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Critical reflections on undergraduate online teaching and module leading in a UK psychology department during a pandemic

The role of emotional regulation and coaching in helping students become autonomous and collaborative learners

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Abstract

Module leading can be challenging at the best of times, more so during a pandemic. In this essay, we reflect on our professional experience as module leaders and academics. More specifically, we reflect on the role of emotional regulation, coaching and group work in learning and teaching at university, as well as the balance between offering students support and helping them become independent learners and take responsibility for their studies.

Keywords

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Introduction

In a 'normal' year, our undergraduate teaching provision would be delivered via face-to-face lectures and workshops, with the help of some online resources and activities on Moodle (the virtual environment that our university uses to organise the learning and teaching material). However, this was not a normal year. It was a year where most of the world shut down to prevent the spread of Covid-19. The university and our department proactively decided to deliver most teaching online and run the workshops and lectures remotely using Microsoft Teams.

To put things into context, the first two authors work in a large psychology department with around 100 staff. There were 320 undergraduate students in year 2, and eight colleagues within each module teaching team. The university is a large post-92 university in the North-West of England in Manchester, a vibrant large city that is very popular with students. The university traditionally had teaching as its priority but is also going from strength-to-strength in research. Typically, there is a good balance between freedom and support for staff to innovate in their teaching (see Paltoglou, 2021) but there are also checks to ensure that there is consistency across modules. There is also emphasis on innovations such as apprenticeship degrees and First-Generation students. This is fitting, given the complex background of the city, being at the forefront of innovation and harbouring many social inequalities.

The first two authors were module leaders for a Cognitive Psychology (first author) and a Lifespan Development (second author) module respectively that ran from November to December 2020. Both modules are core modules, meaning that students must pass these modules to be awarded their degree. Teaching undergraduate students at year 2 is about building on what the students learned in year 1 and preparing students for year 3. In year 3, students are required to run their own independent research project and write up a dissertation. As the dissertation module requires students to independently plan, manage, conduct a piece of research, and write a report on their findings, their academic and professional skills need to have been developed sufficiently in year 2 to be able to do this successfully. In some ways, the whole undergraduate degree is about building the knowledge, skills, and confidence of the students so that they can become independent scholars.

The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on our teaching have been described elsewhere (Chatzidamianos & Nerantzi, 2020; Harkin & Nerantzi, 2021), but here is a summary: we were told that there would be online teaching delivery and that there would be block teaching. More specifically, instead of delivering one session per week, and each module lasting for 12 weeks, we would essentially deliver a double session per week, therefore each module lasting for six weeks. We would use a flipped classroom approach; instead of having a two-hour lecture, we moved to having a 20-minute recorded lecture, which included several activities for the students to work through. In addition, we had a one-hour synchronous interactive online workshop which consisted of 20 students for each member of staff, as well as a one-hour online support session. In summary, we had to completely change the way we organised our teaching. There were many things to learn, software and new ways of teaching to adapt to, for students and lecturers alike.

The first two authors had been meeting on Microsoft Teams twice a month, before, during and after the modules ran, exchanging ideas and supporting each other. The current essay is based partly on notes from those meetings. Furthermore, these notes included incidental feedback that we received from students in meetings, online workshops, online forums, and emails, as well as the 'student voice' forum. There was no systematic data collection regarding the students' views. The last two authors are an academic developer and a fellow psychology lecturer respectively. They have been encouraging us to develop our teaching practices and writing over the years, featured frequently in our conversations, and contributed to the write-up of this reflexive essay.

In what follows, we will reflect on the role of emotion in learning and teaching and discuss it in relation to online workshops and group work. After that, the merits of using coaching methods in teaching will be discussed, followed by a reflection on working with colleagues.

Emotion in learning and teaching

Studying is an emotive activity. There is some evidence that students experience higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression than the general population (Larcombe et al.., 2015). Some researchers go as far as to state that there is a mental health crisis in universities (Auerbach et al., 2018). Psychological distress, which can include symptoms of anxiety and depression developed in response to stress, apart from other harms, can have negative effects on academic performance (Deasy et al., 2016; Harkin et al., 2022).

Even for students not suffering from severe mental health problems, studying can be a challenging activity, especially when it comes to assessment, even more so during a pandemic. It is no wonder, then, that scholars suggest that we need to focus on emotions when exploring student learning (Chatzidamianos & Nerantzi, 2020). More specifically, we need to focus on motivating, inspiring, and empowering students, as cognitive, emotional and motivational processes are intricately linked (Pekrun, 2006).

While teaching on the cognitive psychology module, at this challenging time, I (first author) felt it was important to try not to evoke any negative emotions and make sure the students have an optimistic outlook, which I assumed was the (long-term) mood and (short-lived) emotional state that was conducive to learning. Indeed, it seems almost intuitive that encouraging positive emotions such as enjoyment for learning and alleviating negative emotions such as boredom and hopelessness could be beneficial for learning (Pekrun, 2006).

The broaden-and-build theory by Fredrickson (2001) suggests that positive emotions "broaden people's momentary thought-action repertoires, widening the array of the thoughts and actions that come to mind" (p. 3). Positive emotions tend to create additional physical, intellectual, and social resources. For example, joy encourages the urge to play, and amusement and contentment broaden the scope of attention compared to neutral emotions and it is conceivable that these effects are beneficial for creativity and learning (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). Furthermore, Oswald et al., (2015) suggest there is a positive relationship between happiness and productivity. Similarly, De Neve et al. (2013) in their review suggest that positive well-being is linked with benefits to creativity, productivity, and motivation. Furthermore, Stanton et al. (2016) suggest that trying to enhance well-being as part of learning could create a virtuous circle for both well-being and learning. According to the authors, instructors should create opportunities

for connection, discussion, and peer support and it is important that we encourage students to develop a holistic well-being by embedding well-being experiences within learning.

However, there is evidence that positive emotions are not always advantageous (Shiota et al., 2014; Volet et al., 2019) and negative emotions not always detrimental to learning (Pekrun, 2006). Pekrun (2006) suggested that both positive and negative emotions can potentially take up cognitive resources away from the task at hand, and thus hinder cognitive performance. Interestingly, negative emotions can be framed in a positive way; for example, Kiltz et al. (2020) noted that students defined 'stress' in a positive way, necessary for personal growth.

Critical evaluation of research and scholarly arguments is a key part of university education. Griskevicius et al. (2010) showed that when participants were induced to emotions of anticipatory enthusiasm, amusement, and attachment love, they were more persuaded by messages that were weakly persuasive compared to when induced to the emotions of awe and nurturant love. It is interesting to note that this study did not include negative emotions. When negative emotions were included and compared to positive and neutral emotions, there was some evidence that being induced in positive emotions was linked with accepting persuasive messages more readily than negative or neutral induction, and it is suggested that negative emotions can promote cautious and systematic processing (Bless et al., 1990; Bless et al., 1992).

Other scholars point out that activation is as important as the extent to which an emotion is positive or negative. For example, Baas et al. (2008) conducted a meta-analysis and found that activating positive and negative (such as anger and joy) moods tends to result in higher creativity than neutral or deactivating moods (such as sadness, relief). Other evidence points out that the intensity of emotion is also a key factor; for example, moderate levels of positive mood are associated with better performance than high or low levels (Chermahini & Hommel, 2012; Davis, 2009; De Deve et al., 2013).

Overall, looking at relevant literature suggests that the notion that a positive outlook is linked to positive educational outcomes is somewhat simplistic.

Emotional Regulation

Learning to manage emotions could be key to an individual's development and well-being. Indeed, some scholars argue that teaching emotional regulation skills to students is key for their development and that flexible emotional regulation is important in a fast-changing world (Kobylińska & Kusev, 2019).

Gross (1998) defined emotion regulation as "the processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions" (p. 275). According to Gross' (1998) model, there are five ways by which we regulate our emotions: 1) selecting situations, 2) external modifications of situations, 3) focusing on certain aspects of a situation while avoiding others, 4) re-appraising or reinterpreting the situation, and 5) modifying the response to the situation.

In the cognitive psychology module, students could not do anything about selecting a situation; to be awarded their degree, they had to pass this core module. Furthermore, to pass the module, the students had to write a certain essay, set by the lecturers. That said, the essay title was generic, and they could therefore choose which areas of cognitive

psychology to include. So, they could focus on memory and attention, while avoiding, say, visual and auditory perception.

Re-interpreting the situation and modifying the response to the situation would have been the most relevant strategy here. Instead of thinking of the situation as an exceedingly difficult essay that they are obliged to write, they could be encouraged to think of it as an opportunity to learn and acquire academic writing skills and explore whether they would be interested in doing their year 3 project on this area. This brings to mind the work by Dweck and colleagues, and the difference between adopting a growth mindset, and being inclined to believe that their abilities can be developed, as opposed to adopting a fixed mindset (Dweck et al., 2014).

Personality traits are also liked to the ability to regulate emotions effectively. Kobylińska and Kusev (2019) suggest that emotional regulation should be context-dependent and that environmental and personality factors are important determinants of emotional regulation strategies. Furthermore, individuals should be trained into several different emotion regulation strategies rather than a single strategy (Järvenoja et al., 2019). It is important for educators to be mindful of personality differences and their effects on the emotional regulation strategies adopted.

In summary, positivity is not always beneficial for learning; teaching students emotional regulation strategies appears to be a more constructive way to help them deal with the difficulties they encounter in their learning journey.

One of the most emotive situations while studying is interacting with other students and staff in small-group workshops and/or when preparing coursework as part of a group. The research discussed above on emotion will be discussed further in relation to group work and small group teaching in the next subsection.

Participating in online workshops and working in groups

Learning to work as part of a group, communicating information and asking questions in a meeting are important professional skills. These are skills that students can acquire in interactive workshops that occur in most university courses, whether online or face-to-face. One issue is that often students do not actively participate in such sessions. Our experience is echoed by Hardman (2016), who highlighted the lack of student engagement in workshops and pointed out that workshop teaching tends to run as a lecture. Hardman suggests that it is important to find ways to make workshops more interactive to enhance engagement in the classroom, as well as deep learning.

Harkin and Nerantzi (2021) concur and put forward a structured approach to online workshop sessions; for example, in the case of our six-week block teaching, they suggest asking students to work in groups for weeks 3-6. Initially, I (first author) planned to run structured online workshops with break-out rooms, and debates between groups of students. However, I had discussed with some students from this cohort, and they confessed that they did not enjoy group work, as there were often unequal contributions from group members. This made me less inclined to have sessions that were overly structured and required homework prior to the session.

Here is a relevant reflection by the third author of the current paper:

> I was part of a study where we discovered that students felt really lonely, were glued to the tutor, and had no relationships or connection to their peers. Group work did not work for them, and they found it the most problematic aspect during the pandemic. It does not mean we should not do group work BUT what I think is often missing is that humane/emotional connection that can be the foundation of collaborative learning [...]

The link between negative emotions and collaborative learning has been highlighted in the literature. Järvenoja et al. (2019) note that collaborative learning can result in negative affective reactions. Jacob et al. (2019) found that although student-oriented teaching sessions were higher in terms of autonomy and participation, they were lower in positive emotions compared to teaching-focused sessions.

Interestingly, some students referred to the online workshops as 'lectures'. And at times the sessions did run as lectures, partly because there was limited student participation. Given that all the actual lectures were recorded, the online workshops gave the opportunity to loosely interact with the students and discuss that week's material. Structuring the sessions too rigidly would have not allowed this. Given the discussion in the previous section, in retrospect perhaps I could have tried to give students the skills to be able to emotionally regulate their negative emotions for group work. However, given that the students were already under elevated levels of stress, and perhaps with a difficult home environment in some cases due to the Covid-19 crisis, having to do group work for almost every online workshop and being pressured to participate might have resulted in students avoiding the online workshops, especially since such group work was not included in any assessment for the module.

In the end, we opted for unstructured discussion with the students that volunteered to participate and went through several brief activities in each online workshop, without any compulsory preparation; in other words, we encouraged students to participate, but we did not pressure them to do so. For example, the workshop tutor would ask a question to the whole group and the students would be given a few minutes to collect their thoughts and write an answer. Typically, two or three out of 20 students would write an answer in the Microsoft Teams chat. Some of the students said that they enjoyed and were inspired by the sessions. To our knowledge, none of the students complained about feeling pressured to participate for any workshop in our module.

The students who did participate in the online workshops later told us that they felt compassion towards the workshop tutors and participated in the online workshop in order to help them in their attempts to engage with the group. This compassion and support for their workshop tutors were also reflected in emails to the workshop tutors stating that they enjoyed the online workshops and material of the session. Interestingly, from general feedback within the university, we learned that some students later complained about the non-participation of other students, while others complained that some of the workshop tutors were too insistent on student participation. These conflicting reactions potentially reflect personality differences and their effects on individual and group emotion regulation that Kobylińska and Kusev (2019) highlighted.

We also encouraged students to meet with the module leader (first author) and/or with other students outside of the online workshops, as well as participate in the activities suggested on Moodle. Therefore, workshop tutors gave the students other opportunities

where they could reflect on their learning, interact with staff and other students, and become active learners outside of the pressurised environment of the online workshops. These different opportunities to engage hopefully addressed to an extent the variability in personality and needs of the students (Kobylińska & Kusev, 2019).

This discussion of negative reactions of students to group work links back to the effects of positive and negative affective reactions of students to educational activities discussed in the previous sub-section. Just because students react negatively to an activity, that does not mean necessarily it is not beneficial for them in terms of developing necessary academic and professional skills. Education, and life in general, is associated with both positive and negative emotions, and it is important to give students the skills to be able to deal with both. In that respect, perhaps, I put too much emphasis on making sure I enhanced students' positive affective reactions to educational activities and material.

In fact, it is important to encourage the students to achieve their potential. If they participate in workshops, they acquire presentation and debating skills, as well as the ability to ask and answer questions, which are important academic and professional skills. I (first author) used to be a quiet student; I rarely participated or asked questions. When I was studying for my PhD, the supervisors decided that each PhD student should ask questions in seminars. Although it was initially a stressful experience, it gave me the opportunity for me to develop the skill of asking questions in a seminar.

Another important question is this: does active participation in workshops lead to effective learning? There is some evidence that novel and social aspects of tasks can interfere with learning, rather than facilitate it. More specifically, collaborating learning activities can result in positive emotions for the students, such as joy; they do not necessarily lead to more effort to understand the scientific concepts being taught (Volet et al, 2019; Shiota et al., 2014). It is conceivable that deep learning takes place mainly asynchronously, so presumably one of the functions of synchronous live sessions should be to increase the students' enthusiasm for the topic so that they are motivated to study the topic more in their own time. An important part of live online workshops was to connect with the students, inspire them, and empower them to study, rather than pressure them to engage. Anecdotally, students' participation in online workshops was higher in subsequent teaching blocks. Presumably, by then they got used to the format of the online workshops through Microsoft Teams.

Furthermore, some scholars argue that nonparticipation in the class does not necessarily equate to passive learning (Ollin, 2008). Similarly, Nelson (2018), in his book *Creativity crisis*, noted that lectures are not necessarily negative for students' creativity, and group work is not necessarily positive for learning and creativity. Nelson (2018) suggests that reflecting on what one is learning is particularly important for learning and creativity. Listening to a lecture can be more helpful for reflecting on learning than group work. It is possible that an idea has been generated in the silent student's mind as they are listening to the lecture, or that the student might be thinking of counterarguments to the lecturer's point. Conversely, constantly interacting with fellow students could disrupt the generation of original thoughts and reflection on the topic. Nelson (2018) argues that we need to allow students the freedom, space, and dignity to reflect on their learning, without constantly trying to control their learning and engagement.

That said, working as part of a group is an important professional and life skill. So, it is the responsibility of academics to help students deal with the negative emotions

generated by group activities. Reflexive writing could be part of the answer. Nückles et al. (2020) suggest that reflexive writing can help autonomous and self-regulated learning. Similarly, encouraging students to develop their writing and online academic profile by writing blogs could give students an additional outlet to practice their writing and relatedness to cognitive psychology (Nerantzi and Chatzidamianos, 2018). Furthermore, Järvenoja et al. (2019) suggest that in collaborative learning, there is both individual and group emotional regulation taking place, which can make emotional regulation more complicated compared to working individually; strategies such as encouragement, increasing awareness, social reinforcement, and task restructuring can be helpful. However, generating a positive atmosphere where group activities can take place might not be enough. It is important to also focus on making sure the students work on developing a deep understanding of the topic they are studying, as well as helping them to learn how to regulate their emotions.

In summary, encouraging students to achieve their potential, which typically includes experiencing negative emotions, and making sure these negative emotions do not hinder the students' learning and well-being can be a difficult balance to strike. Training that would enable academics to teach students a variety of emotional regulation skills could be beneficial for the students' professional and intellectual progression. It could conceivably have a positive impact on their mental health, as they would be able to navigate challenging situations more successfully. That sounds much more valuable and constructive than aiming to just encourage students to adopt a positive outlook, which is what I (the first author) aimed to do. Finally, it is also important to balance encouraging students to show signs of active participation, with giving them space to reflect quietly on their learning.

Students becoming independent learners and finding their voice

Some scholars argue that the marketisation of higher education has had a detrimental impact on both academics and students (King & Bunce, 2020). This is because students see themselves as consumers, which can result in adopting a surface level approach to learning. Consequently, there is a desire to gain a degree rather than have a genuine learning experience. Encouraging students to become independent learners and to find their voice within this context can be challenging, especially if they are not intrinsically motivated. This section explores the techniques I (second author) have used to encourage learner autonomy.

I am frequently asked the following questions about the essay for the Lifespan Development module: How many theories should I include? How many journals/textbooks should I include in my reference list? How many points should I cover in the essay? My usual response to the above questions starts with 'that depends on...' In order to help students move away from relying on my colleagues or myself, I attempt to scaffold their thinking by suggesting strategies they could employ. This approach to scaffolding aligns with Dweck et al.'s (2014) notion of cognitive scaffolding where the instructor provides hints or guidance instead of giving direct answers. Drawing on my previous experience as a study skills support tutor, I bring students' attention to the word count for the essay to help them think about how many theories or points they can successfully discuss. Although this might be frustrating for students as they are not given

an 'answer', as illustrated in an online forum post by a student, this is the first step I take in helping them to develop agency over their own learning.

A secondary aim is to encourage students to move away from describing and/or regurgitating information from lectures or reading, and instead present an argument based on their thinking about the essay question. Nelson (2018) argues that students should be given the freedom to reflect on their learning so they can think of innovative ideas or counterarguments. Although I agree with this, I also recognise that students might need to have the confidence, or they might seek 'permission' to present these new ideas and counterarguments. Their reluctance to present new ideas might be shaped by traditional power dynamics where academics are seen as the transmitters of knowledge to learners (Symonds, 2020). Therefore, navigating this power dynamic is also required.

Although I wanted students to become independent learners and develop their own voices, I also wanted to support them especially during the Covid-19 pandemic and the move to online learning. I found that scaffolding student learning and supporting students was often a balancing act. I recently realised that the cognitive scaffolding techniques that I used to encourage students to find their own voices and become independent learners has similarities with some aspects of coaching. According to Peterson and Hicks (1996, p. 41), coaching is a "process of equipping people with the tools, knowledge and opportunities they need to develop themselves and become more effective". Although this might be what academics intend to do whilst teaching, Jones and Andrews (2019) argue that some researchers have conflated teaching and coaching. In order to avoid conflating the two, four aspects of Turnball's (2009) comparison of coaching and teaching shall be drawn upon and discussed in relation to my teaching.

First, a teacher gives advice whereas a coach avoids giving advice. I initially leaned towards the coaching approach when students were asked to deliver a formative (non-assessed) presentation in the third week of their Lifespan Development module. The colleague who developed the subject content for that particular week's online workshop suggested the use of presentations. This task required students to work in small groups that were pre-arranged. Each group was allocated a single journal article to read as the focus of their presentation. Guidance on how to structure the presentation was also provided. Based on previous experience, I was aware that group work could result in varied engagement of students which could be compounded by the online nature of teaching and learning.

I was approached by a small number of students because of the unequal contribution to the task by some of their peers. I avoided giving advice and suggested students attempt to manage this problem amongst themselves. However, to avoid leaving them alone to deal with this situation, I asked them to consider what would be reasonable to do in this situation if they could not engage the other group members to assist with problem-solving. Although I felt uncomfortable leaving the students to manage this situation alone, I believed I was encouraging students to take control of their learning in difficult circumstances. At the time, I felt this approach was somewhat appropriate. After reading Bakir et al. (2020), however, I recognised that providing more guidance might have been more appropriate. The authors argue that students are often left alone to resolve issues that arise from group work and are not taught how to facilitate effective group work, which highlights the need to provide some guidance. On reflection, leaning towards the

teacher as opposed to the coach approach might have been more suitable whereby guidance on how to work effectively in a group is provided to students at the outset.

Secondly, a teacher offers answers from their own 'expert' position whereas a coach maintains a belief that people can find their own answers. I find that I draw on aspects of both teaching and coaching by encouraging students to find their own answers, but I offer some guidance based on my experience. By partly drawing on Nelson's (2018) point that students' learning should not be controlled, if a theory or topic is not understood, I usually ask students about the wider reading they have engaged with to find out more about the topic. This places the onus on students to seek out the information and answers they require and encourages them to problem-solve themselves with the aim of moving them away from reliance on others towards becoming independent learners.

Based on my previous experience of study skills support, providing students with some guidance encourages them to develop the necessary techniques for learning. Therefore, as well as asking about their wider reading, I scaffolded students' learning by directing them to the library website and highlighting general textbooks available on the topic area as a starting point. During the online workshops of the Lifespan module during the Covid-19 lockdown period, I shared my computer screen so students could see which keywords I used to search for sources on the library website. Drawing on what might be my 'expert' position, I suggested students look at a few different sources from the search results list and select one that they find easy to understand. I explained that this is a technique I use when exploring an unfamiliar topic. In terms of the library website itself, I demonstrated the way I navigate the website. For example, I showed them the 'cited by' icon, which lists sources that have cited the paper, and explained that I occasionally use this when a paper is very relevant. Feedback from students from these sessions via the chat box showed that they found this brief demonstration very useful. Although I only set out to direct students to the library website, my live demonstration of how to navigate the website seemed to offer practical guidance that the students appreciated. Additionally, this learning could be taken forward and built on during the remainder of year 2 and into year 3, including when completing their dissertation.

Thirdly, a teacher has a high level of knowledge in their area of expertise whereas a coach has high level of skills in precision questioning and reflecting. Although academics are positioned as having more knowledge on a topic area, this position might be a hindrance to students' learning. Sidky (2017) argued that power is deeply embedded in the relationship between teachers and students, and this shapes what is acceptable in classroom discourse, with some students believing that the teacher should be the sole authority in the class. This can potentially be a hindrance to students' learning because they might seek 'approval' for their new ideas and critical points.

For this reason, I lean towards the coaching approach; I encourage students to question and reflect on the topic area by drawing on their own experiences of development. I ask for these points to be shared within the student group so students can see the diversity of experiences (using the online tool Padlet – see below). In the past, this sharing of experiences resulted in my own thinking changing; having studied or been immersed in a subject for a period, students' reflections or thoughts have often highlighted points that I had not thought of. I communicate this with students to demonstrate that knowledge is not static, thereby attempting to dispel the idea that I have all the answers, that there is a single correct answer or that academics are the transmitters of knowledge to learners

(Symonds, 2020). This method is also an attempt to show students that their voice matters and to develop their confidence in presenting their ideas. However, I recognise that developing students' confidence and helping them find their voice is an ongoing process and that they might need more support at different points of their studying.

Last but not least, a teacher takes a focus on specific subject knowledge and skills whereas a coach focuses on the whole person and their ability to find solutions. Although there is a desire for students to successfully complete the module thereby focusing on subject-specific knowledge, I also want them to become independent learners and apply these skills to forthcoming modules as well as to employment; I therefore lean towards the coaching approach. In addition to the methods mentioned above, students were encouraged to contribute to the online workshops, which consisted of a maximum of 20 students, where they had the option of speaking or using the chat box which all participants could view. Although I have, in the past, encouraged students to participate and contribute verbally, many do not. One reason for encouraging this participation and literally 'finding their voice' relates to the importance of oral communication as a professional skill (Kornelakis & Petrakaki, 2020); students are likely to be in a position where they are required to deliver a presentation or contribute during a meeting.

One way of encouraging participation, which I saw as the first step to building their confidence to eventually contribute orally, was to use a Padlet. This online tool allowed students to contribute by anonymously posting their answers on a virtual board. Using Padlet in this way was originally shared by colleagues who had commented on its effectiveness for this purpose. Padlet was used during my online workshops to allow students to voice their opinions on specific questions that I had posed. I also offered students the opportunity to contribute verbally, although no one did. I evaluated the use of Padlet as being somewhat successful because it allowed students to participate anonymously in an online teaching platform.

Overall, however, I feel that the success of Padlet was limited because not many students contributed, thereby the purpose of using this tool as a first step to helping them 'find their voice' was not achieved. On reflection, and after reading Sidky's (2017) paper, I came to the understanding that limited participation or the silence of some students is not always a negative or evidence of lack of engagement. Sidky (2017) argued that limited participation does not negatively affect students' achievement or indicate that they are not learning. With this in mind, I realised that trying to develop students' subject knowledge and professional skills might not always be achievable. Students might want to focus on developing their subject knowledge because it contributes to passing their degree rather than focus on developing their professional skills. Furthermore, they might not realise the relevance of professional skills just yet. Hence, encouraging students to speak might not work. In my position as a module leader, whilst I recognise that developing students' professional skills is important, I recognise that my chief responsibility lies in developing their subject knowledge. Therefore, while I originally leaned towards the coaching approach in terms of developing the whole person, on reflection, I likely lean towards the teaching approach by focusing on the subject with the inclusion of activities that encourage the development of professional skills. Any professional skills that students develop during the module are an added bonus because professional skills can be developed across the programme.

In summary, like the first author, I have found that balancing my desire to encourage students to become independent learners with providing enough support can be difficult. This is perhaps why I oscillate between a teaching and a coaching approach. However, I recognise there are benefits to both approaches and being confined to one can be limiting when encouraging students to become independent learners.

Emotion and fellow academics

The focus of teaching is mainly on students, but it is important to think of the colleagues teaching on our modules. Uniformity in teaching is important to ensure students can access the material effectively, but it is also important to remember that each colleague has something unique to offer. Trying to be too uniform could reduce creativity and could have negative effects on the delivery of the teaching content.

The job of the academic has arguably high levels of complexity and autonomy. Ohly (2018) suggests that for jobs that require higher levels of complexity and autonomy, individuals experience high levels of intrinsic motivation and creativity. Ohly (2018) suggests that groups whose members support, like and trust each other tend to be high in emotional support. That is beneficial for creativity, as individuals feel safe to come up with novel ideas. However, there is a danger that motivation to maintain the positive atmosphere might result in members avoiding criticising each other, which can be detrimental to creativity.

It is fair to say that we had to come to grips with a lot of modern technology and teaching styles. In times like these, there can be a tendency to be too focused on novel educational technology and less so on the students (Justice, 2021). Chatzidamianos and Nerantzi (2020) suggest that, although continuous professional development is important, it is also important to focus on the skills we already have as educators.

Concluding remarks

We hope it is clear throughout the manuscript that our aim was to optimise teaching by finding the right balance between supporting students and encouraging them to become independent and effective learners. Part of that is promoting effective emotional regulation; studying at university can be uncomfortable, as the students are constantly challenged to improve their academic skills and become independent scholars, and emotional regulation can help manage any negative emotions.

The conversations (between the first two authors) helped us develop as educators, and we certainly influenced each other. For example, the second author has worked on decolonising psychology and inspired the first author to include the topic as part of the assessment (see Patel, 2021). On the other hand, the first author is very interested in helping students find their voice and be more creative and intellectually independent, which influenced the second author. We feel that more systematic research is needed on how to enhance emotional regulation skills, as well as on the effect of coaching on teaching and learning in higher education. As Chatzidamianos and Nerantzi (2020) have noted, we need to rethink our teaching and engage in continuous professional development.

It is also important for academics to have the confidence to admit to students their own academic limitations. Accepting one's limitations is key in modelling the right attitude towards learning. Such modelling takes the academic down from their pedestal and

shows that they are humans too, with limitations; they are not always the experts, but they have the strategies to find the answers. This can make academics more approachable and foster the relationship with their students.

The experience of module leading and teaching during the Covid-19 crisis gave us a taste of flipped classroom and online teaching and made us reconsider our teaching practices. We encountered challenges, and we learned a great deal. We were impressed by the students' and staff's resilience, adaptability, humanity, and compassion at this challenging time. Covid-19 has had devastating effects on people's lives and has resulted in accelerating change in university teaching and learning, but it has not curbed our passion for teaching and for helping students achieve their potential, quite the opposite.

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