

Follow-up Meeting 2 with Participant 6

CH: Ya. I suddenly realized it was a while ago that I observed, because it was a big storm that day.

P6: Yes. It was hectic. It was absolutely hectic. It was scary. It was that day we had like such damage everywhere and there I was sitting on my [webinar] trying to act all calm and I was watching, uh, it looked like the house was going to blow away and ya, the trees were almost touching the roof and ya. Anyhow. Ya. And yet you just carry on.

CH: Like I was about to, you were right at the end of your session and I was just watching the people say goodbye and I was about to type you an email and then next thing, my lamp next to me, which is on at the moment, started to flicker and, and the house was plunged into darkness, but this lamp kept flickering near me like there was an evil spirit possessed in this room.

P6: No. Oh no!

CH: I literally just hit the, the, the switch to switch it off. But the whole house was in complete darkness. Um, and ya, that transformer had blown. So, I didn't even think we would have electricity back for the next few days. But ya, [our area] was lucky that they got it restored. Um, was almost like we had had load-shedding two hours later, but it wasn't, it was that transformer.

P6: But you didn't get hit, and you didn't see, you know, people were talking about that big glow in the sky, and they could see...

CH: No, because I was listening to you! <Laugh>.

P6: <Laugh>. Thanks Chantal. Unlike my students. Thanks.

CH: I missed all the drama that was going on <laugh>.

P6: Oh gosh.

CH: But anyway, so, so there you, I knew you had a storm and then I couldn't work out if there was a storm above us because I had my headphones on. If the storm, I was hearing was your storm or if the storm was actually [outside]. You know when you are trying to work out is this our storm now? And that was about it. That was my level of knowledge of what was going. But anyway. Okay. So [Jade], what, there were one or two questions that, um, we didn't chat about in the first, um, follow-up...

P6: Yes.

CH: ...that I am going to cover. But I am also going to revisit some of the questions and unpack them a little bit more. Um, and obviously what was lovely to see was that the second observation, you had quite a few students who joined that, um, NSC. Or was it NSC?

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P6: Ya. NSS, they call it...it's an acronym, it's the National Support Session. Ya, ya.

CH: Yes, yes. So, there were quite a few students who had joined that session, um, which I know was always a worry in the online space of how many, um, students would be joining at a particular point considering the challenges that we've, we have literally found ourselves in this year. So [Jade], when, when answering these questions, I want you to not just respond with this year because this year has been a particular year where we had such a system issue that has affected the learning environment for our students with students not being able to necessarily log into [the institution's online platform]. And when they have joined, it has been much later. We have definitely seen a, a drop in engagement in the online space.

P6: Yes.

CH: So don't just refer to this year. I think bring your experience of the past few years that you have been in the online space, and I mean, you have been in a fortunate position that you, you have been an online tutor, um, for a fair length of time if we look at most of our online tutors.

P6: Okay.

CH: Would that be accurate?

P6: Ya, 100%.

CH: Okay. So, you spoke about the role of an online lecturer, the primary responsibility. Um, you mentioned that one of the aspects is to be a cheerleader, um, and it is to provide that reassurance and that constant guidance to the students. And you spoke about the importance of consistency that...

P6: Yes.

CH: ...um, you, you have regular points where you will have the same time where you communicate with the students so that there is a form of familiarity and, and...

P6: Yes.

CH: ...um, they are at ease. Is there anything else that you want to add from a cheerleader perspective, um, linked with the reassurance and guidance that you want to unpack in a little bit more detail? Or do you think that sums it up nicely?

P6: I don't know, I don't know, other than, other than maybe it is stating the obvious, but I think it is important and that is that the turnaround time within which you respond to students. You know, we've got a, we have got a 40, supposedly we have got a 48-hour turnaround time specifically for emails. And, as I said to you in my previous session, um, besides weekend, because then that's, you know, once I shut down my computer on a

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late Friday afternoon, then I really don't, you know, I try and keep that time for family time. Um, but I, as I say, I will always, whether it is my face-to-face students or the distance students, I will sit early in the morning and I will answer emails and it is the last thing I will do before I finish my day. Because I think that the sooner you respond, um, it helps build the relationship and it, it lends itself to the issue of consistency as well too. And although it is asynchronous in terms of communication, they know at any time they are not going to sit there for, you know, the next 48 hours. I mean, even 48 hours is a short period of time. But if you have got a student that is busy working on assignment or they are feeling anxious because you know, this is a new platform for them, et cetera, et cetera, I feel the sooner you respond, it reassures them. Um, and then they tend to engage more. Um, ya. I do find that because they, they, in their emails, they comment, "Thank you". Uh, you know, sometimes it is directly and sometimes it is indirectly. "Thank you so much for your quick response." It is almost like in a way they can understand that it was a sense of urgency for them, even if it isn't, but for them it was a sense of urgency that, you know, that they got the clarity or they got the guidance or they got the answer or I find definitely, definitely. Um, and, and just in, you know, I mean, you have been around for a long time, and we could talk for hours about the SETs. You know, they brought in SETs to the distance space for the first time last year.

CH: Okay.

P6: And, um, I mean, there are just so many reasons why I think SETs are flawed, but I mean, it's this, it is a tool that we do have. And that was one of the things that, um, came up where students had mentioned and, and positively so in my SETs, that I was quick to respond. And, but I mean, besides that, that aside, you can see it in their response when they answer your email because I will always finish my email off, um, just my wording. Uh, I try and keep the tone, you know, we, we know this whole issue of going online, one has to be so careful that it's, you have still got to keep a formal tone, but you want to be approachable too. And I will always try to end up with the line, like, um, "I hope this is the information you needed", or "Does this, does this answer the question that you have? Please let me know". So, I don't just like, you know, give them, attach whatever they need or answer. I, you know, I invite a response and they normally do, which Ya, which is, which is great. So, I think speed, speed of response is important.

CH: So, speed of response and also the manner in which you respond.

P6: Yes. Yes. I think we mentioned before. For me, Chantal, tone is everything. Tone is so important, and people forget about, um, how tone comes across even subtly in an email... Um, your choice of wording. And you know, I remember when we first, I mean, I know this is common sense, but I remember when we first brought out that [communication] module when we first launched the BA all those years ago and when one of the, um, textbooks we had with going online and the difference between writing for online and writing for an online audience and writing for an audience that is reading and, and one of the tips they gave, and it seemed so silly at the time, but if you, if your state of mind is bad when you type an email, unconsciously it comes through. Um, so ya, I always, and you know, sometimes I just want to throttle the student because they will send an

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email and I think, well, like, "Have you not gone on to [the online platform]? Have you not seen my last seven announcements? Have you not listened to the recordings? Have you not seen the slides that I have uploaded?" And you know, I say to myself "Okay, calm down. Don't," you know, "don't let that irritation come in." And it's just, and word choice to me is so important. Um, so ya, I, I, I all of that, I mean, it's not trying, I am not trying to make a mountain out of a molehill, but it is as subtle as that because these are all the touchpoints with those students.

CH: Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

P6: Um, the touchpoints that they have with you. And as I mentioned to you, I, I don't, I don't, I don't like to be on a student WhatsApp group, but I always have that, uh, sort of representative on WhatsApp as well. So, there is that. But then when they, you know, when they open themselves up and ask a question to a degree, and sometimes they make themselves vulnerable. They say, "Look, I'm really struggling with this platform. I'm not good at technology, or I, this is the first time I have studied in 20 years, um, and I'm really not getting X, Y, and Z." Um, ya, they make themselves vulnerable. So, I think tone and frequency I think is very important in my opinion.

CH: Okay.

P6: And, and as I said to you in our previous discussion, um, all these years being in, uh, being in education and tertiary education and actually lecturing, I mean, my path was an industrial psych route. I came from the training and development side. You can't get this right Chantal if you don't have relationships. And for online, it is different because you don't have those students in front of you. You don't, you know, that banter, as I said to you before, I rely on that, um, to, to create that environment, um, that is a safe space and that space where they will share and interact. And it is a different thing with online because now you don't, um, ya, you don't have the same skill set. So ya. Answer quickly, tone of voice, and then you will see in my [webinars] too, I have the benefit when you have students for a period of time that you can have bit at that banter and you, you start to hear a little bit about their lives. And I, I will bring that in just so that it, you know, encourages them to, to break down those walls to a degree. But it's a fine line as well too because, um, I had a student this week who was messaging me from that same group of students that you observed. And, um, she wanted a one-on-one with me online to get her ready for the exam. Now we don't do that for distance. We, we don't do that. We have that national support session leading up to the exam. So, um, I referred her back to all the resources. I had created a revision folder with past papers. I referred her back to the various recordings, and my communication, instructing them what to do to get ready for the take-home exam format, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. And, um, ya, the students still didn't get the fact that, you know, this is, this is what she wanted. So eventually I had to refer her to [Jana], who is the Programme Manager, and then just for [Jana] to reinforce that. Because as much as I wanted to help her, if I do that for that one student, I have got to do it for everybody. And that just creates a huge problem in terms of the expectations. So, you, you also have to draw the line as well too, as much as you want to help. Um, and it is so much easier. I mean, like yesterday between meridian hour

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(12h and 13h), I was up in my venue helping students with last minute issues for their POE. And it wasn't even, you know, it wasn't even our lecture, but I said, "Okay guys, I will make myself available. My lecture starts at 13h. There shouldn't be anyone in the venue. Come up. And if you have got anything you need- last minute questions... But it is easy to do that in the face-to-face format. You can't do that in the online format. So ya, you have got to keep the line between, you know, you can't cross that line.

CH: So, if I just had to sum up, like, you know, when we looking at elements that design elements when creating an online learning experience, relationships is still of paramount importance. It is just a different skill-set that one needs in the online space. Because you actually mentioned it's, it is a skill-set that one acquires.

P6: Definitely.

CH: So, through the, through the regular interaction with your students, with the form of banter and humor, you are trying to personalize that space as much as you can without overstepping a fine line between these are the expectations, this is what I need from you, um, and, and we are going to navigate the space together.

P6: One hundred percent. Yes. one hundred percent and then something small like this. You know, I mean, if you were to sit down and someone was to ask you the questions you are asking me and you think back on your last 14 years here of lecturing, there are all these little informal tools that we use. So if something random, like the first ICE task that I set, if the students are brand new in distance, and I ask them to, to compose a professional profile of themselves, just one page, just tell me a bit about, um, and I state in the ICE task if you are straight out of school, then tell me about your schooling background, if you're working, et cetera, et cetera. Give me some insights into you personally and professionally, just one page. And then I will, I literally sit down and I'll, I will go through those tasks, and I will just get an idea of where these people are at because I think that is so, so important. And for them, I tell them, I say to them listen, the only thing I expect for this task is that, uh, you keep it to a page. You keep, you know, you use a formal academic writing style, um, but yet structure, it is completely carte blanche. It is up to you. And I said, and I say to them, listen, just to get to know you a little bit better before we start. And I mean, gee whiz, the things that I read and, you know, some people, the struggles that they have gone through and, you know, some have got high profile jobs, some are going through hectic times in their lives. And it just gives a better insight into ya, who, who your, who your students are at the end of the day. I think that I think that is so, so important. Just understanding who they are, trying to understand, having some kind of a base understanding.

CH: And, and do you use, so is this something you have built into your online sessions, your, your different modules over the year...?

P6: Yes.

CH: ...an informal way of gathering that information?

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P6: Yes, definitely. I do it. As I say, when I get introduced to students for the first time if I haven't had online, then I do it. Um, and then those little bits of information, I mean, I don't give them away in [webinars], but I mean, students will, um, because of that bit of insight then they will, you know, those first five minutes while you are waiting for the [online lecture] to start, there will be a bit of, uh, exchange amongst each other specifically if they have been, uh, you know, like first semester, second semester, first-year or second-year. And then we will, you know, you know a bit about what is going on in their lives and what country they are in. Because some of them are overseas and you know, some of them have got kids and then they will message you and say, this has happened in their lives. So, I will bring it up, but I won't obviously give away personal information, but I will bring it up and say, how is it going? Or, you know, we had the one student that has, was in that, that hurricane that hit in the states. I mean, she's, she's studying across there. And, um, ya. So, it it does, it does help. It, it really does help.

CH: And [Jade], have you ever in your, um, modules, looked at students sharing information to each other like that on an informal um...?

P6: They do. They...

CH: Okay.

P6: ...they do. When I, when I've... With distance, um, like I said to you, it's, it is very different because they do most of that on their, on their WhatsApp group, to be honest. Um, they'll, they will chat, they will have like, you know, exchange pleasantries, and greet each other, whatever in the session. I have tried the whole issue of splitting the groups like we do on, on [the webinar] and giving them a task. Um, but I just find it is so hard because we still have, the majority of those students are in those [webinars], they just want to know, what do I need to do for assignment one? What do I need to do to stay on track? Where do I find this- X, Y, and Z? Um, predominantly that, and, and, and you can see that they, they lose interest. You can see it doesn't have the same effect as the face-to-face where you have got more of a relationship there. You have got more time with them. Um, and they are far more keen. These students, ya, they, they have a lot of dynamics going on in their lives and um, ya, if you get them to the [webinar], you are very fortunate. And then when they are there, you just, you, you are drilling in the basics and, and the core areas to keep them on track. So ya, it's, it's, it is very different environments. But they do that in their WhatsApp group, that I do know.

CH: Okay.

P6: That I do know.

CH: Okay. And then, um, we spoke about in the last follow-up about certain behaviors, or actually it's a, it is a question I don't think I asked you, but you have touched on it just in your response. So when we are looking for certain behaviors from the students to acquire the necessary skill-sets, you, you have alluded to the fact, um, in your earlier response now, that by setting boundaries with the students- and it would have been so easy to have

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just succumbed and done a one-on-one with the student, but you know, you couldn't- that your expectation is that the student needs to be resourceful. And, and that was the challenge you were, you were facing with that particular student who didn't seem to get that these are your resources, you need to go and follow up with, with the slides and, and whatever you have placed on [the online platform] for them. So, so is that a certain behavior that you look for in your students? That they are resourceful before we can move on and develop, you know, certain skill-sets? And the skill-sets that you were mentioning was the, the importance in navigating technology, the element of resilience, um, the focus on the academic writing because we spoke a little bit, I think on...

P6: Yes

CH: ...the quality of their academic writing and the challenges there. Um, are those the type of behaviors or what, what are some other behaviors that you are looking for in your students?

P6: I think, you know, it, it is also that distance has been running now for six years. And so I can only speak from the last six years. As I mentioned to you in the last session, the profile has changed since Covid. Prior to Covid, it was career-people, people who are working, older, the profile, the demographic. Now we have noticed, um, and I think it is post-Covid, there are a lot more, you know, students have switched across, come across from, uh, campus-level face-to-face and they have gone online for financial reasons or because of the whole Covid context. So now we are sitting with a situation where you have got, um, the adults, if I can say that- your more mature career-oriented people who are self-driven versus this, I would say it's probably my, I mean, I am really thumb sucking here, I wouldn't say it's 50-50. I probably would say it is 60-40 or 70-30 at the moment.

CH: Okay.

P6: Um, and they are, the problem is that they, that they are like the majority of the students that we have on campus, that they have that whole expectant culture, you know, that they expect. So, it is trying to find the happy medium and with distance, we don't have the luxury even if we wanted to, which we are not allowed to, to cater to those expectant 30 percenters who want you to do everything for them. So, um, I would say yes, developing the skill-set would be there, but that would be secondary. Primarily would be the fact that you are restricted by the nature of the distance platform and the processes and policies in place that it has got to be learner-led at the end of the day. And that you have got to, you know, you have got to keep them on track and say, listen, I am providing the resources. I am here to help you, uh, support you through the process, coordinate the process, but you must understand bottom line you are responsible for accessing the sources, the resources. That, that I would say is primarily because of the nature of the platform and the policies in place. And then obviously that is the first thing we, we push or prioritize then. And the secondary element would be definitely, I mean, you hit on the critical writing skills. Like for the second years I have got now, um, the ask there, they have got the 2,500, 2,600 word essays and they get given websites and case studies and there is a lot of research and critical thinking. So yes, we are trying to drive them to those

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higher-order critical thinking, um, dimensions. But it, it is taking time. And it's also, it's, it's a, it is a new area for me personally because ya, the students have, they do have to grow, they do have to develop that skill set. Um, but we have now got this complication of the mixture of the demographics. And I, I can note it even just, you know, it is something small, like the way that they compile emails. You know, they... You know what I'm talking about. I mean, and they, they really don't understand that they are actually being rude, or they are actually, their tone is wrong or the request is ridiculous. Uh, whereas you, you will see it in the more mature, uh, students that are working and that are a little bit further up the career chain and they will, you know, ask in a different way and they won't be as expect, as expectant. So for me, that is me this year. That is, I would say the last two years, that has been the biggest challenge in distance- is that the, the dynamic in terms of the, um, the profile has changed. 100%. The demographics are different.

CH: Yes. So to go back to, um, the behaviors then that you are looking in your students, ...

P6: Yes.

CH: if you have to define the behaviors that you expect to see in your students, it would be a certain level of maturity?

P6: Maturity, definitely maturity. But, uh, I think because they have got to take responsibility. They are studying, they are studying via the distance medium. Um, this is not, you know, this is, it is a very different dynamic than if they were studying full-time. Um, and we have such limited time when we do have our [webinars], um, that we need to address core issues. But that, that they, they need to understand that they have chosen this platform and what comes with the platform. Um, and to set up the expectations so we, we follow it through. Because you know, that same example, um, with that lecture who wanted the one-on-one when [Jana] ended up phoning her and talking to her. Two of the other OTs had done exactly that. They had helped her one-on-one. And now this causes a huge problem. And they were doing it out of the goodness of their hearts. But this causes a problem now because now it upsets the whole, whole issue of the expectation. And it causes problems for all the other OTs now because now [Jade] becomes a very unhelpful OT because now [Jade] doesn't want to help with the one-on-one. And I say to my students, please do not- same as we do on campus- do not send me an email asking me to look at your rough draft. I am not. Policy doesn't permit me to do it, but if I do it for you, then I have got to, got to basically make, extend that to every single person in the class. Um, and the same thing that I try to explain for that student. If I do this for you, policy doesn't, doesn't allow me number one but number two, if I do it for you, I have got to allow every one of the 43 students to have an hour with me as well. Um, and it just, it is not the way that this platform works. So yes, it is, I would say responsibility, 100%. Maturity, yes. But also, that they are clear on the fact that the, that they have entered into this contract and that they, that is their role. What is my role? And what is their role at the end of the day? And it is, you know, it, they are studying via a distance medium, um, which some of them do on occasion forget. And for me, as I can see, I am generalizing now, but those youngsters, I can see that whole, you know, the

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whole millennial generation, Zed Z coming in where just the -you will get an email. It won't even be "Hello", whatever, just one line "I can't find X, Y, and Z". But yet the more mature students will say, "Hi [Jade], how are you? Just looking for this one X, Y, and Z. I don't know if I am looking in the wrong place, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." I mean, you know, with our students. And then it's not that they are being rude, they just don't realize that you just... They don't realize, they don't realize that...

CH: I have to smile, [Jade], because you have made me think of my one student literally last week who emailed me. So, he is querying his result because he has got a condoned pass. But it is sitting obviously at 49%. So, there is no way I could actually give him that 50, you know, that the one where you are glad that it's condoned, but the, but you just can't, you can't...

P6: Yes. Ethically, ethically you can't. You can't find the mark entity. It's not right.

CH: Ya. So, he emailed me, but he put the whole message in the subject line, <laugh>.

P6: <Laugh>, yes.

CH: And I had to guess who the student is in the body. And I had to say to him, please, could you resend your email and place your message that you did so kindly in your subject line in the body so I could actually read the whole thing <laugh>.

P6: And how did he respond? I am serious.

CH: And he wasn't, he wasn't being rude. No, he had just apologized. He was, he was polite. "Sorry ma'am." You know, and <laugh>, he wasn't it, it just was... And my module is, you know, academic literacy for those students. I wanted to go <laugh> clearly this is the reason why you didn't get the 50%. No...

P6: <Laugh> No, I know. I know., And my line is again, I have got to like stop myself and grit my teeth and I am going to answer and I say, "Sorry, I", you, um, "I'm struggling to understand your request. Please can you just give me a bit more detail?" Meanwhile, hello, you can't give me one line. Um, ya. And then they are like, "Oh". Then they, then they will respond, and they say, "Oh sorry, uh, I meant to blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah". But ya, they just, they don't understand how they come across. They, they really, really, really don't. Um, ya.

CH: Okay. So, I have got...

P6: That's definitely a challenge. That is a challenge.

CH: ...<laugh>...that is a challenge. Um, I have got down for the behaviors, obviously the certain level of maturity, but responsibility being, um, at the forefront and the idea that they need to be resourceful and independent learner. So, a self, so not self-directed - I haven't got that from you that they need to be self-directed...

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P6: No.

CH: ...because that's still, they are still developing, but more that they can work independently in order to retrieve what they need to do. Um, the resilience factor, how, you know, you have mentioned that that is important, that the students are resilient. Is there anything that you do to help students become resilient? Or is the expectation they already should have that resilience?

P6: Well, the expectation, excuse me, and because, because they are, they are distant students, is that they should, they should have the resilience by the nature of the platform they have chosen to study via. However, however, I would say that the only way, and, and I mean this is also very much a learning curve for me, the only way that you can encourage resilience is everything that we have discussed about before. And it is just, I think it is a continuous reinforcement of what they should be doing to keep them on track. So that is the only way one can do it with distance is just to ensure that they, the resilience comes through the fact that they know where they should be going. They can see... They have got the map, uh, at, at the end of the day. And to me that does encourage resilience because if you know where you need to go... There must be nothing worse and I always say to students, um, there must be nothing worse sitting at home at two o'clock in the morning working on an assignment and you don't know what you are supposed to be doing. It is one thing if you are working on that assignment to two o'clock in the morning and you are finding it difficult and you are finding it long and you are getting tired. But if you are sitting there at two o'clock in the morning, you don't know what you should be doing. It is a very lonely feeling to be working at two o'clock in the morning as it is, which many of them do. Um, but at least if you are feeling all the stresses and strains, but you know what you should be doing, that is a very different kind of pressure then feeling completely in the woods, um, and having no clue as to where you should be going. So, for me, I think the... As a, as an online tutor, definitely as I said, to the cheerleading role. Um, but the resilience comes in. But also making them, keeping them on track and facilitation. I mean [Jennifer], all those years ago, and I often remind her, you know, we, in these online sessions, we are not supposed to lecture, we are facilitators. So, we facilitate processes. We draw the attention to key concepts, um, where they should be, keep them on track. We facilitate the entire process because they are sitting somewhere across the country, we don't know their circumstances, their time is limited, their resources are limited. So, we are supposed to facilitate that. So ya, I don't know if that answers your question a bit.

CH: No, it certainly does. And I think from a, you know, one of the questions I was going to ask you, and um, I will still ask it, but it is the design element. You know, things that you, when you are trying to create these engaging learning experiences for your students, you have mentioned the facilitation, but you have also mentioned then providing them with a sense of direction of where they should be. And there is the constant reinforcement through regular check-ins, almost.

P6: 100%. 100%. And, and as I said, and they, and you know what, all of this we can, and, and we can bring in the terminology and the acronyms, and we can, you know, speak

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about it from a more sophisticated level, but I am trying to break it down to the most basic element. And it is that, that those, as I said to you, those weekly messages, and I say, "Right on a Monday", uh, if you speak about the design, on a Monday, right, "Good morning, how was your weekend? Blah, blah blah, blah. We in week...", Because it's a 16-week cycle. "So, we are in week eight. At this stage, uh, from an overall academic perspective, um, you should be trying to ensure that you are busy with X, Y, and Z. This, this will ultimately lead you up to what you need to know for assignment one. Blah, blah, blah, blah. Don't forget three ICE tasks are up at this stage. Please ensure that you are working on those ICE tasks. Um, and then saying right here is a link, please access this link during the course of the week, this is going to help you with your, uh, referencing. It is also going to help you with an understanding of the outline of the assignments." So, Monday, that's Monday morning. Then Friday, as I said, then I message them on Friday. Then Friday will be "Right guys, hope you had a good week, blah blah. I hope you have achieved X, Y, and Z with the weekend coming up, um, in between, uh, the rugby and the kids. I hope you are going to dedicate some time because you know from next week, we are drilling down to assignment two blah blah blah, blah, blah." So just to try and simplify it. So ya, keeping them on track and the consistency. Uh, it might not sound sophisticated, but that is what is required for this particular structure in terms of the learning, um, with regards to, to distance. And you know, they, they appreciate that because we, we tend to, as I said just now, we tend to forget that, you know, these, they can't lean over and ask the classmate, they can't ask someone at work. Some of them have never ever studied before or we don't even know the... I mean the stories that I hear besides load-shedding. Some of the students, you know, policy-wise we are not allowed to and they have stopped it now, but some students will, I don't know, they will not even have data or they will not even have a laptop to finish their assignment on. Um, so ICE tasks, we can use our discretion. I had a similar... I had a student a few weeks ago when we were getting up to the ICE task deadline, she said, "Please [Jade], um, I haven't got access to a laptop for this last task. If I draw it up very neatly and whatever, will you accept it?" I said, "Yes, I will." I said, "but understand I can't use my discretion for the assignments. But yes I will et cetera, et cetera." So ya. Um, I know it is very long-winded what I am saying, but I am just trying to think of everything and trying to cram it in as we speak. But ya, I think the simple thing Chantal, um, and going and, and you going into your environment now with training and development, for me, um, ya, it's always, it is the basic, the basic elements that work the best no matter how you dress it up. Um, ya, consistency and, and and dealing with the base elements. To me that gets through to human beings each and every time. And that is why I studied Industrial Psych. I mean, I always said to students that you should study what ultimately find where your passion is. And for me it's, it is trying to get through to the person and bring the best out of the person.

CH: And, you know, you keep saying like, I am going to just keep it simple, but that is what we, you know...if, if, if I look at what, what we are trying to establish here, is what are the things that you need to build into your learning experiences, which are simple for any lecturer if they are starting their journey or if they have been years lecturing, these are the elements that are needed. And it is the simplicity of knowing that we just need to reassure the students by telling them where they should be. So, I am not looking for, you know, something profound. It is what are those key things that is going to support those

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learning experiences so that we can extend the students to develop those writing skills that might be lacking. Or developing more resilience in them to hold it, you know, to, to endure slightly longer in an online space that maybe that they may find unsettling or a little bit daunting because they are not used to navigating technology like some others. So, anything you share and you going, "It sounds so simple", for me is the essence of what we are trying to establish here. If that makes sense?

P6: Well, it is good, good to know. Because it comes from, um, ya, it's, it is just a reality of of what it, of what it is. And I must say, um, I have been so privileged when, when we started with the distance space to at least have those few years behind me when we went online with Covid because ya, it just gave me some insight. Insight because it is all the same skills, we use day-to-day, but it is to translate that into the distance space. And that is a whole mindset change. Uh, ya, I don't know, some people seem to find it very hard. For me, I don't find the mind-set change hard, I just find, um, it is a trial and error of what works and what doesn't work. But then to remember you are still dealing with people, but how does that translate? Which I am sure is what your study is all about. How does that translate and what does that look like in the distance space?

CH: Um, ya, because we know you can't take a normal face-to-face lecture and just transpose it into the online space. There, there has to be some variations of how you handled it. So the, the concepts might be similar. So, we might still be thinking, well I need a relationship with my students, but how that translates in an online space is quite different to the face-to-face. Because we saw the, the lecturers really battle with not, like, I am looking at the grey screen and I know that you have got, um, problems with using your video, but that can be quite unsettling for...

P6: 100% correct.

CH: ... lecturers, seeing these grey faces, a sea of grey screens instead of the people and they can't read the body language. I mean, that, that is something that is coming through in lots of discussions. You know, when we have done peer reviews, when we have worked with them during the, with Covid, that was the probably the most unsettling aspect for a lot of the lecturers was "I felt so disconnected." Which allows them to experience what our students are feeling- that disconnected -when you are in distance.

P6: Yes. And you know, it's, it is amazing. You are learning all the time. I had- today is my actual last lecture on campus. But I had an online session with the second years, um, on Tuesday afternoon. And um, with that particular group that I have got, um, you have got some students who will never turn, you know, the ones that will never turn their mic on. And um, I do. I mean I have got this touchscreen computer of mine now that I am talking to you on today and last time. I have also got a desktop at home, where the camera is working. But this touchscreen is amazing. I mean, I mark with the stylist, whatever have you. But the, this computer is so finicky and now as I said, the antivirus, and I have got a problem with my camera, and we still can't work it out. And um, I had a quote, and the guy wants to charge me R7,000 just to sort it out.

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CH: Sjoel! <expression of shock>.

P6: I said to him "Listen, no, it is not going to happen now." But anyhow, the point I am trying to make is, is that on Tuesday I had this particular group and those students that will never turn their mic on, I have got a strategy now where I say, "Right, okay, I'm giving you guys five minutes and I want you all to type in the text box for me. What is your understanding of concept X? And we are going to wait till everyone has given a response and then we are going to discuss it." Um, and then as they, as they type, I make comments. I say, "Sjoel, that's great." I will type and go, "That is great. I never thought of it that way" or "I like the way you expressed X" and it seems to egg them on. And then next thing I know then they are all typing. Um, and that is the way that I try and include those that will not, are not brave enough to turn the mic on. Just like the ones that we have in class that want to hog and have got their hand up and want to discuss everything but what we are talking about in class. um, that is how I have included those students and that I'm, I am trying that in distance. It is working not as great as it works with, with full-time. Um, but I will not sit there with students who, like you say, sit there for a whole 40 minutes for one session and 40 minutes or 50 minutes of the next session and do nothing. I am going to find a way to engage them. So that to me does work. And if you make, you make subtle comments, then they do, they start, they feel like typing in the textbox is safer because I don't know whether it is a generational thing because that is what they are used to, only texting and not talking and I don't know.

CH: Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

P6: I know my [child], my [child] said to me the other day, he was trying to get a hold of his friend at school and they were doing something. I said, "Just phone him. Just phone [Mike]." "No, we only phone each other for emergencies." I'm like waiting for him to answer his WhatsApp. I am like, this morning he has now got his driver's license, which is just going to drive me to to drink. Um, and he was picking up and writing-they had Afrikaans, their Matric finals today, Afrikaans- and he was picking his friend up from home and I am like, "Just phone him and tell him there was an accident on the freeway. Tell you are coming early." He says, "No mom, I will only phone if it is an emergency. We text."

CH: Well, that is an emergency! <Laugh>.

P6: I know. So ya, that seems to be working a bit more to try and engage students if we if we get them. Ya. To type in the text box and um, they seem to be happy there, but they won't switch their mics on.

CH: It is more than just typing in the text box. So, you know, you've, you have spoken to a strategy that has helped engage students more, through just encouraging them by reaffirming what they are typing. So, I like this idea- it would have been interesting to hear a little bit more- you, you are prompting the students to engage even more in a positive manner. So instead of going, "And I don't understand what you mean by that", it is the way it is said where it is encouraging, reassuring and the student... You almost focusing

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on developing the confidence in students. Like "You are on the right track. Let's see if you can take this a bit further." To me, you are prompting through encouragement.

P6: No, definitely. I mean we've had; we have had weird and wonderful things. I had the one student, the one year, last year, last year's first-year BA and I don't know, something happened in the one session and he was playing music and he had his mic on, and before I muted his mic, I said to him, "Yoy, I really like that. Who is that?" So then at the start of every [webinar] before it started, he would come online early, and he would play music <laugh>. And everyone would comment on the music, and they would say, "So-in-so have you heard this?" So that would become our lecture, you know, before the first five, 10 minutes people would start logging on and listening to his music and then they would all comment and chat about it. And it was just such an amazing dynamic. It was completely organic. It happened by default, but it is amazing the things that work and that don't work.

CH: But it was about a connection. So, you had established...

P6: Ya.

CH: ...a connection that that's...

P6: 100%.

CH: ...it was one of your touchpoints that you mentioned.

P6: <Laugh>, yes.

CH: Even though it was unintentional, it became... <Laugh>.

P6: Yes. Ya.

CH: Um, and then just I want to unpack a little bit of those graduate attributes. So, we've, we have spoken on design elements, but now just going back to some of the graduate attributes that you had spoken to in the last follow-up, you spoke to, um, the level of writing and trying to get them to improve their academic writing.

P6: Yes.

CH: Uh, the, the fears that some of the older students have with navigating technology and, and, um, so the ease in which they are navigating, and then the resilience element, which we've, we have touched on a bit today as well. How do you support these graduate attributes in your creation of online learning experiences?

P6: Okay. With regards to, if we are going to be specific, with regards to the academic writing, that is a big issue. And I mean we face that on campus-level as well too. It is something which is a huge problem. The ability of these students to write from in a formal, um, way. And what I, what I do with the students on a distance space is that we have

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now, life has become so much better since we now have an online writing center. Okay. Which, um, and I know we've also been, had the online writing center on this campus and those students that have attended, they have, which are very few, but...

CH: Very few.

P6: ...very successful. Um, it is very few. So, I am driving them to the online writing center. Um, and now they have got a full-time librarian who is now helping there as well too. Um, what, so, so essentially to answer your question, I drive them to the online writing center and then I give them as much feedback as I can on the assignment submissions. Okay. I customize the rubric, the marking rubric, and then, um, for that sort of element. And then I give them a nice, well, few paragraphs on the front page of their submission telling them, you know, for instance, "Flow", uh, "the ability to reinforce their argument", et cetera, et cetera. So, I try and I try with that aspect, I try and give them personalized feedback as much as I can by structuring the rubric accordingly and giving them personal feedback. But now what is also, um, what has also, uh, happened is that with getting PMs onboard now, so now we have got [Jana], and I am sure you know [Jana], I mean she was [...] , she is now the PM for [...] on distance. And what is great now is that we are getting reinforcements in that she is running, uh, academic writing sessions. So, we can now send [the students] the links and the recordings as well too. So, we are starting to get support there. Um, and so even if the students don't attend, we send out the recordings thereafter. So ya, the distance, you are limited to what you can do, but that is what we've been been doing. And um, [Jana] actually ran one this week again. Um, I am still waiting for the recording to come out to send through to my students, but I would be interested to see what the attendance is like. She ran one a lot earlier between assignment one and assignment two, and then she ran one this week. So, we are starting to get the resources that we can refer them to. Because it is limited what a person can do, um, in an online space in terms of academic writing. You can even give students examples, you can give them feedback, but to practice that skill, um, ya, I think it is the same challenge we face on campus. Sjoie. Ya.

CH: If we could have the magical formula, we would be selling it.

P6: I promise you, we would be selling it. I promise you. I tell you. But I must say it seemed, I don't know what is working, I don't know whether it is the feedback. The feedback on the assignments must help because I can honestly say, because [Jana] actually asked me this question. We have got a group that have joined, well, they have joined distance for the first time this semester, so they are the out-of-sync batch, and their results weren't great for assignment one-um, the essay. So [Jana] was asking me when she looked at the stats and she said, "Why are they so out-of-sync with all the other first, uh, first-year groups." So, I said, "Because they have only done assignment one and they are yet to submit assignment two. Let's wait until we see two." Because then we will see whether they have benefited from the feedback of one. And I can tell you that there was across the board an improvement in the academic writing for assignment two. I am not saying it is completely due to my feedback. But it is definitely throughout the semester, the reinforcement from all their OTs for various modules and also understanding what is

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required, there is a huge improvement. And specifically for the students that were flagged, I mean, it's quite scary, I don't know how they passed matric. I don't know how they are passing these kids and all these people, to be honest with you. I mean, I know you must ask yourself that question too, how they...? I mean, my [child] is writing Matric English. He wrote this week. I mean, if I look at what the IEB, if I look at their paper, I must have a heart failure when I look at what they have to write. Um, so ya, there is a definite improvement, which means that between assignment one and assignment two, the feedback that they are getting, um, for all their modules between that period, um, is definitely coming through. Or maybe they have just realized, uh, that they, that they are actually studying in a formal environment, um, and they have got to pull up their, up their game. I don't know. But there is a definite, they do, they do... Feedback, personalized feedback does definitely assist. And that personalizing a rubric as well too, where they can actually go and see the mark that they achieved and link it back to the criteria. So that is the one thing. Ya. That I am definitely would emphasize. Sorry, then what's the other thing you were also asking, the other element you were asking...?

CH: Ease in navigating technology. But I think we unpacked that quite a bit. Um, I think you were saying that you, it is important to have, uh, organized where all the information is. That it was consistent...

P6: One hundred percent.

CH: Okay, so I remember you, you unpacked that.

P6: One hundred percent. Like with all their, like something very simple, like with all their [webinars], I create a folder under more resources with all the- I call it a master link. I mean, I could just open the course room, but they struggle with that concept. A master link for all the [webinars] and then I have the NSS, the national support session one, assignment one, for assignment two, and the exam all in one place. And all that they have to do is go there and click, click, click; everything is easy to find.

CH: Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

P6: They navigate there. It is all very easy to find. And I don't create 10 million folders. I keep it simple, you know, everything you need is under one folder. There are OT support slides, uh, a revision folder... I don't try and create too much. I mean, it is that expectation as well too that, that you think they are going to access everything. They are not. If you can keep it simple and to the point... Limited, but as valuable as possible, I suppose. Um, some of, there have been discussions- [Joan] has those, um, once a week, those, uh, open mic sessions on a Thursday, um, for the OTs. - and we, we are all in agreement. The same with our students face-to-face. You know, you sometimes spend so much time uploading stuff for students, and you can just see by their submissions and their queries that have not even bothered to go there. So, it is a fine line between, I think, in terms of ease of navigation and getting to resources, keep it simple and don't give too much. I mean, I know that probably doesn't sound like good advice, but don't give too much because then you turn to, you can also overwhelm them, or they just don't bother looking.

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CH: I think that is important. It overwhelms them, um, because those who are possibly, um, more student directed or more learning directed would probably go outside of [the institution's online platform] anyway to find those additional resources.

P6: Exactly. Exactly. One hundred percent. And that is the other thing too. The skill which we are, um, which I am battling with now with, we had, we are in second and we are in third-year level with distance is, uh, besides the academic writing, is for the, to try and hone the skill of students understanding how to access credible sources. I mean, and you know, I give them examples, we discuss it. Uh, but sjoe! Ya. That is another, another issue. You know, it takes years. You only start to reap the rewards. Again. I had the second years, I have got them again now at one. And, and I mean I have known them since first year and only now can I start to see the rewards that we are reaping in terms of, you know, they are being more selective with their credible source selection and the penny has dropped. Um, and in distance you see it, some students are just lazy. They haven't even bothered. Um, then some are, are really, they are starting to learn to discern, and they hate Ebscohost. They all find Ebscohost so non-user friendly. So, then I try, I say, "Right. Okay. So technically you are supposed to use an academic search engine, but now how would you do it if you don't find the academic search engine user-friendly? How do you go onto, um, the web and how do you find sources? Where should you look? And then how do you crosscheck those sources to make sure...? What crosschecks should you, what boxes should you tick to make sure that that is a credible source?" Um, that is the next, the next thing. It's a, it is a huge, ya, it is progression, I suppose.

CH: Ya. And, and it is absolutely key in today's world now where the information is so readily accessible, but what is credible? I mean, that, that's, that is a skill set that they have to acquire.

P6: And a lot of them are just, they are just lazy. They don't, they, they are so used to having, you know, they... and in this age where you just click on demand and get what you want. And I say to them, "Right. Well, you know, you have got to still discern, and it takes time. Um, but ya. Then we also have that, when you talk about, we talk about this issue of credible sources and it is also the element of, um, you know, this, you know, you yourself will know, this last three years, the issue of integrity comes up and there are so many sites and ways to cheat the system and I wish that, we wish we didn't have to deal with that. It is just, it is very time consuming.

CH: Well, I just wish they were as resourceful with their academics as they are in trying to buck the system.

P6: Yes. Yes.

CH: But anyway, two last, two last questions. One is, you know, we have spoken about challenges in preparing for the, the online learning space. And I mean, you are pretty well set up at home, um, with regards to, um, having, having internet despite terrible storms, you know, et cetera, and load-shedding. But if you can just answer this question over your six years, what has been your experience in the implementation of these online learning

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experience? How have you felt about, you know, um, lecturing or tutoring in the online space?

P6: As I said to you at the outset of today's session, I am very excited because I feel it has been challenging for me and a huge learning curve for me. Um, and you mentioned like, you know, your 12-year, 14-year, you, you need a new challenge.

CH: Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

P6: And for me, it came around at the right time. It has been six years now. And, but you know, I started distance and then Covid three or four years later arrived, and we realized what an important, uh, developmental aspect, how I realised, what an important development aspect it was for me because it made me far more ready than a lot of other people. Not because I was better skilled, but just purely because of timing. Um, so I, I really, I have enjoyed it. I find, I find this, it is a real learning curve for me for what works and what doesn't work. And it's very challenging, very, I find it very challenging. Um, I really, really do. Um, and I am excited. I am really, really excited where it is going to go. Um, ya, I am hoping... And now as I said, we, you know, all sorts of things are changing. You know, we have unfortunately [the institution] has phased out the [one Communications degree]. And, and to me that was where social media management, content creation, PR marketing and the whole specifically social media management, to me that was just so much where industry is. And I just, you know, I know these decisions are taken for different reasons, but it just frustrated me that we, um, we took away, we will be taking away qualifications where students are finding the jobs. Um, and I think Covid, Covid is reminding us that, "Be careful. You are going to look what is going on in the workplace." And now that we, um, distance has come along and we, they are joining up with [...] and whatever have you, it is going to be even more exciting. But from a purely distance perspective, I think it is really challenging because that space is, is changing, it is changing daily, and the demand of the student is changing daily. Um, ya, I think that there's, there is a lot more, uh, if we watch the space, there is a lot more that is going to happen with distance. I think it is going to really evolve with time to come. I really, really do. And I'm, I'm, I am happy. I am really happy to be a part of that.

CH: Okay, cool. And the, the final question, and, and we have answered the subsequent questions around it. So we have spoken about certain skill-sets and I know that in your initial response was, you know, your, the students in the online space tend to be, um, working people who don't necessarily need all the skill-sets, such as, um, critical thinking because they've, they are more interested in getting what they can out of the, the qualification in order to to be successful. But you have also mentioned that the percentage of students is changing over time with, with post-pandemic. Um, and even during the pandemic that the profile and the demographics changed. So, so this question is in light of all that: are undergraduates, because we are focusing on the undergraduate programs, are our undergraduates ready to develop skill-sets such as resilience, critical thinking, problem-solving, et cetera? In your opinion?

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P6: <Sigh>.I would have said to you pre-Covid via distance, one hundred percent. But now post-Covid, I think it's, I think it is unknown territory because, um, you know, the nature of distance, you can't, you don't really have the luxury of catering to individuality as much. And now you have got the situation of where you have got these motivated, responsible, accountable people with children and jobs or whatever have you. And, and they know why they have signed up to study. And then you have got this percentage of, um, gen Zs and ya. And, and also what is happening too, and I am going to get shot for saying this, but um, there are students that are moving from full-time, they do the first year full-time, and then move to second-year distance and they expect it to be the same. And it is not the same. So, I think the biggest challenge is, I would say more so, purely because of motivation levels, the, the older student that is working understands responsibility, accountability and their motivations are different. The younger students, not so much. That is still unknown territory. I wouldn't, I think we still need to see a lot of issues, Um, personally. I am not saying that there aren't, uh, there aren't the students that, that are the younger Gen Zs that won't cope. But I don't know, I think they, they are inclined to need more handholding. That is my opinion.

CH: It is going to be an interesting space to navigate the challenge.

P6: Ya.

CH: The challenges are constantly evolving. [Jade] I want to thank you so much for giving up your time to, to chat about, you know, your online learning experiences, to share what you have been doing. I really enjoyed it. Um, I have got your, um, email address- your, your [...] one. Are you happy if I use that?

P6: Yes. You are welcome to...

CH: Because obviously when I have done the data analysis and that, I would like you to verify, um, that you are happy with how I portrayed, you know, the discussions that we have had. Obviously, you will be allocated a participant number because that is how I am using it in the actual study. But just that I would like you to verify and check for me that it is correct. I will only be submitting at the end of next year, like August, but I will have written the chapters for you to, to read parts, um, sometime next year. I don't see it happening this year <laugh>. Um...

P6: I will be very, I am very, very keen and I am so interested, I am so interested in what you are doing, Chantal. I just think it's just, to me it's, it is where the world is going as we know. And I am just, I will be so interested to see what you've, what you have managed to put together. I really, really would. So ya, you are welcome to contact me. I have had that email address forever and forever. So, you are welcome to keep me on that address.

CH: Okay, cool. And let me stop this recording now.