of doing this became an important way of marking time. I also found that I had inadvertently fallen upon a new way (for me at least) of viewing the potential of narrative inquiry.

Capturing these stories, or these narratives, has further fuelled my research interest in what constitutes professional learning inside and outside of organisations and the interplay between. There can be no “go-backery”, as one of my new online colleagues said (Jennifer Thetford-Kay). I now know for sure that there is a rich variety of grassroots led professional development opportunities that can contribute to a teacher’s development and I hope to document this and capitalise on this in my research plans for 2021. I have had the privilege of being part of a wider web of professional learning in lockdown that I feel is changing discourses around professional learning and FE research. I know it, I’ve lived it.

Isla Flood

ESOL teacher and coordinator, and Teaching and Learning Coach at Solihull College



‘The digital poverty that so many students experience is crippling.’

‘The most refreshing thing about lockdown has been the ability to reassess and restructure the way I work.’

I have been teaching adults and 16-18 year old students in FE since 2005 and currently am an ESOL teacher, coordinator and teaching and learning coach at a general FE college in the West Midlands. I am fascinated by the use of technology to enhance

learning and passionate about making learning accessible for all, education for social justice as well as learning for well-being and personal development.

Being able to be at home with my children has been a wonderful opportunity but I think the most difficult thing about lockdown, as a mother, has been the constant feeling of being torn between being a good parent and a good teacher. During this time, I have often felt unable to give full focus to both roles and the constant changing between them and (more than usual) multitasking has been exhausting. It is a particular worry that so many others were in this situation but very few seem to have received any support or reassurance. My other major concern has been lack of access to the internet (data) and devices for so many learners, not just in my college, but also across the country. The digital poverty that so many students experience is crippling. Not having a computer can put you at one disadvantage, not having enough data, not having a smart phone, and not having enough devices to support your family's learning are others. This has made it difficult to teach remotely. We have had to adapt and tried to tailor options to meet individual learner's circumstances, though we could not help everyone. It is essential students are provided with the devices and data they need; it has made me think more than ever that good internet access, like electricity and water, is now a human right that should be met by government.

The most refreshing thing about lockdown has been the ability to reassess and restructure the way I work. I have been lucky in that I have had autonomy and independence, so been able to adapt and adjust my work to my life in lockdown. The absolute highlight has been the connections and community I have found online and the transformative nature of that community. During lockdown, I have connected and formed both strong professional relationships as well as incredibly supportive and enabling friendships within #JoyFE. Attending the weekly ideas room has been amazing, I have felt connected, heard, supported and inspired. This collective, found in Twitter connections and tweets, has held me like a supportive net and enabled me to bounce from opportunity to idea to development.

As well as this community I have been able to develop and support others at my college, develop their skills and their network as well as our online sense of community and team within our department. I have been able to hold weekly meetings with the ESOL team on Teams and for the first time ever we have had record numbers of staff attend. We have

been able to connect and work collaboratively like never before, something that was incredibly difficult with a team made up of hourly paid and fractional staff, technology has enabled us to work together better.

A key theme and vital aspect needed in education at all times is connection and trust. This has become even more apparent to me during this pandemic. I have learnt that connection and trust do not have to be built in person together in a room, that community can be built online and what matters is what you do with time, not where you do it. What seems so unnecessary now is the presenteeism that often pervades FE, a need to be in a college building from 9-5 (often longer). In addition, many meetings are unnecessary and poorly used. Meetings should be used to discuss, to think, to connect, appreciate and listen with others. What is also core is equality. What has become more apparent is the lack of equality in our society: mothers were overburdened and disadvantaged during this time; women were more at risk, and learners without resources could not connect and that all of those things were not priorities or headlines during this time.

What I would like to end with here though is a real positive. A hopeful future, an opportunity to not go back, to continue to innovate, disrupt and connect, and find joy in education wherever we can. The pandemic has given me hope and #JoyFE.

Jan Hanson

Self-employed Specific Learning Differences (SpLD) Study Skills Tutor and Assistive Technology Trainer

I am self-employed but work with several different organisations supporting students with differences in Further Education (FE). I work with the students on a one-to-one basis either at the establishment or online providing support with anything from motivation and metacognition to helping with strategies for exam preparation and essay writing. No two days are ever the same. I am based in North Yorkshire and have an office at home, but some of my students are from London and remained with me after moving north.

For me, teaching during the COVID-19 times began before most people experienced it. The reason being that I was working with students from both the University of York and York College. Therefore, the extra hand washing and bacterial spray was already part of my life from early February. However, what I was not expecting was the number of students who suddenly needed extra support. This was with the curriculum changes from exams to open book exams, extended essays and putting art portfolios together. My work suddenly went from about 18 to 30 hours a week!

The students emailed and texted me with worries and concerns because they could not get through to their college. This continued throughout March and April, and I did not know whether I was coming or going. Trying to get into a routine was difficult but, in the end, I needed to think about my own well-being, so I ensured that I had at least a 15-minute break between each student so I could get prepared. One of the biggest things I found hard was always having to be cheerful no matter how I was feeling because the students did not want to see or hear me being miserable as they had enough to contend with by getting their work completed.

I was lucky during the COVID-19 time because I was already familiar with working and teaching online which has been regular for the past three years when it has been difficult to meet up with students face-to-face. The most refreshing thing for me was to have my way of teaching acknowledged because before the pandemic it was not considered as teaching.



At this time, I was working so many hours and was just too tired to do anything else but work and respond to students who needed support and sleep. Working with like-minded people has helped us to recognise that our mental health and well-being is just as important as those of our students. We arranged bingo nights, where my mum won a box of chocolates, lunch, and natter plus a quiz night where I failed dismally. Who knew mocha comes from Yemen? Not me! I have now set up a bi-weekly tutor group so that we can continue these conversations, talk CPD, supervision and research but more importantly have a place to come to talk every other Friday with no pressure.

When lockdown happened, with great pride, I had just launched my very first foray into research with the opening of my Advanced Teacher Status (ATS) project questionnaires. I was determined that I was going to get 60 replies – that was my goal. After the first week,

I had received two! At the end of March, I had a rethink and changed the focus of my project to open it up more and reduce the number of replies I wanted. I also managed to get in touch with a previous cohort which has been invaluable since they said I was aiming too high. Happily, I can say the questionnaires continued to come in, and I now have 20, which I am delighted about. This week I have also managed to complete my eight interviews. Even better, all my students have passed their courses, and they are more relaxed. We are all preparing strategies for when they return to college and university in September and October.

On reflection, I have learnt during the COVID-19 time that people have suddenly realised teaching online through whatever platform is still teaching, and it has a valuable place within education. There should not be any elitist hierarchy happening because we are all in the same unusual situation and therefore, we should be supporting each other by saying “How can I help?” and “Are you okay today?”

‘Now is the time to evaluate all the new ideas and innovation that have taken place in order to create an even stronger sector.’

‘I was working so many hours and was just too tired to do anything else but work and respond to students who needed support and sleep.’

Sam Jones

Teacher Educator and Research Development Project Manager, Bedford Colleges Group



'technology can feel a little monologic in comparison to the physical classroom.'

'I saw so much I wouldn't normally see, from a learners' parents' walk-in wardrobe (it was the only space in their house that was quiet), to bunnies that had been rescued, to members of the family...who hopped onto the camera to say 'Hi'. This seemed to change the variety and tone of some of our discussions and was something really valuable at a difficult time.

I am the Research Development Project Manager, a role that includes the development of the use of and capacity for research in my own college and others, and I lead the Action Research unit on PGCE/Cert Ed programme at the college.

During COVID-19, I had to introduce the Action Research unit I teach to two new groups I had not previously taught. This was hard for me as I found myself doing introductory presentations to groups I neither knew, nor could interact with or see. This constrained the interaction I experience in my usual classroom. Normally, I would be there early with a cup of tea to chat and find out more about the cohort in front of me as they arrive, potentially beginning to talk to the individuals who have ideas about their projects and are keen to talk, identify those who have researched previously and maybe spot one or two for whom the unit appears daunting or unnecessary. My COVID-19 experience was that people were reluctant to chat beforehand, maybe as this cannot be done quietly or without others overhearing and this often extended into discussions and asking questions, which never felt as 'organic' as they did in my 'real life' classroom.

However, this was only part of my experience. The supervision work I did with my existing students was a revelation. I could fit them in, one after another in a time that was perhaps more convenient for them than their scheduled class time and I could focus and guide them much as I always do. I really felt my time was better used in this respect and, in amongst all the social isolation, talking to others one to one was wonderful. I saw so much I would not normally see, from a learners' parents' walk-in wardrobe (it was the only space in their house that was quiet), to bunnies that had been rescued, to members of the family (normally children and pets) who hopped onto the camera to say 'Hi'. This seemed to change the variety and tone of some of our discussions and was something really valuable at a difficult time.

I think the same might be said of the professional development I undertook. I arranged, participated in and keynoted conferences and meetings across lockdown and felt the freedom of logging on instead of travelling, of bringing together people who are geographically distant, and to have those all-important discussions like who has the largest mug! This was a joy and really stopped me feeling down at a time when I was struggling to deal with change. Again, what I hated was during those keynotes I was talking to a screen in a quiet room with only the chat box to show that others are listening

and, hopefully, interested. This was a lonely experience and lacked the interaction I needed to reassure me when I occupy this space.

Overall, my take-away for teaching during COVID-19 is that technology can feel a little monologic in comparison to the physical classroom. I think there is a need to interact at a dialogic level, whether this is done through asynchronous activities or discussions, or through carefully crafted dialogue throughout the learning opportunity itself. Sadly, it appears the 2020-21 academic year is going to present us with more opportunities to practise our craft in this respect, but hopefully will also be framed by some physical classroom interaction.

Jen Lindsell

Assistant Head of Art at Joseph Chamberlain Sixth Form College, Birmingham



‘There are four key terms words that come to mind when I think about teaching in Covid times. Four key terms, which are currently very prevalent as a teacher: **Unknown, Time, Disconnection, Space and Visible Confidence.**’

‘Four key terms, months of struggles and breakthroughs. Teaching in Covid times is, quite frankly, something that I will never forget.’

I’m Jennifer Lindsell and currently my role is as Assistant Head of Art at a sixth form college. I specialise in BTEC teaching, Art & Design and Graphic Art. I have recently graduated my MA in Arts and Education Practices, where I’ve been researching the impact

of the arts on mental wellbeing, specifically how this can be used to support both staff and students in our current educational climate. Although a further education specialist, I'm also really interested in how you can use this across all sectors to ensure we are supported properly. I've been published in InTuition, and am currently in the process of self-publishing my university studies and publications.

@jnfrlinsdell

There are four key terms words that come to mind when I think about teaching in Covid times. Four key terms, which are currently very prevalent as a teacher: **Unknown, Time, Disconnection, Space and Visible Confidence**. This piece is what these key terms mean to me and, in essence, mean to the world of teaching in Covid times:

Unknown. The messiest of them all. Teaching in Covid times, as we all know, has felt hard. The unknown of when we get to go back, the unknown of qualification outcomes, the unknown of the safety of our learners. The unknown is vast and, to me, covers every aspect of teaching during this pandemic. Are my learners gaining knowledge? **Unknown.** Do they understand what I'm asking of them? **Unknown.** I can't delve through a screen and see if they are eating, if they are learning, if they are safe. I can't give them a timeframe on when we can step back into that classroom, that safe space for so many. I don't even know if my version of distance learning is right, and I don't know if it's right for my learners either, because their faces are hidden in a screen of pixels. The unknown is hard, and messy, and vast and, terrifyingly, is likely to continue into our new normal.

Time. There is a big 'but' in this transition. Covid times have also given me time, in so many different ways. **Time** to finish my research, and to genuinely spend time listening and discussing mental wellbeing with other staff members in education. It has given me **time** to set up my own freelance business, and find my love for designing again outside of the classroom. In reality, it's also given me **time** to realise the things I've taken so much for granted in education, and in my classroom. It's allowed me time to reflect, and find new ways to improve my practice. It's so easy, in the business of your day to day life, to not actively make change. This has given us **time** to do so, in so many different ways.

Disconnection. Here we are, in the middle, with disconnection being both positive and negative. Positive, as it has meant I've been able to slightly **disconnect** from my classroom practice, and take time to look at my research, to improve and adapt this and truly give it the time it needed and deserved. Negative, as I am so **disconnected** from my learners. The worry of the unknown, their safety, their mental wellbeing and whether they are confidently learning in their homes. The feeling of disconnection to their learning is something I just cannot shift, and something I have struggled with every day.

Space & Visible Confidence. The final key terms to consider. **Space** is necessary in TLA. **Space** for your learners to think, **space** for you as a teacher to reflect. **Space** to think, **space** to show your vulnerability and humanity to your learners. In the same breath, I have learnt that you do not need to be **visibly confident**. My students have seen my vulnerability through emails and brutal honesty about the situation, they have known that I miss them and they have known that I have struggled, and they have supported me too. That vulnerability has meant we have all worked together through distance learning, and we have all learnt to discuss our emotions together, as a group, as equals. **Visible confidence** does not necessarily make you a good teacher. My question to myself is: does 'putting that face on' prevent my students from being themselves around me too?

Four key terms, months of struggles and breakthroughs. Teaching in Covid times is, quite frankly, something that I will never forget.

Jane Martin

Head of Teaching and Learning Enhancement, Shrewsbury Colleges Group



‘With very little notice, teachers responded to the task of supporting their learners in an online environment, striving to ensure continued quality of learning and overcoming the challenges posed by unfamiliar technology and how to use it most effectively.’

‘Adapting teaching and learning to work effectively in a remote environment has been the catalyst for taking a fresh perspective on professional practice. It has provided opportunities to learn from colleagues across the sector, to engage in research and to discuss ways of taking this forward into a familiar but altered landscape.’

Pausing to reflect between the end of one academic year and the beginning of another, the extent of the challenge to teachers, learners and support staff during a time of unparalleled challenge and change is apparent. So too, however, are the opportunities for professional learning and development. As Head of Teaching and Learning Enhancement at a large 6th form college which offers academic, vocational and higher-level courses, key responsibilities lay in ensuring that the Teaching and Learning Leads, who form the Learning Enhancement Team (LET), were supported as teachers and in their role as leaders of learning across the college. Teaching on the PGCE course was completed by the beginning of lockdown but tutorial responsibilities continued.

With very little notice, teachers responded to the task of supporting their learners in an online environment, striving to ensure continued quality of learning and overcoming the challenges posed by unfamiliar technology and how to use it most effectively. This mirrored the experience of working in a professional development role. The first few weeks seemed almost surreal, a feeling reinforced by living – and now working – in a rural environment. However, the challenges remained real. Collecting vital PPE from science labs at the college and delivering it to under-resourced staff in surgeries highlighted the willingness of the college to work as part of the wider community.

However, as the situation continued and the sense of isolation grew, so concerns and anxieties emerged. These tended to coalesce around the effectiveness of leadership in a remote environment; a keen awareness of responsibility but lack of clarity around expectations and outcomes; a feeling of distance from the 'business of teaching', and how to integrate the many and varied ways of using technology into effective teaching and learning.

This was alleviated, though, by the experience of working in a time of innovation and creativity, of momentum and cohesion. A positive and willing attitude amongst the LET initiated new ways of teaching using technology and of sharing it with teachers across SCG. Difficulties associated with meeting as a team spread across three campuses dissolved as we met online and ideas, resources and great teaching practice was shared. Discussions were focused and constructive, underpinned by a spirit of collaboration and support. Time invested in research through a series of excellent online webinars, blogs, conferences, TeachMeets and websites, prompted ideas around new ways of engaging with learners, and ways in which professional development could be adapted to work in

unfamiliar circumstances. The response across the sector was impressive and it was rewarding to be part of a strong, forward-thinking, network of research and evidence based professional development groups.

Key themes emerged, often informed by the learner voice. Regular review of learners' work, the use of effective questioning to check understanding and dialogic feedback became more important than ever in a virtual environment in which communication with individual learners also provided a vital sense of connection and reassurance. The use of technology to encourage learner engagement and to provide varied, interesting and interactive approaches to learning online developed rapidly.

The LET developed an extensive range of teaching and learning strategies which harnessed the power of technology to encourage learner engagement and interaction and promote autonomy and independence. These, together with the wide-ranging adaptations and interpretations to suit different curriculum areas, learner groups and specific learning needs, created a rich resource that was shared across the teaching body.

It was evident that staff welcomed the opportunity to share effective practice, discuss ways in which to improve further, and appreciated the support given by their peers. The wider Professional Exchange Meetings, already established pre-lockdown, began to re-emerge as areas of common interest developed amongst groups of teachers.

We have learnt a lot during this period of remote working, all of which will influence and enrich approaches to teaching and learning in the new academic year. Adapting teaching and learning to work effectively in a remote environment has been the catalyst for taking a fresh perspective on professional practice. It has provided opportunities to learn from colleagues across the sector, to engage in research and to discuss ways of taking this forward into a familiar but altered landscape. The difficulties encountered by so many people during this time have been profound: sad, bewildering and, in some instances, life-changing. Yet I believe the FE sector has responded well; the quality of the learner experience has remained at the heart of what so many teachers, support staff and leaders have endeavoured to achieve.

Craig McCauley

Foundation Lecturer at Solihull College

As a Foundation Lecturer, I have spent the last 20 years working with this under-represented group in several different forms.

Everybody procrastinates. We all know that feeling when we would rather be doing anything else than meeting deadlines or preparing a lesson for the class I only do to make up my contracted teaching hours. Well, hold my beer: I am the self-appointed king of procrastination. I will not only procrastinate about the things I do not like doing but also the things I feel passionately about and have been looking forward to for months. It is part of my makeup, something I have accepted since being diagnosed with inattentive ADHD and Dyspraxia, the perfect storm for “not getting the baby washed”, as an old mentor used to say. I am comfortable with it. It is part of what makes me who I am. I always find it difficult to get to the end of a task. I go the scenic route, and I will have a story to tell at the end of it, too. It is the reason I love being creative, collaborating with others on ideas and spending endless hours pondering.

Coming back to my teaching practice and contracted teaching hours, if you look up the worst jobs for someone with Dyspraxia, it will often have “Teacher” at the top of the list. Well, look where I find myself. Basically, it means I can do my job, but that is it, no time for innovation or squishing in a “wow” moment into every single lesson as a job coach once encouraged me to do. Are you kidding me? Due to the nature of the students I work with, usually any spare moment is taken up with their welfare issues or their latest social media inflicted drama. I could do this so much better if I had time, I could be a better teacher if I had time. FE is a forever-changing landscape: new courses, awarding bodies, changing job roles, new subjects, and new initiatives that I have lost count of how times I have had to re-invent the wheel. I had an allotment once where I would turn up once a week with my tools and spend pretty much every session weeding and grafting while jealously looking over at the older, more experienced allotmenters relaxing with a glass of wine who seemed to effortlessly tweak everything now and again. That is where I want my teaching practice to be if I had the time. The lockdown has finally bought about the time. Initially, the most important thing was to check in with students and set up a new timetable. I felt that the pressure was off as long as the students were okay and they were

making the expected progress to completing their qualifications. Aside from that, “do what you can’ was the message”.



‘Now we must work together to protect the benefits of a good work-life balance and the extra space we have given to cultivate our practice and ourselves.’

‘I could be a better teacher if I had time...the lockdown has finally bought about the time.’

I have spent 14 weeks in procrastination and creative heaven. CPD was top of my wish list starting with blended learning approaches. This is something I have been looking into for years. I have a notebook full of ideas of how to bring technology into the classroom and I must have used 10% of it. Next up, getting creative with my lessons and at least

attempting to add a “wow” moment to *some* lessons, then it’s time to spruce up my professional profile and explore wider FE contexts. It turns out procrastination is me being myself, loving my job, feeling excited and passionate about my work and proving people wrong and realising my potential. None of these were possible for me pre-lockdown. Now we must work together to protect the benefits of a good work-life balance and the extra space we have given to cultivate our practice and ourselves.

Becky Moden

Learning & Development Mentor at Bolton College



‘I have had the pleasure of attending some fantastic online events... The FE Virtual Research Meet and TENC online conferences were fantastic to gain real-time perspectives from other teachers.’

‘Video calls have given us a space to share and work together, without the stress of having to go anywhere, which certainly works for students who may be more introverted by nature, or fearful of the pandemic.’

I am currently working as a Learning & Development Mentor in FE (commenced in January 2021). I left my previous role in February 2020, a month before lockdown was implemented. Since leaving, I have worked as a supply tutor at two separate schools - extremely different from FE! Over the summer, I focused solely on my Creative Writing

PhD (a chick-lit literary novel based on my own experiences of working in FE). Before commencing my PhD, I worked at a large North-West college as an English tutor and completed a part-time Creative Writing MA. Prior to this, I held teaching roles and two North-West training providers. It has been strange for me to be permanently outside the FE bubble, so I have tried to keep in touch with ex-colleagues throughout lockdown. I suppose we've all been in bubbles of our own. From my discussions, people have told me that the difficulties they have faced have been predominantly to do with technology not working properly. Sadly, some FE students do not have access to home broadband or the required devices, so they have been unable to complete set work. In times like these, we truly understand the value of small group teaching and one-to-one support; a friendly face can be a lifeline to some students. My auntie, who also works in FE, mentioned to me that she has felt under pressure to be constantly available - some students have been emailing completed work through at unsociable hours, and asking questions, so the expectation to be "online" has been huge. It is probably difficult to truly separate home and work life when working from home in this instance. For me, as a student, I have really missed meeting up with my supervisor, just for a coffee and a chat (and occasional moan). Although I have had many Teams/Zoom meetings with my supervisor, it is hard to gauge a reaction through a screen. A 'regular' conversation would have been much better.

Researching during COVID-19 has been challenging. For the first few weeks, my departure from my previous role was still new, so I revelled in having the time and space to devote to my studies. As time moved on, though, it did become more difficult. I became a little bored from just focusing on the theoretical side of my research and worried that my creative side was 'going stale'! So, I decided to insert periods of self-care; even if it meant devouring a 99p kindle read or watching make-up tutorials on YouTube, to clear my mind.

There have been some bonuses to working from home. Despite being apart, we have been able to see one another virtually; we have viewed ourselves from every (sometimes unflattering) angle, with wet hair and needy pets in the background – it has provided us with a level of intimacy we may not have had previously. Video calls have given us a space to share and work together, without the stress of having to go anywhere, which certainly works for students who may be more introverted by nature, or fearful of the pandemic. This disjointed new world takes some getting used to, but I have enjoyed having the time to connect with other practitioners on social media and have subsequently gained more followers via online discussion. I have also been able to use Twitter to build my academic

network and have been retweeted by Academic Chatter, a feed designed to promote academic research, from established scholars to PhD students and ECRs.

I have had the pleasure of attending some fantastic online events - via my institution (The University of Salford) and through others. The FE Virtual Research Meet and TENC online conferences were fantastic to gain real-time perspectives from other teachers, and I attended valuable talks on writing and research in lockdown. I do not drive, so can never usually attend external events. It has been a real treat to be able to do so online. I was due to present my current research at a Creative Writing conference hosted by The University of Nottingham in March, and at the English Shared Futures conference in June. Sadly, I have been unable to do so, however I have been able to talk about my research virtually. The constraints for me have been not being able to see people, but I do think this new virtual world has worked out.

Annie Pendrey

Creating Educational Spaces Ltd and Teacher Trainer

At the time of writing, my place within the FE sector is one of transition which has been the result of COVID-19. My previous roles in FE and HE have been Educator, Teacher Trainer and Professional Development Manager but soon to be Freelance where I can be 'free' to continue with my writing and research alongside studying for my PhD, in addition to some sessional FE teaching.



‘So whilst it has been hard to nurture, plan, deliver and assess online and foster creativity it is something I will take forward with me on the next part of my educational journey...’

I cannot write this piece from a purely professional perspective but have to include a personal perspective, a hidden window from where the sun at times did not shine and the colours of the rainbows which adorned my house in support of the NHS, as my brother fought COVID-19, were not a spectrum of colour which offered beams of light as my world became de-saturated. The energy and joy for teaching and learning became difficult mainly due to lack of freedom, freedom to dance amongst the rainbow of colours, freedom to find ‘light’ in my work, my teaching, learning and assessment.

In turn, the transition to online teaching, I felt, required a much more empathetic approach to teaching and learning and led me to offer Teams meetings to suit the needs of the learners who were missing the humanistic interaction of lessons, rich with discussions and debates, whilst potentially compromising my own well-being in order to ensure learners success. It was one evening when my brother was given 24 hours to live and I continued to deliver an online lecture, I reflected upon my freedom within the teaching, learning and assessment arena. Was I being driven by product not process?

Battling with product and a specification led curriculum, I set about devising a Rainbow of Colour pastoral resource for my learners, with each colour of the rainbow being a theme for my learners. In addition, I devised Rainbow lists which soon became known as one of ‘Annie’s famous to do lists’ which were sent out at the beginning of the week with small manageable tasks for the week at times to suit each learner. We then met online to discuss how we had displayed some of the colours of the rainbow within the pastoral resource I had created, resilience (red) that week, objectivity in our written work (orange), guidance (green), who needed further guidance and how could we scaffold each other’s learning. Blue was to be compassionate for each other in these times, display integrity (indigo) and finally violet was for versatility. Versatility was key throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and I had developed a new colourful pedagogy which celebrated process rather than

product but still as a professional I felt trapped, tracking product, assessment, meeting deadlines and marking.

This pedagogical approach gave me back some of the rainbow but still something was missing, I longed for a confetti of colour and, whilst working in isolation, it has provided me with a space to reflect upon what constrains my practice as an educator. My reflection led me to discover how I missed creativity in the curriculum, the ability to be creative online and more in depth, how I have possibly become entrenched in a specifications-led curriculum which is intertwined with the hidden curriculum and leaves you at times feeling like you are spinning plates to fit it all into a 55-minute session.

Being creative and imaginative is in my DNA and traits which allow me to not be stumped by problems or challenges such as those brought about by COVID-19, having to suddenly teach and assess using a variety of online platforms. None of these processes caused an emotive fear for me but it made me reflect upon how creativity in the curriculum is fostered. Moreover, I reflected upon how to I ensure I provide a space which cultivates freedom and stimulates divergent thinking and encourages learners to 'question the answer'? Enabling this practice leads me back to rainbows and freedom and the need for my professional career to have an injection of colour and freedom, to find a space for my creativity and curiosity to flourish. So whilst it has been hard to nurture, plan, deliver and assess online and foster creativity it is something I will take forward with me on the next part of my educational journey producing colourful patterns with embellishments of glitter in my new space of freedom.

'The energy and joy for teaching and learning became difficult mainly due to lack of freedom, freedom to dance amongst the rainbow of colours, freedom to find 'light' in my work, my teaching, learning and assessment.'

Kathryn Pogson

Teacher Educator at Kirklees College, Huddersfield.



‘Our dining room became the space for working and my children’s homeschooling, and being the best I could for my students, working around their home life and other pressures.’

‘making new connections with people ordinarily I may not have chatted to. This has been empowering and has made me think a lot about my own practice and development.’

I started my career in Further Education (FE) in 2002 teaching Travel, Tourism and Hospitality at an FE college in Leeds. I always wanted to be a teacher but my love of teacher education came from completing my Masters in Professional Development,

which, at the time, was undertaken as further study but it opened the door to many opportunities in my career. I have been a Teacher Educator since 2010 and currently work at Kirklees College in the North of England. My role includes teaching the Cert Ed/PGCE qualification, which is part of the University of Huddersfield's FE initial teacher education (ITE) partnership, working with the Fire Service to train firefighters for the assessor qualification and with other members of the service to develop a coaching and mentoring network across the organisation.

My preparations for teaching during the pandemic began in March 2020 when the 'Beast from the East' forced our college to close and overnight we had to move our classes online. This experience built my confidence, so I did not feel phased about teaching online when the pandemic struck. The last opening day of college was an evening class with students who were due to finish their ITE course in June. The session was spent showing them how to access the online resources and a quick overview of a hastily rewritten scheme of work to assure them how their qualification was still achievable. I felt prepared and the students had confidence in me. I felt quite excited by the challenge ahead and the opportunity to rethink my teaching practice and how it would work online.

On the opposite side of the spectrum were feelings of guilt I had about combining my work with my role as a mother caring for and home educating three children. Our dining room became the space for working and my children's homeschooling, and I did my best to work around the commitments of my learners to ensure they could access the support they needed to achieve their qualifications. We were suddenly in each other's houses, pets and children they had talked about in class were in my lessons and this became normal. A particular memory was of having to stop a class to attend to the more intimate needs of my children's toileting and then resume teaching! My professionalism reached a new level, but I just had to laugh it off and get on with it.

I really missed being in the classroom at the start of lockdown, but meetings online felt quite efficient and easy to manage. I began to feel more creative in the online spaces and sufficiently confident enough to try new things as I do in the classroom, modelling to my students creativity and risk taking. I have supported their online teaching and interactions with their students and have felt privileged to be able to do this. In turn, I have received excellent support from my line manager, who I always feel manages the person and not

the process, and, on some days, has just checked in to make sure I am okay. I am grateful for this.

What has been refreshing about this time is the amount of professional development that I have had the opportunity to engage in, which in normal circumstances just would not have happened. I could choose what I wanted to attend and to some degree when I wanted to attend it. I have particularly enjoyed attending the Education and Training Foundation webinars and engaging on Twitter with #JoyFE's Ideas Room. So much so that I plan to bring this into my own work to promote sharing and collaboration with colleagues. It has also proved that a one size fits all approach to continuing professional development is not effective. The learning that I have engaged in has been inspiring and has really moved my development forward, particularly meetings I have attended with others on Zoom, Twitter and chatting one to one and making new connections with people ordinarily I may not have chatted with. This has been empowering and has made me think a lot about my own practice and development.

On reflection, I have learnt not to question everything, have confidence that I do make fast and smart decisions, and that I am trusted to be a professional and to do the best job I can. Additionally, to be a bit braver, which is why I applied to continue my development starting with the Advanced Teacher Status in October 2020.

Jodie Rees

Lecturer in Post-Compulsory Education and Training at the University of South Wales (USW).



‘One of the toughest challenges of teaching and learning in lockdown has been the persistent assumption that teachers and students have stopped working and are enjoying an extended holiday.’

‘During this time, I have worked longer hours in sustained online learning spaces, provided extended pastoral support, re-designed whole modules of work and assessment overnight, alongside increased levels of marking, data requirement, recruitment, marketing, and shifting deadlines – it has been no extended holiday!’

I have worked with post-14 students in further education colleges for over 15 years as a lecturer, tutor, and coach, whilst undertaking roles as an advanced practitioner, mentor, and union rep. My main research interests focus on further education tutorials, pastoral

support, and critical pedagogy. I enjoy being part of the network #FEResearchMeet and hosted the first one in Wales in December 2019. Recently, I became a convenor for South East Wales with the Learning and Skills Research Network and am currently planning for some introductory sessions to support new FE researchers in the region.

Introducing myself as a teacher in HE may raise some eyebrows as to why I am writing about FE, but this only gives one snapshot and misses over 15 years of FE work, relationships, and research. This experience, advocacy, and love of FE with vocational expertise, social justice and equity shapes my professional identity and supports student teachers starting in FE. I am HE in name, but FE in heart, and teaching in a global pandemic has certainly been a test of heart when juggling the demands of technology, pedagogy, students, and institution.

One of the toughest challenges of teaching and learning in lockdown has been the persistent assumption that teachers and students have stopped working and are enjoying an extended holiday. This is a tough call when still marking and lesson prepping at 3.00 am, and trying to navigate new assessment guidelines and revised coursework. Assuming formal education has ceased often means the inequality and degrees of social, economic, and technological capital that we see and experience are overlooked. During this time, I have worked longer hours in sustained online learning spaces, provided extended pastoral support, re-designed whole modules of work and assessment overnight, alongside increased levels of marking, data requirement, recruitment, marketing, and shifting deadlines – it has been no extended holiday! My priority has always been to maintain stability for students, who are trying to come to terms with huge changes in their situations, and I accept that working from home has blurred the work/home boundaries for us all. The students and I have been co-constructors of synchronous spaces and we have used dialogue and collaborative activities to achieve this with varying degrees of success. Students have valued online breakout groups (despite their annoyance with some passengers, sometimes called lurkers). But as teachers adapt to new ways, students must adapt too - the unnaturalness of the mute/unmute process in stagnating dialogue, the missed funny comments said whilst still on mute, the assumption that lurking is always a sign of disengagement, the challenges of being assigned to a group of new people, and the ease at which students can click “leave” to opt-out of anything that doesn’t suit; it is new territory for us all to navigate.

What has enabled me to sustain these challenges of being a teacher in lockdown is the ability to change from teacher to student, learn new things and develop my teaching practice and research ideas; a change is as good as a rest! It has been refreshing to access lectures, conferences, and talks that have migrated online. I have joined the Gramsci Society, attended the working-class academics conference, working-class solidarity spaces, Chartist and Merthyr Rising talks, #FEResearchMeet and virtually travelled to Huddersfield, Blackburn, Birmingham, and Bedford to name a few, which I could not have done in a face to face context. These networks have also been spaces for me to find solidarity and reflect on wider questions that lockdown has posed about the purpose of formal education, the neoliberal constraints, learning beyond formal spaces, and what constitutes knowledge.

The pandemic has also highlighted the hypocrisies around the value of vocational qualifications and work, which has never been given the parity it deserves in comparison to traditional routes of education and the ridiculous hierarchies that exist with jobs and titles, nor have vocational qualifications been fully respected for the skills and expertise required. Social care is a case in point; it has endured damaging funding cuts, unfair working contracts and wages, with minimal regard for the complexities of its vocation. And yet, vocational work has suddenly become clap-worthy by the same government that has spent a decade devaluing and defunding FE where vocational journeys and expertise often begin. I reflect on the government's grandiose adulation of vocational work, and I am sceptical about how genuine it is, how long it will last, and how it will translate in terms of fair pay, fair work, and secure jobs as we head into an economic crisis. As unemployment figures rise, the FE sector is called upon by the government, not as a social good to build equitable and enriched communities, but imagined as a workforce factory to churn out workers to be procured irrespective of the working conditions or job security; a panacea to prop up a failing economy one short-term limp at a time. Lockdown reflections have left me with a galvanised sense of purpose about education as a social good, and the need to remain steadfast in solidarity of our values and practices of social justice and equity to resist the notion of FE as a capital gains venture that reifies free market values and inequality.

Kerry Scattergood

Adult Literacy Tutor and Further Education Research Lead at Solihull College and University Centre.



I am currently working to build interest in practitioner-led research, especially to enable teachers' expertise and professionalism to be recognised and valued. The first step on that journey was to run a 'mini' #FEResearchMeet at Solihull in the summer of 2019, and I have more recently partnered up with colleague Annie Pendrey to run meets for the West Midlands, with Annie's event being in January 2020.

Lockdown challenges

I am currently studying on the Education and Training Foundation's Practitioner Research Programme, delivered by the University of Sunderland Centre for Excellence in Teaching Training (SUNCETT). I applied for the programme as soon as my younger daughter started in her Reception year at primary school, thinking that this would give me a bit more

time to take my own studies further. However, when the first lockdown was announced, my initial reaction was 'I can't do this!', as I was due in Sunderland the following week for three days of 'virtual' sessions. So, I rang my supervisor and told her I felt unable to continue with the programme whilst working from home and home-schooling my two young children. Her response was inspirational to me, in a moment when I was feeling totally overwhelmed: 'Keep going until you find that you can't do it and if you give up then, fair enough, but don't give up until you've tried'. So, from that moment forth, no matter how tough it has got, I have kept on going, determined not to give up on anything unless I really have to.

My teaching

My own experience was so similar to that of my own students', so I could truly empathise with their experiences: all adults, all with busy lives on their own learning journey, all suddenly disrupted by the difficult situation we found ourselves in. In the early days, the majority of work with my students was pastoral, especially in terms of helping my students support their own children's home-schooling. I worked hard to make contact with every single one of my students to make sure everyone was okay, and had to be accepting of the fact that not everyone was going to, or indeed was able to, keep studying. One adult, someone with previously perfect attendance, engaged initially but then went quiet. I later heard from him that, as a police officer, he had been working long and erratic shifts and had just had no time or headspace for his learning. In addition, whilst home-schooling my Year 4 child I noticed my own numeracy ability and confidence improve, so, just when I thought my research could not continue, I found a new thread: how might home-schooling help adults develop their own literacies?

"I was totally overwhelmed just trying to get to grips with all the new technology we needed to master just to stay in touch, let alone run big events. However, my supervisor's words rang in my ears: 'don't give up until you have to'."

‘I worked hard to make contact with every single one of my students to make sure everyone was okay, and had to be accepting of the fact that not everyone was going to, or indeed was able to, keep studying.’

A Virtual #FEResearchMeet

So, when it came to thinking about what I was going to do about the planned summer #FEResearchMeet, I obviously decided to cancel it! Organising something as time consuming as a #FEResearchMeet felt an unnecessary extra pressure that I did not need – that is, until I thought again about my student and his lack of time or headspace for learning and thinking. It suddenly felt more important than ever that FE teachers find some thinking space during the pandemic.

So, at our next research steering group meeting, all taking place remotely by now of course, when our Dean of HE asked ‘we’ll be moving our research events online, won’t we?’, I found myself nodding in agreement. But what was I agreeing to? I was totally overwhelmed just trying to get to grips with all the new technology we needed to master just to stay in touch, let alone run big events. However, my supervisor’s words rang in my ears: ‘don’t give up until you have to’. Moreover, it is amazing what you can achieve when you work as part of a committed and dedicated team. I contacted Jo Fletcher-Saxon, a seasoned #FEResearchMeet-er from Ashton Sixth Form, tentatively asking for ideas how to run it online, and she immediately put me in touch with Dr David Powell, from the University of Huddersfield, who had been successfully running events and was using Zoom very effectively to keep on going with his teacher education programmes. A planning group formed and we went from there. Each day carrying on, not giving up, and the rest, as they say, is history. The first ever virtual #FEResearchMeet was born!

Alistair Smith

Lecturer in Photography at Lincoln College

‘As I reflect on this time, I see two sides, two experiences, neither being wrong but both telling different stories.’

As I reflected, something more profound came to mind than perceived memories: the mass of data we had gathered about this time. We had records in the form of a digital breadcrumb trail, one of correspondence and discussion.’



My name is Alistair Smith and I am a lecturer in the School of Art & Design at a general further education college teaching photography in FE and HE classes. During the first lockdown, I began working with Jo Fletcher-Saxon to create a FE research-focused podcast. This had grown out of me presenting at a #FEResearchMeet and a desire to create a platform to broaden the reach of practitioner voices: #FEresearchpodcast was born.

Thinking about teaching in COVID times began for me with discussion and note taking: trying to form memories of what happened and how I felt. As I reflected, something more profound came to mind than perceived memories: the mass of data we had gathered about this time. We had records in the form of a digital breadcrumb trail, one of correspondence and discussion.

My initial thoughts about this time were relatively optimistic, something that I looked back on in a positive light, that was until I read something that made me reassess how I saw it. I read about what Daniel Kahneman calls the 'experienced self' and the 'remembered self': the experienced self being in the moment and the remembered self being how we construct our story as the self tells a narrative of what was. We can easily blur the two types of memory and distort our thinking. I felt for accurate reflection I needed to consider how I could think in both mindsets; I used the digital records to help. This was to be a great data source for me to honestly reflect using the experienced self and uncover some things I had chosen to forget in my initial reflections.

The direct 'experienced self' made comments to colleagues that told of a pretty tough time, one of mental fatigue and a focus on resilience, but it also uncovered a compassionate and supportive community.

"Not going to lie it is a struggle at the moment. I am sure it was because I stopped and took a break, it is easier when you are busy. How are you doing?" [14/4/2020 - 16:10]

Looking back on this single line alone, I was able to slot back into the emotion of how I felt; different to the positive experience I wrote about in my notes of initial reflections.

Another message read:

"I am close to giving up, we have just had another hour-long meeting about something that we can't even do and never found a solution" [31/3/2020 – 15:29]

The comment was accompanied by a laughing emoji to add more context. I do not recall this conversation, but it clearly happened, and as I read on, I saw that it had a clear impact on that day's work and overall mood too. Not all the dialogue was negative: some focused on positivity, humour and support. It is important to recognize that these things became easily forgotten when trying to remember what really happened. I encourage you to read on with an awareness that it comes from the remembered self.

What about the remembered self? What experiences could my mind recall and provide a narrative of the moment?

1. We had to move fast to reskill and focus our attention on how we were to communicate and make as much progress as we could. We had to do this in relative uncertain surroundings and unknown technological contexts. Could our learners and colleagues cope with the demands and reliance on technology? We had no idea what was to come but we coped, we found ways and we problem solved, we developed small support communities to help and evolve and learnt new skills to support this.
2. We felt trusted and empowered to get on with what we could. There was more trust handed to us than we have experienced in some time. We felt in charge of our destiny here.
3. We met barriers at every stage but mostly found solutions. It was hard to get past some of the disengagement from some groups of learners, but we needed to try our best and offered support where we could.
4. Our whole working week changed, it was hard to spend all our hours in the way we had been doing as we fought against notifications from a plethora of apps and devices.
5. The idea of what online learning was, for me at least, evolved.

As I reflect on this time, I see two sides, two experiences, neither being wrong but both telling different stories. I am pleased I found the conversations so that I can reflect much more in depth about this time and use that information to expand upon what the remembered self tells me happened. Take a look back at your correspondence from this time, does it match your initial memory? Perhaps not.

Paul Smith

Faculty Head, City of Wolverhampton College



‘Through all these changes ... my connection with the students, through maths and English, has been consistent.’

‘I missed face to face interaction with colleagues. I had underestimated the value of informal conversation with teachers and other colleagues on how colleges function to deliver teaching, learning and assessment (TLA).’

In Further Education (FE), our identities as educators are always in flux. At times I have been a student, a lecturer, a personal tutor, a curriculum manager, an internal and external verifier, a mentor and a researcher. I’m currently a Faculty Head.

My connection with FE began when I was 19. I was accepted onto a degree course at my local college when unemployed and not sure what I wanted to do. There have been a few other courses along the way too.

Through all of these changes in role, along with many changes in funding, policy and qualifications, my connection with the students, through maths and English, has been consistent. For the first time in about 20 years, it felt that this had been disrupted, abruptly, when all maths and English GCSE and Functional Skills exams were cancelled due to COVID-19, with classroom teaching stopping just over halfway through.

Although this was a challenge to our identities as educators, teaching and learning did continue via online tools. Teachers not only adapted but gained new e-learning skills to add to their already formidable arsenal of pedagogical techniques.

My role has no teaching, meaning much of my work did not change. I still checked my emails and attended meetings. I continued to collaborate with colleagues and curriculum plan. We worked through problems and came up with solutions, much in the same way as before, only from makeshift offices at home.

However, it had changed fundamentally in a number of ways. Firstly, I missed face to face interaction with colleagues. I had underestimated the value of informal conversation with teachers and other colleagues on how colleges function to deliver teaching, learning and assessment (TLA). It became impossible to catch up about a project or something that went well without arranging a meeting and logging in. Those conversations with people outside my day-to-day role were also gone including the valuable informal networks formed in lifts and corridors.

Similarly, gone were the interactions with students that take place during the breaks, during a walkthrough or following a knock on my office door; the small conversations that inform how courses are run, or tell us what to look out for.

We also gained another identity. We became examiners for our own students' final grades in a way we had not before. We spent time looking at students' work, judging what grade to award, keeping each other's objectivity in check. We looked at student profiles to see

if we were being fair, challenging each other on grading and biases. This was difficult and time consuming. The lengths teachers went to to ensure that work was available and students were receiving a grade that reflected the progress they had made during the year was amazing.

Seeing the students' work was a joy, especially the work students sent in after lockdown. This work would not contribute to their final assessed grade, and acted as a reminder that many students see their time with us at college as more than gaining qualifications that enable entrance to the labour market. It is also about being creative, meeting aspirations and making sense of the world. This is something I miss the most now I no longer teach.

My favourite days of the year are the GCSE exams. I'm usually sat on the signing in desk, meeting students whose names are familiar from lists or emails but I have never met in person. I missed seeing the mixture of anticipation and nerves, and talking to the students on their return, with their excitement and relief matching my own.

My nervousness and excitement has been displaced as we wait for what comes next. That TLA has changed is beyond doubt. We know education technology enables accessibility to FE as much as lack of access to digital technology has sometimes constrained. We now cannot deny the effectiveness of remote teaching but face to face TLA must remain a key part of FE. Marking a photograph of handwritten work is not the same as observing that work created on the page, watching how the student approaches the work. Yet whether online or in class, students will still develop and make progress. Although teachers and students might not always be in the same room while TLA is taking place, FE will remain consistent, rising to the same challenges as it did when it offered an unemployed 19-year-old the opportunity to gain a degree.

Lynne Taylerson

Director, Real Time Education Focus



‘Despite an amazing collective response to COVID-19, we are not one big FE family but ‘many FEs’.’

‘Families and communities go without digitally.’

‘The FE family’: closer together, or poles apart digitally?

Grounding these thoughts with a brief biography, I left college after mediocre A Levels, blagged a sound engineering job at BBC Birmingham (clinking cups on *The Archers*), then moved to digital broadcast training and mentoring. I completed an Open University Computing degree (having not touched a computer until age 35) and joined a large further

education (FE) college in 2001 teaching access courses, computing BTECs, then teacher education programmes. I completed a PhD investigating FE teachers' use of Twitter for informal professional learning in Spring 2020. I have an eclectic portfolio career now running an independent provider focussed on curriculum design and facilitation for teacher learning and digital skills, researching and writing.

What's been on my mind in COVID times? Jo Cox's quote "*We are far more united and have far more in common with each other than things that divide us*" returns to me. The 'FE family' has been united in chaos and uncertainty. We have been uprooted from learning spaces and resources, established relationships and structures, familiar schedules and habits.

We united in determination to nurture, support and defend our learners who had been cast adrift just as much as we were, if not more so with removal of support mechanisms. We were often creative and innovative, quick to adopt and adapt digital tools and pedagogies. We were resilient and hopeful in our new independence, removed from direct supervision and control. We were able to experiment, fail, reframe and grow our practice and peer networks in supportive environments. We gained, by accident of fate, what so many FE educators had said for years they needed to empower them – constructive, developmental observation and peer learning opportunities.

Despite an amazing collective response to COVID-19, we are not one big FE family but 'many FEs'.

Advanced technology users in EdTech Demonstrator Colleges are given funding streams to push boundaries in artificial intelligence, augmented reality and innovative virtual learning environment use, encouraged to forge closer links with equally innovative employers. These actions are praised by inspectors and the government as providing the answer to the nation's skills gaps. There is a fresh initiative in learning technology every week with an inspiring example of innovation that 'others in the sector' may emulate.

Some others.

Too many adult and community, work-based or offender learning tutors, and in turn their learners, live in a different world. They have scant access to digital devices and networks, relying on free tools or sharing of devices to get by. Worse still, some have no digital access at all. Learners most requiring realistic experiences of digital tools and literacies, and tutors most needing to experiment with digital pedagogies, are most often least able to access or leverage them. Families and communities go without digitally. This is not a criticism of the talent and good fortune of well-funded digital innovators, but an observation

on FE's digital divide and the recent widening of a feast and famine gap that we always knew existed.

So, what now? There is welcome recognition that FE educators need digital mentoring and support and encouragement to focus on digital pedagogies equally, if not more, than 'tech tools'. There is an awareness that digital facilitation has downsides. ETF's Digital Teaching Professional Framework (DTPF), which aims to scaffold educators' digital skills and pedagogy, recognises teacher and learner digital wellbeing and the need for accessible, equitable digital learning, supported by ETF's free '*Enhance*' platform of digital micro-learning opportunities.

While such support is welcome and timely, a richness of Open Educational Resources (OER), systems and support networks remain little-known and go unexplored. Maybe this is a personal reflection from a freeloading digital magpie! It's gratifying to note that COVID-19 has brought significantly more sharing of digital 'free stuff' and given educators more time to review it, but more spreading of digital love and wealth is needed.

It's time to shout about *Good Things Foundation's 'Get Online Week'*, to promote free digital assets including images, papers, books and conference proceedings that lurk unacknowledged under the 'OER' banner. The brilliant e-book *Open at the Margins* helps set out this vision, reminding us that access to free, quality resources and research is essential for learners not enrolled on accredited programmes, those who don't have often taken-for-granted access to large online (or traditional) libraries. If FE leverages OER, tutors and learners with low or no budgets can experience the 'digital levelling up' so desperately needed to help make us all one big FE family with real equity of opportunity.

Amanda Turner

Teacher educator, University of Bolton



‘COVID-19 brought highs and lows, as we collectively rode the coronacoaster, in ever changing tides of emotions, from heightened anxiety through to elation.’

‘Online teaching works most successfully when there is a positive rapport between the members of the group and the teacher, based on respect with clear communication and patience.’

I have been a teacher educator for over ten years, delivering a range of programmes which prepare and qualify individuals to teach, in the diverse and challenging Further Education sector. My background is in special educational needs and I am passionate about inclusion and widening participation for people from disadvantaged backgrounds, as well as professional identity development through incidental learning.

Although I was acutely aware of COVID-19 and the possibility of a lockdown, when it eventually took effect and the doors closed on the university forcing us into isolation, I felt extremely unprepared. The immediate expectation was for all teaching to continue, through the use of virtual platforms and trainees were not to be disadvantaged. However, initially it was a time of heightened anxiety and fear, compounded by social media and the lack of normal contact with friends, family and colleagues. Established routines disappeared over night. We tried to adapt to communicating solely online, alongside managing unstable and at times, demanding behaviour from trainee teachers, as they too grappled with the challenges that COVID-19 presented on an ever-changing basis. After two weeks of drifting into negative behaviours, I made a conscious decision to make the enforced experience a positive one, not just for myself, but for my trainees and team.

The initial feelings of being stranded on a desert island were quickly replaced with the realisation that through the use of technology the world had become more connected than before, in a different way. Familiar pedagogical practice in physical classrooms was replaced with new online platforms, based within our own homes and learning content could be delivered in a more flexible and accessible way. COVID-19 brought highs and lows, as we collectively rode the coronacoaster, in ever changing tides of emotions, from heightened anxiety through to elation. This is not a bleak picture, but one of positivity as trainees and staff developed true grit, resilience and determination. Teaching continued, but in a very different way. Students were supported more than ever as our patience and empathy towards one another, came into sharp focus.

Every journey through this experience has been personal and different. As some trainees lost loved ones, isolated in their grief and spiralling anxiety, they remained consistent with the aim to successfully pass the course and have since come out the other end stronger and more experienced. We have had a shared, common enemy which has provided an

opportunity to be innovative and creative in our practice. My trainees tackled this challenge head on demonstrating professionalism.

No longer needing to undertake long and arduous commutes to work and home again, my energy levels improved, along with more time in my day. I managed to build a different type of relationship with my learners, built on empathy and a mutual understanding of shared challenges. Spending an increased amount of time together online, but in our home environments, provided a window into each other's lives, which strangely felt more human and responsive than a face to face tutorial. Our professional identities developed through the experience of using technology as a platform for engagement and participation.

Communication when at its best has become more considered, more thoughtful and the quieter students have found a space for their voice to be heard. At its worse, communication has been frustrating, when the arena has been dominated by some, and the usual visual clues and body language have been deafened within the new landscape, which is more like a cheap version of celebrity squares than any kind of learning environment we are used to.

I have learnt that space for all to think and participate in a supportive and non-judgemental way is crucial in teaching and learning, with clear boundaries and guidance to ensure this happens inclusively. It has been possible to learn from one another, through shared ideas and creative solutions, as a group of people who have varying levels of expertise with technology.

Online teaching works most successfully when there is a positive rapport between the members of the group and the teacher, based on respect with clear communication and patience. The content should be stripped away to the core, so that ease of ideas and discussions can result and opportunities for small group discussions are embedded through the use of break out rooms.

This experience has made me realise that it is unnecessary for everyone to be located in the same room, at the same time, in order for learning to happen. Technology, when embraced positively, can bridge the gap across counties, countries and international

waters, to provide a platform for all to access and participate in teaching and learning experiences.

Kevin Williams

Lecturer in Business, Coleg Ceredigion Campws Aberystwyth

‘It was as if the stabilizers had been taken away.’



“Gradually I began to realise the ties I had built up were still there and connections started to be made remotely. We were all in new territory and needed more than ever to support each other.’

After more than 25 years in management roles in the UK, USA and Middle East, I returned to Wales in 2018 and embarked on a part-time PGCE at Coleg Sir Gar. This career change

was motivated by my desire to share my experiences in education and business, with the aim of helping young people see the world of opportunities open to them. Part-time study allowed me to continue with my business consultancy work and combine this with acquiring experience of lecturing on the BTEC Level 3 Business course, work-based learning and teaching support in various Welsh medium schools. In 2019, I secured a project coordinator role with Coleg Ceredigion to deliver a series of pilot vocational workshops for 14-16-year old and for those Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET), to engage them in pursuing paths into education.

I was completing my PGCE; the project was moving into Phase 2 and building up a bank of teaching experience when lockdown happened. Suddenly, I felt the support network my students and I needed had been switched off; it was as if the stabilisers had been taken away. Despite this, I completed my PGCE and, in September 2020, I became the Year 1 Course Tutor for the BTEC Level 3 Business at Coleg Ceredigion in Aberystwyth.

I thrive on the social aspects of classroom-based teaching and learning. I take cues from students' facial expressions and body language and this provides me with instant feedback that offers clues for what I need to do, if anything, to support students and change my teaching. Not having that physical proximity to my students, PGCE peers and lecturers made me feel isolated. I felt cast adrift. However, gradually I began to realise the ties I had built up were still there and connections started to be re-established remotely. We were all in new territory and needed more than ever to support each other.

My own isolation provided an insight into what our students might also be feeling. I decided early on to ensure that each morning I would message the students with the day's activities, with links for the class and an individual Google hangout allowing them to decide how they would respond to me. This initial contact, and their responses, replaced the traditional visual cues when arriving at class with a virtual cue, an early indication of their engagement and highlighting potential issues such as connectivity, lateness and availability.

When you start a new role, you tend to play it safe, conform to the norms, adopt the standard approaches that you see work for others and make short forays into new territories. COVID-19 forced me to think completely differently. There was no playbook or

examples to follow. I needed to change how, what and when I taught based on my own judgement and be more reflective. My lecture materials were not slide driven; there were more links to supporting material to encourage research and curiosity. I moved away from quantity to quality. Afterwards, I provided a reflective recording of the class that allowed me to clarify any points or questions raised. Not quite a factory reset but certainly a reboot.

Getting technology to work was a steep learning curve. I knew what it could do and I saw where it would fit in, but there was a lot of trial and error to get it seamless and working as I intended. I discovered additional premium features for software were provided free, though I am sure that some will vanish over time. This was not how I expected my early teaching to go. However, it provided me with “permission” to test things. Some failed, some were okay and some were great. My experimentation was perhaps a better way of developing as a teacher. Pre-COVID-19, I saw reflection as a task that occurred at the end of the week, focused on what did not work. My experimentation forced me to reflect daily and see what worked well and what I could build on. This experimentation and reflection process enabled me to better support learners showing that this evolving, trial and reflection is ongoing and is a continual development stage on any learner’s journey. Whilst I can feel isolated, lockdown forced me to look further afield for sources of support, new ideas and virtual networking and events with FE practitioners, webinars and podcasts, which have enriched my knowledge and, as a result, I hope to start contributing to these discussions about FE.

Amy Woodrow

Lecturer in Hospitality and Learning and Development Coach at City of Bristol College



‘Dear COVID-19, Since you closed our doors on the 20th March this year, you have caused all kinds of different problems and made us re-evaluate everything we do.’

‘It seemed that some staff were testing every tool on students, but it had little pedagogical value. There was almost too much tech, a different app for each activity and it was overwhelming for them.’

Dear COVID-19,

As a further education lecturer, I’m writing to you to give you some insight on how you have changed our lives and practices, both for the better and the worse. I teach hospitality at a large college in South West England and I support colleagues with their own teaching practice as a Learning and Development Coach.

Since you closed our doors on the 20th March this year, you have caused all kinds of different problems and made us re-evaluate everything we do. Who would have thought that quick chat with Wendy at reception while collecting my photocopying would be so sorely missed? Or catching that ex-student in the corridor I haven’t seen for a while just to say ‘hi’ would soon be gone. You see its those small moments, although insignificant

at the time, that I truly miss. While working from home, I have been regularly speaking to my close colleagues and my own student groups but I have lost those connections with my wider network.

Our students have suffered greatly at your hands. In my practical subject area, it's been difficult to engage them in theoretical content as they are so used to spending 8 of their 11 hours in the kitchen or restaurant. The slow release of information from awarding bodies and Ofqual has meant that staff and students were left in the dark about how they would complete their qualifications. We were stuck between a rock and a hard place. It would be unfair to expect students to purchase ingredients to cook at home and expect them to have the right equipment. Do they even have access to a kitchen? We also had to accept that some did not have access to devices or were sharing with siblings, so we had to ensure that as much learning as possible was accessible around the clock.

Within my coaching role, I have been partly responsible for planning and delivering training on the various online platforms which has been no mean feat! It was exhausting to deliver online sessions to hundreds of staff in those first few weeks. But actually, it was what we wanted to do anyway. We wanted to build our digital strategy this coming academic year, we just had to speed up! So, in a way, Covid, you have helped us realise the true potential of using technology to support our teaching and learning in a way that we never imagined.

You have given us the opportunity to reflect on our teaching practice although I wish you had given us more notice! You have opened up a world of opportunity for staff to develop their understanding of technology and I am amazed by how my colleagues have embraced it. After completing some small-scale research, I identified that maintaining relationships and teamwork was key in effective teaching, learning and assessment. We provided opportunities for student collaboration, to replicate the physical spaces, even if it was just for fun. I also found that some digital applications were unnecessary. It seemed that some staff were testing every tool on students but it had little pedagogical value. There was almost too much tech, a different app for each activity and it was overwhelming for them.

Despite the negatives, I've seen a lot of good. I've seen so much compassion from colleagues, students and strangers. We've been far more tolerant and understanding while respecting work-life boundaries. We have also focused firmly on self-care and well-

being. Throughout this time, we have built our networks and found firm friendships with people we have only seen through a screen or a Twitter handle.

I wanted to thank you for giving me the gift of time. That gift has been used to experiment with digital tools and try new things in my teaching. I have also reignited my love of learning. Spending countless hours watching webinars, completing courses, reading and research. You also gave me the confidence to 'put myself out there' by operating an online support network for colleagues. This then led to receiving the Principal's Award at our staff development event and securing an interim promotion. Without you I would have never been able to do those things, so I am very grateful.

I am very fortunate to have not been directly affected by you but I know others that have been. You have changed the lives of every person on Earth. I hope this letter has helped you to realise the impact you have had on me personally.

Sincerely,

Amy

Themes which emerged from our writers' reflections

Early in the pandemic, a report from the Edge Foundation, which attempted to analyse what was happening to the FE sector as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, stated that:

The sudden lockdown of the country in March created an unprecedented teaching and learning environment that meant for the FE sector rethinking technical, professional, and vocational education delivery ... supporting learners having to work from home has been a significant challenge. Some feel that COVID-19 has become a catalyst for new ways of delivering learning (Edge Foundation, 2020: 31).

As we shall see from the words and thoughts of our writers, this conclusion, correct though it is, significantly understates the depth, range, shock, and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on staff and students in the FE sector. Writing about working in the sector during the pandemic has been challenging, as the whole situation has been, but our writers have combined to capture the situation in just 750 words per writer. This has been an exceptional accomplishment.

This analysis is split into three different phases which capture the spirit, ideas, experiences, emotions, and judgements of the authors and provides a meaningful and representative series of themes within their "FE stories". The three phases are named "Shockwaves", "Riding the Coronacoaster" and "The New Normal". They reflect the fluidity of events and experiences and how they appear, increase, persist, reduce, then start all over again. They firstly prompt shock and fear, reaction, and reflection, but these responses rapidly transform into adaptation, innovation, and a determination to support students and their colleagues to the best of our writers' ability. The three phases overlap, merge, separate and reappear as one major change flows into another, whilst the practitioners involved make Herculean efforts to adapt to the needs of their students, to cope, to remain calm and to positively carry out their professional responsibilities. The stories suggest a remarkable capacity to achieve that goal, but the pain, soul-searching and anxiety involved is not understated.

Shockwaves

What FE practitioners encountered from the start of the pandemic was a series of shock waves. One writer created a letter to COVID-19 which started:

“Dear COVID-19,

Since you closed our doors on the 20th March this year, you have caused all kinds of different problems and made us re-evaluate everything we do.” (Amy Woodrow).

Teaching and non-teaching staff were “ejected from the workplace mid-project” to “wait for further instruction”. This “was foreign territory” (Kelly Casey). Unsurprisingly, it was “a time of heightened anxiety and fear, compounded by social media and the lack of normal contact with friends, family and colleagues. Established routines disappeared over night” (Amanda Turner), and “it seemed almost impossible to imagine how we would find a way forward” (Amy Creech).

Further early feelings included:

“Almost immediately ... I feared the chaos and messiness of an upheaval unlike anything I have experienced before.” (Bryony Evett Hackfort)

“when I realised that I was no longer physically able to be in the room strategising with my colleagues, I hit a wall. A big wall. I felt utterly lost with no sense of how I would move forward.” (Bryony Evett Hackfort).

Can I do it?

Our writers were on the edge:

“I am close to giving up, we have just had another hour-long meeting about something that we can’t even do and never found a solution” (Alistair Smith)

“I was totally overwhelmed” (Kerry Scattergood)

“it was as if the stabilizers had been taken away.” (Kevin Williams).

Supporting students

During the early shockwaves, staff struggled with how to support their students:

“Normally, I’d be there early with a cup of tea to casually chat and find out more about the cohort in front of me as they arrive.” (Sam Jones)

“what I hated was...talking to a screen in a quiet room with only the chat box to show that others are listening and, hopefully, interested. ” (Sam Jones)

“...what I was not expecting was the number of students who would suddenly need support with the changes to the curriculum from exams to open book exams and extended essays.” (Jan Hanson).

Supporting each other

Staff were also concerned about how they could support each other:

“We were all separated from each other and there was a huge wave of loss as we all faced up to the idea that this wasn’t going to change back any time soon.” (Amy Creech)

“Suddenly, I felt that my support network [from the PGCE] and the support I was providing had been switched off.” (Kevin Williams)

“Not having that physical proximity to my students, peers and teachers made me feel isolated initially; cast adrift.” (Kevin Williams).

Home, work and workload

Suddenly, the home became the workplace, and for those with family commitments, the “physical wrench of ‘Home’ and ‘Work’ pulled them in different directions” (Kelly Casey). This both strengthened some of the connections between colleagues and students and weakened others.

“I was working so many hours and was just too tired to do anything else but work and respond to students who needed support and sleep.” (Jan Hanson)

“I worked longer hours than usual, not sure when or how to switch off, worried about my students. There was so much to hold, so many threads of learning and living, interwoven and fraying.” (Amy Creech)

“During this time, I have worked longer hours in sustained online learning spaces, provided extended pastoral support, re-designed whole modules of work and assessment overnight, alongside increased levels of marking, data requirement, recruitment, marketing, and shifting deadlines – it has been no extended holiday!” (Jodie Rees).

Riding the Coronacoaster

After the initial shockwaves, and indeed as they were happening, our writers sought to adapt to the situation. One writer brilliantly conveyed this situation as if all “collectively rode the coronacoaster, in ever changing tides of emotions, from heightened anxiety

through to elation” (Amanda Turner). This sums up the ups and downs, pace, and gravity of the situation, but also the lift in spirits experienced at the end of a successful ride.

Personal and professional coping strategies for self, students and colleagues were emerging, such as setting up a “Sunlight Station” at home which was intended to make use of the potential via technology to be “more connected” (Kelly Casey). Opportunities were found to make use of the “freedom to find ‘light’ in my work, my teaching, learning and assessment” (Annie Pendrey) and to immerse themselves in “healthy practice that would elevate me to a place where I knew I could use this tragic circumstance and uncertainty for good.” (Kelly Casey).

Learning about learning technology

Our writers found themselves immersed much deeper in online teaching and learning than had previously been the case, but adaption, innovation and combining technology with appropriate pedagogy begun to come to the fore. They “not only adapted but gained new e-learning skills to add to their already formidable arsenal of pedagogical techniques.” (Paul Smith)

“gradually I began to realise the ties I had built up were still there and connections started to be made remotely. We were all in new territory and needed more than ever to support each other.” (Kevin Williams)

“I had to learn rapidly how to use the platforms, teach the students how to use them and then teach staff at one of the colleges ... I am now a lot braver and am much more likely to experiment with the use of technology.” (Heather Booth-Martin)

“I had been on a huge learning curve without knowing it. I had accessed a rich seam of professional learning, some practical, some more philosophical. I had been witness to the building of community in online digital spaces.” (Jo Fletcher-Saxon)

“The absolute highlight has been the connections and community I have found online and the transformative nature of that community.” (Isla Flood)

This is not to minimise feelings of “losing connection” with learners and colleagues, which were also present, and the experiences and associated emotions involved in witnessing day to day events which were a “harsh reminder of what was going on in the world” (Kelly

Casey). These included time “when my brother was given 24 hours to live and I continued to deliver an online lecture” (Annie Pendrey).

“One of the biggest things I found hard was always having to be cheerful no matter how I was feeling because the students did not want to see or hear me being miserable as they had enough to contend with by getting their work completed.” (Jan Hanson)

“It seemed that some staff were testing every tool on students, but it had little pedagogical value. There was almost too much tech, a different app for each activity and it was overwhelming for them.” (Amy Woodrow)

Torn between responsibilities

Combining working from home, home schooling and regular life unsurprisingly left some of our writers torn.

“My own children’s education fell on my shoulders with my husband working a variety of shift patterns. Quickly I had to reorganise my work timetable to try and balance my roles as parent and teacher.” (Fey Cole)

The most difficult thing about lockdown, as a mother, has been the constant feeling of being torn between being a good parent and a good teacher...I have often felt unable to give full focus to either role and the constant changing between them and (more than usual) multitasking has been exhausting”. (Isla Flood)

Importantly, Isla added that “very few” colleagues “seem to have been given any support or reassurance.” (Isla Flood)

“feelings of guilt I had about combining my work with my role as a mother caring for and home educating three children. Our dining room became the space for working and my children’s homeschooling, and being the best I could for my students, working around their home life and other pressures.” (Kathryn Pogson).

The new normal

No ongoing “new normal” has yet emerged across the FE sector, but our writers did reflect on how they had adapted, developed, and changed in what they thought could be part of a different and possibly more positive future. One writer felt that more online learning had provided “a window into each other’s lives, which strangely felt more human and responsive than a face-to-face tutorial. Our professional identities developed through the experience of using technology as a platform for engagement and participation” (Amanda

Turner). The same writer also felt online teaching “works most successfully when there is a positive rapport between the members of the group and the teacher, based on respect with clear communication and patience” (Amanda Turner).

Making connections

Having reflected on the shocks and the initial experiences of riding the coronacoaster, ideas started to form up which pointed out positives, ways forward and how to potentially overcome some of the future challenges.

“It was exhausting to deliver online sessions to hundreds of staff in those first few weeks. But actually, it was what we wanted to do anyway ... in a way, Covid, you have helped us realise the true potential of using technology to support our teaching and learning in a way that we never imagined.” (Amy Woodrow)

“I wanted to thank you for giving me the gift of time. That gift has been used to experiment with digital tools and try new things in my teaching. I have also reignited my love of learning. ... You also gave me the confidence to ‘put myself out there’ by operating an online support network for colleagues.” (Amy Woodrow).

Technology as a catalyst for collaboration and sharing

Overall, one key message was that “technology, when embraced positively, can bridge the gap across counties, countries and international waters, to provide a platform for all to access and participate in teaching and learning experiences.” (Amanda Turner) One particularly good aspect of positive technology has been the opportunities for collaboration and sharing.

“The biggest shift I have seen has been more collaboration across the profession ... There have been many people not only sharing their expertise, but also offering friendship, joy and reassurance throughout. This has been encouraging in a time where it is easy to feel isolated.” (Fey Cole)

“What has been refreshing about this time is the amount of professional development that I have had the opportunity to engage in, which in normal circumstances just would not have happened.” (Kathryn Pogson)

“making new connections with people ordinarily I may not have chatted to. This has been empowering and has made me think a lot about my own practice and development.” (Kathryn Pogson)

“There has been increased sharing of ideas amongst teachers and greater connections online.” (Heather Booth-Martin).

Ways of working and thinking

Being placed in a situation where new ways of working and thinking were essential was one of the initial shockwaves, but its value has been appreciated as part of the ride on the coronacoaster.

“We have been able to experiment, no one expected us to have it all worked out and packaged neatly, and this has brought a richness to the practice. We have learnt to prioritise depth over breadth, and to let some things go.” (Amy Creech)

“COVID-19 forced me to think completely differently. There was no playbook or examples to follow. I needed to change how, what and when I taught based on my own professional judgement and a far more reflective approach.” (Kevin Williams)

“This period has brought an opportunity to focus on the values important to us and reflect on what the key priorities are for our students’ learning.” (Fey Cole)

“I have spent 14 weeks in procrastination and creative heaven.” (Craig McCauley)

“I could be a better teacher if I had time...the lockdown has finally bought about the time.” (Craig McCauley)

“I have had the pleasure of attending some fantastic online events... The FE Virtual Research Meet and TENC online conferences were fantastic to gain real-time perspectives from other teachers.” (Becky Moden).

Envisioning a hopeful, better future for FE and the wider community

We all hope that we will emerge from COVID-19 into a better world, and our writers were particularly clear about their wishes for that to happen in the FE Sector.

“There can be no “go-backery”, as one of my new online colleagues says” (Jo Fletcher-Saxon quoting Jennifer Thetford-Kay)

“We need to reflect on what we have learned and not rush back into the same routines. Now is the time to evaluate all the new ideas and innovation that have taken place in order to create an even stronger sector. There needs to be a trust in staff to play and be creative, valuing each individual within the team and appreciating all that they bring to our FE community.” (Jan Hanson)

“Now we must work together to protect the benefits of a good work-life balance and the extra space we have given to cultivate our practice and ourselves.” (Craig McCauley)

“...we responded. We instituted regular breaks, we danced together, we made art with whatever we had to hand at home, we got creative. We saw all around us the evidence of the value of the arts to support people through a crisis like this, and whilst it was difficult to learn online, the material of the course was thrown into a new light... Students revelled in the challenge and were creative within tight boundaries. We explored what creative facilitation looked like online and learned how to do it together.” (Amy Creech)

“A crisis fosters ingenuity, I learned.” (Jo Fletcher-Saxon).

There are still major challenges

Equality of access to learning was an issue which was highlighted by our writers.

“a few [students] experienced problems with technology, shining a light on digital poverty.” (Jo Fletcher-Saxon)

“My other major concern has been lack of access to the internet (data) and devices for so many learners, not just in my college, but across the country. The digital poverty that so many students experience is crippling.” (Isla Flood)

Final thoughts for a kinder, more trusting FE sector

The reflections of our writers highlight the massive effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The shockwaves were, and still are damaging. The messages from our writers are however optimistic for the future and indicative of the values of those working in the FE sector.

“I have noticed different values at play during the pandemic, with an increased concern for wellbeing, humanity and kindness. I have also seen greater trust in me as a teacher” (Heather Booth-Martin)

“Adapting teaching and learning to work effectively in a remote environment has been the catalyst for taking a fresh perspective on professional practice. It has provided opportunities to learn from colleagues across the sector, to engage in research and to discuss ways of taking this forward into a familiar but altered landscape. “ (Jane Martin).

Research from the Further Education Trust for Leadership argued that “the COVID-19 pandemic has tested our resources, our resilience and our creativity. It has reminded us of our interdependence, as well as of the frailty of our social contract. And while it has taken a huge personal and social toll, it has also revealed hidden reservoirs of strength and hope on which we might build.” (FETL, 2020: 4)

Our writers must have the final say. They had discovered ways of “rethinking how we can enable education to be not just about subject knowledge but subjective, a way of it being a journey of self-actualisation.” (Christine Challen)

The pandemic is seen as responding to “a shared, common enemy which has provided an opportunity to be innovative and creative in our practice“. There is also hope “that we use this for good moving forward and don’t lose sight of what we have discovered”. (Amanda Turner). Our letter writer, Amy Woodrow, concludes with

“You have changed the lives of every person on Earth. I hope this letter has helped you to realise the impact you have had on me personally.”

And some beautifully positive reflections from another writer to close this section.

“Human beings are adaptable and resilient. Our minds and bodies have an amazing design that enables us to face challenges and fight off illnesses ... it is important to model ourselves in strengthening our mind, body and soul so that we can look after each other better in the long term.“ (Joyce Chen)

“Communities of practice have also become communities of love, care, empathy, creativity and curiosity” (Joyce Chen).

FE Stories in Covid times – Conclusion

This has been a remarkable project. The writings produced tell the close-up and personal story of just what has happened to those working and learning in the FE sector during the first part of a truly tumultuous year. It is not sensationalised or exaggerated. It is also not expressed in the complex and often inaccessible language of academia. What it is, however, is a series of reflexive, personalised, human but highly professional accounts of not just what happened, and how challenging it was, but how solutions were found, ideas and approaches were shared, and innovation and hope emerged.

It will be a massive disappointment if the FE sector returns to the “old normal”, as it wasn’t really that great. Not only is it aptly called the “Cinderella sector”, constantly being treated worse than the other parts of education in the UK, but it often feels like it is being run by Ebenezer Scrooge.

Teachers have been at the heart of the sector and its achievements and its difficulties since it was formed, but they have never stopped trying their hardest for many years of austerity before COVID-19 to turn their difficult, diverse, and under-valued sector into a part of the UK education system which everyone else valued as much as they and their students do. COVID-19 was also not going to stop them from working as hard as they could for the benefit of the sector and their students.

To give FE practitioners an opportunity to write these stories, four questions were asked, with answers to be in no more than 750 words. What a challenge the questions below were.

1. What has been **messy or hard** about teaching in COVID-19 time?
2. What has been **refreshing (or 'good')** about your work as a practitioner during the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. What's **enabling and/or constraining** your practice (including any research) during COVID-19 time?
4. Upon reflection, what have you **learned** from COVID-19 time is necessary in terms of TLA and what is **unnecessary**?

Having read this publication or even part of it, you can easily see that all these questions have been addressed and answered by our pieces of writing. The answers are thoughtful, serious and reflect the authors’ true experiences, but they manage to provide something which is even more important than that. They provide a truly inspiring tribute to the FE sector and all those who work and study in it.

In conclusion, the Further Education Trust for Leadership emphasised that we “must be sure to learn the lessons of the pandemic so that the world we build back is truly better than the one that preceded it.” (FETL, 2021: 5)

I think we can all wholeheartedly hope that is what happens.

Coda

Professor Sam Broadhead, Leeds Arts University

27 writers have each said so much in their 750 words.

These further education (FE) practitioners have found themselves operating in unique circumstances at a particular juncture that will have substantial historic significance. They have chronicled the dramatic and wide-reaching impact of the coronavirus on their professional lives. Some of the stories presented here have talked about the inequalities students faced when accessing learning technologies. Digital poverty existed previously, but has become more visible since learning moved online.

In response to the challenges, FE educators have been required to address the work/home balance in new ways and as a result have devised teaching structures that are much more flexible and interconnected. Sometimes this has seemed like an intrusion where some found it difficult to break from teaching on screen to carve out their own down-time when they could rediscover their own love of learning. But this fluidity has also inspired collaboration, sharing, inclusivity and community. Many have gained the confidence to innovate and to make new connections with colleagues from around the world.

A self-assured FE identity has emerged; one that has escaped institutional boundaries, prevailing in communal, global, virtual spaces. Practitioner research has been an important aspect of this transformation where the writer-practitioners have created their own knowledge based on their own experience, expertise, cultural and social capitals. FE stories are told by FE voices that have spoken for themselves rather than being the subject of other sectors' and policy makers' agendas.

Looking forward it is difficult to say with certainty that there has been a paradigm shift in how FE operates. However, it is clear that these writers have provided valuable testimonies about the resilient creativity of those working and learning in the FE sector. It is important that we do not lose sight of their innovative practices during those extraordinary times.

Appendix

Methodology

This project adopted a bricolage approach (Kincheloe, 2004, p.1) to collect and narrate these 27 FE-based stories. We used volunteer sampling to invite and recruit the participants from the 40 or so FE-based practitioners who attended a #FEResearchMeet on writing in July 2020. We decided to employ prosopography as our methodology, an approach normally used by historians to study the lives of a group of people through the analysis of historical documents and texts. We combined this with an approach used by Peter Lorist, formerly of HU University of Applied Sciences Utrecht, and Anja Swennen, formerly of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, that used four prompt questions to create the autobiographies of the lives and work of a group of teacher educators (Lorist and Swennen, 2016). We used the following four prompt questions to help the participants write their stories:

1. What's been messy (hard) about teaching during COVID-19 time?
2. What has been refreshing (or 'good') about your work as a practitioner during the COVID-19 time? For example, new practices? New professional learning?
3. What's enabling/constraining your practice (including research) during COVID-19 time?
4. Upon reflection, what have you learned is necessary in terms of Teaching, Learning and Assessment and what is unnecessary?

This gave us a 750-word account for each of the participants. These participants were paired up and asked to peer review their partner's account to ensure they were answering the four prompt questions. Then the stories were submitted to the editorial team for a further review and thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The data analysis was done in three stages:

1. Stage 1: Three of the editorial team analysed the stories they were responsible for editing and sent their preliminary analysis to Dr Jim Crawley.
2. Stage 2: Jim read the preliminary analysis of his two colleagues and wove them together with his own analysis to create an overarching analysis, which he illuminated with relevant literature.
3. Stage 3: The editorial team met to review Jim's overarching analysis and reach a consensus on a final, publishable version.

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The Editors

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Dr. Jim Crawley has worked in and with the FE and Skills sector since 1976, in basic skills, teacher education, adult and community learning, education studies, and professional development. Jim co-ordinated the Bath Spa University Post Compulsory Teacher Education programme, which gained two consecutive outstanding grades in OfSTED Initial Teacher Education inspections. He is now a Visiting Teaching and Learning Fellow. He is the author of: 'Just Teach in FE – a people-centred approach' (2018), and a wide range of articles, papers, reports and conference contributions in topics including Teacher Education, Learning Technology and Adult and Community Education. He chaired the Post-16 Committee of the Universities' Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET) from 2012-15 and was a founder member and convenor of the national research network Teacher Education in Lifelong Learning (TELL), which has 350+ members and holds regular network meetings each year. Jim gained his PhD with a thesis on the professional situation of teacher educators in the Lifelong Learning sector and has examined a range of FE related programmes and PhDs.

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Jo is an Assistant Principal at Ashton Sixth Form College. She started her teaching career in further education in 1996. Jo started out as a part time lecturer teaching students on early years vocational courses. She became a head of department and then moved into a role establishing adult and then higher education and teacher training. She became a senior leader in 2008. Jo has a cross college role as practitioner research lead. Her own research interests are in teacher research opportunities within professional learning and the impact of grassroots research movements on teachers' professional development and identity. Jo is currently studying for an MPhil with Sunderland University (SUNCETT). Jo co-hosts the #FEresearchpodcast which aims to capture the stories of FE research. Jo is chair of the LSRN (Learning and Skills Research Network) Planning Group and she supports colleagues across the sector to plan professional development events and to establish networks that enable and showcase teacher research.

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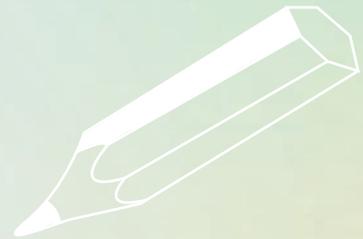
Kerry Scattergood has worked in the further education and skills sector since 2001. She entered the sector through personal and community development work, and has worked in many community settings, including schools, libraries, children's centres, community centres and a women's centre. She is currently Family Learning Coordinator for Solihull College and University Centre. Inspired by the lessons she learnt from her first action research project, examining the everyday literacy practices of a group of offender learners, Kerry has become a passionate advocate for practitioner research across her college and the wider sector. She is currently FE Research Lead at Solihull College, the Midlands region convener for the LSRN, and a member of the Society of Education and Training's Practitioner Advisory Group. She is currently studying an MPhil on the ETF sponsored SUNCETT Practitioner Research Programme and her current research interest is the seeming disconnect between Functional Skills English and adults' everyday literacy practices.

Cover artwork by **Jennifer Linsdell**

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Solihull College & University Centre



In the summer of 2020, the Solihull College & University Centre #FEResearchMeet was forced to become virtual, after the first COVID-19 lockdown enforced closure of schools and colleges across the UK. During the meet, the keynote speaker challenged delegates to write, to share their experiences.

27 practitioners shared their stories of experience, captured here as we remember and document working and living in further education during the COVID-19 pandemic.

