



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH
Moray House School of
Education and Sport

Hybrid Pioneers

Interim Report January 2022



Action Group

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Introduction

Hybrid Pioneers is a cross-institute pilot initiative developed at Moray House School of Education and Sport (MHSES) and the Centre for Open Learning (COL) for the academic year 2021-2022. The Action Group is led by Professor Do Coyle and includes representatives from each of the four institutes in MHSES.

The pandemic has accelerated our collective understanding of the need to address challenges fundamental to our work that involve on-line as well as in-person learning and teaching, focussing on digital capacity and exploration into what has become known as hybrid learning and teaching. However, work in the field of enabling alternative approaches to learning and teaching in higher education has been ongoing for some time, bringing together a broad range of perspectives in line with the University's 2030 Strategy, MHSES and COL aspirations as set out in the School Action Plan and Edinburgh Futures Institute's practices for fusion learning in a post-digital world.

The purpose of this year long pioneering initiative is four-fold:

- 1.To reconceptualise hybrid learning and teaching to develop a shared understanding of emergent theories, practices, pedagogies, and lived realities of dynamic hybrid learning spaces in higher education contexts.
- 2.To ensure that Moray House provides fit-for-purpose high quality hybrid learning and teaching across its programmes which is in line with the School Action Plan and resonates with the University of Edinburgh's 2030 strategy.
- 3.To lead the way in terms of making dynamic pioneering pedagogies visible.
- 4.To demonstrate MHSES and COL leadership in the field of exploring and innovating different ways that spaces (physical and virtual) are fundamental to all teaching and learning approaches in hybrid settings.

The project actively involves students and staff working together, sharing spaces, voices and developing hybrid pedagogies through emergent practices. The idea is to span different types of teaching spaces (e.g. 'classroom'; 'activity'; outdoor; and online) which reframe all learners as hybrid learners. The term 'hybrid learning' accommodates a range of interpretations and applications, something we will be exploring through this initiative. For the purpose of this report, however, and as the starting point for our conversations, we use the broad working definition of hybridity as the combination of two or more modes of learning and teaching. Drawing on outstanding expertise in MHSES across all Institutes and COL, we will experiment and reflect on our pedagogical understanding and practices to demonstrate how we advance high quality hybrid learning for our very diverse student communities and disseminate our work in innovative ways. The initiative will involve approximately 800 students across 12 programmes.

- MSc in Digital Education
- MSc Dance Science and Education
- MSc Language and Intercultural Communication
- MSc Transformative Learning and Teaching (TLT) / MSc TLT Language Pathway
- MSc TESOL Methodology
- MSc TESOL Second Language Teacher Education
- MSc Outdoor Education/Outdoor Environmental and Sustainability Education
- PGDE Expressive Arts
- MA (Hons) PE
- PhD student development
- International Foundation Programme (Centre for Open Learning)
- Languages for All (Centre for Open Learning)

The following is an interim report on the initiative, reflecting on activity in Semester 1 and emerging themes and key considerations for future research and practice, which will be submitted to the Director of Learning and Teaching and circulated across MHSES and COL. A final report will be presented at the end of the academic year, along with other planned dissemination outputs, including seminars and knowledge exchange events.

Emerging Themes

Theme 1: Reimagining Hybrid Learning and Teaching

"For me the hybrid pioneer initiative isn't really about COVID... that was the trigger, but underneath it all, it's about the future of education in universities" (HP9)

For staff in the Action Group, working on the Hybrid Pioneers Initiative offered a valuable opportunity for critical reflection, and a chance to re-evaluate and reimagine learning and teaching. Operating through a mixture of online, in-person, and hybrid formats on their programmes allowed staff to explore and question their own practices. Hybrid learning and teaching was not viewed as predominantly or exclusively about online aspects; rather it prompted considerations of how, in any modality or format, staff could further empower students, facilitate critical enquiry, and open a dialogue about the purpose and future of university education.

Case Study 1

Yesterday I had my first in-person workshop. I absolutely loved seeing people and seeing their reactions, which feels like an eternity since that happened the last time. When afterwards I was in the office after the buzz had died down, I thought to myself, do I prefer in-person teaching, or have I gotten so used to online activity that now this feels like something different, something new? And that made me think, this question of hybridity is also in relation to my reflexivity as a teacher. To what extent am I imposing on to people, whether virtually or online, my stances, my beliefs, my values, and to what extent am I trying to open up these things in a creative sense to try and get the students some sort of agency? (HP1)

With the changes brought about by COVID and continuing exploration with hybridity, staff also did not see it as necessary to return to the 'old ways of working' and recognised that there was a tension between messages coming from the university and the expectations and wishes of some students and staff.

Case Study 9

There is a tension that is huge, between universities as business and universities as places of learning. And now we're entering a world where learning has changed, and is changing, and it will continue to change. COVID is a bittersweet pill because in some ways, it's forced a lot of questions to be asked about teaching and learning, but sadly I don't think that the answer has been found. They're quick fix solutions that are dependent on technology and not the big, big questions about what is deeper learning? (HP9)

Redefining 'hybrid learning and teaching' was discussed widely amongst the hybrid pioneers. Many felt that the term had become 'rigid' or even ineffective because of the changes brought about by the pandemic, and that there was a need to redefine what we mean by hybridity: *"I'm not a fan of calling it hybrid in many ways because I just think it's good pedagogy and finding the spaces where learners need to access"* (HP8). Some called for a 'critical approach to hybridity,' for instance by taking account of the learning spaces, the tools, and who owns the tools.



Theme 2: Challenges in Delivering Hybrid: Opening up a Dialogue

"We're on the cusp of change and potential for development, but I don't know how we can really harness that without the resource. And that resource is technology, but it's also time. Time to use the technology, to learn to use it. Time to have dialogue such as this and time to work with students." (HP3)

"It's very stressful, because if it all goes wrong then the students don't get a session and then that's an hour wasted, and they do get angry because they're very good at using technology." (HP5)

The members of the Action Group all spoke about facing significant challenges in 'delivering' hybrid learning and teaching – the very term indicating specific interpretations of what learning and teaching in HE entails. Whilst recognising that the shift to online during lockdown had brought about some new useful approaches, there was also a sense that many decisions had been made in haste, as was required in the immediate response to COVID, but without any critical thought and subsequent reflection. The impact on workload had led to stress and anxiety, and many staff spoke about the 'unseen work' of preparation that was involved in facilitating hybrid learning.

Case Study 3

I know how to make all of that technology on its own work, but can I make it work together in a hybrid fashion? I cannot. I'm spending in advance of 30 minutes per class going into the room and it's taking up a lot of time and it's also adding to, honestly, what's my anxiety in terms of, what am I presenting? And when I speak with others, actually it's not it's not a pedagogical conversation, it becomes a technical conversation, it becomes a conversation about what works. (HP3)

Technology failing or glitching caused frustrations for both staff and students and contributed to a lack of confidence: *"There's always something glitching ... and I think that's when people get disillusioned, and they go back to pen and paper"* (HP5). Some staff felt that there was not an effective 'infrastructure' in place at the university to support the rapid changes to learning and teaching, which added significant pressure. There were calls for further serious investment in technology, for example new cameras and mics. It was suggested that a technologist could be present in each hybrid session for support, though it was recognised that currently resource was not available for this. On one programme, a member of staff spoke about supporting and collaborating with a colleague to build confidence and resilience in relation to using the technology in an on-campus classroom.

Case Study 6

My colleague is not really that interested in technology and I don't think they're that confident. It was about me kind of reassuring them... I said we need to be realistic here and realize that there'll be things that just don't work and there'll be weeks where it goes wrong and we just have to scrap it... It's been interesting now he's just picked it up, and he's seen how valuable it is and how much the students are valuing it, and he's just getting on with it, there's times when he's doing stuff with the technology without having to be prompted. (HP6)

The Digital Services Team at MHSES is engaging with the Action Group around how to effectively support hybrid learning and teaching. It was recognised that the hybrid context and reliance on technology led to many staff feeling a lack of control and perceiving a lack of knowledge or skill in the tools for delivering teaching: *"technology needs to be the enabler for better teaching and for enhanced teaching... or to make things more effective, or more inclusive, but not an obstacle or another roadblock"* (HP7).

Training sessions were viewed by Digital Services as a key for building capacity; it was recognised that the technology should work hand-in-hand with the pedagogy, and that training should be bespoke and responsive to needs. It was also suggested that there could be a 'reframing' of training, or the creation of different collaborative spaces, similar to the HPI Action Group, to facilitate regular dialogue between Digital Services, staff, and students.

Case Study 7

Maybe we need to reframe it as not training, to have a feedback loop where we're not just saying what a tool does but listening to what the tools should be doing and trying to figure that out... there probably is more room for this, not just requests for support, more of a collaborative... you hear feedback when something doesn't work, when something works perfectly, then you're much more likely to not hear anything. (HP7)

Staff found it helpful to be honest and open with students about the challenges and encouraged them to also problem-solve and find solutions amongst themselves: *"I didn't even realize but about 15 minutes into the session the students just went, it didn't work, but we just FaceTimed and that seems to be a lot better... so they're working it out already"* (HP6). There were examples of what staff perceived to have been effective hybrid teaching, though this depended on factors including the learning space, available technology, content and aims of the session.

Case Study 6

Thursday morning we were in the Game's Hall in St Leonard's... It went a lot smoother than I anticipated. So much so that one of the students got in touch and said are you going to do the same thing for the other course on the Monday? On Monday we were in a traditional classroom, Paterson's Land G.21. We were trying to do something similar but it didn't work, straight away the students were going, we can't hear, there's too much background noise, whereas in the Game's Hall, the way I'd set up, there was no background noise because the groups were so spaced out... but they just said on Monday, after a couple of minutes, no, this is pointless. (HP6)

As the term progressed, staff found that they were moving from considerations of the administrative and the technical to exploring and theorising their own practice: *"The first two or three weeks it was all about... technical issues, administrative stuff, organizational stuff. And I think that's really important, these stories need to be told. But to me, that's not about pedagogy. So in the last couple of weeks I've started to think right, what are the broader issues here?"* (HP6).



Theme 3: Harnessing Space(s) as a Resource for Learning

"If we see learning in space, then we see either a classroom, or somebody's bedroom with a laptop, and that's the space, whereas if we're seeing learning as space, then wherever we are, we're creating an agile environment around us that enables us to learn." (HP9)

Across the programmes involved in the initiative there were considerations of how and in what ways space (online, indoors, outdoors) could be enabled as a resource for learning. An awareness of spatial literacies, and the impact of space on learning, was viewed as a key component for bringing about greater ownership for students: *"the students' experience in hybrid is around agreements... shared understandings of what hybrid is and how space can be used as a resource"* (HP9). Tutors in COL talked about *"making inflexible seminar spaces with carpets and bulky furniture flexible"* (T4), speaking to the need for more agile, multipurpose, and adaptable learning spaces. For some staff, challenges around operating in a hybrid context acted as a catalyst for critiquing how they used space.

Case Study 9

My first teaching session in person was awful. I hadn't thought it through in terms of what you can and can't do, according to COVID regulations, and they were set out in rows... I just reverted back to didactic teaching where I did all the talking. And one person was unable to come, so I had to ask one of the students to beam her in for me on their laptop and she was facing me. The whole thing was completely disastrous from a learning space perspective. But rather than beating myself up about that I want to take that as a springboard... I allowed the space to dictate what I should and shouldn't do. I hadn't really thought it through in terms of what to do if you want interactive learning, and students are meant to be a metre apart. I hadn't really thought that through in terms of the technology and in terms of the tasks I was doing. (HP9)

Other members of the Action Group were also exploring how to facilitate dialogue with students about how learning spaces are constructed and the positionality of both humans and technology in these spaces: *"It's never just about the human... space isn't just a neutral container of activity, and technology isn't just a tool or an instrument. The decision universities make around learning platforms can have profound impacts on the kind of teaching you're able to do, because it can give you potentialities but can just as easily constrain"* (HP11).

There were also concerns that digital spaces and virtual learning environments (VLEs) continued to be thought of primarily *"as a repository space rather than a learning environment"* (HP11) and that the potential for these spaces was yet to be fully realised: *"we need to think about how the formations of space and technology and pedagogy nurture the kinds of conditions that we want to see in practice"* (HP11). The potential role of outdoor spaces in hybrid learning was also highlighted, with calls for further investigation into why some spaces may be further supported or prioritised over others.

Case Study 8

The definition is limited to online and indoors. And that's a real frustration... I understand why the digital space has been so pushed because students can't get here, I really appreciate that. But at the same time, I'm like, well, why is the outdoors not being pushed? In an outdoor tutorial you can't live stream someone in, but you can provide similar activities for students to do independently and report on, and possibly more meaningfully than ... being live streamed into a classroom. (HP8)

Theme 4: Student Agency and Empowerment

"We talk a lot about wanting to do everything we can for student voice and enabling that voice. But to what extent are we really listening?" (HP1)

"I honestly believe that hybridity is the way forward for inclusive and accessible education." (TLT Student 10)

There was a clear and ongoing tension reported around student expectations of and preferences for their learning. Preference for online or in-person or hybrid varied widely and was partly dependent on the context of the programme, but there were also differing perspectives within programmes. For example, some students and parents on the MSc TLT were anxious about any return to in-person teaching: *"I am very worried about next semester planning to be in-person and not hybrid at all... very concerned"* (TLT Student 8). International students on MSc Language and Intercultural Communication, seeing COVID cases increasing in the media, were very concerned about staying in the country and asking about options for studying remotely from Term 2.

However, on programmes such as MSc Dance Science Education and MSc Outdoor Education/Outdoor Environmental and Sustainability Education, perhaps due to the practical nature of the courses, students were 'desperate' not to go back to online formats. Students in COL talked about the important social aspects of being in person and developing connections with peers and tutors.

Case Study 2

I feel like mainly it's because we don't know the teachers as well, you don't even get to connect with them [online]... There's like this element of just casually joking around [in-person]. You can laugh if you tell a joke, you know I'm laughing, you know I'm not muted or something. Then you can actually get to have a connection with your teacher and your peers. And that makes it more comfortable to ask questions if you don't understand. (COL Student 2)

Students also mentioned the value of working with others in-person in terms of being 'inspired by others' and creating a friendly but 'competitive atmosphere' where they were driven on by the work of their peers. Tutors also picked up on student dissatisfaction with campus life: *"It's basically a vessel of classroom. There is no buzz, no social life and no feeling that the cogs of the university turn there"* (T5). Some staff were exploring ways in which social spaces could be created to include both in-person and online students: *"we're talking now about having spaces within the cafe area, and in the social areas where those conversations can actually include the online learner, so that when people go off for a chat outside of tutorials or outside of workshops, the online student isn't feeling othered or isolated"* (HP11).

On the Languages for All programme in COL, most courses for semester 2 are set to return to in-person due to concerns over the effectiveness of language learning online. A similar plan on one of the short courses in COL prompted responses from students that demonstrated the potential for hybrid to widen participation.

Case Study 2

I teach literature to a group of older people, a couple of younger ones, but my oldest student is 92 nearly, and they've all moved from being in-person to being online and some of them have been coming to my classes for years, [the student] who is 92 has been coming to my classes for about 15 years. And his wife has totally aced getting him on an iPad... But when I said to them, we're moving to in-person in January, one of my students said, well why aren't you doing hybrid? It was really interesting that A, they knew what hybrid was, and B that he thought that was applicable to that audience. Because I think it's really applicable to them. (HP2)



Some staff noted that there was an increasing demand from students who were now coming to expect a more 'in-time' learning experience that allowed them to engage when suitable and appropriate for them. Again, it was highlighted that this contrasted with the university's general message of moving towards a return to in-person teaching for students. The students themselves talked about the benefits of asynchronous or flexible learning: *"having the lectures recorded and shared so that you can re-watch it until you understand, repeat the same part, go back to specific points if you need clarifications... It's really helpful to know that something is there just in case you maybe don't pay attention for like 2 minutes"* (COL Student 1).

On hybrid learning, there was a mixed response from students. Some appreciated the mode of hybrid where some classes were in-person and some held online, but when presented with the option of having both in-person and online attendees in the same class, some students stated that they believed *"either the whole class should be online or the whole class should be in person"* (COL Student 4). Although some recognised that it could benefit those joining online, they also thought it could also make classes 'drag on', make organisation more 'complex', and mean that classes were vulnerable to problems occurring with the technology. Other students, however, found the flexibility of hybrid learning *"very inclusive for those with caring responsibilities, jobs and other life needs"* (TLT Student 4); they valued having the choice.

Case Study 2

The opportunity to select between working in groups online (breakout groups for example) or meeting on campus to work with your groups, for example when we created our posters some groups chose to work online whereas the group I was in decided to meet in the Levels cafe to produce our work together. It was nice to have that choice. (TLT Student 8)

Often when I am feeling particularly anxious, it is easier / more accessible for me to be able to tune into a class online rather than in person. (TLT Student 11)

There was also a mixed response from tutors; some viewed hybrid as a 'substandard mode' that diminished student experience in that you had to do certain activities that 'accommodates one group but disadvantages another.' Others were more positive about the potential of hybrid but recognised the challenges and the vital need for preparation: *"I think it is the way forward - but it needs to be planned carefully, not just adopting a one size fits all approach... it needs appropriate physical and virtual spaces for hybrid teaching to be meaningful"* (T5).

The Action Group raised questions over how to ensure equality of experience for all students, no matter what format for learning was employed. One challenge that was discussed was around accurately capturing feedback from international students, some of whom for cultural reasons may feel reluctant to offer a critique of their courses. In addition, it was recognised hierarchies of power existed in all learning spaces, and that this was something that needed to be reckoned with in hybrid learning and teaching across all programmes.

Case Study 6

There's times over the last five weeks where I've been able to make it, I would say really authentic for the students who are online, and they're getting a similar experience to the in-person students, but I know that there's times where... the online students have had quite a passive role in the lesson, it's been difficult because we're doing all our practical stuff.

The students that have been in-person we've been giving them iPads, so that they can engage. But again, the online students have said it's difficult sometimes to actually see and sometimes they put an iPad down and I'm left looking at the ceiling for 15 minutes... I'm seeing that they're in a position where they're quite vulnerable in some respects, and they don't have control or power, so that is something I'm also thinking about in terms of my own pedagogy... For me it's been about empowering the students and giving them the devices so that they can interact. (HP6)

Students themselves recognised the importance of *"building a sense of community"* through hybrid sessions *"that echoes the community built in in-person sessions"* (TLT Student 10). Consulting with students and developing platforms for co-constructing their own learning was viewed by staff as key for creating hybrid spaces that were equitable and inclusive, and facilitated deeper and more meaningful learning.

Case Study 11

Hybridity doesn't mean trying to dilute what's happening in the physical classroom, to achieve uniformity. Instead, what we have to do is recognise and take advantage of different kinds of positive learning experiences. You continue doing what was brilliant in the physical space, but you create something different in the online space, something meaningful and positive for those students. Otherwise you're just going to end up with a really watered down uniform experience and what we want is for education to be inspiring, exciting! (HP11)





Emerging Ideas

Hybridity as a catalyst for reimagining university learning and teaching:

- Grasping the opportunities in this time of change to explore and implement new ways of learning and teaching, and trial these in Semester 2.
- Asking important and challenging questions like 'what is the purpose of learning?'
- Embracing pedagogies of uncertainty and taking advantage of opportunities to be reflexive about our practice.
- Reckoning with the tensions between universities as business and universities as places of learning.

Creating equitable learning experiences for all students:

- Building on practice in Semester 1, exploring ways to further empower students to make decisions about and take the lead in their own learning.
- Increasing student participation in the Hybrid Pioneers Initiative, including involving students as researchers and in co-constructing (hybrid) learning.
- Ensuring that we are not only listening but acting on student voice and recognising that there are different perspectives and expectations both across and within programmes around the purpose of learning.
- Giving students more choice about the format of their learning, including allowing students to select their preferred mode at the beginning of the programme.

Harnessing space as a pedagogical resource:

- Recognising the ways in which all spaces can be used as a resource for learning and interrogating assumptions about learning spaces through the [Shared and Agile Learning Spaces Toolkit](#), and a lens of sociomateriality.
- Exploring the ways in which some spaces are prioritised over others and the hierarchies of power in and of learning spaces.
- Investigating how outdoor spaces can be further integrated into considerations of hybrid learning and teaching.

Creating and sustaining safe spaces for dialogue:

- Continuing regular Action Group meetings that offer a 'safe space' for dialogue between staff, Digital Services, and students.
- Exploring different ways to build capacity, reframing 'training' as a more collaborative enterprise, and providing spaces for feedback loops to discuss successes as well as problem-solving.
- Further evidencing the 'process' towards best practice and identifying the most important areas for technological investment and advancement.