



The Paradoxes of Emergency Remote Teaching

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ABSTRACT

This article presents and discusses some of the paradoxes that educators in the higher education sector encountered during the COVID-19 lockdowns. It takes a fresh look at data from a study involving 3,000 teachers and 20,000 students as the empirical background in the form of both quantitative and qualitative material. Based on a paradoxical-theoretical perspective, the article looks at the experiences of educators who had to teach online - some of them for the first time. The article finds that the lockdowns led to teaching and learning situations in an online format which were paradoxically different from both familiar on-site and online teaching.

Keywords: paradoxes; emergency remote teaching; higher education; learning design; COVID-19

INTRODUCTION

Instructing someone with whom you are not physically together is an activity we have practised ever since Paul the Apostle sent instructive letters to congregations throughout the Roman Empire. However, distance learning has evolved quite significantly since then. Nonetheless, since the sudden ban in March 2020 on physical teaching, many teachers have felt they were out of their depth. This article aims to shed light on some of the paradoxes that educators and teachers encountered while providing this so-called emergency remote teaching, outlining and discussing how educators maintained or changed their usual teaching practices and ideas about teaching during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Online teaching is no longer a new field of research, and by now many teachers, educators and institutions of education have extensive experience of this particular teaching format. However, when COVID-19 led to the cessation of all on campus teaching, all educators suddenly had to teach in this format without necessarily having tried it before. In terms of research, this created a unique opportunity to gain insight into online teaching, as if it were something new and being implemented for the first time, because the situation was so completely different from 'normal' teaching. So, this article investigates the nature and experience of online teaching in the situation created during the Corona lockdowns, looking at how this special period in time played a role in teaching and learning as described in qualitative interviews with 49 teachers at higher education institutions in Denmark.

Even before the Corona virus lockdowns, the switch from physically-present teaching to an online format had been a challenge for teachers (McInerney & Druva, 2019). Research often highlights the particular challenges encountered when teaching practical or music related subjects, when students, teachers and artefacts are not present in the same space (Georgsen et al., 2021). For example, Burke (2020) writes that “[g]iven [...] the repeated indications that arts learning requires situated and embodied learning opportunities, it is understandable that some consider arts learning to be incompatible with online platforms” (Burke, 2020, p. 3). Despite general challenges encountered in other subjects as well, on the basis of their study of the views and experience of medical science teachers vis-à-vis technology in clinical teaching, McInerney and Druva conclude that “[w]ith technology playing a more central role in education, it is imperative that we understand how to ensure it is utilised to its full potential in all domains of education” (McInerney & Druva, 2019, p. 79).

In many ways, the emergency remote teaching during the Corona revealed conditions in both physical and online education, which research has not yet scrutinised to any great extent. Thus, several researchers point out that some groups of pupils/students (e.g. due to disability) are rarely taught in online formats, and that special considerations need to be taken into account when teaching these vulnerable groups online (Ault et al., 2020; Karunaratne & Karunaratne, 2020). As both an opportunity and a difficulty in digital learning environments, they also point out that there are far more options for differentiation online, given that we must differentiate and plan not only in relation to the learning skills and interests of the students, but also in relation to their specific hardware and technical skills. Singh et al. (2020) highlight time as a further differentiation parameter, given that teaching can also be conducted either asynchronously and synchronously, and organised by the individual

student in terms of both speed and pace.

Professional educations have always been specialised enterprises (cf. Ryan, 2011). So, when all teaching suddenly had to be conducted as emergency remote teaching, it changed not only the teaching space, but also the school space, to which, for example, the work practice element of teacher training refers. Kidd and Murray write: “these new spaces have to continually refer back to the past, ‘real’ spaces, now gone” (2020, p. 574), because also the teaching space in primary and secondary school changed. In this context - as the analysis of paradoxes below illustrate - the authors find that the online space of emergency remote teaching also merges the professional and private physical spaces of the teachers resulting in advantages and disadvantages for the teaching and learning taking place.

Despite challenges and paradoxes, however, several researchers find that the demands of emergency remote education for online presence also have provided positive surprises for teachers in various educational institutions. In this context, particularly noteworthy (Kawaguchi-Suzuki et al., 2020; Sorensen et al., 2020) is how professional groups have identified opportunities to meet across even very long distances. For example, on a note of hope and relating to pharmacy education, Kawaguchi-Suzuki and her colleagues conclude: “[...] this pandemic brought all pharmacy educators together to make our profession stronger around the globe” (2020, p. 1046). Similarly, Wilkerson et al. (2020) state that the subject of social work long has lacked insight into how to incorporate digital technology into professional work in the future. “Our experience in providing the [...] program also speaks to COVID-19’s potential acceleration of the adoption of technology for delivery of social work services” (p. 1144).

In other words, even before the Corona lockdowns, online education was presenting teachers and students with challenges and options, pros and cons, flexibility, and established formats. But the contention of this article is that the suddenness of emergency remote teaching boosted the way educators experienced these and other simultaneous paradoxes. The research question is, therefore: What paradoxes did the teachers experience in the context of emergency remote teaching, and did they maintain or change their teaching practice during the Corona lockdowns?

Methodological and theoretical approach

The empirical basis for the analyses consists of data from a study of online education during the first period with COVID-19 lockdowns of higher education institutions in the spring of 2020. A consortium of 10 higher education institutions in Denmark was behind the study, which consisted of four elements: a questionnaire and a series of interviews, both adapted for teachers and students respectively; a mapping of the institutions' technological infrastructure and resources to support the teachers' redesign of teaching and learning, and finally an identification of exemplary cases taken from teaching at the participating institutions as experienced by either teachers or students (see also Georgsen et al., 2021).

Methodically, the original study was based on a mixed methods-approach, where a questionnaire was sent to resp. 85,443 students and 6,087 lecturers at 9 higher education institutions. Subsequently, potential interview participants were strategically selected and a total of 81 interviews were carried out (43 lecturers and 38 students). The interview participants were selected on the basis of their answers in the questionnaire survey, as the intention was to ensure a spread in educational areas and in attitudes towards online teaching in the future. Both the quantitative and the qualitative data were presented and analysed in Georgsen et al., 2021, where especially data on the prevalence of different teaching practices, the perceived quality of these and teachers' and students' experiences with online teaching were presented. In this article, we mainly draw on interview data in a closer analysis of how the teachers have experienced being a teacher during the lockdown, where online teaching and emergency teaching became a reality. The qualitative interviews were all individual interviews and of approximately 1 hour duration.

The interviews were aimed at both teaching and learning practice (foreground) and the participants' everyday life outside teaching (background). The foreground questions examined i.e. the teachers' experience of professional satisfaction which came across as the interviewees described their teaching practices during the lockdown, their self-evaluation of its variations and quality as well as their collaboration and interaction with other participants. The background questions aimed to generate detailed descriptions of life as a teacher in a COVID 19-influenced everyday life, including the informants' experience of coherence, and their coping and action strategies. In the interviews, we used a semi-structured approach where pre-prepared topics helped guide the interview. Individual interviews were chosen to enable a focus on everyday as well as educational conditions and experiences. Individual interviews created an opportunity for the individual story to unfold in a trusting space with the interviewer. It thus became possible for the interviewees to reflect on feelings and changes that lay several months back without having to worry about what colleagues or students might think about these. Interviews were conducted in the period mid-September to the end of October 2020, and they were therefore within time distance of the questionnaire (carried out in June 2020). This meant, among other things, that many participants at the time of the interviews had gained experience from their return to campus-based teaching in the period from August onwards (which was when the lockdown was temporarily lifted in Denmark).

One of the authors of this article has participated in the design of and conduction of both survey and interviews, and thus knows the original methodological design and data material in depth, while the other author has participated in data processing and analysis of interview data after the completion of the original survey.

The analysis process behind the present article is methodologically based on a constructivist grounded theory approach (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2012; Thornberg, 2012). With this approach, we seek to be open and exploratory in the analysis, initially in order to understand the breadth and the multifaceted nature of the interviewed teachers' experiences and experiences with online teaching.

The first open reading and coding of the numerous interviews with educators revealed that the educators partly reflected on, and were puzzled by the conditions of teaching, which had not hitherto played a role in their regular teaching. To gain a deeper understanding of such challenges, we drew inspiration from paradox theory (Lewis, 2000; Smith & Lewis, 2011) for our further analyses.

A paradox can be defined as “contradictory yet interrelated elements that exist simultaneously and persist over time” (Smith & Lewis, 2011, p. 382). Consequently, this understanding indicates that a paradox is composed of two or more elements, all of which are logical, but which, when juxtaposed, become incompatible opposites. Attempts to convey paradox theory (Pina Cunha & Putnam, 2019) often refer to the so-called Icarus paradox. According to Greek mythology, the master craftsman Daedalus constructed a pair of feather-and-beeswax wings for his son Icarus, so he could fly away from the island on which he was trapped. But in a state of hubris and excitement, Icarus flew all the way up to the sun. The wax melted, destroying the wings, and Icarus crashed to the earth and died. The moral of the myth consists of the paradox that strong performance promotes a defensive mindset that may lead to dysfunctional outcomes” (Amason and Mooney, 2008, p. 407).

There are many paradoxes also in educational contexts. For example, von Öttigen (2001) sees a paradox in teaching as such, asking how to educate – through external influence – a human being to be independent and not affected by external influence? Another example of a paradox that is related to teaching and learning: teachers know that they should include their students in the activity of selecting the teaching content – even if the area of knowledge is unknown to the students at the time of teaching preparation.

Below, we will present and discuss four such paradoxes, which emerged in the interviews with the teachers. Some of the paradoxes are substantiated in empirical data, while others are merely thematic estimates. COVID-19 restrictions changed the usual place for teaching from on site teaching or traditional online learning to always-at-home-teaching and learning, and, moreover, it changed the time from specific time slots to timeless and never-ending access to teaching activities. These changes created the four paradoxes that can be framed as it is shown in figure 1. They will be presented and discussed below.

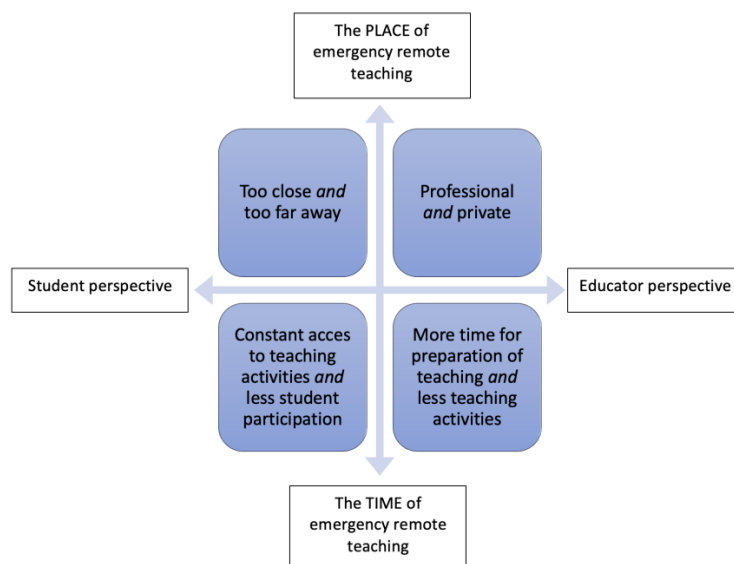


Fig.1: Four paradoxes framed by emergency remote teaching's time and space.

The paradoxes

This section introduces the four paradoxes that emerged when reading the interviews with the educators. The headings present the individual paradoxes. The following text features the argument for the paradox and any consequences. For each paradox, we illustrate with data excerpts and examples how we find the paradoxes

through our analysis of the data. To avoid ‘quantification’ of the qualitative data we have included examples only, rather than quoting extensively from the interviews. All paradoxes, however, are found across individual interviews, and as such we see them at least in part as collective experiences.

Paradox #1: The educators want to maintain their accustomed professional role while sitting at home in privacy. Many of the educators are highly experienced and often very aware of how they teach and what role they find educationally beneficial and natural for themselves personally. Thus, some of them stress how personal and professional are related by connecting their personal behaviour with their professional activity. For example, one of them says: “I’m the kind of person that talks a lot. I do the same when I’m teaching.” Another one says: “And it’s probably also because I’m as practice-oriented as I am, because I enjoy being in the teaching space.” A sudden change of the ordinary way of playing the role of teacher gives rise to challenges for some of the educators. One of them finds that being restricted to sitting on a chair and speaking into a screen are counter to her approach to teaching: “You feel like you’re failing as a teacher, because you can’t do what you want. It’s simply impossible. It was really frustrating.” In another interview, her colleague says: “So I told my boss: ‘If we’re supposed to do this in the future, then forget it. I’ll simply resign [...] It isn’t a job for me!’” Other educators are more ambivalent about the necessary change to teaching practice, believing that it may also be an advantage: “The good thing about online teaching is that it forces me not to talk all the time. I usually love talking and I think you learn a lot from it.”

The fact that the role of the teacher is usually regarded as closely linked to personality and that, for good or bad, this is changed during the pandemic, does not reflect any paradox. However, there is one in the fact that, in the environment of emergency remote teaching, the private and professional roles or identities of the teachers clash. Many teachers point out that this issue gives further rise to questions and puzzlement. One educator describes the clash between their professional and private role as a surprising experience in the middle of the teaching: “It entailed some fun challenges... also a strange mix of private things. I can remember on one occasion I was sitting there teaching etc., and my doorbell rang. So, one of the students wrote [in the chat]: ‘Malene Madsen has a visitor.’ Then you think ‘What to do?’ And of course, it was just the parcel post. Then there was the issue of whether I should let my cat out. Things like that. But the students found things like that amusing. It was as if we became more real for each other.”

This educator overcame the paradox by putting the professional role on hold and letting the private role take over for a moment. ‘Malene’ thus seems to find that her private ‘real’ person can help make her professional role more authentic.

However, the paradox is most clearly evident in the case of her colleague, when she points out that the boundaries between her public and private role were blurred, both for her and for the students.

“[It’s about] how you come across... to other people in public. The fact that to an extent this consideration disappears for the students. And maybe they turn on their camera and there they are – almost undressed, or they’ve just got up or they’re smoking into the camera... So, the issue of how you actually behave like that in front of other people... If we were sitting in a physical room, I’d say: ‘You know you’re not allowed to smoke here’, wouldn’t I? But how can you do that when the person is actually sitting in their own home and smoking? So, I think there are some no man’s lands that be kind of harder to operate in.”

In this case, the educator is thinking about how the sudden, still unfamiliar nullification of the professional roles also raises questions of an ethical nature (e.g., ‘do smoking bother the others even if it does not harm them physically?’), and it poses challenges for her as a professional teacher in private environments.

A third teacher tried to empathise with their students’ experiences of having to participate in teaching in the unfamiliar online space. This educator explains their silence in joint discussions with the transgressive element of having to talk to a teacher whom they do not recognise from their normal teaching on campus:

“[It was probably] very transgressive for them to ask questions, because it wasn’t me they were asking, it was some kind of screen. So, it was very strange for them to sit and talk from home.”

So, many teachers regarded the paradox of the juxtaposition of private and professional space and role as insurmountable but consoled themselves with the fact that the situation was only temporary. Some of them seemed to see something surprising and amusing in the paradox, and occasionally enjoyed replacing the professional role with a private one. However, in the view of the teachers, the juxtaposition of the private space with the usual campus roles was expressed differently in the way the students dealt with it. We will see this below.

Paradox #2: Students are too close and too far apart at the same time

In synchronous online teaching, meeting technologies such as Zoom, Skype and Teams allowed participants in the online space to see and hear each other on the screen. Educators and students only had to switch on their camera, and they could see the faces of all the others next to their own. But normally only the microphone of the person talking was switched on, so participants took turns. Thus, despite the physical distance, participants in online teaching could sit close to one another, because they could look at their faces and zoom in unnoticed even closer on an individual. One of the teachers described this experience of both excessive physical distance and excessive online physical proximity as a paradox:

“And as we sat there, we’d say things like: ‘Oh, looks like you have a wood-burning stove.’... Then a cat would walk across the dining table or something. It’s paradoxical that you are both closer to and further apart from one another. So, it’s the kind of paradox we’re in all the time, isn’t it?”

However, the teachers found that the facial closeness could be too intimidating for students, especially because it was difficult for them to figure out how fellow students were responding. So, because they feared being misunderstood, exposed, or ridiculed, they noticed that many students chose to turn off their camera or keep the microphone off.

“There were some who disappeared, for example because they didn’t have the camera on... and claimed that their camera wasn’t working...”

Another one said: “The students didn’t dare say anything, because they didn’t know whether the others were giggling. They had turned off their microphone.”

Most of the teachers ascribed the turning off of cameras and lack of active participation to the fact that their group of students were not happy with the online format. An educator says: “Our students are social and would rather be face-to-face” and “[they] miss the physical, bodily element.” Others ascribed it to the fact that the online format runs counter to the way you work in the profession and accordingly the way you provide meaningful teaching. Educators that require special spaces and physical interaction will, therefore, best be able to do their job when physically together with their students in the same room. This is how an educator put it: “[...] our training is not at all geared to lack of physical presence.”

However, one educator who had very small groups of students in his classes, had a different take on the paradox in this category - the situation of students being both too close to each other and too far apart at the same time. This is what he had to say about the paradox:

“It takes a lot of self-discipline from them. I think it relies on ‘belief’. But when we do online teaching and we’re sitting separately, even though we’re all far apart, I actually feel closer contact with them individually than I do with the students who are sitting right at the back of the classroom. It has something to do with the fact that you are close to the ones who are in your immediate vicinity and, even though we try to pay attention to those at the back and ask them questions to keep them awake, there is still a longer distance to them.”

The experience of the overly large, close faces coupled with the invisible, distant bodies had several different consequences for the teachers and the students. Many of the students chose to turn off their camera and remain silent because (as the educators saw it) they felt insecure about the reactions of their fellow students, because the bodyless format ran counter to their understanding of education and teaching. They did not know who was looking at them and when. Or maybe it was because they got tired of looking at themselves for a long time. Nevertheless, some of the educators described how the emergency remote teaching also allowed students other than the usually active ones suddenly to take part in the teaching on a par with them, because the students who were usually regarded as the bright ones were unable to persist in their usual way of showing off how intelligent they are:

Maybe some academic skill is evident in groups that couldn’t be seen during corona. Maybe the students are actually more equal, if you can put it that way. You didn’t get that person raising their hand, constantly drawing attention to themselves - ‘Look at me. Aren’t I clever!’ They didn’t get the chance to express themselves in the same way during corona.

For the educators, the paradox also manifested itself in various consequences. For some of them, the online format of emergency remote teaching seemed incompatible with their training, and they were just waiting for the world to return to normal, so they could get back to teaching in their usual way. They felt like a “radio presenter”, “talking to a big black space”, as one educator put it, because they felt no interaction with the students. Meanwhile, some described how they found it difficult to get a sense of the students and how they were getting on, and whether they understood what was being taught. Others found that they got closer to their students and gained new insight into their learning processes. In the latter case, though, it was crucial that there were fewer students in the digital space and that they had cameras, microphones and the active participation feature turned on.

Paradox #3: Teachers spend more time on teaching. Less teaching activities are conducted

As already mentioned, as part of the surveys of students at universities and university colleges, the participants answered a number of questions that were then processed quantitatively. These tables will form the bulk of the background to the presentation and discussion of the third paradox.

The teachers were asked: During the COVID-19 lockdown, as a teacher did you spend more or less time on your teaching? The vast majority answered that they spent more time on preparation and actual teaching during the Corona virus lockdowns than they did for normal teaching.

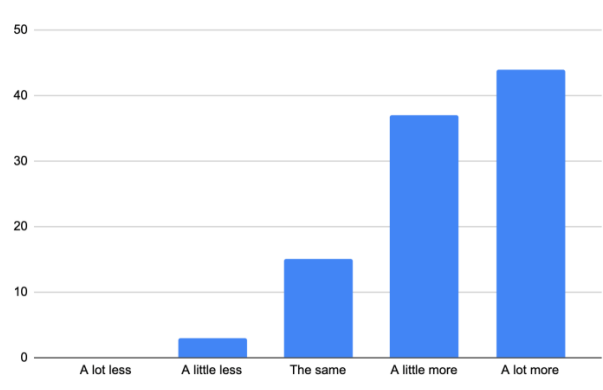


Fig.2:shows the teachers' answers in percent to the question of whether they spent more or less time on teaching during the lockdown. (Georgsen et al., 2021, p. 75).

Despite the extensive amount of time invested in teaching, neither teachers nor students were entirely satisfied with the implementation of the planned activities in the online teaching. In the interviews, several teachers stressed that the way they usually preferred to teach - for example, through discussion or the inclusion of practice and practical exercises - was not feasible. One teacher said:

“We attempted to use the learning material we’re used to. The big challenge was that our presentations are very discussion-based. And actually... in that the groups work on different projects, it is often in the reflection and supervision time right after a presentation that many of the things actually click for the students. So, we started to become a bit like petrol pump attendants, giving them information instead of them finding it themselves. Because we didn’t get any discussion up and running when we were on Canvas.”

[...]

“The students just turned off their microphones, so when we were teaching, it was really like sitting and talking to a blank screen. We had no sense at all of the students being involved in this interdisciplinary experience. Because that’s usually the case when we walk around among the students.”

So, the general feeling was that the teachers could not conduct their ordinary teaching activities as they wished. However, a single activity succeeded just as well as, or slightly better than in regular teaching, and that was prioritised far more frequently than the others: students’ independent work on assignments, followed by feedback from the teacher.

Considering what the teachers usually regard as good teaching, it is clear that the emergency remote teaching was conducted quite differently from usual. During the lockdown, it changed from being and planned and delivered with a teacher in a central role to being more dependent on the student’s planning of independent work on assignments by themselves.

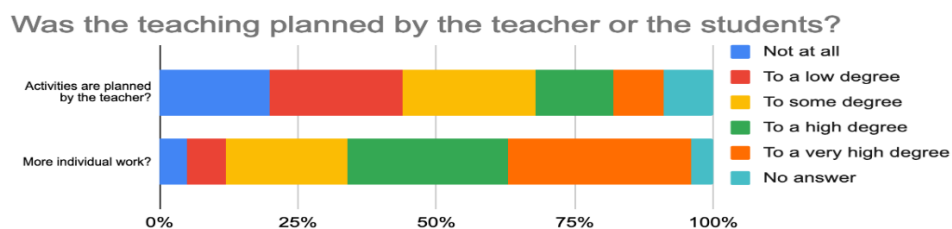


Fig.1:shows the students' assessments of whether the teaching during the lockdown was more teacher-controlled or featured more independent work on the part of the students (Georgsen et al., 2021, p. 48).

So, the paradox in this category consists of the fact that the teachers spent (much) more time on teaching activities, but the consequence was less teaching (in the sense of interactions between teacher and students and students and fellow students). This is the opinion of both the teachers themselves and the students.

Paradox #4: The students always have access to the teaching content. They participate less and are less active. This paradox is closely related to Paradox #2, in which the teachers described how the students were both too far apart and at the same time too close to each other to be able to participate actively in the teaching, in contrast to what the teachers usually expected of them. Paradox #4 also relates to the students’ more passive participation in the teaching. But in this instance the paradox is more related to time and less to place. The corona period made it possible for teaching, which was often conducted in Zoom or similar synchronous online technologies, to be accessed either live or - because it could be so easily recorded - asynchronously afterwards.

Some of the teachers also videotaped presentations, which they posted on the usual digital learning platform, where the students could view them when they had the time. One teacher said:

"[...] And I also recorded some small videos. I posted them for the students on Canvas... They featured some of the concepts I teach as part of scientific theory. They're some of the difficult concepts, which I attempted to explain in some short videos I posted on Canvas."

Teaching time during Corona seems to have felt longer and harder than regular teaching time. Prior to lockdown, teaching for six or seven hours was regular and manageable. In the teachers' view, this period now seemed too long for the students. One teacher also described how she tried to divide the teaching into smaller chunks of time:

"Otherwise, I continued with the teaching that I'd planned in advance and, given that we were in an emergency situation, I continued, as it were, with the existing plans, also in terms of what they had to read. But in my planning, I reviewed the material I intended to share with the students to select the most important points, in recognition of the fact that I didn't think we could keep the class going between the class and me for maybe six or seven hours..."

On the one hand, Corona time seemed insurmountably long: in the interviews several teachers described how it could also be extended in terms of access and accessibility. Many informed their students that they were available for supervision at many different times and in many digital formats:

"So, I was online, so they could contact me, and... they could contact me on Canvas, they could contact me on Teams, and I had also said they could call me, and they could use email. But I have to say that the weak students got lost in the process."

Gradually, many teachers found different ways of utilising COVID time in more appropriate ways by dividing classes into smaller groups or pairs in hybrid formats, and the students also met up outside class time:

"I don't think they met up. I really don't think so, no... Yes, they do it now in the second phase we're in..."

The paradoxical influence of the lockdown period on students' learning thus consisted of enabling access to teaching and tutoring maybe to an even greater degree than under normal conditions, while synchronous online teaching often came across as protracted, despite the option of experiencing the presence of teachers and fellow students and without the presence of others. Although many teachers in the survey indicated that they had sufficient IT skills, some highlighted the difficulty of suddenly having to use either other or new teaching aids and platforms:

I think it was because we were faced with Teams so suddenly. We weren't given any real training in anything. It was a question of: 'You're going to be using Teams!' So, we were going to use Teams. What can Teams do? ... What can we do, and how do you do the different things?

As in the other paradoxes above, it does not seem that expanded access of teaching in emergency teaching situation resulted in greater activity and participation on the part of the students. Far from it.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As mentioned before, the results of our analyses are based on data created in the Danish autumn of 2020, while teachers still regarded emergency remote teaching as something unusual, new, challenging, and changeable. Time itself was strange and different, a departure from normality. Most people expected that the COVID situation would cease and everything - including teaching - would return to normal. However, we can also tell from the interviews that the educators slowly got used to the new way of teaching, and they tried to change their teaching so that it was better suited to the domestic situations of the participants as we saw in Marlene's case.

There is only a tenuous similarity between emergency remote teaching and the e-learning or blended learning that is familiar to many teachers. Therefore, by way of conclusion, we will discuss whether the paradoxes presented above apply to ordinary online learning: i.e., teaching implemented in a purely online format without the usual everyday physical attendance and outside a context of corona lockdowns or the fear of viruses and disease.

Paradox #1 revealed that the place of teaching during emergency remote teaching occasionally blurred the boundaries vis-à-vis the professional role of the teachers, because their home and private behaviour got mixed up with the role. This is not generally the case in traditional online teaching, where the teacher will select a site where there is no disturbance from cats, postmen or children. Online teaching can also be conducted from an office on campus, a classroom or another relevant context. In other words, Paradox #1 does not usually figure in traditional online teaching.

Paradox #2 relates to the fact that the students seemed to be too far away from each other and from the teacher, yet at the same time too close for experiencing teaching as normal. For many students, the result of seeing each other's faces close-up all day long during the teaching was that they turned off the camera and their participation in the teaching was indicated solely by their names on the screen. In contrast, a great deal of research reveals that students who choose a course of study provided in an online or blended format belong to a distinctive group of students (Doyle, 2009; Galy et al., 2011) who see particular benefits in this format of education. In normal online teaching, therefore, it seems less likely that students will be reluctant to participate in new digital ways.

Similarly, fundamentally they might be expected to have a more positive attitude towards participating in a synchronous format (cf. Kolbaek, 2021 p. 221 et seq.). Paradox #2 is not likely to exist in a corona-free, digital teaching context.

Paradox #3 reveals that, even though the teachers stated that they spent more time preparing for teaching during the corona lockdowns, far fewer teaching activities and far more independent and individual assignment work took place. It was clear that, for many teachers, the sudden shift to online teaching was a very demanding didactic challenge. Teaching in blended or online formats requires special didactic knowledge and skill, (Gurley, 2018; Kolbaek, 2021) and normally teachers in university colleges or universities would probably have received various kinds of competency development in the field of e-learning before having to teach in such a format. Furthermore, it would be natural to allocate time for the development of didactic concepts for teaching online (Hodges et al., 2020). As we know, this did not happen in terms of the didactic design of emergency remote teaching, so Paradox #3 would probably not be predominant among experienced teachers and educators.

Paradox #4 requires more research and investigation before we can conclude whether it could emerge in normal online teaching formats as well. As stated, in the Corona context, we find that, despite the many places that provided expanded access to tutoring, teaching materials and activities, there was no corresponding rise in the amount of student interaction and activities. Overall, however, there are so many parameters to take into account if we are to investigate a direct causality between online teaching format, learning outcome and student activity, that many researchers regard it as a risky undertaking (Nortvig et al., 2018). Nevertheless, as a teacher and researcher, one usually expects a kind of positive correlation between teaching format, teachers' activities, learning outcome and student interactions, so such a very clear paradox as our #4 will not be predominant in regular online teaching (Alawamleh et al., 2020).

In our research questions, we asked what paradoxes the teachers experienced in the context of the emergency remote teaching, and how they maintained or changed their teaching practice during the Corona lockdowns. We saw that the teachers found it paradoxical to work as professional teachers at home in a private setting with the students both close and far away at the same time. Despite the teachers spending a lot of time preparing their teaching, the main student activity that resulted was independent written assignments. Nor did the expanded access to teaching content and activities lead to expanded student activity. In this challenging time and strange place, the teachers maintain their usual way of teaching, but in a very different format.

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