What happens to our students' experience of learning, in and out of the 'classroom'?

Learning was never only about what happens in class, but this is going to be more true than ever. The QAA [Guidance on Contact Hours](#) explains that learning activity in the UK is measured in two ways: the 'level' of learning in terms of Learning Outcomes, and the 'amount' of learning in terms of Notional Study Hours. Each module has an 'academic credit value', with10 credits equalling 100 hours of study. So a normal undergraduate year load of 120 credits adds up to 1200 study hours; this makes it roughly equivalent to a 40-hour work week across 30 weeks.

One of the most serious challenges for students will be how to organise their independent study and where to make it happen. Jim Dickinson of Wonkhe, a former director of the National Union of Students, has some sobering and provocative thoughts on this: [What exactly are students going to do with their time?](#) and [If we must reopen campuses, we mustn't waste them on teaching](#).

Squaring the Circle. One solution to this conundrum would seem to be something that many of us in the face-to-face classroom were creating without knowing we were doing so: **Presence.** But what *is* Presence? David White, Head of Digital Learning at University of the Arts London, makes a stab at defining it in [The need for Presence not 'Contact Hours'](#). Creating a sense of being seen and heard and engaged – a sense of shared enterprise with a tutor and, equally importantly, peers to bounce off of – may come instinctively in the face-to-face classroom, but in a virtual environment it requires careful planning and deft implementation.
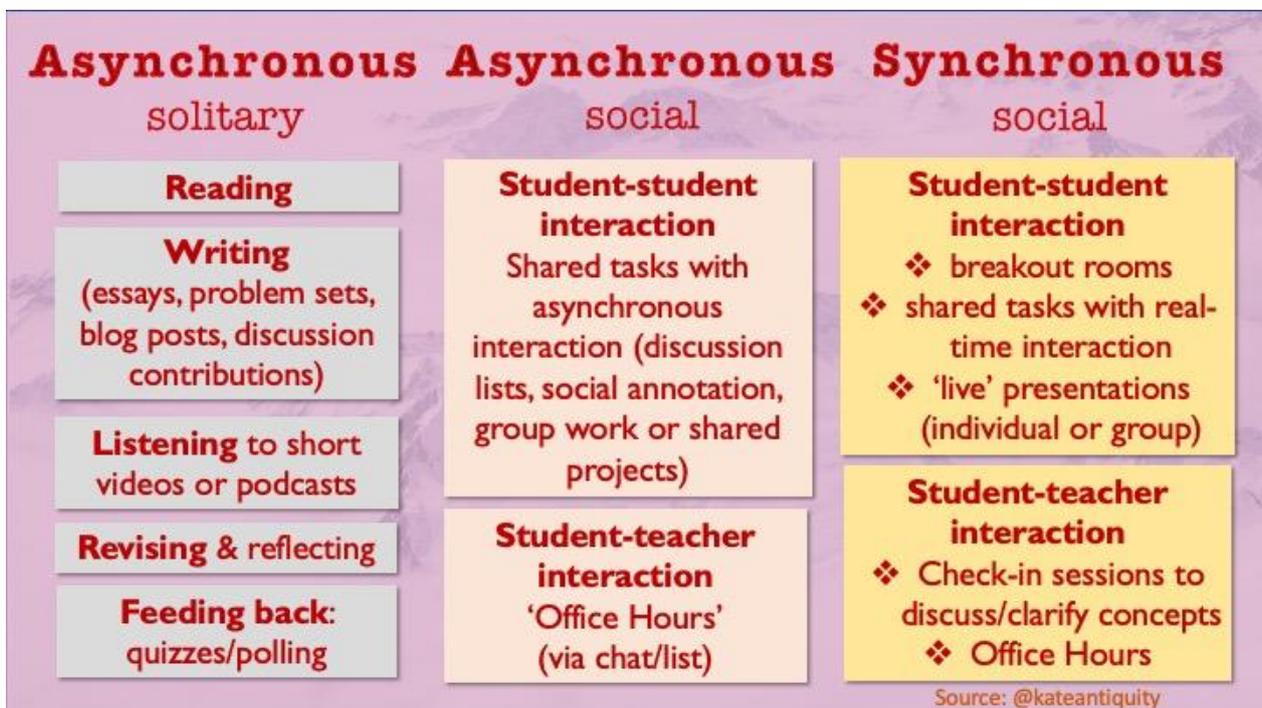

Image: In this chart Kate Cooper looks at the role peer-to-peer and social learning play in learning design (Source: Kate Cooper, [Should we stop worrying about contact hours?](#))

For Staff: We need to shift from thinking about 'contact hours' to thinking about what actions **offer the best support to learning**. Long hours in Zoom meetings are no substitute for the 'buzz' of the real-life classroom. What is needed is a sequence of carefully designed prompts, provocations and check-ins that support students by offering guidance and the reassuring sense that they aren't alone. When benefit to students comes from design and implementation rather than physical presence, this will also have a knock-on effect in how institutions think about **staff workload**.

Activity	Presence	Interactivity	Mode
Live broadcast lecture (Replay)	High	Low. Can be raised through use of comments area or other backchannels (Discussion fora or Twitter)	Synchronous
MS Teams session	High	High. Instantaneous communication via audio, video and text. Improvements to service will increase interactivity.	Synchronous
Chat* (Moodle)	High	High. Instantaneous communication with low bandwidth requirement.	Synchronous
Discussion forum* (M)	High	High. Interaction extends beyond live sessions and offers a flexible, self-paced medium for discussing, sharing and planning.	Asynchronous
Audio/video feedback (cohort wide) (M, R)	High	Medium. Can be raised by publishing to a discussion forum.	Asynchronous
Pre-recorded/flipped video lecture (M, R)	Medium	Medium. The comments area can be used as an in-situ discussion forum.	Asynchronous
Recording of broadcast lecture (M, R)	Medium	Medium. The comments area can be used as an in-situ discussion forum.	Asynchronous
Announcements* (M)	Medium	Low. These are intended to act as online notice boards.	Asynchronous
Textual quiz feedback (M)	Medium	Low. These are pre-determined and are intended to provide rapid feedback based upon performance.	Asynchronous
Link to completed Moodle profile (M)	Medium	Low. These are useful in adding degrees of presence to activities marked with an *	Asynchronous

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Image: In this chart Martin King shows that asynchronous strategies can achieve 'presence'. (Source: Martin King, [Considerations for online teaching: Presence](#))

Further Reading:

1. [Building Community & Presence in Online Learning](#) by Kevin Chamorro, Jon Hoff, Keith Mickelson & Tyler Skillings, from [Designing Online Courses: A Primer](#), distinguishes between *teaching presence* and *teacher-centred presence*. They see teachers as most effective when perceived as being 'present', but **without being the centre of attention**.

2. On the History UK Blog, read Kate Cooper (Royal Holloway), [Should we stop worrying about contact hours?](#)