



Student Mental Wellbeing and Teaching during the Covid-19 Pandemic



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When thinking about student wellbeing...

You matter



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Current situation

The shift to online has been breath taking in speed and delivery

But what has been delivered is not online or distance learning – it is best classified as Emergency Remote Teaching

(Hodges et al, 2020)



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(Kirschner, 2020)



Acceptance

We have to let go of perfection and accept reality as it is.

We cannot transfer the entire learning experience from the well designed classroom interaction

Accepting reality, means we can then work from where we actually are, to give our students the best possible experience

It can lessen the burden on you and them, reduce frustration all around, help everyone focus on what is important and deliver a better experience as a result



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Student Mental Health and Covid-19



Evidence is being gathered and is slowly coming in – what we have is partial

We must be careful not to make too many assumptions – there are a lot of things we don't know. We must listen to what students are telling us, otherwise we will assume and get it wrong

We must be careful not to pathologise normal responses to an abnormal situation



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Early issues



This is impacting differently across the student community

- University actions appear to impact on student wellbeing (Smarten 2020)
- Authenticity and imposter syndrome
- Learning gaps appearing
- Social isolation
- Anxiety and existential concerns caused by ongoing uncertainty
- Motivation
- Bereavement (complicated by current circumstances)

Equality and inclusivity issues

- Family relationships (or lack of them)
- Physical space to study and engage with services
- Technology access
- Money – and food etc.
- Pre-existing conditions
- Much of this is intersectional





Questions



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Myths to be wary of



Students are digital natives – they know how to do this online

All students have laptops / tablets / i-phones, etc.

They are used to finding knowledge online

What is happening now can be a map for the future of HE



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Cognitive load

Many students are struggling to extract learning about content because they are cognitively overloaded by having to learn new aspects of learning on line

1. Learn the platform
2. Learning to learn online

(Sweller 1988)



1. What matters is not the technology

Focus on pedagogy not technology

- Relationships between you and your students
- Responsiveness and feedback
- Signs that you understand them, the situation and that you care



This matters more than knowing how to use every facet of the learning platform or glitches in the technology

This is one of the reasons why you and your wellbeing matter

(Clark & Feldon, 2014)



2. Talk about and model wellbeing

This does not mean going beyond your boundaries and knowledge

However, you can acknowledge the situation and encourage students into helpful learning and wellbeing behaviours

Encourage acceptance in order to be ambitious

Academic candour can be helpful in the right measure



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Things that can help maintain mood

Sleep

Music – particularly upbeat music

Exercise

Mindfulness/meditation

Yoga

Fun

Focusing on now and what can be controlled

Remembering that this will pass

Staying connected to others

Gratitude





Questions



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3. Meta learning

Guide students through the platform – if you want them to use some aspect of it, show them how to do it and acknowledge some may struggle, that this is ok and that they can ask repeatedly for help

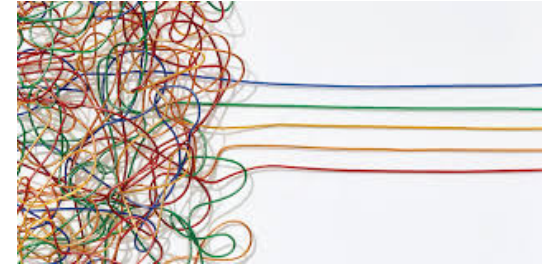
Acknowledge that learning online is different and that it's ok if they take a while to adjust and guide them through, e.g.

- Repeat viewings - focus on what you didn't understand
- Spacing
- Beware butterfly defect and distractions



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4. Simplify



Use short sessions – break up longer sessions with time to step away from the screen

Strip back – what do they need to know, understand and be able to do? What can you lose?

This doesn't mean make it easy – challenge is good but beware of cognitive load and that learning from a screen can be more difficult. Keep it focussed

Keep the tech simple – can they use it on a phone?



5. Scaffold

Recognise that some of your students may have learning gaps – explicitly address this

Sequence your curriculum from broad idea to complex detail and back out

Help students see the narrative development

Contextualise their learning to ensure they see the relevance

(Kift, 2014)



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6. Socialise

Create space for students to interact – during lessons and outside

Don't assume all students can and do use social media

If you are using break out spaces – teach students to use them



7. Ensure they know about support available

Most Student Services are still delivering support, but online – include the contact details in your slides

Think broadly about services – e.g. study skills, mental health/counselling teams, careers, chaplaincy

Students are more likely to access services if you are positive about them

(Hughes, et al, 2018)





8. Think about the transition back

Don't assume when students can come back on campus all will be fine

The transition back will be difficult for some

Plan activity to reacclimatise students to the classroom and each other



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Reasons to be cheerful

Students have clearly indicated that they value the effort their academics are making – when they can see you care, they can let go of technical glitches, etc.

Universities have survived worse than this – we will survive this

This may prompt a rethink by Governments about regulatory bureaucracy

Crisis forces us to think about what is really important – that may allow us to recalibrate the future

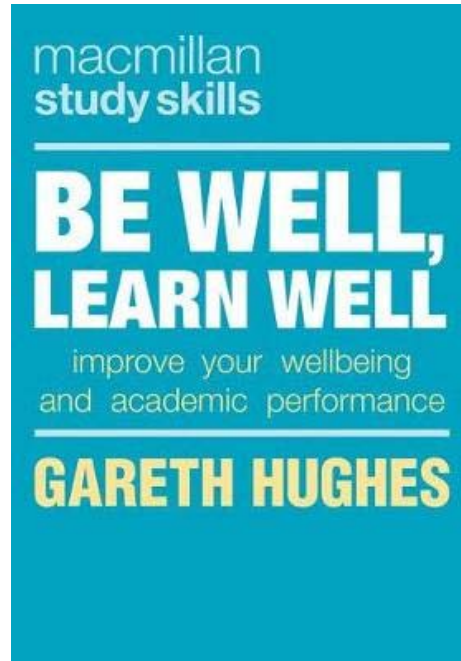
Look at what you did - it was amazing



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Questions



Subliminal message – available now for pre-order



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