

Book Review of Abegglen, S., Neuhaus, F., & Wilson, K. (Eds.) (2022). *Voices from the digital classroom: 25 interviews about teaching and learning in the face of a global pandemic*. University of Calgary Press.

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With the aims of documenting the complex effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on higher education and initiating proactive discussions about its future, Sandra Abegglen, Fabian Neuhaus, and Kylie Wilson released a timely book titled *Voice from the Digital Classroom: 25 interviews about teaching and learning in the face of a global pandemic* in August 2022. The University of Calgary's Teaching and Learning Online Network (TALON) conducted these 25 interviews between July and December 2020, gathering diverse perspectives from educators and graduate students both within Canada and internationally.

The book is structured into two main series. While *Series 01 Voices* features 14 interviews held between July and September, *Series 02 Voices* compiles another 11 interviews conducted from September to December. Throughout both series, the interviews center around a consistent set of core topics: (1) interviewees' backgrounds, (2) their adaptations to online education, (3) the challenges and opportunities this shift presented, (4) the virtual tools and resources perceived as useful during the pandemic, and (5) their perspectives on the future of higher education. A notable feature of both series is a follow-up with the interviewees a year later as "an update or extension to the original discussion" (Abegglen et al., 2022, p. 6), enriching the book with reflections on how their initial reactions and adaptations have evolved over time.

To further enhance these textual insights, the book features a visual section with portraits of the interviewees. Captured by photographer Julian Salinas, these portraits are derived from three freeze frames taken from the interview recordings, dynamically showcasing each person in varied poses and the moment-to-moment interactions that took place during the interviews. This visual addition not only personalizes the stories but also vividly conveys the essence of each participant's experience.

In terms of content, the interviews collectively reveal a rapid adaptation to new learning methods by both instructors and students amidst the early pandemic phases. Initially, educators like Charlie Smith and Jane MacFarlane expressed concerns about the effectiveness of online learning. However, as the online classes progressed, they began to recognize several advantages, including flexible learning schedules, more equitable access to digital devices, the enhancement of students' digital literacy, and the amplification of diverse student voices. A significant benefit noted was the increased accessibility of digital resources for students from various geographical locations, promoting equity among learners. For example, Rujuta Nayak, an Indian student, appreciated being able to attend courses at the University of Calgary from her home country, highlighting the global reach of digital learning.

Nonetheless, some interviewees, such as Sandra Sinfield and Ruth Healey, observed that the swift transition to digital platforms had affected practical learning experiences and the quality of interactions among students and between students and teachers. Particularly, students in certain fields, like clinical mental health therapy, encountered difficulties in acquiring comprehensive body-mind training when limited to remote learning, as discussed in the interview with Christal Ramanauskas.

The observed consensus suggests that blended learning might emerge as a prevalent trend in future higher education, balancing online and in-person elements to optimize learning outcomes and well-being for both educators and students. Furthermore, the strategic integration of digital tools (see Table 1 in Appendix) is

recommended to address specific educational needs and enhance the effectiveness of teaching in future learning environments.

This book stands out for its in-depth and experience-based exploration of online emergency teaching, drawing upon perspectives from various educational roles, disciplines, and geographies. Central to its narrative are contributions from a diverse group of educational stakeholders, including university faculty, online education specialists, graduate students, librarians, and content creators. This deliberate and varied approach to participant recruitment not only enriches the narrative but also creates a triangulated, trustworthy dataset. By presenting experiences from individuals within similar fields, such as juxtaposing the insights of graduate students in architecture (e.g., Darby-Marie Henshaw, Dimitri Giannoulis, Robin Whitteker, Rujuta Nayak) with those of professors (e.g., Anna-Maria Meister, Charlie Smith, Guy Gardner, Mary-Ellen Tyler, Thomas Keenan), the book enables readers to make comparisons and thus better understand pandemic-relevant challenges and opportunities faced by individuals at different stages of their academic and professional journeys within the same discipline, providing a layered perspective on the complexities of online emergency teaching.

A second essential facet of the book is its detailed illustration of how various disciplines, such as education, communication, law, architecture, performing arts, and medical science, confront and leverage the opportunities and challenges presented by online education. These discipline-specific insights unveil the vast potential for what Byrd Clark (2016) described as transdisciplinary learning, where insights from one field can illuminate and critically inform practices in another. When deeply engaged with the book's diverse interviews, readers are encouraged to critically reflect on their own teaching and learning methodologies and envision creative improvements. Within this context, Robin Whitteker (2022), an architecture graduate student, provides a compelling insight: "Architecture has a digital presence but when it comes down to it, a building is an object in the real world and we need to keep that idea alive, and that starts with education" (p. 65). This reflection not only underscores the complex relationship between digital and physical environments but also emphasizes the indispensable value of hands-on, on-site learning experiences in architectural education. Whitteker's perspective, among others, can serve as a catalyst for readers across various fields to reevaluate the unique characteristics and needs of their disciplines, foster transdisciplinary idea exchanges, and in turn pave the way for devising effective pedagogical strategies that are well-suited for the future.

The book's richness is further amplified by its geographical diversity, with insights from educators in Canada, Germany, Egypt, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The multiple perspectives reveal distinct challenges and innovative solutions in online teaching that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic's early stages. For instance, while educators almost universally grappled with the abrupt transition to emergency online teaching, engagement barriers, and concerns over mental well-being, unique initiatives like Canada's TALON and EdTech Examined Podcast, Egypt's Virtually Connecting and Equity Unbound, and the United States' Professors at Play illustrate creative approaches to overcoming these challenges. This global lens not only broadens the reader's understanding but also underscores the interplay between universal trends and localized strategies in adapting to socio-educational uncertainties.

In addition to the aforementioned rich diversity of educational roles, disciplines, and geographies, this book notably excels in welcoming diverse interpretations of its findings, offering avenues for both technical and critical reflection. On a technical level, it introduces readers to an array of digital tools (outlined in Table 1) for use in the digital teaching and learning landscape. Equally if not more important, the book invites engagement with critical thinking. For example, it compellingly argues that digital tools are not inherently neutral but are designed with specific intents—whether for documentation, communication, lesson delivery, or assessment; these tools also carry their respective benefits and limitations. Such arguments highlight the need for cultivating critical media literacy, so that users can move beyond merely taking these tools for granted and instead make informed decisions in their use (e.g., Chen, 2019; Zhang et al., 2023). Moreover, the book critically points out the vital importance of humanizing higher education, particularly stressing the need to enhance student engagement, foster socio-emotional resilience, and transform community building, as Chen (2023) recently emphasized. By presenting these critical insights as open invitations for further analysis, the book challenges

readers to engage with pressing questions and unresolved challenges, thereby fostering a deeper understanding of the content and prompting broader reflections on the future of higher education.

While the book offers a wealth of insights, it is important to acknowledge a perceived imbalance in participant representation. The compilation of 25 interviews shows a predominance of voices from the social sciences over those from fields such as medical science. Additionally, faculty and staff members are featured more frequently than students, and there is a noticeable emphasis on perspectives from developed countries or the Global North, potentially sidelining voices from the Global South. These observations suggest room for increasing the diversity of viewpoints in future editions of the work. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the existing scope of inclusion may have been influenced by constraints such as time, resources, and specific research objectives, particularly in the unprecedented context of a global health crisis. These limitations notwithstanding, incorporating a broader range of voices could enrich the dialogue and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the pandemic's educational impact worldwide.

In conclusion, despite the noted room for broader participant representation, the book is a timely and insightful compilation that provides a snapshot of educational shifts during the pandemic. It not only captures these changes but also stimulates further discussion and innovation in higher education. By encouraging readers to reflect on the progression of digital education and the importance of finding the optimal balance between online and in-person learning, the book deepens our understanding of how these shifts affect both individual teaching and learning practices and the wider socio-educational environments.

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Appendix

Table 1: Synopsis of Insights into Challenges, Opportunities, Most Used Tools, Favorite Resources, Changes of Higher Education in 10 Years

<i>Interviewee Names</i>	<i>Challenges</i>	<i>Opportunities</i>	<i>Most Used Tools</i>	<i>Favorite Resources</i>	<i>Changes</i>
<i>Gregory Tweedie</i>	Presence/human contact	Simultaneous collaboration	D2L	Video assignments	More micro-credentials
<i>Patrick Kelly</i>	Abrupt shift to emergency online teaching	Discussions about effective e-learning practices	Zoom, D2L, MS Teams	Learning from the campus community	Greater access to work; more research experience for undergraduate students; more micro-credentials
<i>Anthony Seto</i>	Pedagogical preparation	Pushed innovation; wider accessibility; clearer messaging	Zoom, Google Forms, cell phone, Final Cut Pro, PowerPoint	Videos	More online education, with fewer traditional lectures and more hands-on learning
<i>Isadora Mok-Kulakova & Laura Perissinotti</i>	Presence; constant updates of tools; technical issues; attendance rates; balancing general workshops with targeted needs	Work from home; more options of digital tools; students' greater sense of control over learning	D2L, Zoom, YuJa	Interactive resources: H5P, Google Apps	More online course offerings; micro-credentials
<i>Kris Hans & Erik Christiansen</i>	Abrupt shift to emergency online teaching; preparation time; uncertain consequences of course materials made online; netiquette	Technological integration for better student experience; chances to invite guest speakers; collection of resources	Zoom, Google Docs, Google Suite, Padlet	Screening recording software: Snagit ISSOTL Listservs; podcasts - productivity and technology; Google news alert - EdTech; Fast Company Magazine	Reexamination of the value of higher education; reduced number of traditional disciplines but more interdisciplinarity; more micro learning; more powerful technological tools: AR, VR
<i>Tom Burns</i>	Student attendance and engagement	Work from home	Blackboard Collaborate; MS Teams; Emails	Student engagement and feedback	Return to on-site experiences
<i>Brian McDonough</i>	Lack of bodily presence in online environments; mental health issues	Work from home; meaningful usages of digital resources	VideoScribe; YouTube; Panopto	VideoScribe	A fully online transition requires not just technology but also societal shifts.
<i>Robin Whitteker</i>	Loss of spontaneous communication and student engagement; learning curve	Experience in using online tools; recorded lectures; enhanced documentation	Zoom	Slack	Architectural education will be partially rather than exclusively digital.

	with online tools; challenges to teach the making of architectural models	of student interactions			
<i>Anna-Maria Meister</i>	Finding ways to effectively discuss course content with students and address their concerns	Various ways to engage the students	Zoom, Moodle, Conceptboard, Camtasia, PowerPoint	Facebook groups; universities' resource websites	Useful digital tools for integration in traditional classrooms; studio teaching in Germany remains largely on-site
<i>Darby-Marie Henshaw</i>	Creating a routine	Social connectivity	Zoom, WhatsApp	Zoom	Online education's affordability and convenience levels may increase; physical presence remains key.
<i>Charlie Smith</i>	Inability to work with physical models	Proactive adoption of technologies	Canvas, Zoom, Panopto	YouTube	Computer-aided design can be useful while design studio stays.
<i>Jane MacFarlane</i>	Presence, concentration, and communication in online voice coaching	Accessibility	D2L, Time Release, YuJa, YouTube, iMovie	YouTube, TED Talks	Large lectures will be replaced by smaller classes emphasizing human connection and collaboration.
<i>Sandra Sinfield</i>	Abrupt shift to emergency online teaching	Developing creative solutions in the virtual learning environment	Blackboard, Collaborate, Zoom, PowerPoint, Google Docs, Wiki	Google Docs, Digital Storytelling 106, Twitter	A blend of both online and physical learning
<i>Christal Ramanauskas</i>	Student engagement	Better performance without instructor presence; more control over teaching content; increased digital literacy; telerehabilitation practices	Zoom, Google Meet	Feedback from colleagues and students	More online delivery with course becoming more engaging and informative
<i>Maha Bali</i>	Sustaining care and wellbeing	Equal access to technology; time flexibility	Google Docs, Twitter	OneHE which connects Equity Unbound with Virtually Connecting	Greater agency among students; teachers' focus on learners' wellbeing and critical thinking
<i>Ruth Healey</i>	Uneven technological access; technical issues; users' digital literacy; student presence	Useful webinars and seminars; greater potential for flipped classrooms	MS Teams, Moodle, PowerPoint, Blackboard, Padlet	Blackboard, Padlet	Stronger partnerships between instructors and students

<i>Rujuta Nayak</i>	Inability to be in person with classmates; different time zones	Staying with family in home country while pursuing education online	Zoom, Skype, WhatsApp, OneDrive, Google Docs, Gmail	D2L; UCalgary e-library; Architecture-specific websites: ArchDaily, Dezeen	A blend of both online and physical learning
<i>Dimitri Giannoulis</i>	The need to use sophisticated software on laptop; difficulty to remain focused and manage distractions	Affordability	Zoom, Miro, Adobe Creative Cloud	No particular preference	Transition back to in-person learning
<i>Mary-Ellen Tyler</i>	Time limits of teachers' preparation, assessment, and students' responses	Connectivity with people and resources	Video camera, Photographs, PowerPoint	Photographs, PowerPoint	Students work more to afford their education; learning becomes more customized and hybridized.
<i>Guy Gardner</i>	Model construction; Abrupt shift to emergency online teaching	Acceptance of digital work; support from faculty and staff; pedagogical innovation	Zoom, Mozilla Hubs, YuJa	Discord, MS Teams, YouTube	Accelerating technological advances and greater support for students to find passion and access resources
<i>Lisa K. Forbes & David Thomas</i>	Abrupt shift to emergency online teaching; inability to foster deep interpersonal connections; student disengagement	Community building for pedagogical improvement; more opportunities for play	Zoom, Listserv, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube	Flappy Birds, Zoom, Google Docs, Flipgrid, Google Forms	Stronger technological mediation and network; changing roles and hierarchy of professors and students; more playful higher education
<i>David Gauntlett</i>	Abrupt shift to emergency online teaching; Inability to use physical materials	Interactive video environment; creativity workshops	Zoom	Google Jamboard, Twitch	Not entirely online; Reexamination of the value of higher education
<i>Kiu Sum</i>	Isolation	Dialogues with like-minded individuals	Conferences and webinars	LinkedIn	Enhanced student engagement and collaboration with staff and students
<i>Lisa Silver</i>	Community building online	Rethinking a course	D2L, Zoom, Google Jamboard, Mentimeter	Resources from the Teaching Institute	Not entirely online
<i>Thomas Keenan</i>	Mental issues: Zoom fatigue; Presence; Academic integrity	International collaboration	Zoom, e-databases	Zoom	Transition mostly back to campus; fewer traditional lectures; accelerating technological advances

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