



## **Experiences in Digital Learning 2022-23**

### **Webinar Series Booklet**

*This booklet discusses a series of four free webinars held between September 2022 and June 2023 and organised jointly by the Centre for Online and Distance Education (CODE) at the University of London, and the University of London Institute in Paris (ULIP). CODE was formed in 2005 as the Centre for Distance Education and changed its name in 2022 in response to the rapid, pandemic-driven ‘shift online’.*

*This was the third webinar series organised by CODE and ULIP under the strapline of ‘Experiences in Digital Learning’: the first series, held during the academic year 2020-21, was also co-organised by Goldsmith’s, University of London. The overall aim of the series is to enable practitioners of open and digital education worldwide to discuss and learn from each other about innovations in digital education during and after the pandemic. As in previous series, these webinars were well attended, and each was followed by a lively discussion. A fourth series is being planned for the next academic year and is due to start in October 2023.*

A blog report of each of the webinars in the 2022-23 series is available separately.

### **Executive Summary**

On 5 May 2023, the World Health Organisation finally declared that acute COVID-19 was no longer ‘a public health emergency of international concern’. This third series of webinars, therefore, has coincided with the official end of the pandemic. Over the last two years, even as the pandemic ebbed and students gradually returned to campus, it has become abundantly clear that there will be no return to the ‘old normal’ of 2019. Today’s students are – or at least should be – exposed to a wide range of digital technologies whether they are taught at a distance, face-to-face or mixed mode. It is therefore timely that this webinar series took the broad overall theme of blended learning. Within that theme, however, the webinars covered a wide range of topics. The first returned to the technical theme of the first series, with talks on using virtual and extended reality in teaching; the topics of the other three were, respectively, students, scholarship and sustainability.

As last year, this series was ably led by Linda Amrane-Cooper, the director of CODE, and Tim Gore OBE, the CEO of the University of London Institute in Paris. It featured nine speakers and two further chairs from four countries; three of the speakers were members of the now 42-strong team of CODE Fellows, including international fellow Alex Mihai from Maastricht in the Netherlands.

The motto of the Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers in Paris, where speaker Thierry Koscielniak works, is ‘teach everyone, everywhere’. That summarises an aspiration for distance and online education, but one that it currently falls far short of. The ‘new normal’ of blended education has reduced some barriers but raised others. One question that came up time and time again, in different contexts and different ways, was how these inequalities might be overcome. For Claire Smith, it would be by creating virtual-reality surgical simulations that do not require expensive



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headsets and fast, reliable internet connections. Students (through ‘students as partners’) and teaching staff (when introduced to the scholarship of education) can gain immensely from involvement in educational research, but inevitably those who put themselves forward for such schemes will be those with the most supportive institutions, and with sufficient confidence, resources and – perhaps above all – time.

This academic year will be remembered for one development that has nothing to do with the pandemic and its lockdowns, but that is likely to have at least as far-reaching an effect: the emergence and rapid rise of generative artificial intelligence and, particularly, ChatGPT. Much has been written about the headaches its use as an essay-writing tool is causing those who design and mark assessments. In that context, it was encouraging to hear speakers including our only student panellist, Eddie Plunkitt, suggesting ways to use these tools deliberately with students to make assessments more authentic and engaging.

Artificial intelligence is bound to be an important topic in next year’s webinar series, which is due to start in the autumn. We are planning about 8 webinars, with more focus on individual disciplines and linked more closely to the University of London’s member institutions.

And I will leave the last word to my CODE colleague David Baume, who sadly died in early July at the age of 80. I was privileged to share a panel with him in one of last year’s webinars, appropriately enough on the theme of academic freedom. David proposed that we as scholars and educators have a responsibility as well as a right to present our own ideas and critique others’, but we should always do so with courtesy and kindness. That would be a great message to take on into the blended educational landscape of 2023-24.



### Speakers and Chairs

- **Linda Amrane-Cooper**, Centre for Online and Distance Education, UK (CODE) (Chair; April)
- **Peter Felten**, Elon University, North Carolina, USA (1 June)
- **Tim Gore OBE**, University of London Institute in Paris (Chair; September)
- **Jess Humphreys**, University of Warwick, UK (1 June)
- **Eileen Kennedy**, London Knowledge Lab, UCL, UK (22 June)
- **Thierry Koscielniak**, Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers (Le Cnam), Paris (September)
- **Alex Mihai**, Maastricht University, The Netherlands and CODE (Chair; 22 June)
- **Norbert Pachler**, UCL Institute of Education and CODE (Chair; 1 June)
- **Dominic Pates**, City, University of London (22 June)
- **Eddie Plaskitt**, ULIP (April)
- **Claire Smith**, University of Brighton and Sussex Medical School, Brighton, UK (September)
- **Donna Smith**, The Open University UK and CODE (April)
- **Denise Sweeney**, University of Warwick, UK (1 June)



## Webinar Highlights

### *September 2022: Extended reality and the future of education*

- '[Currently] students can only access VR content if they are wearing headsets, which are quite heavy, bulky and expensive, and if they are using reliable, high bandwidth connections... simpler, lower-cost solutions are necessary' – Claire Smith
- 'Likely further developments include the incorporation of haptics, to provide the sense of touch, and 'augmented reality' simulations in which a virtual scene overlays the real one' – Claire Smith
- 'Using videos in surgical education raises questions of privacy, and the staff involved will need to become *au fait* with GDPR rights to prevent developments being derailed by legal and ethical problems' – Claire Smith
- 'Many of the new tools are still too unfamiliar for many staff to be comfortable with' – Thierry Koscielniak
- 'Some of the problem-solving extended reality scenarios we have developed, such as those involving radioactivity, would be too dangerous for students to try out in 'real life' – Thierry Koscielniak

### *April 2023: Supporting student voice and students as partners in a blended environment*

- 'It can be harder to learn basic skills such as problem-solving and critical thinking if all your teaching is online' – Eddie Plaskitt
- 'Language students are already expected to use AI tools constructively in their work, to critique automatic translations and to draft presentations' – Eddie Plaskitt
- 'The concept of 'student community' can take many forms: it can be formal or informal, and, separately, it can be academic or more social' – Donna Smith
- 'Working with students as partners can give those students a 'sense of belonging' to an institution and thus have a positive effect on student retention, confidence and achievement' – Donna Smith
- 'Even where all students are given equal opportunities to participate, the level to which they do so will depend on their confidence, resources and time' – Donna Smith

### *June 1, 2023: Scholarship and Research of Teaching*

- '[In the scholarship scheme] each novice scholar was paired with a more experienced researcher, and the advisors were expected to, and did, learn from the scholars they were mentoring' – Denise Sweeney
- 'Not surprisingly, most participants felt that their largest challenge was finding time to engage fully' – Jess Humphreys
- '*A pandemic is... a portal... which we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world... and fight for it, leaving behind dead ideas*' – Arundhati Roy, quoted by Peter Felten



- ‘Good, detailed, personal feedback can help develop student-instructor relationships and aid learning’ – Peter Felten

*June 22, 2023: Sustainable Approaches to Managing Technology for Learning*

- ‘The main solution [to global heating] is so simple that even a small child can understand it... we have to stop our emissions of greenhouse gases’ – Greta Thunberg, quoted by Dominic Pates
- ‘Recent studies have attempted the complex task of comparing the footprint of online and face-to-face teaching, with most coming down on balance in favour of online’ – Dominic Pates
- ‘Graduates need to develop attitudes, values and mindsets that enable them to engage with the [climate] crisis – Dominic Pates
- ‘In online education, meta-work – work that enables work – will include finding and learning the right technologies to get interaction with students right, and institutions need to... make this straightforward’ – Eileen Kennedy
- ‘If we are to sustain high-quality teaching online, we should be thinking about co-designing with the teachers and learners concerned’ – Eileen Kennedy



### Some Useful Links

- **Virtual Reality in Medicine and Surgery (VRiMS):** <https://www.vrims.net/>
- **Immersive Learning Lab** (in French): <https://i2l.fr/>
- **Uptale** (immersive VR editor for the web): <https://www.uptale.io/en/>
- **ChatGPT:** <https://openai.com/chatgpt>
- **Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition** (Vincent Tinto, 1994, University of Chicago Press, USA):  
<https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/L/bo3630345.html>
- **ELESIG** (Association for Learning Technology (UK) special interest group on evaluating students' experiences): <https://www.alt.ac.uk/groups/special-interest-groups/elesig>
- **The Pandemic is a Portal** (Arundhati Roy, *Financial Times* 3 April 2020, free to read):  
<https://www.ft.com/content/10d8f5e8-74eb-11ea-95fe-fcd274e920ca>
- **Connections Are Everything: A College Student's Guide to Relationship-Rich Education** (Peter Felten *et al.*, 2023, Johns Hopkins University Press, free to read):  
<https://muse.jhu.edu/book/111986>
- **On Task** (AI tool for automatic document generation): <https://www.ontask.io/>
- People and Planet's **sustainability league table** for UK universities:  
<https://peopleandplanet.org/university-league>
- **Mainstreaming Climate Change Education** briefing for COP26:  
[https://uucn.ac.uk/uucn\\_briefings/mainstreaming-climate-change-education-in-uk-higher-education-institutions/](https://uucn.ac.uk/uucn_briefings/mainstreaming-climate-change-education-in-uk-higher-education-institutions/)
- **Course Resource Appraisal Modeller** (London Knowledge Lab):  
<http://web.lkldev.ioe.ac.uk/cram/index.html>

*Dr Clare Sansom*

*CODE, University of London*

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