論文：

Distance vs. Remote: Reflections on Online Education

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Abstract

This is a reflective case study on how courses were designed for emergency remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. It talks about remote course design and how to create a learning community that is student-centered. Ideas are presented from the instructor's own courses, as well as other courses, to encourage student participation and help combat social isolation of students and instructors.

Keywords

Introduction

The world has now been battling the COVID-19 pandemic for a full year and the virus is still spreading, and people are still dying from it. Educators and administrators around the world have been forced to either teach and work under unsafe conditions or make sometimes superhuman efforts to continue to educate their students. There was a worldwide effort to move a lot of courses online in a very short time. Educators, and students, who were not trained to use digital technology have had to use new techniques to continue providing students with the education they need and want. This has left many educators asking, "Am I doing enough?" (Schuck & Lambert, 2020).

Online Learning Experience

This instructor earned his Master's degree from Stony Brook University, New York. The program was offered completely online, utilizing the Blackboard system, now called Blackboard Learn. Blackboard Learn is a learning management system (LMS) which allows instructors to create bulletin board type spaces, chat rooms, post different kinds of files, such as audio and text files, and videos. The program instructors used both synchronous text assignments and asynchronous wall posting and group assignments. The program still exists and is one of the most popular completely online Master's degree programs offered in the U.S. To step

out of the objective role for a moment, participating in that Master's degree program was a joy, and earning that degree remains one of the best decisions that I have made.

When the national university at which I teach put all of their courses online, suddenly, due to COVID-19, I remembered my online experience at Stony Brook. Which is why the decision was made to put all my courses on the university's Moodle platform. Moodle is open source, and thus more affordable, but it is otherwise similar to the Blackboard system which I used as a graduate student. I, thus, tried to keep my course design as similar to what I experienced as a student. I loved my courses as a student and tried to replicate that for my students in Japan.

There have been issues. In the past, I tried using a LMS offered by National Geographic Publishing, now called NGL Cengage. The university's servers at the time could not handle the traffic of the students. There were numerous and repeated failures of access and students complained. As well, the tech support for the LMS was located in another Asian country at the time, not in Japan, so there was little to no help from the publishing company. I resorted to paper quizzes and homework assignments, and that remained the norm until the pandemic. Due to the threat from the global crisis, the university has upgraded and expanded its servers and the students have been able to access the Moodle system mostly trouble free. But because of the LMS debacle in the past, I decided when designing the courses

for the pandemic year, to keep it as simple and low-tech as possible. As numerous authors have pointed out, the infrastructure for technology must be stable for it to work in distance and remote mode (Zhang, 2020; Schuck & Lambert, 2020; Kaiper-Marquez et al, 2020). Other authors recommend keeping online courses and materials as low-tech as possible (Howley, 2020; Wang & East, 2020).

Course Design

When it came to the design of the courses, the excellently designed courses at Stony Brook were the inspiration. But it was clear that those had been graduate-level courses for fluent or native English speakers. Other sources and ideas were needed. Keep the lessons short (Major & Calandrino, 2018; Kaiper-Marquez et al, 2020). Offer flexibility in timing, assignments and grading (Gamage et al, 2020; Wang & East, 2020). Some educators recommended a combination of both synchronous and asynchronous lessons and activities (Hambacher, et al, 2018; Schuck & Lambert, 2020; Baran & Alzoubi, 2020). Online discussions, both synchronous and asynchronous have been used with positive results. Designing the online discussions around questions for the students, as opposed to instructor lectures, is a way to encourage student participation, help the students feel connected and less isolated, and get them to work collaboratively (Hambacher et al, 2018; Hsieh et al 2016; Schultz & deMers, 2020). It also encourages them to reflect on their experiences during this stressful time and gives the students the message that they have knowledge of value. Even though all classes at the university are online, the school is requiring attendance be taken. Timed quizzes and assignments that the students do during synchronous lessons fulfill this obligation. Amaka and Goeman (2017) recommend using a variety of media sources such as videos and animated visuals for distance classes. They engage the students and enhance the learning experience. The textbooks that were selected for the courses were all published by NGL Cengage and have free student websites that accompany the texts. The websites have authentic National Geographic content in the form of videos and audio tracks, as well as some reading texts, in addition to the students' textbooks. The students can watch and listen to the material as many times as they need, and there are subtitles on some of the videos. There are audioscripts in some of the textbooks, as well. The point was to offer the students ample, interesting lesson materials, which they

could study at their own pace, as often as they wanted. Hopefully this reduces anxiety for the students (Hsieh et al, 2016).

Accountability is an issue. How can we evaluate students in a remote learning environment (Schuck & lambert, 2020)? The technology helps with that. The Moodle system records times and dates of students entering the course page. Quizzes can and have been set on the course page. Moodle records the students' scores. Time and date can be set for a few minutes to weeks. Discussion questions can be answered individually or group assignments can be set. But other schools are experimenting with different ideas. Oxford University has cancelled exams for first-year students. Some schools are implementing No Detriment policies, which allow the students to receive pass/fail credits, and not harm GPAs during a time of stress and crisis (Gamage et al, 2020). Some educators have implemented flexible, asynchronous, modular courses for students in areas with problematic internet access (Baran & Alzoubi, 2020). It should be pointed out that while Japan has decent internet access overall, it is not perfect, and the university's own system only recently was made able to handle pandemic traffic. And even then, there have been outages and access problems. I have had to reset quizzes for students who said that they could not access the course page during the synchronous lesson. There is no way to verify such a story. It is in the best interest of the student to just accept, and trust, in this emergency.

Technological Issues

Some of the courses I teach are conversation classes. I have been asked how I teach a conversation class without video conferencing. As has been noted previously, the students have had access/connection issues, as have I during synchronous class time. But there are other reasons why I do not like video conferencing. For one thing, it does not do one important thing that it is being used for: it does not allow emotional connection. Schuck and Lambert state, "While technology allowed interaction, it took away relational aspects of teaching and learning that were upsetting to teachers" (2020). Schultz & deMers point out that "For online learning to be truly effective one must begin with a well-structured course and deliver it effectively." Everything needs to work properly (2020). Wang and East documented technology exhaustion for teachers (2020). Students found video conferencing difficult to learn and had technical difficulties (Kaiper-Marquez et al, 2020).

Williamson et al (2020) challenge the popular idea that all young people are "well-connected, digitally savvy, 'digital natives'". They report that whole populations of young people are being excluded from education because they do not have access to technology, devices and internet. In the United States, 77% of households have internet access, and the U.S. has a higher percentage of pc/internet access than other countries (Gamage et al, 2020). Japanese students reported not knowing how to access the university Moodle system and could not figure out how to navigate the well-designed, easy-to-use student websites that accompany their textbooks. This from students who uniformly possess smart phones and are frequently online during in-class lessons. There have been students who during synchronous video conference classes at a smaller university, could not see what had been shared with the class and wound up having to share her friend's computer during class time. And during video conferencing classes, students are hesitant to turn on their cameras, and will resist doing so for several minutes.

Learning Culture

As Hambacher et al point out, social interaction is a component of learning (2018). They define a community of inquiry as "a group of individuals who collaboratively engage in dialogue and reflection to form personal meaning and confer mutual understanding." Having students participate in online discussion forums helps build social presence so the students feel like they belong "and are invited to express their perspectives and engage in social relationships with peers and the instructor." Howley recommends that students work online collaboratively and instructors step back and act as facilitators (2020). Educators need to be willing to move into the background, and change their role from "sage on the stage" to "guide on the side", to allow students to take more responsibility for their own education, especially in a remote learning environment (Schultz & deMers, 2020). Hsieh et al state that "language learners often experience anxiety about speaking in public, such as in front of their classmates, for fear of making mistakes" (2016). "Whereas in a face-to-face classroom discussion it is common for some students to remain on the periphery, the online setting provides an entry point for students who do not readily speak in class" (Hambacher et al, 2018). Educators agree, connections among learners are important. Flynn & Noonan report that students may feel "alienation and being disconnected

from the learning community" in online classrooms (2020). Baran and Alzoubi talked about how their asynchronous online discussions "provided spaces for students to engage in collaborative discourse" (2020). Hsieh et al state "using the online communication environment for interaction with their classmates, they could consider their comments and responses without feeling the pressure of needing to make an immediate reply" (2016). As Hambacher et al point out, dialogue is different from conversation, "asynchronous dialogue in text-based online learning environments" is useful (2018).

Reflection

"Academic leaders had to quickly overcome any lingering normalcy bias… and quickly assess their current reality in which students, faculty and staff are experiencing genuine difficulties in their everyday life" (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020). Almost half of academics were not confident teaching remotely (Flynn & Noonan, 2020). It is not only students who feel isolated, academics felt isolated, too (Flynn & Noonan, 2020). Staff felt the emotional labor of creating caring relationships with students in remote conditions was more difficult (Flynn & Noonan, 2020) Educators have reported, "it seems like now we're connected all day on these devices" (Schuck & Lambert, 2020). Kaiper-Marquez et al report "Shifting to remote instruction significantly increased instructors' class preparation time, which may not be feasible for part-time instructors or those with heavy class loads" (2020). Wang and East have also documented prolonged working hours for teachers (2020). Everyone, teachers, students, administrators, support staff, are all doing the best they can. The world has hope now that vaccines are becoming available, but the world is still looking at another six months, at least, of danger from the coronavirus pandemic. Do universities put classes back in the classroom or do they wait? A Japanese university student said today in an online forum that with warmer weather the coronavirus would go away, like influenza. These online classes have increased my workload. But I willingly took on that load because I had such a positive experience with my own online learning. I wanted to recreate that for my students. Students have probably not enjoyed the classes as much as I have creating them. Wang and East say "We realized that, no matter how well-intended curriculum adaptations are, they cannot reflect or address the diverse needs of students, especially during a crisis situation" (2020). However well-intended my class adaptations have been, The students will

probably be very glad to get back into the classroom and "back to normal".

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