Jean Murray is professor of education, emeritus, in the School of Education and Communities at the University of East London in England. Her research focuses on the sociological analysis of teacher education policies, research and practices internationally. Jean has written well over 200 books, chapters, articles and official reports on these issues and has also run a large number of research projects. She has taught at all levels of higher education and in schools, as well as being an educational consultant for governments, NGOs and universities internationally.

Initial Teacher Education and learning for all our futures

Jean M. F. Murray School of Education and Communities, University of East London, UK

As I write in March 2021, children in England have returned to bricks-and-mortar classrooms and student teachers have resumed their 'real world' placements. This then is a time of hope, although it is still too early to proclaim the end of this pandemic era, with all its profound and differentiated implications for our educational and personal lives. I am therefore writing here not about learning from the pandemic but about learning in and through its impact on Initial Teacher Education (ITE). I write from a personal viewpoint, but drawing on evidence from research and practice and from hearing the voices of teacher educators in recent webinars and meetings.

The ITE system in England has shown its ability to be flexible and responsive to an unprecedented crisis that has challenged its curricula, pedagogies and assessment modes, some of which have remained fundamentally unchanged for years, if not decades. Because of intermittent school closures, the place of the practicum in student learning has had to be radically rethought. In 2020, for example, the pandemic struck just as many Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) students were starting their final practicum. Most were then unable to return to school that year and so, with government approval (DfE, 2020), completed their courses and qualified as teachers with far less classroom experience than the statutory 24 weeks normally required for a PGCE qualification. This academic year, students have already experienced hybrid economies of teaching and learning, including online and face-to-face learning in both university and school.

The importance of the practicum experience in teacher education is, of course, widely recognised. International policy trends have been to increase the amount of practical training which students undertake in schools, with the assumption that more such experience straightforwardly produces better teachers. This simplistic assumption has, however, been widely challenged in professional fields. The quality and the creativity of some of the alternative provision put in place during the pandemic has now underlined and strengthened those challenges.

Responding to 'the practicum vacuum' as the pandemic struck, it is clear that teacher educators had to rethink everything and move to online learning. As numerous studies in 2020 show, an initial period of 'emergency elearning' (Murphy, 2020) was followed by growing confidence and increasing competence and innovation. In his study of primary school teachers' responses to the pandemic, Warren Kidd states that these changes showed 'pedagogical agility' (Kidd, 2020a, b). And in a chronological study of teacher educators' pedagogy, Warren and I (Kidd & Murray, 2020) showed how the 'missing practicum' was replaced by a rapid evolution of practice as communities were relocated to new online spaces and technology became simultaneously the medium and the location of learning and teaching.

For all the teacher educators in our study, this relocation forced the reconfiguration of personal pedagogies and often the formation

of deeper relationships with students, as well as the strengthening of some school partnerships. In general, technology became a transformative agent to relocate learning and generate alternative pedagogies. This often created the need to think more deeply about knowledge acquisition and creation.

Talking with teacher educators during recent webinars, it is clear that many features of the practices in our research were duplicated more widely (Ferdig et al., 2020; la Velle et al., 2020), and some have led to ongoing changes in provision. At a recent webinar for the Teacher Education Advancement Network (TEAN), we highlighted some of these practices, particularly those that have ongoing significance in the hybrid economies of learning and teaching experienced by ITE systems this academic year.

- For a science tutor, doing 'kitchen chemistry' online meant that students could work in their own homes but still plan and implement experiments together, whilst the watching educator could then bring out the different applications of the practical techniques.

- Use of the Flipgrid system provided an online form of micro-teaching, meaning that, after students taught certain experiments, they could reflect and receive feedback from both the educator and their peers.

- A subject group of students (many with their own young children also at home) took turns to teach and 'home school' these children, creating a shared online home-classroom organised around small lesson study groups. Children's learning was discussed, as other student-parents sat in to observe the teaching. These practices enabled the creation of online spaces with national reach.

- Tools such as Padlet and Jamboard, new to some educators, become the site of communication, discussion and silent debate, putting the community back in when the pandemic had taken it away.

- Use of online writing circles overcame students' potential isolation, providing pragmatic but meaningful support for writing Masters-level assignments. These were a focus to ensure regular interaction, to give purposefulness to an otherwise worrying and isolating time, and to extend learning.

- A YouTube channel became a resource bank for online teaching demonstrations from educators, ex-students, mentors and other members of the school–university partnership. Such initiatives resulted in the students benefiting from 'many more voices in the room'.

All these reconfigured pedagogic strategies provided rich learning experiences for the students, even though they were no longer in the conventional practice space of the school. Alternative forms of 'virtual' learning with peers and enhanced opportunities for individual and communal reflection meant that students were still learning about practice. Teacher educators were often able to model both personal pedagogical practices and use of technology in their online teaching and to use technology to connect their students with a greater range of teacher-mentors, themselves isolated from their schools. As well as strengthening partnerships, this provided opportunities for a breadth of learning which would not otherwise have been possible. Partnership was also maintained through online triadic meetings between student, mentor and teacher educator to review individual progress. These were reported to be effective in enabling open discussions and bringing about positive changes in previous power relations. Significantly, in all these reconfigured practices, occurring in newly formed online spaces, many principles and 'intentionalities' of pedagogy remained unchanged, as did the teacher educators' orientating values.

Our research and the experiences of many others suggest, then, that there has been a reconfiguring of the ways in which authentic teacher education can occur. The pandemic has forced the flexible and creative (re)design of alternative pedagogies and technologies to support professional learning in the case of the 'missing' practicum. These achievements do not, however, mean that we should overlook the multiple challenges of moving practice learning online including differentiated student access to relevant technology and learning support, digital literacy gaps, and the underlying increases in social and educational inequalities that have become even more apparent during the pandemic. The social justice issues alone implicated in the move to online learning are profound and need sustained communal analysis, followed by action at all levels of the ITE system. And it must also be acknowledged that we do not yet know – and may never know to any degree of accuracy – how missing many weeks of placement experiences in real classrooms has affected the confidence and competence of newly qualified teachers.

Yet, it would be foolish to envisage a future in which the ITE system can return, unquestioningly, to its 'old familiar' structures and practices in either the short or long term. Rather, as Ann MacPhail stated in Research in Teacher Education (RiTE), it is 'timely for us to rethink, reconceptualise and consider alternative approaches to the (uncertain) future of effective teacher education' (MacPhail, 2020: 3). And whilst our futures may still be uncertain, it is hard to think of turning our backs on the creativity and extensive learning opportunities which technology-enhanced practices have brought to ITE.

I argued above that the quality and the creativity of some of the alternative provision during the pandemic has strengthened previous challenges to the proposition that increased practicum time straightforwardly means increased teacher quality. The best of that

alternative provision has illustrated the many ways in which student teachers can learn about practice without necessarily being in the conventional environment of bricks-and-mortar classrooms. It has also underlined the benefits of new types of online reflection and experimentation, occurring in different, less pressurised and controlled spaces than those of a conventional school practicum. Part of learning in and through the impact of the pandemic means, then, recognising that technology now has the potential to generate innovative and creative learning experiences in online worlds. We should now take maximum advantage of that potential to strengthen our ITE system and the quality of the new teachers it generates.

This article, and the research which it informs it, could not have been written without my colleague, Dr Warren Kidd. My sincere thanks go to him for all his work and inspiration. ■

REFERENCES

Department for Education (DfE) (2020) 'Guidance: Coronavirus (COVID-19): initial teacher training (ITT)' [Online] Available at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-initial-teacher-training-itt/coronavirus-covid-19-initial-teacher-training-itt#itt-guidance-overview

Ferdig, R., Baumgartner, E., Hartshorne, R., Kaplan-Rakowski, R. and Mouza, C. (eds) (2020) Teaching, Technology and Teacher Education during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Stories from the Field. *Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education (AACE)* [Online] Available at: www.learntechlib.org/p/216903/

Kidd W. (2020a) 'The rise of the flexible and remote teacher: a primary school's response to the Covid-19 context in London', [Blog post] Available at: www.bera.ac.uk/blog/the-rise-of-the-flexible-and-remote-teacher-a-primary-schools-response-to-the-covid-19-context-in-london

Kidd W. (2020b) 'Agility, return and recovery: our new Covid context for schooling and teacher education?' [Blog post] Available at www.bera.ac.uk/blog/agility-return-and-recovery-our-new-covid-context-for-schooling-and-teacher-education

Kidd, W. and Murray, J. (2020) 'The Covid-19 pandemic and its effects on teacher education in England: how teacher educators moved practicum learning online', *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 43(4), 542–58. doi: 10.1080/02619768.2020.1820480

la Velle, L., Newman, S., Montgomery, C. and Hyatt, D. (2020) 'Initial teacher education in England and the Covid-19 pandemic: challenges and opportunities', *Journal of Education for Teaching,* doi: 10.1080/02607476.2020.1803051

MacPhail, A. (2020) 'Time to really re-envisage teacher education, *Research in Teacher Education*, 10(1), 52–6

Murphy M. (2020) 'COVID-19 and emergency eLearning: consequences of the securitization of higher education for post-pandemic pedagogy', *Contemporary Security Policy,* 41(3), 492–505. doi: 10.1080/13523260.2020.1761749