

**An ethics of care:
PGCE students' experiences of online learning during Covid-19**

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Abstract

The article discusses the online teaching and learning experiences of university students during the recent countrywide lockdown and higher education institutional shutdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Drawing on philosopher Joan Tronto's phases of care and associated moral elements, the article reports on survey data from a large cohort of students in the Post Graduate Certificate of Education programme at Stellenbosch University and seeks to analyse the students' care needs and experiences of care during this period. The aim of the article discussion is not to answer the question whether the university institution offered the students good care during the campus shutdown and remote teaching and learning, but rather to understand the experiences of the students of online teaching and learning during this time.

Keywords: Covid-19, Emergency remote learning, Ethics of care, Higher Education, Post Graduate Certificate of Education, Student experiences,

Introduction

On Sunday, 15 March 2020, the South African President Cyril Ramaphosa declared a national state of disaster and the closure of all schools from Wednesday, 18 March until after the Easter weekend to contain the spread of the coronavirus. Universities in South Africa followed suit, with all universities suspending face-to-face tuition from Friday, 20 March. On 23 March the president announced a three-week national lockdown starting on 26 March. On 9 April, the lockdown was extended for a further 14 days until 30 April.

Not unanticipated information, this unprecedented move caused significant uncertainty and concern within the education sector, most especially regarding the way forward for teaching and learning in schools and universities. At Stellenbosch University (SU), where the research for this article was conducted, following the president's announcement on 15 March, the university rectorate issued a statement that all face-to-face lectures and assessments would be suspended from Tuesday 17 March. With this announcement, everyone, including most of the students in the university residences, was asked to leave the Stellenbosch campuses. Following this, Prof



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Arnold Schoonwinkel, the Vice-Rector of Learning and Teaching at SU, stated that the decision had been taken that all faculties would proceed with online emergency remote teaching and learning from 30 March and that all second term teaching and learning would continue online from 18 April.

Stellenbosch staff were encouraged to familiarise themselves with the university's online Learning Management System SUNLearn, and to assist lecturers, a range of guides, websites, documents, virtual seminars, and webinars were made available. Students were provided with the necessary information regarding how online teaching and learning would proceed and a webpage was developed that provided all information about the university processes in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, SUNLearn was zero-rated and students could apply to receive a laptop and a monthly 10 gig data bundle paid for by the university.

It is difficult to fault the university's systemic processes and response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The university's already well-established SUNLearn platform enabled the move to online access of information fairly easy to manage. What was more complex for many staff and students, however, was the sudden move from face-to-face lectures to the disconnect and distance that can accompany online learning. While the advent of technology and internet access has made many successful online learning opportunities possible, fully online programmes are designed to mitigate students' feelings of disconnectedness. Lecturers who teach online usually create virtual communities of practice and online discussion opportunities among the students to encourage a feeling of connectedness in the virtual learning space. However, given the swiftness of the countrywide lockdown and the immediate decision by the university to suspend face-to-face tuition and switch to online teaching and learning, there was no time for lecturers and students to discuss the way forward and all future correspondence between students and faculty immediately moved to online modalities.

The focus of this article, situated within teaching and learning during the Covid-19 pandemic, is to reach an understanding how students studying at Stellenbosch University in a Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) programme mediated their online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic that resulted in the shutdown of all learning institutes. The article seeks to understand the PGCE students' online learning experiences during this time in light of their acceptance, albeit not by choice, of the online teaching and learning mode for the circumstances. Specifically, the focus is on the students in the PGCE programme as this is a unique one-year programme of study in education. At SU the PGCE programme is only offered in the Further Education and Training phase, that is, for students training to teach Grade 10-12 learners.

My interest in researching and writing this article is as one of the lecturers in the PGCE programme is that I am challenged to develop an understanding of the students I teach from their perspective. This is well captured by philosopher Joan Tronto who states that one of the dangers within institutions is that of paternalism where one assumes that one knows what support and care are needed by those under one's care. As a lecturer in the PGCE programme I, therefore, sought an understanding from the students' perspective within the unique situation of emergency remote learning in term two of the 2020 academic year. This is not the first time that

universities have faced crisis situations that have led to campus shutdowns. Fairly recent university protests within South Africa such as #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall in 2015 caused many universities to shut down their teaching and learning programmes and move some lecturing online and postpone many end of year exams and graduations. It is possible, therefore, that there may be more occurrences of crisis situations that require education institutions to change the modality of how teaching and learning take place, and as a new lecturer in higher education, I wanted to understand the students' learning experiences to better support and care for student groups going forward. In addition, I would suggest that this research provides insight into students' online learning experiences that has relevance for teachers, academics and leaders in education institutions in general. The article starts by presenting an overview of the university and students where the research was conducted. It then presents the methodology used for the research and the conceptual framing used to understand and present the student data and discussion section. This is followed by a discussion that draws on the student data. The article concludes by suggesting that developing an ethics of care within a higher education teaching and learning context is necessary alongside institutional structures and organisation that support students from a systemic point of view. By this, I suggest that as is shown through the data presentation and discussion section of the article, for the students, while teaching and learning were able to continue fairly successfully online, connectedness and engagement with others impacted significantly on students and their learning.

Stellenbosch University and the PGCE student cohort

Stellenbosch University is home to an academic community of 29 000 students, including 4 000 foreign students from 100 countries, 3 000 permanent staff members, and five different campuses. SU has ten different faculties of which the Faculty of Education is one. As part of its initial teacher education programme, the faculty of education at SU offers a Bachelor of Education Foundation Phase and Intermediate Phase programme as well as a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) for students who choose to teach in the Further Education and Training (Grade 10-12) sector of schools. It is the PGCE programme and students currently completing this one-year teaching qualification which is the focus of this article.

There are currently (2020) 265 students enrolled in the PGCE programme at SU. Students enrolling for the PGCE programme are required to have one teaching subject from their undergraduate degree to be accepted into the PGCE programme. The students enter the PGCE from a variety of disciplines such as Bachelor of Commerce, Science, Arts, Sport Science, Music, Drama, and Art to name a few. Some students have also had some work experience either in education (such as teaching English in Korea) or in other work sectors, or have completed their Honours (19 students) or Masters (4 students) degrees before enrolling in the PGCE programme. As the PGCE is a one-year qualification, several students have completed their undergraduate degrees at other universities. Of the 236 students who completed the survey for this research article, 72 of the students indicated that they had moved to Stellenbosch to complete their PGCE year. The majority of the students (191) are between the ages of 20-25, with 31 of the students

between the ages of 26-30. The rest of the class's (19 students) ages range between 31-60.

Some lecturers, prior to moving to online teaching due to the campus closure, made use of the university's SUNLearn platform for posting notes, copies of PowerPoints and for messaging students. However, many lecturers still provided printed copies of the class readings and encouraged students to make notes during lectures, therefore not making use of the SUNLearn portal for uploading class material. In general, lecturers were encouraged to make use of the online platform, but it was not a requirement.

Assessments in the PGCE programme are varied and term tests or exams generally take place on campus and are allocated a time and venue on an official campus timetable system. When submitting an assignment some lecturers require students to print their assignments and submit them to the lecturer for marking, while other lecturers make use of SUNLearn for assignment submission and marking.

For the PGCE students, given the different faculties or universities where they completed their undergraduate degrees, their experiences of using an online platform for their studies varied. Also, given the early stage of the academic year when the university shutdown occurred, it is fair to assume that many PGCE students were still finding their way around the education faculty as every student in the PGCE cohort is new to all aspects of education, the faculty, lecturers and how teaching and learning take place within the faculty.

Given the PGCE students' varied experiences of both SU and online learning management systems, the research for this article invited the students to complete a survey of their experiences online during the Covid-19 pandemic. In the next section, I report on the methodology used in the research process.

Methodology

The methodology employed for the collection of research data for this article was student surveys. The goal of surveys is to obtain valid data as an accurate representation of a population group and can involve, but is not limited to, demographic information, collating attitudes and beliefs of a population group, documenting behaviour and behavioural intentions, and so forth (Frey, 2018). Different to questionnaires that usually focus on a limited scope of questions to obtain information, the advantage of using surveys, in particular online electronic surveys, is that researchers can collect a large number of responses on how individuals feel about an issue (Tan and Siegel, 2018; Tuckman and Harper, 2012).

In the case of the survey research that is being reported on, the students were provided with a link to an online Microsoft Form that contained 30 questions. The questions were divided into sub-categories: general student information; student responses to lockdown and the move to online learning; access to electronic devices and internet for studying; and questions that invited discussion on the students' experience of online learning during term two. Approximately half the questions required the students to choose from multiple-choice options or choose a response on a 3-point Likert-scale with each question offering them the option to comment further if they chose to. The other half of the questions were open-ended paragraph-type

questions. The survey questions asked were not specific to any module.

The responses to the survey were analysed using inductive thematic analysis (Henning, et al., 2004). Themes were developed from the data across the different question responses and were refined to identify emerging patterns in relation to Tronto's (1993) evaluative framework of a political ethics of care that was used to present the student information in the data presentation and discussion section of the article.

My positionality as the researcher in the process should also be acknowledged in this section. I am currently a lecturer of one of the SU PGCE core modules. As such, during the university move to remote online learning, I too grappled with how to organise and manage my students' learning. As a lecturer the almost sudden silence at the start of term 2 was unnerving for me and this research is an attempt to understand what was happening in the students' lives during this period.

Ethical clearance for the research project was applied for and granted from the university. This included institutional ethical clearance that allowed the researcher to use data obtained from students at the university. As part of the electronic survey, the students were asked to permit the data they provided to be used for the research project. Of the 241 responses received, five students declined to permit the use of the data they provided. Their information was deleted from the survey and not used as part of the research process.

Situating the discussion

Modern communications technology has the ability to remove many of the restrictions related to physical distance from our social life. Yet distance is not only a material or geographical matter; it is also a social and ethical one. (Miller, 2012: 280)

To support an understanding of how the PGCE students experienced the online learning modalities during the countrywide lockdown, I found the concept of an 'ethics of care' a particularly useful framing. Noddings' (1984) seminal work on the 'ethics of care' makes a case for acknowledging care as a core element in pedagogic relationships. Noddings develops this in her work by placing an emphasis on the caring relation to describe a certain kind of relation or encounter in the teaching and learning process (Noddings, 1984).

Discussing the context of teaching and learning online, Deacon (2012) notes that 'creating a context of care is ... even more pressing in online classes'. Rose and Adams (2014), discussing a pedagogy of care in online learning, discuss how online lecturers who seek to exhibit a caring nature may struggle with deciding to what extent they can extend themselves to their students' needs beyond the boundaries of normal workday hours. The question posed, therefore, by Rose and Adams (2014: 12) in their research is to 'what extent does caring ... become a matter of doing what needs to be done for the other, in a functional, routinized, and minimalistic way?'. A further issue raised concerning online learning is that not physically 'seeing' one's students might remove elements of visceral care from the teaching and learning relationship. Thus, Rose and Adams

(2014: 12) question: 'To what extent is caring similarly intercorporeal, dependent upon co-presence and a visual connection with the other? Can we experience feelings of care and solicitude for someone we have never seen, someone who is "out there in cyberspace"?'.

Levinas (1996: 54) states that face-to-face encounters give rise to a sense of ethical responsibility for the other: 'a face imposes itself on me without my being able to be deaf to its call or to forget it'. Similarly, Noddings (1984: 113) suggests that our caring impulse is activated by those who are 'proximate...under whose gaze I fall'. Given that online learning is inherently 'faceless', the question can be asked as to how do we 'encounter' others when they are not physically present, and can one experience feelings of care and solicitude for someone one cannot see?

It can, of course, be argued that with large classes which are often found in campus-based university lectures, personal engagement and encounters with one's lecturer are constrained by the class size and structure of how lectures are delivered and thus all students can not be known or 'proximate'. However, most lecturers even in large classes, will, to some extent be able to 'read' the lecture room and their students and respond accordingly. Jansen (2020) in his recent column in the Sunday Times describes university teaching as not only a profoundly intellectual activity but also an emotional activity:

Faced with a few hundred students, I rely on all my senses when I teach. I not only see, but hear, feel and touch as I move around the lecture room. As I lead a discussion of government policy on corporal punishment, I notice a student whose eyes start to tear up. It is quite possible that he is recalling a harsh experience with *lyfstraf* [corporal punishment]. This is a cue for me to soften the tone, slow down the pace and, as I walk past the young man, place a brief, reassuring hand on his shoulder. With screen teaching, I cannot see, hear or touch, especially when the pre-class instruction is to "mute" (what an unfortunate word) yourself.

As described by Jansen, it is possible to forge connections in a large lecture room; however, this connection is much more difficult to develop in online teaching and learning.

Miller (2012) in his article titled 'A crisis of presence: On-line culture and being in the world' problematises how social life as experienced through contemporary networked digital communication technology and describes these encounters as a 'liminal space of on-line interactions' suggesting that an important disjuncture can exist between one's online presence and 'the ethical sensibilities of material presence which ... has potential consequences for the future of an ethical social world' (Miller, 2012: 265). To mitigate this, Miller drawing on Levinas argues for an 'ethics of encounter' approach. He states convincingly:

... if we desire ethical conduct within an increasingly significant on-line social sphere, we need to recognise and work against our cultural and technological tendency towards abstraction, instrumentalism and metaphysical presencing, re-examine our focus on locality in our horizons of care and strive for ways to re-establish sensual aspects of physical presence in mediated encounter. (Miller, 2012: 267)

As noted earlier, Levinas places the face-to-face encounter as the first and primary human encounter, one which is found within the gaze of the other. This encounter is also fundamentally ethical in that we accept responsibility for the other through this encounter. As Miller (2012: 278) states, '[i]n short, faces matter; being together matters'. What happens, therefore, if we are not together in our learning? How do we encounter others when we are not physically present as was experienced during the emergency remote teaching and learning due to Covid-19?

An ethics of care

I found Tronto's (1993) work on the political ethics of care a particularly useful framework for understanding and discussing the students' experiences of online learning during the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic. Tronto's framing of care is situated in the belief that an ethic of care is both a practice and a disposition rather than a set of rules or principles (2017). Tronto notes that an ethic of care should not be discussed in terms of the success or failure to care but rather about 'particular acts of caring and a general "habit of mind" to care' (1993: 127).

As a starting point, Fisher and Tronto (1990: 40) provide a description of care as:

On the most general level, we suggest that caring be viewed as a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our "world" so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web.

Tronto (2015: 3) notes that 'care shows up almost everywhere in our lives' and can best be thought of as a practice that involves both thought and action and which results in some kind of engagement among individuals toward some end (1993).

Thus, Tronto (2010: 32) argues for a conceptualisation of care that is relational and 'starts from the premise that everything exists in relation to other things ... and assumes that people, other beings and the environment are interdependent'. Tronto (2017: 32) suggests that '*all* humans are vulnerable and fragile', some more so than others, and that all humans are at some point in their lives vulnerable which requires them to rely on others for care and support. Humans are both recipients and givers of care, although a person's capacity and need for care shifts and changes throughout life (Tronto, 2017: 32). As an ideal, caring relates to the general allocation of care responsibilities rather than the daily work of care that takes place in specific contexts. In other words, within an institution, for example, care relates to how people within an organisation identify, respond to, and take responsibility for care. Tronto (2017: 33) refers to this as democratic caring.

Discussing democratic care within institutions such as a university, Tronto (2010) argues that often how well students are cared for is evaluated by surveying the effectiveness of the teaching offered in the institution. In other words, an educational institution can argue that the students are being cared for in their studies if they are receiving good tuition. While an institution might feel that quality teaching equates to caring about the students, Tronto (2010: 159) argues

that this is not the same as students actually experiencing care within an institution. Care is about meeting the needs of individuals and as such 'it is always *relational* ... it is about creating conditions for [individuals] ... to feel safe in the world' (Tronto, 2015: 4; Italics in original). Tronto further notes that care practices do not just suddenly begin, they are ongoing and involve 'disagreements, messy distractions, and complications. The trick is to determine the best ways of caring in a particular time and situation' (Tronto, 2015: 4-5). This involves being able to assess and meet the needs of individuals in a particular time and place.

As a framework for an 'ethic of care', Tronto (2010, 2013, 2017) provides us with four moral elements of care that are associated with different phases of care¹ that enable us to evaluate a given practice and analyse how care needs are met. The first phase, *caring about*, involves noticing that care is required. The corresponding moral element suggested by Tronto is the element of *attentiveness* which involves assessing what is required to address an identified need. Tronto cites the philosopher Simone Weil who states that attentiveness is essential for genuine human interaction to take place; to care effectively '[o]ne needs, in a sense, to suspend one's own goals, ambitions, plans of life, and concerns, in order to recognize and to be attentive to others'. (Tronto, 1993: 128)

The second phase, *caring for*, involves identifying a need and deciding how to respond. The corresponding moral element here is *responsibility*. Tronto argues that responsibility goes beyond obligation and duty and 'is embedded in a set of implicit cultural practices, rather than a set of formal rules or a series of promises' (Tronto, 1993: 131-132). In other words, responsibility as an element of care can be framed as one choosing to respond to a need rather than being formally obliged or expected to respond to a need. Additionally, responsibility takes on different meanings based on a person's role within a context or practice and is related to a particular time and location.

Tronto (1993: 132) warns that it is possible for aspects of responsibility to become political when they become matters of public debate. How the higher education institutions responded to the Covid-19 pandemic would certainly have placed questions of responsibility within the public debate. Placed as an obligation, one might look at formal duties and agreements and argue that in the case of the universities there was a moral obligation for the institutions to provide devices and data for the students. Tronto (1993: 132) thus notes that the question of responsibility to care can be ambiguous and rest on various factors that need to be identified and considered. As such, she suggests that focusing on a flexible notion of responsibility, rather than 'to use obligation as the basis for understanding what people should do for each other' within an ethic of care is useful (Tronto, 1993: 133).

The third phase, *caregiving* refers to the actual work of care and the related moral element of *competence*. Tronto (1993) aligns competence in caregiving to moral consequentialism. In other words, ensuring that caring takes place and that needs are met. As she notes, '[i]ntending to provide care, even accepting responsibility for it, but then failing to provide good care, means

¹ In her 2013 work, Tronto added a fifth phase and element of care, *caring with*. For the purposes of this article I have chosen to focus on the first four elements of Tronto's work.

that in the end the need for care is not met' (Tronto, 1993: 133). Tronto (1993: 110) notes that there may be times when care might be inadequate when the necessary resources are not available as 'care depends upon adequate resources: on material goods, on time and on skills'. By way of example, she suggests that a teacher in an under-resourced school context might not have the necessary resources to adequately care for her students by providing quality education, or a teacher might be required to teach a subject area for which they have not been trained. While the school might argue that they have 'taken care' of learning in the school, this is superficial care and is an example of what Tronto (1993) refers to as a tendency in bureaucracies to 'take care of' a situation with no concern about the outcome or end result.

The fourth and last phase is *care-receiving*. The corresponding moral element here is the *responsiveness* of the care-receiver to the care offered. Tronto (1993: 134-135) notes that '[r]esponsiveness signals an important moral problem within care: by its nature, care is concerned with conditions of vulnerability and inequality' thus belying the myth that 'we are always autonomous, and potentially equal, citizens'. To assume that we are all equal ignores important dimensions of human existence and to provide an ethic of care within the inequalities found in society, responsiveness requires one to consider the other's position as expressed by them. In other words, one needs to engage with others from the standpoint of the other, understanding the uniqueness of another's experience placing your assumptions of their experiences aside. Young (1997: 341) refers to this as asymmetrical reciprocity which she describes as the understanding that within a communicative situation each participant 'is distinguished by a particular history and social position that makes their relation asymmetrical'. Asymmetrical reciprocity, or responsiveness, involves understanding the life histories, experiences and different perspectives of others from their point of view. Thus, adequate responsiveness to others brings one back to the need to be attentive (found in the first phase of care), highlighting how each of the elements of care is intertwined and must be considered as part of an integrated whole (Tronto, 1993).

The four phases of care as ongoing practice enable us, therefore, to consider adequacy or ethics of care within a public institution such as a university. Active caring as a relational practice 'shapes what we pay attention to, how we think about responsibility, what we do, how responsive we are to the world around us, and what we think of as important to life' (Tronto, 2015: 8). This is what Tronto (1993) refers to as 'the integrity of care'. Within the Covid-19 pandemic, therefore, a framing of care perspective highlights the relational aspect of human activity and institutional practices and foregrounds the lives of the students relative to the university's ability to maintain, continue, and repair the students' 'world' so that they could continue to live (and study) as well as possible.

The online learning experiences of PGCE students during the Covid-19 pandemic

Out of the 265 students registered in the 2020 PGCE cohort at SU, 241 students completed the survey with 236 students permitting for their data to be used for research. As a starting point, of interest from a practical understanding of the students' ability to move to online learning, is the

information that they provided about their access to devices (cell phones, laptops, or tablets), data and the internet to facilitate their ongoing online learning during lockdown. In the survey out of the 236 students, 195 had their own devices, 16 had no access to any device, and 41 applied for and received a laptop from SU. Regarding data and internet access, 189 students stated they had internet access in their place of residence during lockdown, 53 had no internet access and 103 students applied to SU to receive data for their studies. However, as reported by the student surveys, this was only one aspect that enabled them to continue with their studies. Noted repeatedly in the surveys, moving to online learning was not a seamless or easy move for many students. Tronto's phases of, and moral elements of care, are thus used below to understand the students' experiences in relation to an ethics of care.

Caring about

Tronto's first phase *caring about* and the corresponding moral element of *attentiveness* involves noticing that care is required and finding ways to respond. Thus, in this section the discussion focuses on understanding the students' needs and requirements, and in particular, the students' concern over whether anyone is actually noticing what they are going through and experiencing.

Asked in the survey to comment on their experience of online teaching and learning at the start, during and the end of the second term², many students expressed concern and anxiety about how the process would unfold. Some students stated that they had specifically chosen not to study online and now were being forced into this mode of learning. Others noted concern about their peers who they knew did not have access to devices, the internet or data and worried whether the university and lecturers would be aware of this.

The students in their comments responding to the question that asked about their initial response to the decision to move to emergency remote learning were gracious in acknowledging that the lecturers also had to adjust to the changed teaching and learning modality. However, student comments concerning their experience by the end of the term suggested frustration and even anger towards lecturers who they felt had not made the effort to adjust, communicate effectively, support them, or show an understanding and caring attitude to the challenges experienced by the students. In other words, using Tronto's moral element of recognition that care is needed, many students highlight that although as students they had the means to continue with their studies (internet access, data, study material provided), they felt that from a 'caring about' their learning experience perspective, their needs were not necessarily recognised or met. When there was little to no interaction with the lecturer online, the students described feeling overwhelmed by the module workload, even stating that it felt as though the workload was increasing as they had to navigate their way through the work on their own. Conversely, students noted that when lecturers took the time and care in how they managed their module

² At the time that the students completed the survey and provided comments and discussion about their online learning experience, no-one had any clarity as to whether teaching and learning would remain online for the rest of the academic year. The article therefore reports only on the students' experiences of online teaching and learning during term two of the 2020 academic year.

online, such as the provision of lecture videos, voice notes, schedules, and prompt email communication the learning experience in the module improved dramatically.

Issues around internet access and data were frequently discussed by the students in the survey. Even with the university providing data, students living in rural areas describe struggling with internet connectivity which could mean that when they were completing an activity online they might lose their work or not be able to complete the activity in the time provided. These students were unsure as to whether lecturers would be aware of these challenges and provide alternative or additional opportunities to complete assessment opportunities. Students described their initial responses as scared, uncertain, stressful, anxious, and isolating. Studying off-campus, according to some students 'was just hard – hard to establish a routine, hard to study at home which was noisy, busy, where I am expected to help out with domestic chores'. Many students felt like everything took longer to do: 'Accessing the work, doing the readings, completing the assignments just felt like it took much longer than when we were on campus'. Some students said that it felt like they were studying for long hours and still not completing the work and falling behind and worried that their lecturers would not believe that they were making an effort to complete their work.

Struggling to shift to the online learning mode, many students felt that 'most lecturers just have no idea what we are dealing with at home, they think that learning can just continue like it did when we were on campus'. Many students described their online learning experience as feeling like: 'work was thrown at us', 'we were bombarded', 'it became disheartening over the term', 'there was a general lack of care, or not noticing what we needed'. Some students stated that even though they knew that learning online was the only way forward in term two, it 'remained an awful experience' leaving them 'exhausted' and 'drained in all aspects, mentally, physically and emotionally'.

Being thrust into a new mode of learning, students' feelings of fear, anxiety and isolation highlight that they realise that without physically being present on campus and in lectures, it is possible that no-one would notice, be attentive to, or in fact may even be ignorant (Tronto, 1993) of their needs. Those most vulnerable, that is, students without their own devices, data, connectivity, stable homes, and students with underlying mental or health issues, in particular, felt the isolation of lockdown and having to study off-campus most keenly. As noted by Weil (cited in Tronto, 1993), feeling that someone cares about you is an essential part of genuine human interaction. This then, in relation to the research under discussion, can also be applied to care about one's studies.

Caring for

Under the framing of *caring for* and the related element of *responsibility*, the student surveys highlighted several aspects of their experiences of online learning. Tronto notes that *responsibility* in terms of those *caring for* goes beyond obligation and duty and is found in the choice to respond and care. In terms of being *cared for*, student voices in this section describe

how important it was for them to feel a level of connectivity and human interaction as part of their studies.

While acknowledging that lecturers may be struggling themselves with the shift to online teaching and learning, the students identified aspects in their online learning experience that left them feeling disconnected and isolated in their learning. Most students stated that they missed the face-to-face interaction with the lecturer as well as the class and peer discussion that takes place both in lectures and informally on campus. Noted by students: 'In face-to-face lectures, one gets immediate feedback on questions, which was not the case with online learning ... most of the time I felt like I was teaching myself'.

Aspects that left the students feeling that their lecturers were unaware of how difficult they were finding the changed modality of learning related to lecturers changing assignment and assessment dates, an increased workload and late communication or feedback on assignments. A perception of the students was that they 'received a lot more work in many modules to compensate for not being in class'. In addition, students describe feeling that they were missing out on understanding deeper aspects of the work, or being challenged to think differently: 'I miss getting different perspectives on the work from lecture and peer interaction – only my own which feels narrow and unchallenged – I would like the lecturers to engage with us more'.

On a positive note, however, some students noted that they enjoyed working at their own pace and being in control and responsible for how and when they engaged with the module content. Most lectures took place online asynchronously and students could access lecture videos in their own time and stop, start and re-listen. Students stated that lecturers who provided clear guidelines for the sequencing of the work that they needed to complete helped to make them feel that the workload was manageable. An interesting comment made by several students regarding feelings of connectedness related to lecturers who provided voice notes; 'hearing a human voice talking about the work made it more accessible' ... 'listening to my lecturer's voice made me feel that everything had not gone haywire and that the lecturers were still there monitoring and supporting our learning'.

Of interest regarding how the students felt cared for either by their lecturers or by their peers were found in comments made by students with regards to virtual communities of practice that developed during this time. A community of practice (CoP) as discussed by Lave and Wenger (1991) involves interaction among groups of individuals who collectively share information and experiences. Virtual or online CoPs made possible through technology, are an extension of traditional CoP and enable groups of individuals, such as the PGCE students, to discuss aspects of a shared problem in a virtual domain. While some of the PGCE students created small virtual groups to support one another, other students noted that class or subject-specific WhatsApp (WA) groups either created by the lecturer or by the students were successful in creating a virtual learning community 'where there was always someone willing to assist you'. Referring to the use of the WA groups, a student noted: 'Because we were all in the same situation – dealing with the C19 pandemic – we learned how to support and care for one another'. Connecting to others, discussing the work, checking on deadlines were all aspects that the students discussed in the

WA groups to support one another and alleviate the stress and worry that they felt working in isolation at home.

Most of the students acknowledged that they realised that they needed to step up and be more responsible for their own learning, however, what is expressed in the survey comments is that what the students felt that they needed was to feel that their lecturers were present and were monitoring their learning. Thus, the moral element of *responsibility* as an ethic of care, as stated by Tronto (1993), one that goes beyond obligation and duty, was necessary for care to be evident in the unique time of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Caregiving

Tronto's third phase, that of *caregiving* and the related moral element of *competence* refers to ensuring that the care required or needed by the person being cared for, is met. In this section the discussion focuses on institutional caregiving in relation to the PGCE students. As noted by Tronto within institutions care needs to go beyond superficial aspects of care.

It can be argued that as part of the university 'caring' about student learning, all students could apply for and receive a laptop that was couriered to their place of residence during lockdown as well as 10 gigs of data a month from the university. However, there was a delay in getting the laptops to some students and having to ask for extensions for assignments due to not having devices or data added an additional level of stress and worry for these students. The students also described feeling constantly unsure as to whether they would have sufficient data for online tests especially when the tests were scheduled towards the end of the month. One student described the entire experience as 'exclusionary' stating that students who did not have the physical and mental means to easily study online felt mostly excluded from the learning process during the term.

The worry of falling behind, not knowing what they should be doing, missing an assignment due date, was echoed by many students. They noted that when they are on campus students support one another by discussing the required work and lecturers would remind them of upcoming assignment or assessments during classes, 'everything feels easier on campus'. Even with lecturers generally being sensitive to this issue and allowing students extra time, worrying about or managing this aspect of their studies caused significant additional stress for some students. Thus, as Tronto states, the element of competence in care-giving as a form of moral consequentialism needs to ensure that needs, such as students being able to access and complete the term's work, are actually being met for end goals to be achieved.

Generally, it would be fair to state that SU's institutional response of caregiving during the unprecedented lockdown, campus shutdown and the move to emergency remote learning is hard to fault. As stated previously, once the university decided to shut down campus teaching and learning students were immediately made aware of how to apply for a device and data and surveys were sent out requesting students to identify their needs. Given this, it can be argued that the university ensured that as an institution they were 'taking care of' (Tronto, 1993) the students' ability to continue with their studies. However, as Tronto points out, caregiving and

ensuring competence is a moral quality moves beyond the institutional organisation, provision, and good intentions to a deeper level of thoughtful knowledge of, and engagement with, the needs of the individual. Thus, taking into account the experiences expressed by the students in the survey, it is clear that many students were still struggling with online learning even when provided with the means (devices, data and learning material) to continue with their studies. Students did report in their survey comments that by the end of the term their learning experience had been 'generally fine', 'good overall', and that the workload and learning online had been 'more manageable as I got used to it'. However, as stated by one student, 'there needs to be a mutual effort from both the students and the lectures to make it work. If not or if there is not sufficient communication, then the experience is not positive, in fact, it can be really really terrible!' And, while some students report managing to cope, what is important to highlight is that there were students who did not feel cared for or enabled in their learning. As noted by a student, 'I did not enjoy it at all ... It has impoverished my learning and caused me much anxiety'. Thus, the converse question needs to be considered, what aspects of care did they feel that they received?

Care receiving

Care-receiving for Tronto corresponds with *responsiveness* that takes another's position, as expressed by them, into account. In other words, irrespective of what we think we have done to care for the other, being responsive to the other requires us to listen deeply and understand the uniqueness of someone's experience as expressed by them. Tronto (1993: 135) links responsiveness to aspects of vulnerability and inequality stating that '[t]hroughout our lives, all of us go through varying degrees of dependence and independence, of autonomy and vulnerability' and therefore we are not always autonomous and equal citizens.

Aspects of the unevenness of the students' experiences during the second term highlight issues of student vulnerability during this time. Mental health issues were mentioned by several students. Loneliness, uncertainty about the situation, both the pandemic and their studies, anxiety, depression, panic attacks, financial stress, emotions dealing with family problems that they don't normally have to face living on campus were also commented on in the survey. One student noted: 'I have developed good routines and certain practices to keep my mental health in check, but these were completely disrupted by moving home and the lockdown'. Students had to establish new routines, self-motivate in different ways, and find spaces to productively work in their homes. All this took time, energy and focus which left them with less time for their studies.

However, students were also willing to note that there were positive aspects of their online learning experience stating that 'it was the best choice during this strange time'. Several students acknowledged that they were 'grateful to SU to be able to continue with classes during this pandemic', noting that 'I was happy that our university was proactive in resuming our course online'. A further positive aspect was that students acknowledged that they had learned new technology skills, 'especially given the uncertainty in contact teaching in schools due to Covid-

19'. As noted by the students: 'It exposed me to alternate ways of learning' ... 'different forms of learning ... that I can use in my own teaching one day'.

It is, however, important to note that several students stated that nothing for them had been positive, 'nothing about online learning is enjoyable, it's all stressful' ... 'I commend and support the online continuation for my studies, I also dread and hate it. There was no positive for me at all' ... 'I felt so alone, it drained me emotionally, physically and mentally'.

Jansen (2020) discussing the move during Covid-19 to online higher education teaching from a lecturer point of view describes the inadequacy of online teaching stating:

With screen teaching, I cannot see, hear or touch ... A nod, a frown, an eager hand shooting up all over the place are vital behavioural cues about who "gets it" on a slippery concept, such as a "theory of action" in policy analysis, and who does not.... A screen does not give me those vital data points in real time to (re)adjust my teaching.

As stated by one student: 'Nothing replaces contact time with lecturers in class even if it's an 8 o'clock lecture on a Friday!' Thus, as Levinas (1996) and Miller (2012) remind us, being together matters, faces matter, face-to-face encounters give rise to a sense of ethical responsibility for the other.

Conclusion: An integrity of care

The aim of this article was not to answer the question as to whether the institution had offered the students good care during their online learning, but rather to understand the experiences of the students with regards to emergency remote learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, implicit in understanding the students' experiences is always the question about what care practices we as lecturers should employ in the future to better support student learning. To consider this question, I return to Tronto's discussion on an ethic of care. Good care, according to Tronto (1993: 136-137), requires all four phases of care to work together as a whole, and all four moral aspects of care, attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness to be integrated:

Care as a practice involves more than simply good intentions. It requires a deep and thoughtful knowledge of the situation, and of all of the actors' situations, needs and competences. To use the care ethic requires a knowledge of the context of the care process. Those who engage in a care process must make judgements: judgements about needs, conflicting needs, strategies for achieving ends, the responsiveness of care-receivers, and so forth.

Caring is a complex process; it shapes what we pay attention to, how we think about our responsibilities, what we do, how we respond to the world around us, and what we think of as important in life (Tronto, 2015). Within an education institution, therefore, what has emerged

from the student data in relation to an ethics of care is the need for connectivity and human interaction that moves beyond the systemic organisation of the institution. Tronto (2015: 4) reminds, 'care is about meeting needs, and it is always *relational*', it is about creating conditions in which individuals feel safe in the world. In other words, within an institutional setting such as SU, a ethics of care as a practice needs to encompass both thought and action and involve aspects of ongoing relational care. For those, therefore, who want to engage with a politics of care, the starting place is to start caring about care.

Author Biography

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