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Title: Joined-Up University Services in Seminar Teaching During the Lockdown

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Short Description: *In this article, I share with you my largely positive experience of working with different academic services to support students in seminar teaching*

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The phenomena that I share with you here related to an issue that stemmed from pre-Covid times – the issue of supporting first year students’ academic study skills needs while delivering subject content during the seminars that you deliver. It’s an issue many HE lecturers are familiar with and not just with first year students as the issue stays alive throughout the students’ degree.

The first year students’ needs are particularly relevant as in this case. I have been delivering an introductory module to the course (BA – Hons - Education Studies) that the course team has been trying to turn into a sort of an opportunity for students to evaluate and work on their academic study needs to facilitate their progress during the rest of the course. What the experience reveals is that university-based support is not necessarily designed to be a linear or hierarchical type of education (Meyerhoff, 2019). What may make our service so is the way we might deliver education and how it may be evaluated and planned at a local level, especially if our pedagogical reactions to management practices lead to a self-inflicted hierarchical and hegemonic approach to teaching and learning.

When Covid-19 and the associated restrictions hit us, as a team we had planned to integrate academic skills support within the module content. The increased and inevitable reliance on digital and online services enabled us to integrate university’s services that align well with the kind of a radically modified pedagogy that Meyerhoff (2019) calls for which the post-pandemic university could rely on.

To deliver the impending content and mode of support for during the module, we relied on the university’s Personal Development Department, the Library and the IT Services staff, both of who were absolutely fantastic, to create and deliver content using a mixture of face-t-face, asynchronous, synchronous seminars. We had sessions covering module content and skills such as academic writing, reading, presenting to an audience or planning and time-management.

At that early point in the pandemic we were still able to have some face-to-face sessions. There were sessions where the PDD staff or the Library Staff would connect to us live while we were in four seminar rooms on campus; our module group had to be split into smaller groups in separate rooms due to social distancing. Some students joined us from their home (UK and abroad) and the IT services would contact them directly to resolve technical issues and sometimes met us physically in our seminar rooms to resolve issues that we faced. Sometimes we would play a recorded video from PDD, or an interactive exercise they

had designed and they would join us live via MS Teams to answer questions students had. So what we had going was certainly non-linear and very often messy but I'd argue an integrated joined-up approach that made the complex network of services work together to address meet students' needs – needs that we had been working on for a couple of years.

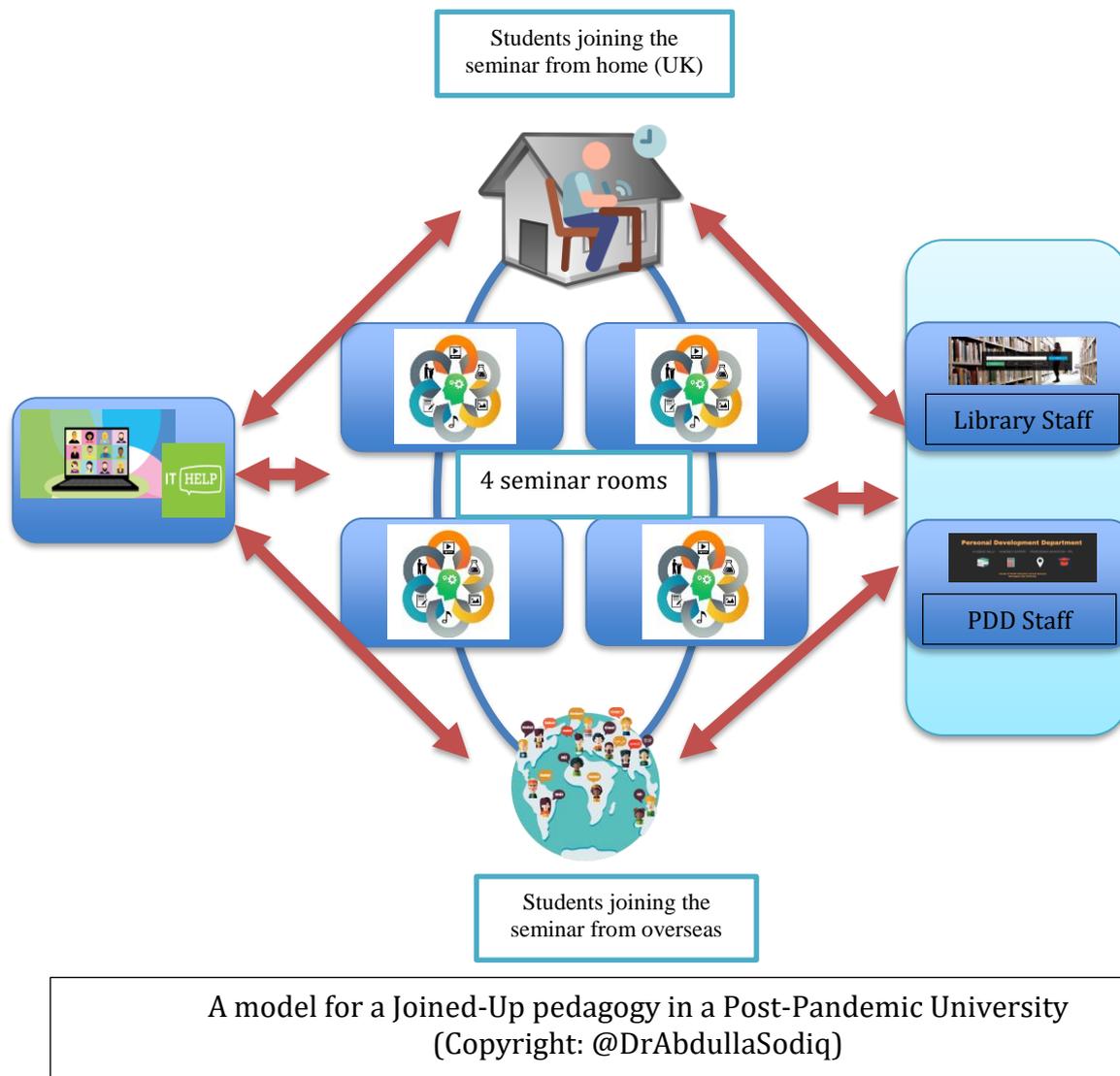


Figure 1: A model for a Join-Up pedagogy in a Post-Pandemic University (Copyright - @DrAbdullaSodiq)

In this set up, what we achieved and the impact was clear. One student highlighted that “the interactive support from teachers” and the mixture of “doing group work, discussions in breakout rooms (MS Teams), in class discussions, etc.” worked well for them. These students are now in their second semester and I certainly feel they, in comparisons to previous cohorts, have a clearer idea of university education, the kind of evidence they rely on when supporting their arguments and how best to approach module assignments and tasks.

The experiment has highlighted the need to find ways to the online and digital services to adapt a joined-up approach in pedagogy and I can see a purposeful place for such an approach in the post-pandemic university.

Reference:

Meyerhoff, E. (2019). *Beyond Education: Radical Studying for Another World*. Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press. doi:10.5749/j.ctvpb3vm2