An Exploration of the Ideological Becoming of Online Educators

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Abstract

As online education continues to proliferate there is a need to understand how institutions can better support faculty in the transition to online education. Building on work that has suggested the importance of learning spaces for faculty to engage in discussion and reflection on their move to online education, this paper employs Bakhtin's notion of *ideological becoming* to provide a theoretically grounded understanding of how the design of such spaces can better facilitate this move. The paper reveals how learning spaces designed to develop critical awareness empowers faculty to navigate discourses of online education, enabling them to build on their existing knowledge and skills as educators. The findings reveal how engaging faculty in critical dialogue can enable a cumulative shift in thinking from discussions dominated by authoritative discourses of online education that create an initial confusion between performance and pedagogy, to the development of critical awareness that enables them to challenge dominant discourses and reconnect with the self as an experienced educator. The paper provides an important insight into an approach that might enable institutions to better support faculty buy-in and acceptance of online education.

Practitioner Note

What is already known about this topic

- Institutions struggle to understand how best to engage faculty in the transition to online education.

- A number of frameworks and models have been proposed to facilitate the transition, but these mostly take a managerial perspective.

- The transition to online teaching is most effective when supported by opportunities for faculty to engage in critical reflection and discussion.

- Less is known about how opportunities for critical reflection support the transition process and there is a need to theoretically ground such understanding.

What this paper adds

- The paper draws on Bakhtin's notion of *ideological becoming* to explore how learning spaces for educator discussion and reflection can be used to facilitate the transition process.

- The findings show how learning spaces can be designed to enable faculty to develop the skills to navigate and challenge dominant discourses of online learning.

- The development of critical awareness amongst educators can also facilitate the development of educational practices for both classroom and online teaching.

Implications for practice and/or policy

- The transition to online education is not an individual activity, but a collaborative and dialogical process.

- Faculty need time and space to critically challenge dominant discourses of online education, and to re-establish their existing skills and experience within an online context.

- This should not be a one-off event but an ongoing process and conversation in a constantly changing and evolving higher education context

- At the policy level we should not expect online educational practice to be based on one approach or model, but to celebrate individuality and innovation.

Introduction

As online courses become an integral part of higher education (Cutri and Mena., 2020), institutions continue to struggle to know how best to engage staff in the transition to online education (Kumar et al., 2019). Moreover, discourses of online education, often focusing on the transformation of higher education, can place increasing pressure on educators to rethink their approaches to teaching and their role as educators (Peters et al., 2022; Greenberg and Hibbert, 2020; Cutri and Mena, 2020; Ryazanova et al., 2021; Baran et al., 2011; Selwyn, 2016). Studies that have focused on educator experiences of the transition to online education have highlighted how the move to online education impacts on their epistemic practices (Mor and Abdu, 2018) and approaches that have been 'honed' to the classroom (Mitchell, 2020). As Fox et al (2021: 2079) nicely summarise:

> 'the shift to the online is perceived and experienced by educators as troubling, creating significant emotional labour, fraught with issues of power, identity and student autonomy'

To help support the transition process, there has been much attention paid to how institutions might support faculty in developing competencies and skills for online education. Several frameworks and models have been discussed at length in the literature, including the

Transtheoretical Model of Change (Mitchell et al., 2015), the Technology Acceptance Model (López-Bonilla and López-Bonilla, 2017; Wingo et al., 2017), and TPACK (Technology, Pedagogy, Content, Knowledge) (Koehler et al., 2013). These frameworks are useful in their own right. However, they generally fail to offer a more critical analysis of the often-complex transition process of becoming an online educator (Becker et al., 2018). Indeed, there remains a recognised need for deeper and more critical insight into the forces, structures and cultural contexts that influence faculty's readiness to teach online (Cutri and Mena, 2020). In addition, there is also a need to further understand the transition process for individual faculty (Englund, Olofsson and Price, 2017; Schaefer et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2020).

A fruitful body of work has explored the effectiveness of approaches designed to engage faculty in critical dialogue during the transition process. These have included, for example, understanding how well the Community of Inquiry (CoI) model (Vaughan & Garrison, 2006), discussions forums (Houghton et al., 2015; Lee and Brett, 2015), or action learning (Goumaa and Hay, 2018) might work in supporting the transition process. Yet there remains a lack of insight into how these discussions might enable faculty to navigate, challenge and synthesise discourses of online education (Selwyn, 2016). Such insights are important to provide a deeper understanding of the transition process as faculty bring with them their own views based on previously established discourses of teaching and learning. This paper turns to ideas from Bakhtin's work to provide a theoretically grounded understanding of how faculty discussions and reflections can facilitate the move to online education. In so doing, the paper provides an important contribution to understanding how spaces for critical discussion and reflection play an important role in faculty transition to online education (Houghton et al., 2015; Fox et al., 2021).

Ideological Becoming and Educator's Transition to Online Education

Bakhtin's work has been invaluable in providing a more holistic understanding of learning that emphasises the importance of becoming more critically aware of language and discourse both within the classroom and for teacher development and training (Matusov, 2007; Freedman & Ball, 2004; Greenleaf and Katz, 2004; Lee and Brett, 2015). Prior studies, drawing on Bakhtin's ideas, have sought to understand how we might overcome the challenges educators face in the successful integration of new educational technologies (Lee and Brett, 2015; McLay et al., 2023). These studies have highlighted the importance of discussions and interactions to further develop educator's knowledge and skills (Lee and Brett, 2015), and to make sense of discomforts and struggles in technology-rich learning environments (McLay et al., 2023). This paper builds on this line of inquiry and uses Bakhtin's notion of *ideological becoming* (Bakhtin, 1981) to explore how immersing educators in a project that encourages critical discussion and reflection enables them to better navigate the tensions between discourses of online education, and help to facilitate the transition to online education.

Ideological becoming is a process through which individuals develop a critical awareness of the world around them. It emerges through dialogue with others, especially in situations where there are diverse views about the world that create struggles and tensions between different perspectives (Freedman and Ball, 2004). Such moments have been found to arise when educators begin to navigate different perspectives of educational technology and educational practice (McLay et al., 2023), and as they develop new perspectives and understandings to create their own 'mark' or view of the world (Gomez et al., 2015). Within the context of our study, *ideological becoming* thus refers to the process through which educators develop a critical awareness of discourses of online education, and use that critical awareness to develop their own perspectives of what online education means to them and their educational practice.

Underpinning ideological becoming are the notions of *authoritative* and *internally persuasive discourses.* Ideological becoming is the journey from a reliance on authoritative discourses to

the development of discourses that make sense internally to the individual. Authoritative discourses are discourses that are "the words of the fathers" (Bakhtin, 1981: 342), they are texts that are regarded by the author to be 'true' and are characterised by:

> 'intolerance, speaking for others, an unwillingness to listen to and genuinely question others, the failure to test one's own ideas and assumptions, and the desire to impose one's own views on others', or

> 'freely, but uncritically, accepting the views of the dominant ideology in a community' (Matusov et al., 2007: 231).

Internally persuasive discourses emerge as educators engage in dialogue with others and as they become critically aware of tensions between dominant and alternative discourses (Sharma and Phtak, 2017). As our existing ideas and beliefs are confronted with alternative perspectives, we experience an ideological *crisis (*Kumashiro, 2004) that challenges our existing ways of seeing the world requiring us to work to create our own critical view of our world. This process of developing internally persuasive discourses forms an important part of a person's learning and growth, and is regarded as the basis of their *ideological becoming* (Freedman and Ball, 2004). An exploration of the ideological becoming of educators thus provides an opportunity to explore the important role of critical discussions in engaging with new educational technologies (Selwyn, 2016; Mor and Abdu, 2018; Ross et al., 2014; McLay et al., 2023) as well as addressing the wider need for the development of criticality within educational practice (Edwards and Usher, 2007; Gourlay, 2011).

Method

The Context of the Study

The study is based in an internationally recognised research-intensive UK management school. The study follows a capacity building project during which a team of 12 management school

educators designed, developed and piloted 6 online taster or introductory modules across a wide range of subject/discipline areas. The initiative was rolled out over a two-year period prior to the Covid pandemic. Throughout the project the team were encouraged to form a learning community and to engage in critical enquiry and collaborative dialogue and reflection. The learning community was grounded in an established critical pedagogy based on Networked Learning (Goodyear, et al., 2004; McConnell, et al., 2012; Hodgson and Reynolds, 2005). To support the learning community the project provided an online space as a critical learning environment (Goodyear et al., 2018; Hodgson and McConnell, 2019) where team members could feel safe to share their ideas, thoughts, views and reflections, as well as engaging in open discussion to challenge each other in a constructive way over their views of various aspects of online education alongside the design, development and piloting of online mini-modules/courses. The learning community included members from across all the School's departments (from professors to newly appointed lecturers), as well as support functions. Table 1 below outlines the team members in the project, with pseudonyms.

Table 1: List of team members and their roles

Participant	Role
AB	Task force lead
CD	IT learning and teaching co-ordinator
EF	A university librarian
GH	Education development unit
IJ	Academic staff and mini-module developer
KL	Academic staff and mini-module developer
MN	Academic staff and mini-module developer
OP	Academic staff and mini-module developer
QR	Academic staff and mini-module developer
ST	Academic staff and mini-module developer
UV	Academic staff and mini-module developer
WX	Academic staff and mini-module developer

The mini-modules were intended to be five weeks in duration and they had a mixture of synchronous and asynchronous elements.

Data Collection

The main data sources were discussions from the online forum, alongside final written reflections and interviews with team members on how their views of online education had been challenged and shaped through the project. In addition, the team met several times in person and meeting minutes and notes were recorded. Table 2 summarizes the data sets used in the paper.

Table 2 Summary of Data Sources

Data source	Numbers
Discussion forum text-based discussion threads	78
Discussion forum text-based responses	256
Team member written reflections on experiences	7
Interviews on reflections and lessons	8
Planning documents, meeting minutes and notes	10

Data Analysis

Analysis was conducted in three stages, following a process similar to other studies using *ideological becoming* as an analytical lens and focusing on individual journeys from authoritative discourses to the development of internally persuasive discourses (e.g. Edmiston, 2016; Gutierrez, 2016; Lee and Brett, 2015; Gomez et al., 2015). The first stage involved a broad reading through the data to identify key moments during the project where team members were experiencing moments of 'crisis' (Kumashiro, 2004) and where their views were being challenged, or they were actively challenging authoritative discourses and working towards

creating internally persuasive discourses. Three key moments were identified. The first was at the start of the project as team members engaged with authoritative discourses of online education, based on observations of freely available online courses. At this stage, the crisis, or struggle, for team members emerges as they foreground discourses of online education which are in tension with their understanding of classroom-based teaching. The second occurred as team members reflected on the initial designs of their mini-modules. At this point, we start to see a different kind of struggle, where team members were starting to question and challenge authoritative discourses that had dominated the early stages of the project, and were beginning to critically explore differences and similarities between discourses of face-to-face and online teaching. The third moment was in team members' reflections and interviews at the end of the project which provided insight into how the project had enabled them to further develop their critical awareness, and how the project had shaped their understandings of both online and face-to-face teaching. These three moments provide an insight into the journey of ideological becoming for team members.

The second stage of analysis involved an in-depth reading of data from these the three key moments to allow a closer examination of team members' journeys, and struggles, from authoritative to internally persuasive discourses, and the different ways they began to question and challenge dominant discourses of online education. The third stage of analysis sought to identify themes from the data at each stage, from which we were able to identify characteristics of the struggles during each key moment of the project, and how these related to the development of the educator self and educator practice.
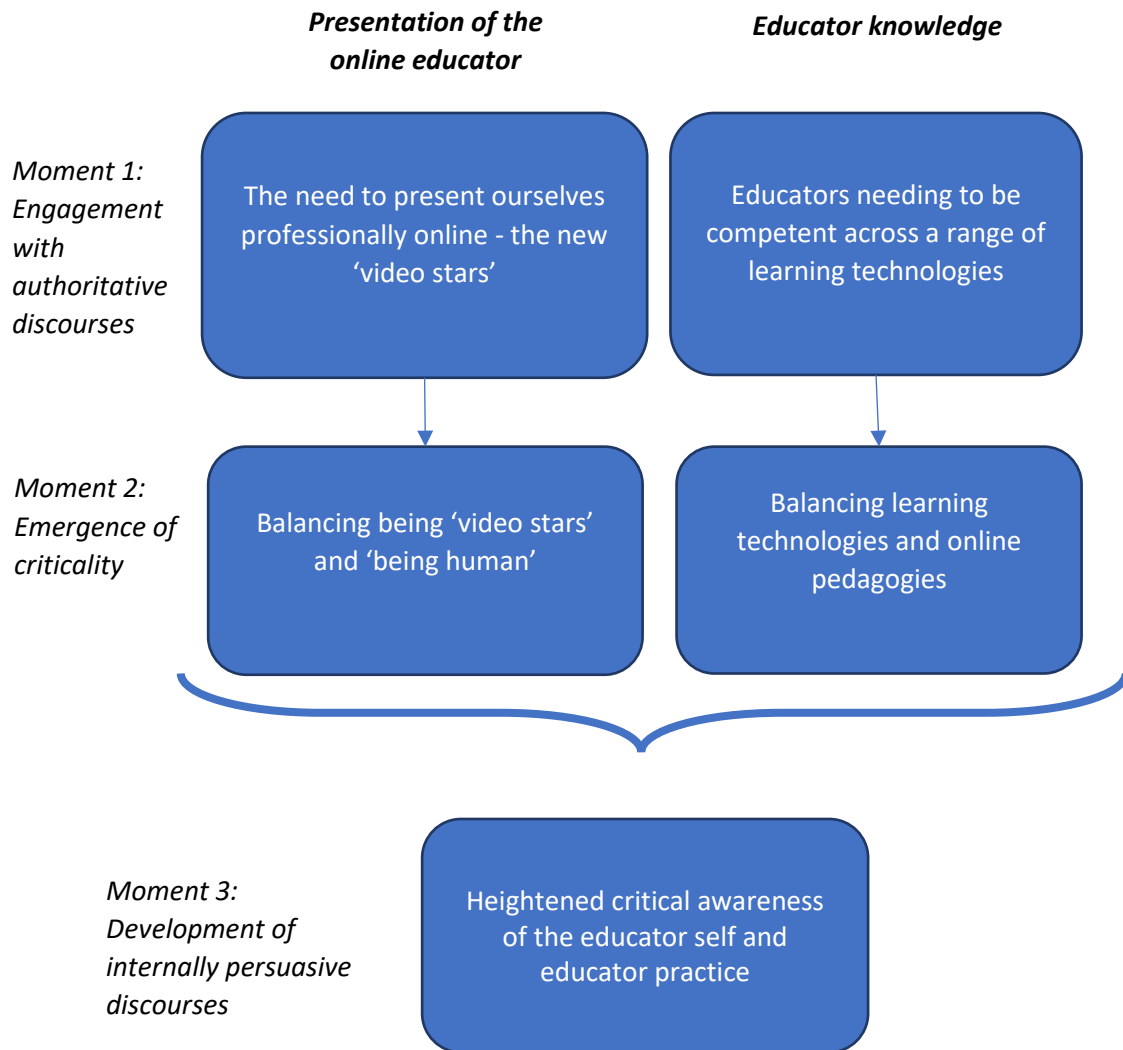
During the analysis, one author conducted the initial coding of the data, and the other author conducted a second phase, including iterations with the first coder and another team member, to agree the themes that emerged. During the analysis, coding and themes were compared across each of the different data sources to ensure consistency in analysis (Lincoln and Guba,

1985). At the same time, we were also mindful of ensuring the credibility of our analysis, and we held six further meetings where we presented our analysis and engaged in discussions with team members on the credibility of our themes (Tracy, 2010).

Findings

Figure 1 below provides an overview of the process of ideological becoming at three key moments during the project. For each moment we provide examples from our data to illuminate and illustrate the way the discussions enabled team members to becoming more critically aware of the ideologies underpinning authoritative discourses of online education and how they developed their own internally persuasive discourses.

Figure 1: The process of ideological becoming of online educators

Presentation of the online educator **Educator knowledge**

Moment 1: Engagement with authoritative discourses

The need to present ourselves professionally online - the new 'video stars'

Educators needing to be competent across a range of learning technologies

Moment 2: Emergence of criticality

Balancing being 'video stars' and 'being human'

Balancing learning technologies and online pedagogies

Moment 3: Development of internally persuasive discourses

Heightened critical awareness of the educator self and educator practice

Key moment 1: engagement with authoritative discourses

At the start of the project, team members were encouraged to look at other freely available online modules, such as MOOCs, for initial insights into online education. They were also asked to read selected research papers, discuss their initial thoughts and ideas about online education, and to think about what support they might need in developing their mini-modules. To support these discussions a new thread was created on the online forum labelled "Needs/Wants/Offers". These early discussions reveal two dominant authoritative discourses which caused a noticeable tension with team members' existing understanding of education

based on classroom teaching. The first is a discourse that portrays online education as a professional production; the second is a discourse that online educators need to be conversant and competent across a range of learning technologies.

The need to present ourselves professionally online - the new 'video stars'

In the forum there began a discussion around the need for skills development in the professional production of educational materials. MN's comments, for instance, revealed how her engagement with other institutions' MOOCs had been instrumental in supporting an authoritative discourse that online education was about the professional presentation of the educator, and "the 'glitz and glamour' of the box office sensation" (MN), with polished materials and educators professionally trained to work in front of a camera. This was followed by a provocative question by AB, "do we all need to become video stars now I am wondering?" (AB).

Without challenges to this discourse, the seeming need for 'video stars' led to team members becoming uneasy with teaching in the online environment as it was in tension with team members' existing conception of what being an educator meant to them, developed through their experiences teaching within the classroom. WX, for example, stated that in the online environment education needs to be 'state of the art' and that team members are 'complete beginners' in this space, despite all having teaching experience:

> "As several people have noted, we cannot hope to produce state-of-the art learning materials and courses because we are using this time to experiment, we are complete beginners, and we have limited time and resource to draw on." (WX)

This led to requests from team members for professional training that included voice and acting skills; MN stated:

"I*('ve)* added my name to acting skills […] because presenting yourself in podcasts requires a different set of skills than delivering in a Lecture Theatre. I think of how actors on television or in the cinema can draw you in to feel like they are having a conversation with you." (MN)

As the project progressed in the early stages, 'glitz and glamour' and professional acting metaphors became increasingly central to team discussions of what support was necessary, as team members re-imagined themselves within what they saw as a new educational environment, reinforcing a difference between classroom and online education.

Educators needing to be conversant across a range of learning technologies

The second theme was based on an authoritative discourse that promoted online education as requiring educators to be conversant across a range of online technologies. Rather than questioning this perspective, IJ, for instance, stated that online education required institutions to continually train their educators in new online technologies:

"The world of education is changing and it's changing fast, probably faster than the careers of people inside education […] we need to retrain our facilitators to use and take full advantage of every technology that's available"

The lack of a challenge to this discourse was common across other team members leading to them adding training requirements that included filming, production and the use of online tools, as illustrated by MN, UV, KL and OP's postings:

"*(in reference to a link they had seen on training for online education)* I can see at least 4 courses would be of interest to me: Filming for academic purposes, Filming and directing

web videos, Podcast presentation and production, and Producing and uploading videos"
(MN)

"Setting up and using wikis as they would be a useful tool… and creating learning log spaces" (UV)

"I need to understand what tools are available to support asynchronous discussions" (KL)

"Recording with Panopto (…) Moodle related support: setting up regular/peer reviewed blogs, regular/peer reviewed online discussions, setting up discussion groups and setting online quizzes" (OP)

As team members added to these lists, there were several attempts by the project team to steer team members towards more critical thinking, asking participants to think more about pedagogy and relationships between educators and learners. GH posted the following question to team members:

"This *(i.e. all the technology training requests)* all begs the question about the kind of relationship that you want to have with your students... and what it is that you imagine yourself doing in the different environments that fosters (or doesn't) that kind of relationship?"

Despite such attempts to engage team members in thinking more broadly around what is important in the online environment, at this stage of the project authoritative discourses of 'video stars' and technological competence remained at the forefront. We see how the dominance of authoritative discourses leads to a particular type of 'crisis' (Kumashiro, 2004) that manifest as challenges to existing understanding of educational practice and the role of the educator.

Key moment 2: emergence of criticality

As the project progressed, and team members became immersed in the development of their mini-modules, team members began challenging the authoritative discourses that had dominated the early stage of the project. As team members become more critically aware of discourses of online education, they begin to identify similarities between presenting oneself online and in the classroom, and begin to interweave their own understandings and perspectives of education into the discussion. In the data we see how team members begin to work on balancing the view of the need for 'video star' alongside notions of 'being human' in front of the camera, and start to interweave their understandings of pedagogy into the discussion alongside the need for technological competence.

Balancing being 'video stars' and 'being human'

A thread on the online discussion provides an insight into how team members were starting to challenge their own and others' authoritative discourses which promoted the need for professional acting skills. This discussion began with a comment from ST, who had joined the project late. ST's comment echoes the earlier views of other team members on the need for the 'glitz and glamour' for online courses:

> "[the development of online modules] would require significant resources and much time spent in development and professional production […] I have no doubt whatsoever that even with our best efforts our head of department would be mad to allow our module to be released into the world"

ST also included links to "two all-time favourite e-learning videos", which were essentially what he regarded as authoritative examples of what online teaching should look like. AB, the

project lead, responded initially to his comment and questioned whether this view of online education was accurate:

> "For me the question is (…) are there other ways to engage with learners now that does not necessarily mean imparting knowledge/material and/or skills and models in the most accessible or entertaining way? Do we need to reflect on this first perhaps?"

Whereas during the earlier stages of the project comments such as ST's were shared by other team members, we now see how these views are beginning to be challenged by the team. For example, UV, whose earlier discussions had been dominated by discourses of professional production now started to highlight the "human stuff":

> "I know when I was recording my early Panopto sessions, my mind was on appearing professional and it was only later that I remembered all the human stuff - humour, word fluffs, asides, etc - they are a natural part of F2F delivery that add warmth to online delivery" (UV)

Other team members also supported this view of the need to be human in front of the camera. For instance, OP who had initially expressed concern over appearing professional in front of the camera stated: "we're not perfect in the classroom, so can we be perfect online?", and GH stated, "be prepared to not be perfect". We thus start to see how through reflecting on personal experiences of online module design, discourses of online education dominated by professional presentation were being challenged, and a new critical awareness of the relationship between classroom and online teaching was being made.

Developing an effective online pedagogy

At this stage we also see a shift in emphasis from discourses of technology to discourses of pedagogy. As an example, a discussion thread initially created during Moment 1 by GH focused on curriculum and learning design for online teaching but no team members added to the discussion. During Moment 2, however, team members started to engage in discussions on pedagogy, and this thread became active. MN began by posting reflections on her experience of course design, and CD responded with a post to spur further discussion on the importance of values and beliefs underpinning learning:

"…such a template risks our values and beliefs *(about learning)* remaining implicit and potentially unexamined (…) If say, I was to add in a starter heading 'Your underpinning approach for this module – aligned with (arising from) your values and beliefs about knowledge and learning in your subject discipline' how would you fill it out?"

This sparked further discussions drawing on discourses of pedagogy, revealing the depth of knowledge of the group which hadn't been evident during the earlier stage. MN, as an example, responded:

"I think I would want to be using words like experiential learning and co-produced knowledge. I would also want to say something that reflected the value given to students/participants' experience and activities (…) and something about learning processes rather than learning outcomes *(…as well as …)* a move away from 'sage on the stage' models"

The data also reveals a moment of realisation amongst team members on how a focus on technology had been to the detriment to a focus on pedagogy in which team members were highly skilled. UV's comment illustrates this:

"I have *(got…)* a bit ahead of myself in terms of wanting to create a module with more than one tutor, recorded interviews, music, etc.... so I have returned to the original plan in order to take incremental steps to getting a sense *(of what to do in terms of pedagogy)*"

As discussions progressed, team members started to draw further on their own critical understandings, or *internally persuasive discourses,* of teaching and pedagogy, and through dialogue with others they started to navigate and negotiate differences, to interrogate authoritative discourses (Gomez et al., 2015) and to see these as 'an opportunity rather than obstacle' (McLay et al., 2023: 10). Yet at the same time, we see how this process takes time and, in this particular study, engagement in experimental practice around online course development is equally important alongside critical reflection in the journey of ideological becoming.

Key moment 3: development of internally persuasive discourses

After the project ended, the team leader asked faculty team members to reflect on how the project had shaped their understanding of online education and the role of the online educator. The final reflections reveal more individualised learning from the project, as the team had had further time to reflect on their journeys and develop further critical awareness of the discourses of online education, allowing them to more constructively challenge those discourses and create their own understanding of what online education means for them and their educational practice. At this stage, we see educators drawing on their wider understanding of teaching and learning, and more confidently critically reflecting on the ways in which the project had enabled them to shape their understandings and views of teaching and learning.

Becoming a better educator: bringing prior ideas and understanding of education into the online environment

For MN and KL the project and discussions with team members had been central to enabling them to challenge discourses of technological disruption. MN's reflections, for instance, point to how discourses of technological disruption place pressure on faculty to develop new sets of skills. She reflects on how the project had allowed her to challenge those discourses and to draw instead on her understanding and knowledge of teaching and learning from the classroom to develop her online teaching:

> "We had adversaries advocating for new ways of educating online and trying to trigger change, and at the same time there were others, like myself who would reinforce (unintentionally) particular ways of doing (…*I realised I could*) fall back on academic practices that I knew to be successful as opposed to opening up and attempting something new *(...and therefore I could*) mirror other modules that I have designed based on face-to-face learning with a few twists" (MN)

MN's reflections reveal the tensions created by authoritative discourses of online education, which tend to promote the idea that teaching within the online environment should be, and perhaps should feel, different.

KL also reflected on the disruptive nature of discourses of online education and how the project and discussions with other team members had enabled her to challenge those discourses, to feel more confident about her knowledge and understanding of teaching, which has led to the development of her critical awareness of educational practices:

> "Initially I thought that online teaching was completely different to classroom teaching… yet as the project has progressed I can now see how I can use (*my experiences from the project*) in many different situations not just the online learning environment, I can integrate it into existing *(classroom-based)* modules (…) the discussions we have had have challenged my way of thinking about education more broadly" (KL)

Becoming a better educator: Taking new understandings of pedagogy into the classroom

Discussions on the project had also brought to the fore discourses of student-led learning, and this had enabled team members to assimilate knowledge and understanding about teaching within the classroom and online. QR, for example, reflected on how before the project she had assumed that the educator needed to assume control over student learning, yet discussions with other team members had enabled her to challenge this view and consider how she might integrate student-led learning into her future teaching practice:

> "*(through discussions, I realised)* my role as tutor was to provide a 'scaffolding' that enables students to open the world and discover possibilities for learning, (*teaching can be*) a truly facilitative process" (QR)

We see the same ideas being challenged for UV too, as she discusses how the project had enabled her to realise that the role of the educator could be one of 'participant' and 'fellow learner', rather than 'leader and 'teacher':

> "*(the project and discussions)* allowed me to see that I could usefully go much further in handing over the shaping/leading of activities and responsibility for learning to the students. By letting go of responsibility for learning, though not accountability for module outcomes, I have been able to shift my sense of self from 'leader' to 'participant' and from 'teacher' to 'fellow learner'." (UV)

In a different way, IJ reflected more broadly on the often-bounded discourses and practices of teaching and learning within a particular subject area, and how the project had revealed these boundaries and enabled him to explore outside of these boundaries:

"In one sense I thought I was quite experienced and I knew quite a lot *(about learning and teaching)* but then when I started to listen to other people's practice I realized that my development was quite contextual (…) I realized I still had a lot to learn *(about other pedagogical practices)*" (IJ)

Our analysis provides a window into the journeys of ideological becoming for a group of educators as they engaged in practice and critical discussions about online education and as their views and beliefs were shaped through the course of a two-year project. We have seen how the early stages of the project were dominated by authoritative discourses, portraying a 'glitz and glamour' view of online education and the need to be conversant across a range of technologies. We then saw how team members' initial experimentation with module design and further engagement in discussion led to a growing critical awareness of dominant discourses and shared realisations about the importance of their own knowledge and understanding about pedagogy and student learning. At the end of the project, we see more individualised reflections on how they had become ever more critically aware of the ideologies underpinning discourses of online education. The process led to the creation of educator selves more confident in developing their own knowledge and understanding of their educational practice. The study provides a deeper insight into the important role of spaces for critical discussion and reflection and the role these play in the ideological becoming of educators (Lee and Brett, 2015; McLay et al., 2023).

Discussion

The paper contributes to our understanding of the importance of learning spaces for faculty to discuss and critically reflect on their online teaching practices (McLay et al., 2023; Fox et al., 2021; Cunliffe, 2008; Goumaa and Hay, 2018; Vaughan and Garrison, 2006). Learning spaces

for discussion and reflection that connect to the life and experiences of learners has long been considered important in critical pedagogy (Mead, 1967; Dewey, 1916). Such spaces have been shown to enable faculty to build on their prior knowledge and understanding about teaching and learning and enable them to reinvigorate their educational practice (McLay et al., 2023). The importance of such spaces perhaps needs to be highlighted more within frameworks and models designed to support the transition process (e.g. Mitchell et al., 2015; Wingo et al., 2017; Koehler et al., 2013). Whilst a variety of structural and cultures forces influencing faculty experiences of the move to online education have been identified (Cutri and Mena, 2020), the tendency has been to focus on the abilities of educators themselves (Fox et al., 2021; Mitchell, 2020) and the development of their knowledge and skills (Lee and Brett, 2015). A challenge with this line of inquiry is that it foregrounds individual educators, rather than taking into consideration the wider context that includes the problematising of discourses of educational technology (Selwyn, 2016). As Selwyn states: "Properly acknowledging the complexity of digital technology and higher education therefore requires adopting an appropriately *critical* perspective, both towards higher education and towards digital technology." (p.14). More recently, Mor and Abdu (2018) make an important call for educators to critically assess 'the epistemic and pedagogical practices' associated with the use of education technologies in the online learning environment. The findings from this project suggest that one way to achieve this could be through learning spaces designed to develop educator's critical awareness of authoritative discourses of educational technology and online education, building on previous work in this area (Lee and Brett, 2015; McLay et al., 2023; Houghton et al., 2015; Goumaa and Hay, 2018). Such learning spaces enable educators to draw on existing classroom-based knowledge and skills that can facilitate a deeper understanding of pedagogy and learning applicable to both classroom and online environments.

Understanding the relationship between the qualities of learning spaces and the vitality of valued learning activities is not straightforward (Goodyear et al., 2018) and there is a need for more work in this area. Emphasis needs to be placed on well-designed and facilitated learning spaces and communities that develop trust and support amongst participants so that they feel comfortable to openly challenge each other's views and ideas, enabling them to develop critical awareness (Rapanta and Cantoni, 2014; Matusov, 2007; Freedman and Ball, 2004). In addition, such spaces need to also be based on celebrating differences, rather than seeking tightly bound outcomes (Ferreday et al., 2006; Goodyear et al., 2001; 2004; Hodgson and Reynolds, 2005). The structure of such spaces, plus the composition and diversity of participants would be an interesting and important area for future study. When designed well, these spaces provide an important mechanism for addressing key questions such as "how can we facilitate faculty buy in and acceptance of online education?" (Kumar et al., 2019: p 34) and also goes one step further in understanding how online educators make sense of a new form of practice (Fox et al., 2021; Mor and Abdu, 2018; McLay et al., 2023).

The paper also builds on studies that explore educator experiences of the move to online education (e.g. Fox et al., 2021; Englund et al., 2017; Baran, et al. 2011; Houghton et al., 2015) by providing a Bakhtin informed theoretical lens for explaining the importance of faculty dialogue and critical reflection. Bakhtin's ideas provide a number of possible avenues to further explore the dialogical aspects of participative and experiential approaches to educator transitions to online education (e.g. Vaughan & Garrison, 2006; Houghton et al., 2015; Goumaa and Hay, 2018). Ideological becoming also provides a perspective of pedagogical and educational practice as an ongoing process of renewal and change embedded in one's critical awareness of the values and beliefs underpinning ideas about teaching and learning, an area deemed 'extremely important for education' (Matusov, 2007: 231), and the recognised need

for the development of criticality in educational practice (Edwards and Usher, 2007; Gourlay, 2011).

A Bakhtin informed analysis also provides faculty with a theoretically informed explanation of the issues they experience when transitioning to online education. It takes the focus away from faculty's feelings of inadequacy or vulnerability when teaching in an online environment (Mitchell et al., 2015; Cutri and Mena, 2020), and places emphasis on the need to engage in critical reflection and discussion about educational practices, especially given opportunities to do so currently remain rare in today's high pressure, time scarce institutions.

Conclusion

Although this study occurred just before the Covid pandemic, the timing is important. Since 2020 there has been a raft of publications advocating guidance based on existing research models and frameworks to assist often beleaguered academics in making the rapid transfer to teaching online (e.g. Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020; Gardner, 2020; Hodges et al., 2020; Rapanta et al., 2020). Support and guidance based on learning theories, models and frameworks are in themselves not enough to enable or assist faculty to make long term switch to online education, and are only part of the solution. Without the opportunity to engage in dialogue with others in supportive and facilitated environments, the move to the world of online education and becoming an online educator can be arduous and the obstacles experienced greater than perhaps they really are. Clearly tensions and challenges will always exist but this paper has demonstrated how approaches that encourage discussion and debate allow educators to engage in a process of becoming that is reflective and developmental.

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