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Pandemic pedagogies: reflections on pedagogical approaches to art and design librarianship during a pandemic

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The covid-19 pandemic instigated a rapid digital shift in UK higher education libraries, changing the way teaching was delivered. The digital shift of the pandemic meant library teaching was reimagined for online delivery, however pedagogical principles were challenged by new ways of working. How can a pedagogical approach for art and design librarianship adapt to online delivery when grounded in embodied, material and sensory experiences? Taking a reflective approach which brings together personal experience with discussion of selected literature, this article explores how pedagogical approaches to art and design librarianship have been continually reshaped by the pandemic.

Introduction

The idea for this article originated partway through the pandemic, whilst we were still immersed in the emergency response of lockdown. My contribution to *Library Pedagogies: Personal reflections from library practitioners*[1] had been sent to the editors and preparations were underway for the start of a new and hugely different academic year. But everything I thought I knew about teaching was in flux. Whilst some academic libraries were already engaged in aspects of online delivery for many, including my institution, this was a new way of working.[2] In this article I consider how my teaching practice has been continually reshaped by the pandemic. Using a personal and reflective approach I discuss the impact of the pandemic on my teaching practice, drawing on anecdotal experiences to reflect on selected literature about librarianship, art pedagogies and responses to the pandemic. My pedagogical approach for art and design librarianship is grounded in embodied, material, sensory experiences. I reflect on the digital shift during the pandemic and the way this changed my teaching practice, drawing upon using Shreeve et al.'s key characteristics of art and design pedagogies.[3] I conclude with reflections on how the pandemic has reshaped my pedagogy and broadened my views about the benefits of online teaching.

Disrupted pedagogies

My pedagogical approach for art librarianship has grown and evolved during the six years I have been an art librarian, and has continued to evolve in response to the digital shift during the pandemic. The characteristics of art and design pedagogies outlined by Shreeve et al. hold significant resonance for my pedagogical beliefs. Learning in art and design needs to be social, physical, and material. Learning has a visible dimension and requires acceptance of uncertainty. The physical space and collections of the library are central to my work. Appleton et al. acknowledge information literacy for art and design needs to take a different form, as approaches taken in other disciplinary areas by librarians cannot be applied to art and design teaching.[4] This idea of information literacy for art students taking a different shape to other subjects also forms a core foundation in my personal pedagogy. When

1. Williams, Laura. "Developing a Pedagogy for Art and Design Librarianship", in *Personal reflections from library practitioners*, edited by Sam Aston and Andrew Walsh (Innovative Libraries, 2021), 87–106.
2. Appleton, Leo. "Accelerating the Digital Shift: How a Global Pandemic Has Created an Environment for Rapid Change in Academic Libraries." New Review of Academic Librarianship 27, no. 3 (2021-07-03 2021): 257-58. https://doi.org/10.1080/13614533.2021.1994184.
3. Shreeve, Alison, Ellen Sims, and Paul Trowler. "'A Kind of Exchange': Learning from Art and Design Teaching." *Higher Education Research & Development* 29, no. 2 (2010): 125-38. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360903384269.
4. Appleton, Leo, Gustavo Grandal Montero, and Abigail Jones. "Creative Approaches to Information Literacy for Creative Arts Students." *Communications in Information Literacy* 11, no. 1 (2017): 7.

borrowing ideas from colleagues I have learned that classroom activities and methods of delivery for other subject areas don't always have the desired impact with my students. The shift to online delivery meant learning how to teach again and borrowing ideas from colleagues working in other subject areas. As I adapted and recreated my teaching materials for the online environment the distinctiveness of my teaching diminished. I found myself asking how or if it was possible to stay true to the characteristics of art and design pedagogies whilst learning to teach online.

Libraryness and the digital shift

I find myself drawn to the term libraryness as a way of conceptualising a core belief in the shape of library teaching. The term libraryness has been used by Black to explain the essence of a library; the services, collections and its role as a space for knowledge and learning.[5] Libraryness is also a concept used by Cox, in discussion about how students form learning atmospheres through multi-sensory experiences.[6] Reflection on ideas about libraryness and embodiment has led to a new way of understanding my struggle adapting to online teaching. Libraryness was lost from my teaching during the pandemic. Appleton's reflections on the accelerated digital shift as a sudden jump into a 'digital or nothing' environment resonate with my experience;[7] suddenly I was cut off from the physical spaces and resources that anchored me in my job. Warwick suggests the "experience of interaction online, whether with other people, or with information is very different from what we do in person".[8] Teaching online is different to teaching in person, and I struggled with this shift in how I was expected to teach. Cox[9] explains how learning is experienced as an embodied process, as well as a cognitive and emotional process, in which the physical, spatial, and sensory atmospheres of a space create libraryness. This led me to question if my pedagogical values are partly shaped by embodied experiences of the library? According to Cox, being a body in a space shapes the learning experience of students. The sensory, social and affective could also be applied to my professional identity and practice. My practice had become rooted in physical spaces and material objects. It is understandable I felt adrift from my identity as a teacher when disconnected from the spaces and material objects which are fundamental to my practice.

Teaching in a pandemic

I needed to reimagine what my teaching looked like as I was no longer working within the physical library. My teaching had lost its distinctiveness and I was struggling to incorporate the pedagogical characteristics of art librarianship. I turned to the art library community online and I looked to the literature for knowledge about teaching in an online, digital space. I revisited the research and articles I had engaged with as part of my book chapter research, looking at those ideas from a new perspective. Appleton and Staddon[10] discuss strategic approaches to teaching at UAL, suggesting art and design library teaching should be research-informed and focus on curiosity, making and critical questioning. I realised there were ways to ensure my teaching still incorporated these elements. Curiosity can be brought into an online space. Criticality was something I had not previously engaged with to a great extent. The digital shift prompted me to embrace these ideas and begin to reshape my personal pedagogy for art and design librarianship.

A key characteristic of art and design pedagogies is that learning involves living with uncertainty and unknown outcomes. When teaching in the physical library I will incorporate games or interventions which encourage students to explore the collections and embrace serendipitous discovery. My challenge was to find a way to reimagine information literacy teaching with greater emphasis on online serendipity. Is it possible to encourage students to think in divergent ways and seek out the unknown in a world of search engines and keyword searching? I used the opportunity for asynchronous content delivered on the Virtual Learning Environment to start creating teaching materials focused on topics I previously hadn't incorporated into my teaching. I created a series of videos to support the development of visual literacy skills, with the aim of helping students to learn about good practice for image research. Topics covered included the problems of over reliance on Pinterest, copyright issues and metadata quality. Creating a series of bite-size asynchronous resources allowed me to create a space to

5. Black, Alistair. "'We Don't Do Public Libraries Like We Used To': Attitudes to Public Library Buildings in the Uk at the Start of the 21st Century." *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science* 43, no. 1 (2011): 30-45. https://doi.org/10.1177/0961000610390991. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0961000610390991.

6. Cox, Andrew M. "Space and embodiment in informal learning." *Higher Education* 75, no. 6 (2018): 1077-1090.

7. Appleton, Leo. "Accelerating the Digital Shift: How a Global Pandemic Has Created an Environment for Rapid Change in Academic Libraries." New Review of Academic Librarianship 27, no. 3 (2021-07-03 2021): 257-58. https://doi.org/10.1080/13614533.2021.1994184.

8. Warwick, Claire. "Negotiating the Digital Dystopia: The Role of Emotion, Atmosphere and Social Contact in Making Decisions About Information Use in Physical and Digital Contexts." *New Review of Academic Librarianship* 27, no. 3 (2021/07/03 2021): 259-79. https://doi.org/10.1080/13614533.2021.1964550.

9. Cox, Andrew M. "Space and embodiment in informal learning." *Higher Education* 75, no. 6 (2018): 1077-1090.

10. Appleton, Leo, and Elizabeth Staddon. 2017. "Strategic Approaches to Teaching and Learning Development for Art and Design Librarians." *Art Libraries Journal* 42 (2). Cambridge University Press: 107–15. doi:10.1017/alj.2017.11.

continue encouraging students to embrace serendipitous discoveries in research. Previously I might have suggested they browse our book collections as part of the visual research process, but I turned my focus to online image collections and digital libraries. Without the shift in ways of learning and increased focus on asynchronous content I would not have developed these types of learning resources or found a space for this type of work.

Before the pandemic, my teaching often involved classrooms a pile of books or activities where students browse the library. These types of workshops are built upon many of the characteristics of art and design pedagogies; the teaching is social, places emphasis on the physical and material, and puts emphasis on embracing uncertainty and unknown outcomes when searching for information. The challenge was whether it was possible to successfully reimagine this workshop for a socially distanced teaching environment whilst following strict Covid risk assessment guidelines. In Autumn 2020 a limited amount of on-campus teaching was taking place in my institution, with students on courses with practical elements returning to use studios, workshops, and labs. I was asked if I would be able deliver a face-to-face class about library collections to give students opportunity to use some of our specialist print only collections. At first this sounded like the perfect opportunity to return to my preferred style of teaching. However, in a socially distanced classroom it is difficult to fully embrace the principle of learning as fundamentally social. Students were seated at individual tables, which did not create a social learning atmosphere. I was unable to move around the classroom. Teaching as material and physical was difficult to reimagine in this scenario. Although this was important as it provided an opportunity for students to engage with the collections. students were not able to share the books they were looking at. It was a vital opportunity to experience the book as a design object however we were limited in how we could engage with these objects. The alternative may have been an online discussion about artist books making use of digital collections, which could have been a more social form of learning compared to the socially distanced classroom, however it would have lost the physical and material characteristics.

Embracing pedagogical uncertainty

We have moved into a new way of living and working once again, free from the rules and restrictions brought into effect by the pandemic. But traces of the collective experience we have lived through still affect our daily lives. I feel a continued sense of uncertainty about the future. Throughout 2021-22 I was doing a significant amount of face-to-face teaching but also a lot of my work remained online. The start of the Autumn term in 2022 sees a return to on-campus teaching as the standard option in my institution. Although I now believe that information literacy teaching can work very successfully online, even for art and design students, most teaching is back on campus. I will miss the easy opportunities for turning a standard lecture for a large class size into something more interactive by using collaborative tools. The digital shift of the pandemic forced new ways of working and created different opportunities to break free from the PowerPoint lecture. Whilst teaching online it felt easier to use breakout rooms and tools like Padlet to give students group tasks or space to share ideas. At the time of drafting this article I have returned to working in rooms with tables piled high with books, using creative activities like collaborative drawing tasks, and playfully browsing the library shelves. I'm back in my pedagogical comfort zone of a practice underpinned by social, physical, and material ways of learning. However, I must also learn to embrace uncertainty for my teaching practice. It is possible we will need to revert to online teaching again in response to a new pandemic or emergency. I must learn to be more open-minded about the possibilities of online teaching and discover new ways to embrace my pedagogical principles in those environments as well.

Conclusion

Throughout the pandemic my teaching practice was continually shaped and reshaped in response to the current working arrangements. My beliefs and values about teaching are still continually being challenged. The early months of the pandemic were spent reflecting on how I used to teach knowing that the shape and form of my teaching could look different for a period. At the time of drafting my book

chapter for *Library Pedagogies* I didn't know how my teaching would be forced to change but I expressed concern about the shift to teaching in an online world. The digital shift was followed by the hybrid shift and now we are returning back to predominantly face-to-face ways of teaching. I've regained the libraryness in my teaching practice as I'm able to work in the physical space again and make the collections central to my work. However, I have grown to appreciate the benefits of online teaching and hybrid ways of working. At the start of the pandemic, I was concerned about the disruption to my pedagogical beliefs, whilst also living with the anxiety and stress of the pandemic more generally. Of course, my struggles to reconfigure my way of teaching felt insignificant viewed within the wider context of unfolding global tragedy, but I felt it would be important to document and reflect on the impact of the pandemic on my teaching. Focusing on the ways my teaching practice and pedagogical values were being renegotiated in response to the pandemic was one way of making sense of my experiences during a time of chaos and uncertainty. The digital shift created a situation where I was forced to renegotiate my identity and beliefs as a teacher to work in a time of crisis and disruption. I created a new form of libraryness for myself to counter the physical disconnect from spaces and collections. The lack of opportunities for material and embodied ways of teaching initially impacted on my professional identity, however I have learned to embrace the uncertainty of teaching in a shifting world.

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