

Pedagogy First!

A blog project of the Program for Online Teaching



Spring 2015 Collection

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Program for Online Teaching

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Introduction



In this booklet we have collected blog posts from online instructors and experts posted at the Program for Online Teaching website in Spring 2015.

The Program for Online Teaching, founded in 2005, is a volunteer faculty group focused on the pedagogy of teaching online. We have offered free workshops and classes to faculty at our home institution (MiraCosta College in Oceanside, California) and around the world. In honor of our tenth anniversary, we invited online instructors and experts who have donated their valuable time over the years to write about the current state of online teaching.

The collection is a mix of informal, colloquial posts and more research-based articles. It also features perspectives on both the “how to” and the “why to” of online teaching.

We open with Art instructor Joanne Carruba’s confession of being afraid when handed her first online class (*Back to the Beginning*), followed by my own post emphasizing selecting materials that suit ones own pathway for student learning (*Materials in an online class*).

Historian Bethanie Perry begins a discussion of *Instructor Presence*, emphasizing the use of surveys and frequent personal communication with students. Graphic Arts specialist Jill Malone’s *Strategies for Assessment* relays her strategy for adding synchronous communication and audio commentary on student work.

Todd Conaway of Yavapai College in Arizona continues ideas about *Developing Presence as an Online Instructor*, with explanations about creating an online persona and staying connecting by using the affordances of the web. Rachèle DeMéo, French instructor, details creative ideas for *Encouraging Community Online* through pairing students, introductions, and group projects.

Then we get practical! In *Cool Tools: Voicethread*, Bethanie Perry goes hands-on, detailing a specific tool for student interaction. Spanish instructor Silvia Vazquez Paramio continues the theme with a well-referenced collection of *Online Collaboration Tools*, based on current educational theories about collaboration as a learning mode. Rachèle DeMéo then presents the *Useful Tools for Teaching Online* that she prefers, emphasizing that the choice must be influenced by pedagogy and detailing the uses of each. English instructor Jordan Molina sets out the uses of *Cool Tools* like Survey Monkey and LucidChart for enhancing instruction.

We then get into some of the challenges and research in the field. In *This is About the LMS*, educational technologist Todd Conaway lays out the challenges of adopting

Canvas at his Arizona community college, and broadens those challenges into larger considerations of Learning Management Systems. Child Development instructor Laura Paciorek's article *Student Retention in Online Classes: More Questions Than Answers* reviews the current research on student retention in online classes, and some of the many theories about why retention differs online versus on-site.

From New Zealand comes Ross Kendall's *Culture skills – reflections on the online Umwelt*, discussing what happens when we focus more on the learner, and connecting his/her ideas and perceptions to instructional materials and methods. Kendall emphasizes the freedom of the student to make these connections themselves, and the challenges of creating that environment online.

Expanding on the idea of self-directed learning, Cris Crissman of North Carolina writes about *MOOCs: A Tool for Reimagining Our Teaching*. In detailing her experiences as a MOOC (Massive Open Online Class) participant, and the lessons she's learned from MOOC instructors, she shares the ways in which she's applied her MOOC learning to her own online classes.

Ending our collection with a focus on ideas, my *The tyranny and comfort of "best practices"* questions the current trends in standardizing online learning based on research and advice from non-teachers. Jenny Mackness, a top UK researcher in online education, provides us with an erudite examination of some *Big issues in online teaching*, including the teacher's role, the introduction of automated elements in teaching, and the application of the newest theories, all within a framework of ethics and responsibility.

Our concluding informal post, *Pedagogical Philosophy*, features Joanne Carrubba closing our work with the idea that learning should be student-centered.

We hope you enjoy this collection and find it useful.

Happy online, hybrid, and technology-enhanced teaching,

Lisa M Lane
Director, Program for Online Teaching

Back to the Beginning

 mccpot.org/wp/2015/03/back-to-the-beginning/

by Joanne Carrubba, MiraCosta College (Art History)

If I think waaaayyy back (5 years, but it seems so long) to when I started teaching online, I remember being completely intimidated with the idea of teaching Art History to students through a computer rather than in a classroom. I could not conceive of how I would show images, encourage discussion of those images, give feedback, and do assessments. I suppose it didn't help that I was given a canned, pre-done Moodle classroom, and no training or assistance.

I wish I had known what was out there for online instructors. I didn't think about doing video lectures, or being sure that my syllabi, classroom, and feedback were not too text heavy. It was by far the most intimidating, confusing, and scary start of a semester in the 10+ years I have been teaching. Also, it was the LEAST successful, for me and the students.

I wish I had known about the numerous [pedagogy and online teaching blogs](#) that exist on this wonderful internet. I also wish I had known about teachers who post examples of [interesting, clickable syllabi](#). Knowing about [cool tools](#) for myself and my students, and the idea of video lectures, intros, and voice thread for feedback would also have been amazing for all involved in that first, disastrous online class. I also wish I had gotten involved in the POT community right then, as this is a wonderful place to share ideas and tools, as well as give feedback.

Ah, but now....how far I've come! (I hope)

 mccpot.org/wp/2015/03/materials-in-an-online-class/

Lisa M Lane, MiraCosta College (History)

When designing an online class (I'm doing one now on the History of Technology) I try to keep in mind that I have the whole web to play with.

Starting from a position of control, of knowing that I have choices of what to offer my students, is important. To me, the materials make the class, not just by providing "content", but by creating pathways for learning.

Many years ago, I was teaching at San Elijo campus and it was the first day of a new semester. After going over the syllabus, a student asked, "What are you going to do to get me interested in history?" I responded that the materials I've assigned should do that, the letters and documents and readings. I explained that they had all been carefully chosen to provide a real sense of the past, and would draw him in if he'd let them. At the end of the semester, he told me he thought that was bullshit on the first day, but it turned out I was absolutely right.

Similarly, I had a student tell me that my reader was an "activist text". It's a collection of my favorite primary sources, so I asked him what he meant. He said every document I'd chosen somehow celebrated American citizens actively trying to change the world. I'd never thought about it, but he was right.

This is why I can't really ever start with a textbook. I know that in some departments you have to, and I've been blessed that we may choose our own texts. Studies indicate that the instructor feeling in control of his/her own online class is very important. All textbooks have their own pedagogy, in the choice of material, the layout, even the questions for study. I've noted here that [I don't like having to go with the whole package](#).

My first materials, then, tend to be of my own creation. I write out (and later record) "lectures", sharing resources along with my perspective of that particular era or subject. These lectures don't substitute for the factual, encyclopedic information in a textbook, so more and more I've been turning to a brief textbook, or Wikipedia, for that. I select supporting materials that are freely available, or that I can carefully cite and use according to the [TEACH Act](#), behind a password. I write my own introductions, so that students know what to look for.

I look for cool things, visual things. I hunt down YouTube video clips and gif animations. I not only look for art, but [have students post visual primary sources every week](#). So part of collecting materials is also deciding what should also be collected by the students, rather than me!

I confess that finding and creating materials is one of the best parts of teaching online. Unlike in the classroom, where I have to present things in a certain order, often while explaining, online the student can jump around amongst the resources, and go back to anything at any time. And the vast selection of materials available online makes it a voyage of discovery to develop a class.

mccpot.org/wp/2015/03/presence-as-an-online-instructor/

Bethanie Perry, MiraCosta College (History)

Today I will be posting a video blog, in typical “peanut history” fashion, from my phone.

The question of perception of (and reality of) presence has been one of my primary concerns as I develop my online teaching style. I am currently in my second semester teaching online and this is still something I am trying to figure out and assess, hence the thought of blogging about it would encourage thoughtful reflection and feedback!

My concern is two fold: 1) how do students assess or perceive the instructor’s presence? and 2) how do I create the same style of presence I have in f2f classes online (and is this even possible)?

For me the answer to the first question is more straightforward (maybe). I am regularly creating and posting content, commenting to discussion posts, and sending out announcements. While, I currently do not hold online chat sessions since so far no students have seemed interested in this ability, I mostly communicate with students via email or discussion forums. I just sent out a survey for feedback on students’ perceptions of instructor interaction, among other things. We can’t be online all the time and so far I don’t think students expect this either.

The second question seems to be the real question for me, how do I create an online presence that is similar to my f2f presence. In my f2f classes, I am highly energetic, constantly moving, rarely lecturing, and generally questioning/discussing material with my students. It is a highly interactive and energetic setting. I want my online presence to somehow capture this energy. But how?!

First, I am sure to create my own video presentations of the material, hoping that the video of facial expressions and the sound of voice will convey this same energy. Second, I am actively involve in the discussion forums by asking more thought provoking questions as replies to postings. I am not sure if the first approach meets the objective with complete satisfaction, it is at least a step in that direction. I am currently awaiting feedback to see how students perceive my interjections. So far, I have found that only a few students actually go back and read my replies and respond. This is a real struggle for me, as I do not want to create a stale online environment where students simply submit work and receive a grade—while the grade comes with feedback I assume most students do not read the feedback since they are not responding to my replies.

So I do not know if I had added to the discussion of online presence as much as I have created questions about developing this topic, but that's what I do, ask questions.

Jill Malone, MiraCosta College (Media Arts and Technologies)

In some ways project assessment for my online students is nearly identical to that of my on-site classes. Maintaining very high standards (I keep raising that bar and they keep meeting it, it's awesome) and providing my students with a clear, detailed assessment rubric (evaluation guide, check list, whatever you choose to call it that might look like this: [Rubric for PS Project 2-online](#)) that defines exactly what I'm going to assess and how I'm going to assess it are key to both my online and on-site courses. "I was supposed to do *that*???" is not something I should ever hear, and if I do it's because (1) the student didn't bother to read the rubric, or (2) my rubric is a mess and I need to fix it.

I've also learned that if I want to assess excellent work from my students, it helps to show them what "excellent work" actually looks like. This, of course, is more easily done in an on-site class where I have printed examples to share. For my online students, however, this entails generating yet another instructional video. Okay, I can hear some of you protesting that you've already created a hundred online videos and You Are Over It, thank you very much. Great, this will be video #101. It's worth it. I've found that providing examples of outstanding work from former students stimulates creativity and demonstrates by example that exceptional craftsmanship really is achievable in my class. Here's a for-instance: For their second project my students need to create a digitally painted piece that visually expresses the emotions and imagery a particular song evokes for them. Sound like fun? It is! Easy to do? Absolutely not! So to get them started I provide [a video with examples of what other students have done](#). In addition, I created a video with a "before & after" example by a former student that illustrates some artistic hurdles she experienced with Dave Brubeck's "Take Five" and how she handled them. I've found that the more time and effort I invest up front providing good examples for my students to ponder, the better the results are at the end (and the less work and frustration I have) when it comes time to assess their creations.

Even so, I found the artistic quality of the work in my online class wasn't as good as that of my on-site students, and the reason was pretty obvious. In my on-site classes everyone learns from the immediate, real-time feedback I give each student during our rough draft critique sessions, which in turn, makes for dramatically improved final projects. But how to accomplish this in an online course where everything is asynchronous? The answer: By making this part of the course **not** asynchronous. So now, as a required part of their project grade every student must attend a real-time, synchronous rough draft lab session where, using Collaborate, I capture their computer screen and share it with the other students in attendance. At that point I can see what they've done and how they've done it, and I can offer suggestions for improvement. To accommodate the various schedules of my students I offer these synchronous sessions at different times during the week – in the evening, in the morning, and in the afternoon – so every student can attend at least one session. I also post the dates and times of these synchronous lab sessions prominently in the course syllabus so each student can plan ahead for them. This has improved immensely the quality of the work submitted by my online students, which in turn has made my assessment of these projects much easier.

And finally, there's that business of assigning a numeric grade to each student and providing the rationale behind that grade. For years I wrote paragraphs explaining this-is-why-you-got-the-grade-you-did to each student, trying so hard to explain what was done well and what wasn't and how to improve. Except I'm never sure they even read my carefully crafted comments. Plus, the tone I was trying to convey never seemed to make it across in my writing (and probably still doesn't, are you all bored to tears??). So I

stopped doing it. Instead, I now create and attach an MP3 file with my verbal comments ([fictitious MP3](#)). Because my students have heard that familiar voice week in and week out from all my posted videos, there's no question who's talking to them. This simple switch from text to audio has been a godsend: It's been well received by my students, and posting their grades is faster and easier for me to do.

Oh good lord, I just blathered on for four full paragraphs! Is anyone still reading this?? I swore I was going to keep this discourse to a hundred words or less. Not even close. Sorry! That'll teach you, Lisa, to ask **me** to contribute to a blog!

 mccpot.org/wp/2015/03/developing-presence-as-an-online-instructor/

by *Todd Conaway, Yavapai College, Arizona (Educational Technology)*

I suppose there is “presence” as in time and space and there is also the type of presence you have in the online environment. The former is more like, “Are you easily available to your students,” and are you present in course discussions and active member of the class. The latter might be more like what does the internet say about you? How does your personality come across in the digital spaces? I am not sure if you can have one without the other. Just as when you are talking to someone in a hallway, you are obviously there in time and space, but you also can’t help but to share your personality with the person you are speaking to. **PRESENCE IN TIME AND SPACE** I have a colleague who just completed a master’s level course that was delivered online. After lengthy discussions about the absence of his instructor in class activities he finally emailed the faculty in charge and was told that the class followed a constructivist model and that the learning was created by the students. Therefore, the instructor was the barely visible guide on the side. My questions were like these:

- Did the faculty have any synchronous office hours? Like a phone number? A Skype contact? If so, was it encouraged that students use it?
- Were there any synchronous times and tools for students to meet? With or without the faculty? How was that encouraged by the faculty?
- Were there any kind of office hours in real buildings or coffee shops in the off chance that someone taking the class actually lived near the institution the course was being delivered from?
- How active was the instructor in the course discussions in the LMS? On blog postings or in Facebook groups?
- Does the course use Twitter as a means to communicate trouble? Happiness?

We all have a syllabus that says we are located at this email address. If we are an adjunct, maybe we give our students our cell phone numbers? Sure, there are ways to communicate online in what in many cases has become a completely asynchronous environment. Email dominates the communication in most online college courses. But email is terrible and time. And time is important. I do not have any answers for the best way for instructors to travel in time, but I do think a good question to ask is, “How can I best relate information to my students?” In many cases, email will not be at the top of the list. So what are the options in this digital age where we wear all the world as our skin? **PRESENCE AS IN “WHO ARE YOU?”** In 2008 I delivered a conference session titled, “Your Digital Personality: The Real You in Your Online Class.” At that time I also bought my first domain and used it for the handout for the conference session. I handed out business cards with the conference logo, the URL of the digital personality site and a Pink Floyd shirt.

Your Digital Personality from **Todd Conaway**

While at that time I felt like I was becoming more comfortable in the online space, it was still a big learning curve and I spent much time trying to figure out how to control the web and how to make it reflect just who I am what I want to share. The Digital Personality site has an RSS feed on the right side from a Diigo list I created. It has some good articles on digital presence. Do you ever Google your name? Does the real you show up? If nothing shows up, what does that say about your comfort on the web? Your digital footprint, large or small, should reflect who you are out there in the real world. Just like the real you in a classroom reflects who you are outside of the classroom. You can’t escape that and it is becoming harder and harder

As we push for a better and deeper digital literacy for our students, we should expect the same or more from our faculty.

The World Wide Web is meant to connect things. In many ways, classrooms are meant to contain things. That is particularly true of the Learning Management System. How do we use the web to share the great things we do as educators? As people with unique and wonderful gifts? Taking advantage of the web and using it to share our work is one way to build a larger and fuller image of you on the web. Just recently our institution allowed faculty to create their “probationary portfolios” online. They had all been required to turn them in in three-ring binders up to that point. How do you share the digital work you create? Do you use YouTube to record lectures? Do you use Jing or some screencasting tool to create demonstrations or micro-lectures? Do you curate relevant course content for students using Diigo or some other tool? How do you see the opportunities the web/the computer provides? As possibilities or as detrimental deterrents to learning in the classrooms that exist today? Most likely, a little of both. To me, it is being able to send my mother who lives in another state a video of her granddaughter singing a Leonard Cohen tune my mom loved so much.

I don't care what you say, that is invaluable. One thing I have learned from working with teachers is that they are usually a humble lot and don't see what they do as “really amazing.” I know that they do amazing things every day. And I know that sharing those things they do outside the classrooms they work in and the Learning Management Systems they teach from is hugely important to the progress we will make in education in the coming years. The internet provides a great medium to do just that.

 mccpot.org/wp/2015/04/encouraging-community-online/

Rachèle DeMéo, MiraCosta College (French)

As an online student, it can be challenging to feel part of the “classroom”. I can identify as a student—one of my two Master degrees was completely online. But I can also identify as an instructor. So *what are some ways to keep our students feeling a part of a community in our online classes?*

Here are some ways I believe we can help our students to create a community online.

As a student

Something I make my students do the first week of our semester together is to **pair up with another student to practice weekly**. I teach French (I’m originally from the [South of France](#)) and practicing a language is essential in learning it. So based on their usual weekly schedule, students pick a time/day that usually works for them and they can either meet in person or via [Skype](#) to practice. Weekly, I **provide them with a prompt** so they can know what they need to practice (which correlates to our lesson).

They also have to jot down the time/day they practiced and provide me with other details.

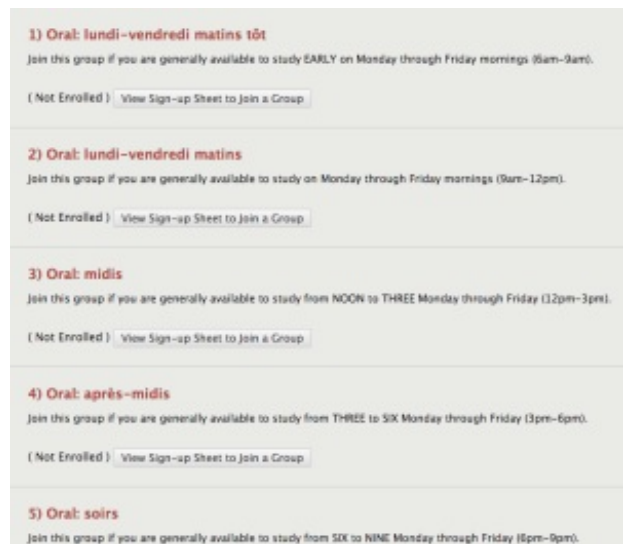
The Discussion Board on Blackboard is a great way to keep our students feeling involved in our online community. I’ve seen instructors use the Discussion Board in a variety of ways to keep students plugged in (pun *intended*) to their

classrooms. Here are some of the ways I personally use Blackboard.

At the beginning of the semester, I **ask students to introduce themselves and include a picture or avatar**. I ask a few more things based on their level, modeling it by introducing myself first.

Throughout the semester I’ll **create different posts** (not an overload, but a few) **such as asking them what their hobbies are**. By seeing their classmates’ hobbies, they can connect outside the classroom (and hopefully speak/text/email in French together!).

Mid-Terms are another way to get the entire classroom to get to know one another. I assign them



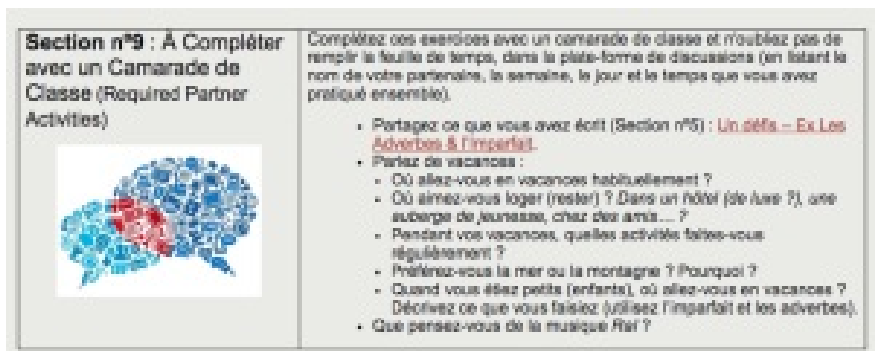
1) Oral: lundi-vendredi matins tôt
Join this group if you are generally available to study EARLY on Monday through Friday mornings (8am-9am).
(Not Enrolled) View Sign-up Sheet to Join a Group

2) Oral: lundi-vendredi matins
Join this group if you are generally available to study on Monday through Friday mornings (9am-12pm).
(Not Enrolled) View Sign-up Sheet to Join a Group

3) Oral: midis
Join this group if you are generally available to study from NOON TO THREE Monday through Friday (12pm-3pm).
(Not Enrolled) View Sign-up Sheet to Join a Group

4) Oral: après-midis
Join this group if you are generally available to study from THREE TO SIX Monday through Friday (3pm-6pm).
(Not Enrolled) View Sign-up Sheet to Join a Group

5) Oral: soirs
Join this group if you are generally available to study from SIX TO NINE Monday through Friday (6pm-9pm).



Section n°9 : À Compléter avec un Camarade de Classe (Required Partner Activities)

Complétez ces exercices avec un camarade de classe et n'oubliez pas de remplir la feuille de temps, dans la plate-forme de discussions (en listant le nom de votre partenaire, le semaine, le jour et le temps que vous avez pratiqué ensemble).

- Partagez ce que vous avez écrit (Section n°5) : [Un défi – Ex Les Adverbes & l'imparfait](#).
- Parlez de vacances :
- Où allez-vous en vacances habituellement ?
- Où aimez-vous aller (rester) ? Dans un hôtel (de luxe ?), une Auberge de jeunesse, chez des amis... ?
- Pendant vos vacances, quelles activités faites-vous régulièrement ?
- Préférez-vous la mer ou la montagne ? Pourquoi ?
- Quand vous étiez petit(e) (enfant), où alliez-vous en vacances ?
- Décrivez ce que vous faisiez (utilisez l'imparfait et les adverbes).
- Que pensiez-vous de la musique à l'époque ?



FEUILLE DE TEMPS (Partner Activities TIME CARD)

You are required to practice weekly with a classmate. We are going to use the “honor system” which means you can practice with your classmate (you will not need to record your conversation on Blackboard Collaborate). Use this forum to jot down when (week we are on, day & time) you practiced with your classmate (including his/her name) and how you practiced (using Skype, or perhaps in person, or even on campus).

Merciii

with a Group project and then they have to comment on one another's presentations.

Throughout the semester I **encourage them to do activities with their classmates, outside of the classroom setting.** I inform them about upcoming **local events** (relating to the French language) they might want to attend.

I also recommend they form study groups (based on their location) so they can study together.

As an instructor

Something I saw demonstrated so well by my (absolutely amazing) grad Professor (Dr. Beth Ackerman) was to **personally reach out to students.** I believe it's important we show we genuinely care about their success but also about them as a person. **Writing a short email asking how they are doing,** can help create that community we are looking for. **I will also email them if they are missing assignments or have been "absent" online** for a while (they might have something going on at home that I should be aware of). Since we can't always sense the "tone" (or see any facial expressions) in an email I always try my best to sound understanding, professional and personal. I make it a point to respond to emails as soon as I can (usually 2-3 business days). It helps me create a relationship with each individual student.

I encourage them to sign-up for my office hours. I use [SignUpGenius](#) to schedule my office hours. I give them the option to meet in person (on campus) or via [Skype](#). I tell my online students that I'd love to meet them in person.

Half-way through the semester, **I have them take an oral exam with me (instead of with a classmate).** This gives me an opportunity to "meet" them (online or in person). It also makes it less intimidating for them when we have our final oral exam together.

Présentations
(Introductions)

Utilisez le "**fichier LOTO**" pour vous présenter au reste de la classe.

Using the "LOTO" handout, introduce yourself to the rest of the class.

1/20/15 2:55 PM	Bonjour
1/19/15 10:51 PM	Bonsoir!
1/19/15 8:04 PM	Bonsoir!
1/19/15 6:53 PM	Bonjour!
1/19/15 6:35 PM	Introduction
1/19/15 9:50 AM	Introduction
1/16/15 7:47 PM	salut mon nom est Nisha
1/16/15 8:21 AM	présentation

Quels sont vos
passés-temps?

Dans ce forum, listez vos passe-temps. Puis, lisez quels sont les passe-temps de vos camarades de classe. Vous avez peut-être des choses en commun!

In this forum, list your past-times/hobbies. Then, read what hobbies your classmates have. You might have things in common!

Sign-up for a
group to work
on MID-TERM

Bonjour!

On est bientôt au milieu du semestre déjà! Our MID-TERM is actually a presentation you will work on with a group of classmates. Read the instructions and concerning our MID-TERM and sign-up for a group!

- Watch [introductory video](#) with more info on your Mid-Term.
- Also read the [information](#) about your MID-TERM.

Présentation
MID-TERM

Bonjour élèves,

Dans ce forum vous devez (in this forum you must):

1. poster vos présentations (de [Present.mel](#)) (post your presentations from Present.mel)
2. commenter 3 autres présentations (de vos camarades de classe). (comment on 3 presentations from your classmates).

Groupes
d'études /
Study Groups

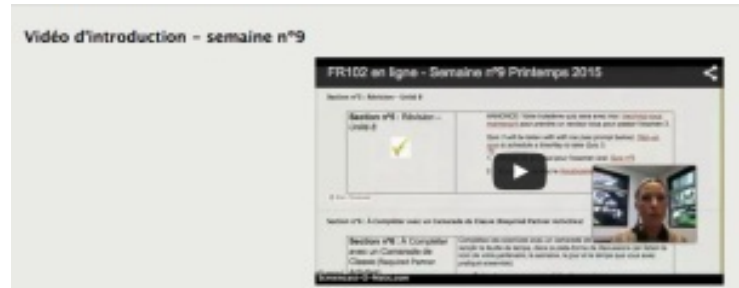
Dans ce forum vous pouvez proposer ou joindre un groupe d'études. Si vous créez un groupe, indiquez dans le titre le lieu où vous comptez vous réunir et les jours/heures où vous êtes disponibles chaque semaine.

In this forum you can suggest or join a study group. If you create a group, indicate in the title the place where you plan on meeting (e.g. North County) and the days/times you are available each week.

Weekly, I create short videos to give them announcements and introduce the new week ahead.

I send out announcements (sent directly to their email inbox) several times a week. I'll keep them updated on what I have graded (I try to grade any submitted work within 1-2 weeks), let them know of any important assignments coming up and give them additional resources, tools, etc.

To me those are small ways to keep students in our online class feeling part of the community of our classroom.



Finally, I'd like to take a moment to thank two wonderful Professors who have helped me in my journey in online teaching: Pilar Hernandez and David Detwiler.

I hope this post was useful to you. Thank you for reading.

-Rachèle DeMéo

www.ProfDeMeo.com



 mccpot.org/wp/2015/04/cool-tools-voicethread/

by *Bethanie Perry, MiraCosta College (History)*

My goal as an online instructor is to create an engaging and dynamic classroom for my dynamic and diverse students—I assume this is the same for most instructors. Part of my desire stems from discussions with students and friends who have tried online classes and determine that the online learning environment is not for them. I should probably say, “fine, online learning is not for everyone”, but instead I usually ask why. In fact, I had this discussion just this past weekend. My friend said she preferred face-to-face classrooms because she was not so great at expressing herself in the written form, such as discussion forums. This also reminds me of a conversation I had with another student who said that most online instructors spend most of their time corresponding with students via email and therefore, written form. Therefore, as an instructor looking for ways to improve upon this seemingly one-dimensional teaching style, I am looking for ways to provide students with a more diverse experience.

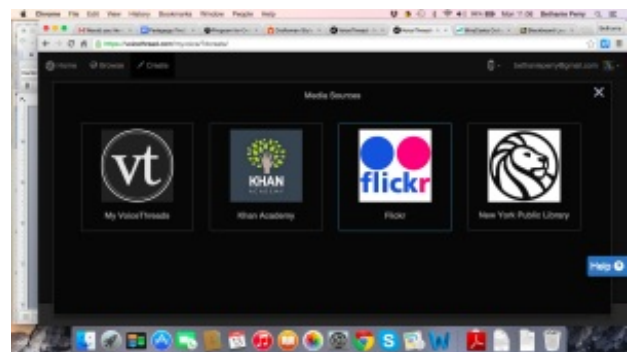
There seem to be a million tools out there to use to meet this goal, but today I will focus on one, VoiceThread. What I like about this tool is it offers an alternative to the text heavy engagement with material. VoiceThread in fact offers students the ability to use voice or text to interact with material.

Voice thread is especially dynamic as users are able to create presentations using media, voice, and text. Responders can leave comments in a variety of ways as well, including their phone. While, the free version is limited in the amount of threads you can create, a Higher Ed subscription is \$99 a year and the program can be integrated into an LMS; something to consider anyway. <https://voicethread.com/>

VoiceThread is also very easy to use. Create an account and then begin. You can upload documents—including images—from your computer, record videos, or upload from media sources integrated with VoiceThread.

So creating the thread is dynamic. Once a VoiceThread is created, the class can comment on content using a variety of means. Not only could this be used to make discussions more interactive, but students could produce presentations using VoiceThread and receive a variety of feedback.

And of course VoiceThread is also available for your mobile device, so you can create and comment on material from your phone!



 mccpot.org/wp/2015/04/online-collaboration-tools-selecting-the-right-tools/

by Silvia Vazquez Paramio, MiraCosta and Saddleback Colleges (Spanish)

On the process of devising your online class, online collaboration tools are one of the corner stones, since they are the vehicle to reach the pedagogy goals for your class and have profound effect on the learning outcomes of the student (Katz, 2008).

Recently, collaborative activities have become increasingly popular in the classrooms as multi-disciplinary researches have shown that the benefits and learning gains are significantly greater than working independently, Johnson, Johnson, and Smith (1998). Nevertheless, Hershock and LaVaque-Manty (2012) point out that “Although research clearly suggests the virtues of collaborative learning, it is worth noting that these impacts depend upon how instructors implement and manage collaborative activities. Key considerations include, but are not limited to, task design, group formation, team management, and the establishment of both individual and group accountability” (Finelli, Bergom, & Mesa, 2011; Michaelson, Fink, & Knight, 1997; Oakley, Felder, Brent, & Elhadj, 2004).

Keeping these ideas in mind, online instructor should carefully design online collaborative activities to create the appropriate interaction that promotes content learning and engages student interaction. In my experience as an online instructor I consider this task quite important yet difficult. While the use of instructional technology can also considerably improve student collaboration and learning (Zhu & Kaplan, 2011), introducing and keeping up with new instructional technologies and integrating them productively into your online course, “can be challenging” (Sorcinelli, Austin, Eddy, & Beach, 2006; Zhu, Kaplan, & Dershimer, 2011, Hershock & LaVaque-Manty, 2012).

Through the years I have been improving and refining the collaborative activities and tools I use in my online classes. With the appearance of new tools and technologies, new opportunities for improvement are always coming. The variety of collaborative learning tools in the Web 2.0 is vast and varied but the decision about which collaboration tools to use should be driven by your course learning objectives more than the tool. Another aspect that you should consider is that the less variety of tools you adopt in your class the better. Introducing many different technologies can be counter productive and time consuming for your students. The research conducted by Hershock & LaVaque-Manty (2012: 7-10) narrowed some of the main factors you should consider when electing a tool to the following aspects:

1. **Start-up costs.** Instructors should consider how difficult it is for them (as well as their students) to set up and learn any given tool.
2. **IT support.** What technical support is available to students and instructors?
3. **Tool overload.** Students can be overwhelmed by the diversity of instructional technologies in several ways. First, they may become frustrated if they have to learn how to use many different tools to complete similar tasks across courses.
4. Is the technology accessible to students with disabilities? For example, Google Docs are accessible to some users with disabilities, primarily via keyboard shortcuts, but are not accessible to visually or dexterity impaired users who depend on screen reader or speech input technologies.
5. **Protect students and their privacy.** Instructors should think about how widely information from a course or a tool will be shared.
6. **Resist the myth of “the tech-savvy student”.** It is a mistake to assume that all of our students

7. **Develop guidelines for equitable and inclusive participation.** As with all group work, instructors should consider using strategies to foster equitable participation and accountability as well as to develop guidelines for appropriate etiquette just as they do for in-class discussions.
8. **Actively foster and sustain desired student engagement.** Getting students to use a tool and then keeping up with what gets produced can be a challenge. Simply making a tool available for students doesn't mean that it will get used; students may need some incentive to use it.
9. **Have realistic expectations.** Technology can fail mechanically. Therefore, it is always a good idea to have a contingency plan in place, especially if your learning activity depends heavily on a particular technology.

Keeping these premises in mind. I would like to share some of the collaborative tools that I am using on my online classes. I am a Spanish language instructor but these particular tools can be used in different disciplines.

Wikis and blogs– I use the wiki and blogs tools that come in Blackboard, which is the system management that my institution uses. Nevertheless, there are many sites to create wikis [here is a list](#) of free software platforms. Right now, I am having great success using them for compositions, peer reviewing and editing to improve the students writing skills. By providing critical feedback to other students, they learn about vocabulary, different written styles, spelling and grammar while increasing the student motivation.

ThingLink- It is a tool that enables students and teachers to collaborate creating interactive images that can be embedded in websites, add files and/or media. There are multiple uses for ThingLink in education, [here is an article](#) that will give you an idea of the things you can do. Part of the curriculum in a language class is to learn culture while practicing the student's language skills. With this purpose, I used ThingLink in my classes partnering 2-3 students to create an image with information about a Spanish speaking country. They have to write about the country and its culture and include videos, images and text. This is a very easy and fun tool to use. Recently, ThingLink has partner with Qzzr to combine quizzes and video. I haven't used this feature yet, but I find it quite interesting since I could use it to create quizzes about videos in Spanish allowing me to assess the student's language comprehension. [Here is a link to a video](#) on how to use it for quizzes.

Voicethread– It is a group audio blog for asynchronous digital conversations. It allows users to record text and audio comments about uploaded images. In the past, I have used Voicethread for my language classes but it doesn't allow you to provide personalized and private feedback to each of your students. Most teachers use Voicethread providing a general feedback, but recently I found a video that teach you how to create different identities on voicethread allowing you to record more than one feedback message. If you are interested in using this tool I recommend you [watch this video](#).

Zoom.us-This is definitely, one of my favorite tools for my online language classes. I use it for videoconferencing between students. While there are a wide range of tools for this purpose, like Skype or Google hangouts and even Blackboard Illuminate, but this is a particularly useful tool because it is free, it is very easy to use and most importantly because the conversation can be recorded. Right now, I pair my students to interview each other in Spanish using this tool. I ask them to record their conversation and to e-mail me the video file once they end their conversation. I am finding that this tool is increasing the speaking interaction between my students and allows me to review and assess their conversations.

Lastly, I want to share with you a video in which I compiled the tools I mentioned above.

These are the main tools that I have used with great productivity to create project-based collaborative

learning. All of these tools are currently available and are free in the basic service. I hope this post helps you to successfully integrate instructional technologies in your online classes.

Silvia Vazquez Paramio- Online Spanish Instructor

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 mccpot.org/wp/2015/04/useful-tools-for-teaching-online-and-on-campus/

Rachèle DeMéo, MiraCosta College (French)

Useful tools can transform the experience in both *teaching* an online class and *taking* a class online.

Technology can make an online class captivating, fun and interesting.

When I was completing the Program for Online Teaching through [MiraCosta College](#) I discovered a plethora of tools—for online and on campus classes. I still absolutely love discovering new tools.

It's important to **find the RIGHT tools** for your class. Since there are so many out there you have to, in some ways, “weed-through” to discover the ones that will make your online class successful.

I also believe it's important to **be consistent** with what tools you use in your classroom. Students like consistency. I believe it's better to have less tools that are very useful and you use consistently in class rather than using a bunch of tools only once.

Here are some tools I'd recommend:

Screencast-o-matic records screen captures. I use Screencast-o-matic to create tutorials for my students. Here are some examples of some of the tutorials I've created for my class:

- [Starting up – FR102](#)
- [Weekly introduction videos](#) (example provided for Week 13)

Present.me uploads your Power Points and records a video of yourself. Why do I love Present.me? Because I've been able to upload Power Point Presentations I already use in my on campus classes and record my lecture. It simulates what I'd teach in the classroom.

Here are some examples of videos I've create for my courses:

- [Learning Styles](#)
- [Verbes en -IR](#) (French Verbs ending in -IR)

Google Drive uploads documents you've already created so you can share them. You can also create documents in Google Drive. **Dropbox** is another similar tool that uploads your documents. You can access both Google Drive and Dropbox from any electronic device.

Here are is an example of a handout I share with my students early on in the semester:

- [Study Tips](#)

You can also **create surveys with Google**. I receive feedback for my classes by asking my students to complete this [survey](#) at the end of each course.

Blackboard contains many tools I find useful for an online class. From creating surveys, tests, writing assignments, the Discussion Board, Voice Board (to record oral exams), Blackboard Collaborate. Each is worth exploring to find out what is right for your online class.

YouTube may be a popular tool but also a very useful tool for instructors. I've found many useful videos for my students on YouTube.

Survey: Why are you learning French?

To best help you learn the language, I'd like to know more about why you want to take French. Please read the instructions below and complete the short survey.

Instructions: Please complete this short survey to inform me why you want to learn French. Though not graded, this will count towards Class Participation.

Here are a couple I really like:

- [Learn another language](#)
- [Phonétiques – Imagiers](#)

I really like creating movies using **iMovie** (Apple). If you're unsure where to start, YouTube different tutorials to help get started. I've used iMovie to create videos of interviews of other French-speakers or daily scenarios. Here are some videos I've created using iMovie:

- [Au supermarché \(At the grocery store\)](#) – Food shopping in France
- [Interview – Laura & Camille](#)

GoAnimate is a fascinating video maker! Create videos based on cartoon characters you choose. Use the voices available on GoAnimate or record your own. I've found GoAnimate helpful to *show how* you'd use something taught in class (for instance verbs).

Here are a couple I made:

- [Intro au monde francophone](#) (Introduction to the French-speaking world)
- [À la photocopieuse – COD/COI](#) (Using indirect and direct object pronouns)

SoundCloud records audio. Why do I like it? Because you can record using just your smartphone. A few Summers back I went camping with my family and I recorded audios for my online class while my children were napping! Since there's an application for SoundCloud, students can listen to your audios from anywhere, pause, repeat, listen to the audio again.

- Here's an audio I recorded on [French Numbers 0-20](#) (or check out [all my audios](#)).

I use **SignUpGenius** for my office hours. When students sign-up for office hours, they reserve the "spot" so others can see that that spot is taken already. They receive a notification two days prior to remind them. It's helped me avoided having to go back and forth with emails. I also use SignUpGenius so students can sign-up for oral exams and the final oral exams.

Skype is a popular tool. I personally use it in my class for my office hours. If students can't make it on campus, they can Skype me. I also use it for oral exams and the final oral exams.

There are so many tools out there and I believe finding the right ones for your class is essential. It's worth trying each out so you can know which ones you prefer. Test them out and ask your students what they think.

I hope this post was helpful. Thank you for reading!

I would like to personally thank Lisa Lane for everything she taught me through the Program for Online

Teaching.

-Rachele DeMeo

ProfDeMeo.com



mccpot.org/wp/2015/04/cool-tools-for-instructor-and-student-use/

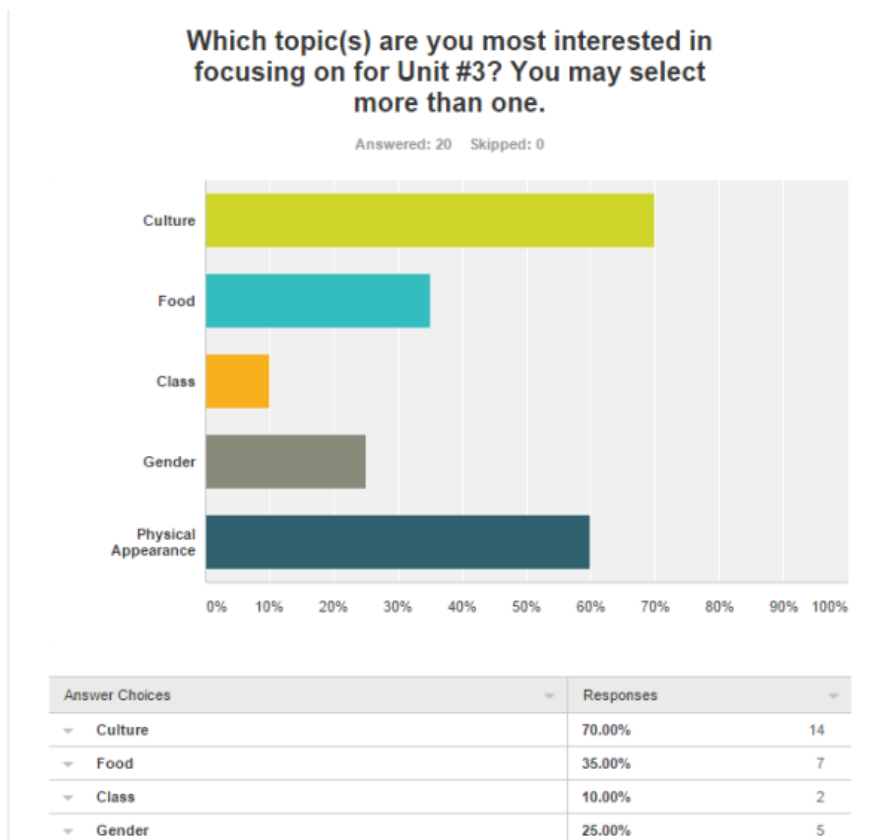
by Jordan Molina, MiraCosta and Palomar Colleges (English)

I am interested in using student-generated content (educational material authored by students) in my classes—which generally encourages student engagement, authority, and accountability— so I thought I would highlight a few online tools that students can use to create course content to share with their peers.

Survey Monkey

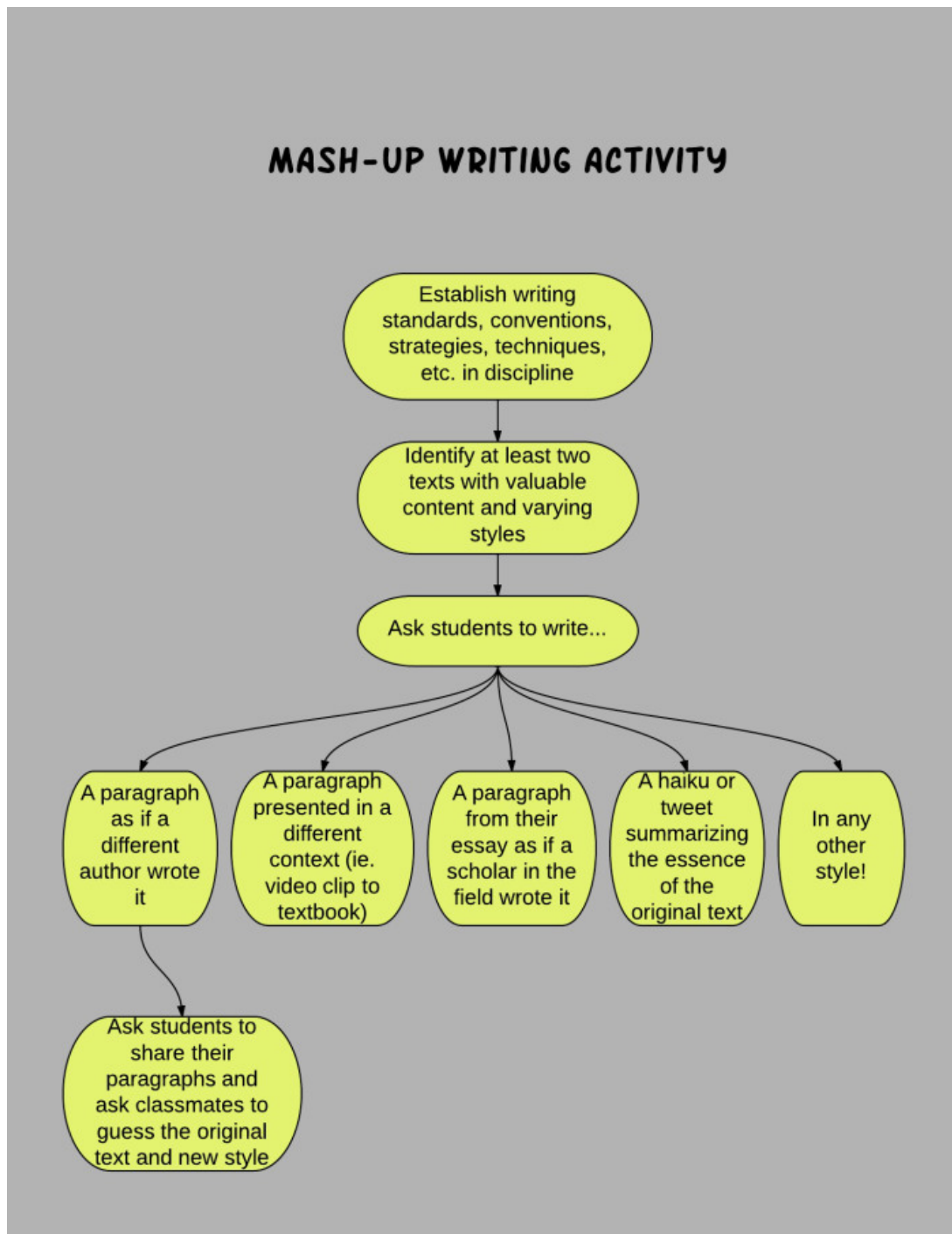
This free, accessible tool allows users to create their own surveys or quizzes which can include a variety of questions from fill-in-the blank to multiple choice to ranking responses. These surveys or quizzes have a unique URL that is easy to copy and paste into an email to respondents. Survey Monkey also automatically analyzes the results and provides graphics for easy comprehension.

Students can use this tool to poll peers, gather research, create sample test questions for review or for a question bank, in addition to many other useful outcomes. (I've used Survey Monkey to poll students to select essay topics and readings of interest.)



Lucid Chart

This free (for students and educators) tool allows users to create flowcharts or “brain maps.” Students can chart steps in a sequence of events, associations among concepts, or paths to various outcomes. (I've used Lucid Chart for writing prompts—like the Rhetorical Mash-up below—that require a variety of steps to



Discussion Boards & Wikis

Both discussion boards and wikis are often integrated into Blackboard and other LMSs which provide students an opportunity to carry on conversations with each other in an asynchronous format. Wikis allow students to collaborate on documents—think Google Docs—and generate content that can be edited by all users.

Students can be leaders in discussion board threads throughout the semester to engage with their peers in meaningful ways and demonstrate authority of topics. Wikis are great tools to use for group projects or generative assignments when students are asked to create a resource list, prompt, etc. (I've used discussion boards in onsite classes, too, especially when an interesting group discussion is cut short because of time constraints—we continue the conversation online!)

Snipping Tools/Screenshots/Screencasting:

Capturing the image of our computer screen or recording our screen is a necessary task for both instructor and student. Screencast-O-Matic is a simple tool to use for this purpose. Screenshots often give important “guideposts” to students that help them navigate the online course components. Screenshots are also useful troubleshooting tools. If a student is having technical trouble, a screenshot of the issue might allow the problem to be easily solved or at least verified by the instructor.

While not a true screencast (although it attempts to be one), I like showing my students this youtube video that demonstrates the process behind writing a simple email. It’s a fun snippet that helps us English instructors emphasize the importance of everyday rhetorical decisions.

Happy Online, Hybrid, and F2F Teaching!

 mccpot.org/wp/2015/04/this-is-about-the-lms/

Todd Conaway, Yavapai College, Arizona (Educational Technology)

After nine years of helping faculty learn how to use Blackboard, our college is moving to Canvas.

Right now.

I could say lots of funny things about this move. Like the several faculty who noted that they felt as if they were just figuring out how to use Blackboard and now they are being forced to move to another platform. I could tell you about the faculty who said that they were pissed for having to recreate courses that took them years to create. Of course, there are also those who had long railed against the Blackboard Borg like engine and are happy as larks to finally be free of the beast.

I could even comment on the few who said that if we move from Blackboard, they are going to quit teaching online.

That one is not so funny.

For me, as an instructional designer, it gives me some different spaces to craft courses and some features that will be new to instructors here at this college.

Simple things really. Like we will have the ability to chat in real time with our students and students can, like we have been able to do in Facebook for years, see who else in our class is online. We never purchased the Wimba tools in our version of Blackboard here at this college. We had to use Facebook groups to see who might be available to help us. As you can imagine, few faculty took that road.

Simple things like being able to be notified via SMS that a paper has been graded or someone has responded to one of our discussion posts. We never had those tools in Blackboard either. To be fair, they have been available, we just never purchased them.

Having a mobile app that works well will also be a step up for us. Having the ability to click a button and create a short video without having to have a YouTube account will also be new to us.

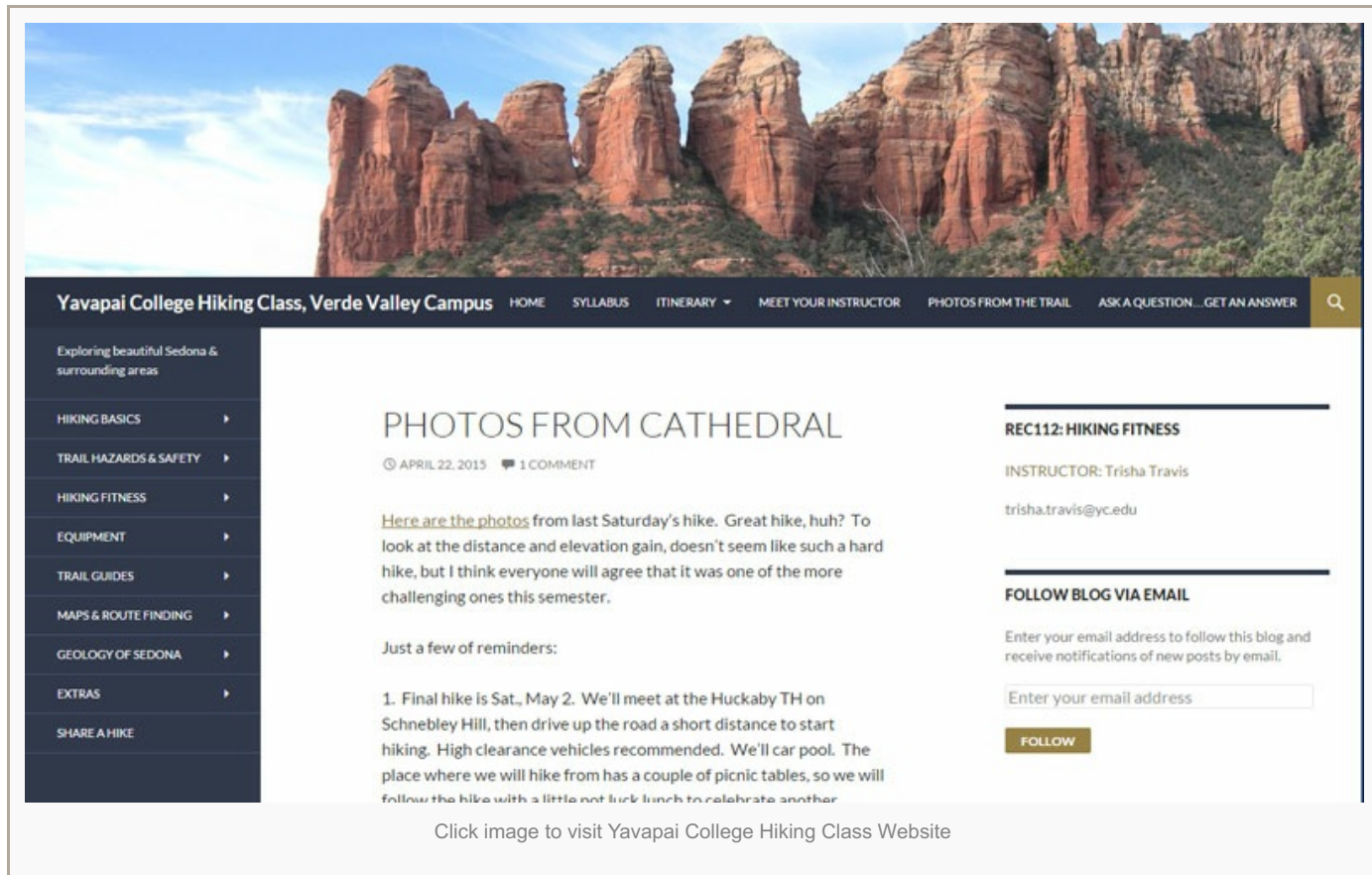
Lots of little new improvements. Great.

But I am also saddened as Canvas is a little closer to an institutional dress code than I would like.

Of course the notion of management and learning is nothing new. We have organized course in specific rooms for years. And certainly there is some wisdom in assisting the institution and the students with some of the organization. Yep. Enrollments and grades and other information that needs to be secured can all go in safe and secure system. We have things that do just that. And as we often sadly note, we have crafted the online learning management to look just like the face to face management of a common classroom.

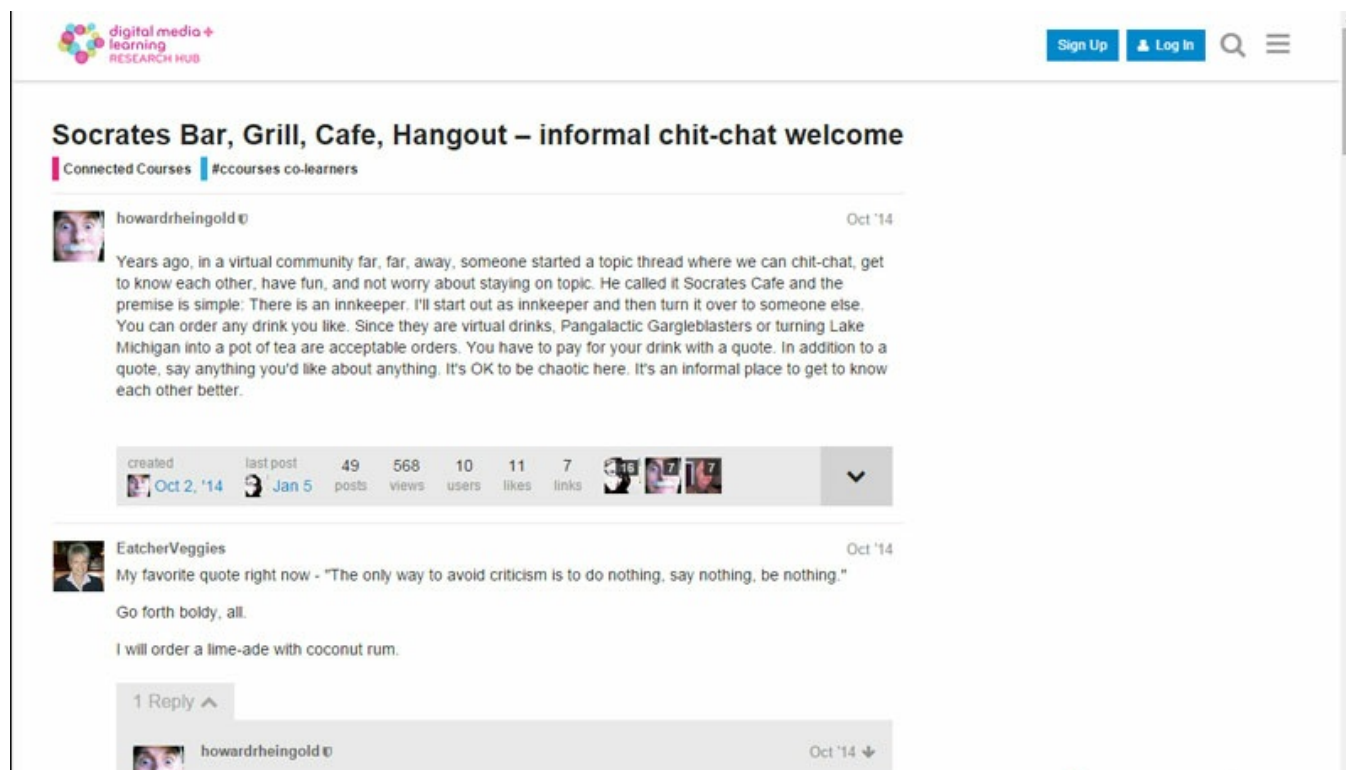
Much of what is in any online course is just stuff to be delivered to a student. Sadly anyway, that is often the case. The LMS is a vehicle to get stuff to students. I understand. They need to have stuff delivered to them. The internet on the whole is good at delivering stuff to people and it can do it well in many ways. With or without the LMS.

Some faculty roam around the internet and make something beautiful for students. At least as beautiful as the stuff that can go into the rectangle can get. And beautiful is a part of learning. At the very least there is an aesthetic that is part of ALL experience, be it audio, visual, or tactile. Why not provide our students with at least some sense of a pleasant aesthetic experience when we are just delivering stuff to them?



The screenshot shows a website for a hiking class. The header features a large image of red rock formations. Below the image is a navigation bar with links: HOME, SYLLABUS, ITINERARY, MEET YOUR INSTRUCTOR, PHOTOS FROM THE TRAIL, and ASK A QUESTION...GET AN ANSWER. A search icon is on the right. A left sidebar lists menu items: Exploring beautiful Sedona & surrounding areas, HIKING BASICS, TRAIL HAZARDS & SAFETY, HIKING FITNESS, EQUIPMENT, TRAIL GUIDES, MAPS & ROUTE FINDING, GEOLOGY OF SEDONA, EXTRAS, and SHARE A HIKE. The main content area has the title 'PHOTOS FROM CATHEDRAL' and a date 'APRIL 22, 2015' with '1 COMMENT'. The text reads: 'Here are the photos from last Saturday's hike. Great hike, huh? To look at the distance and elevation gain, doesn't seem like such a hard hike, but I think everyone will agree that it was one of the more challenging ones this semester.' Below this is a section 'Just a few of reminders:' followed by a numbered list: '1. Final hike is Sat., May 2. We'll meet at the Huckaby TH on Schnebley Hill, then drive up the road a short distance to start hiking. High clearance vehicles recommended. We'll car pool. The place where we will hike from has a couple of picnic tables, so we will follow the hike with a little not luck lunch to celebrate another'. On the right, there is a section 'REC112: HIKING FITNESS' with 'INSTRUCTOR: Trisha Travis' and 'trisha.travis@yc.edu'. Below that is a 'FOLLOW BLOG VIA EMAIL' section with an input field for an email address and a 'FOLLOW' button. At the bottom, a link says 'Click image to visit Yavapai College Hiking Class Website'.

Even the threaded discussion forum can look reasonably nice. This one using [a tool called Discourse](#).



The screenshot shows a Discourse forum post. The top left has a logo for 'digital media + learning RESEARCH HUB'. The top right has 'Sign Up', 'Log In', a search icon, and a menu icon. The post title is 'Socrates Bar, Grill, Cafe, Hangout – informal chit-chat welcome'. Below the title is 'Connected Courses' and '#ccourses co-learners'. The post is by 'howardrheingold' and is dated 'Oct '14'. The text of the post reads: 'Years ago, in a virtual community far, far, away, someone started a topic thread where we can chit-chat, get to know each other, have fun, and not worry about staying on topic. He called it Socrates Cafe and the premise is simple: There is an innkeeper. I'll start out as innkeeper and then turn it over to someone else. You can order any drink you like. Since they are virtual drinks, Pangalactic Gargleblasters or turning Lake Michigan into a pot of tea are acceptable orders. You have to pay for your drink with a quote. In addition to a quote, say anything you'd like about anything. It's OK to be chaotic here. It's an informal place to get to know each other better.' Below the text is a statistics bar showing 'created Oct 2, '14', 'last post Jan 5', '49 posts', '568 views', '10 users', '11 likes', and '7 links'. Below the statistics bar is a reply by 'EatcherVeggies' dated 'Oct '14' with the text: 'My favorite quote right now - "The only way to avoid criticism is to do nothing, say nothing, be nothing." Go forth boldly, all. I will order a lime-ade with coconut rum.' Below the reply is a '1 Reply' section with a reply by 'howardrheingold' dated 'Oct '14'.

I suppose for my part here at the college I am getting better at the use of Canvas and I see some great opportunities. And really that is all I have ever looked for. Great Opportunities.

I was not looking for the EASY way to get students into the “work.” I never really thought that it was best to make it easy. I understand the argument of making content readily available to students, but having a single URL that has the course information is far easier than logging into some SAS system and then clicking on the Blackboard icon and then finding the right class and clicking on it. One click versus three or four. The internet is just a bunch of links and addresses.

I do think as we ponder our use and abuse of the LMS in academic settings we should wonder about things like aesthetic, ownership, literacy, visual demonstration of competency, and what it looks like to demonstrate life-long learning. The computer and internet, for all the sad ways we have used them and the changes they have made to society, are not going away. We need to use them wisely.

I am genuinely excited by the possibility of improvement for the college and the students learning experiences as we move to Canvas. But if we only keep our eyes focused on the LMS and ignore the rest of the internet we will continue down a path leading to minimal digital literacies for faculty and students, and a path that ultimately confuses the beauty of discovery and possibility with the simple delivery of content and ease of access to it.

And you know how I feel about “easy.”

Student Retention in Online Classes: More Questions Than Answers

 mccpot.org/wp/2015/05/student-retention-in-online-classes-more-questions-than-answers/

By Laura Paciorek, MiraCosta College (Child Development)

Introduction: Student Retention

Student retention has always sparked a lot of questions for me and for many faculty with whom I have discussed the issue. Why do some students finish a class and others do not? Why is it that some sections of the same classes, even those taught by the same instructor, have different student retention rates than others? What can an instructor do, if anything, to help with student retention in classes?

Should we be concerned about student retention or student success? Are success and retention the same thing or are they different? Whose issue is student retention: the student, the instructor, the institution, or some combination of the three?

Throughout my conversations with fellow faculty members and administrators regarding the topic of student retention, many theories have surfaced. In preparing for this blog post, I decided to do a bit of research into the literature on student retention in online classes. As a whole, my research has led to more questions than answers.

I reviewed a total of six articles on online student retention, each on a totally different aspect related to retention. I tried to find some of the most recent articles on the topic that were available to me. The six articles found have all had a different focus and approach. I will briefly describe the articles here:

Article 1

Leeds, E., Campbell, S., Baker, H., Ali, R., Brawley, D. & Crisp, J. (2013). The impact of student retention strategies: an empirical study. *International Journal of Management in Education*, 7(1/2), 22–43. doi: 10.1504/IJMIE.2013.050812

[This article by Leeds, Campbell, Baker, Ali, Brawley, and Crisp \(2013\)](#) was particularly interesting to me because it looks directly at what instructors do to help with retention and whether or not those strategies were successful. The study was empirical with an experimental and control group. The focus was on whether or not the following strategies would increase student retention: video orientations, welcome e-mails, personal phone calls, e-mails of course contracts, course/syllabus quizzes, start here documents, welcome to student services activities, post-introductions, ice breakers, team projects, and small group discussions.

The finding: There was only about an 0.85% difference in retention for the treatment and control groups (Treatment = 70.37% retention, Control = 69.14% retention).

Does this mean that what an instructor does to help with retention does not matter? Is there some other issue with the study that may have impacted the results?

Because there is a lot more to the article than what is listed here, I encourage you to read it yourself and see what questions and answers it brings up for you.

Article 2

Britto, M. & Rush, S. (2013). Developing and implementing comprehensive student support services for online students. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, 17(1), 29-42. Retrieved from http://sloanconsortium.org/publications/jaln_main

[This article by Britto and Rush \(2013\)](#) suggests that “retention” is both completion and success. The main point of this article is to describe what one college system did to address online student retention. The Lone Star College system, in the Houston area, created a Comprehensive Online Student Support Services Model to attempt to provide comparable services to online students as are received by face-to-face students and to increase completion and success rates.

The following services were described in detail as a part of what was offered to students: technical support, an early alert system, advising services, case management advising, readiness assessments, student orientations, tutoring, new student orientations, and e-newsletters. For individuals interested in institutional responses to retention, this article provides information that could be useful. The authors are still looking at outcomes related to the model. However, they noted that face-to-face students are requesting to access online advising because of efficiency of model (p. 39).

Article 3

Tobin, T. J. (2014). Increase online student retention with Universal Design for Learning. *The Quarterly Review of Distance Education*, 15(3), 13-24. Retrieved from <http://www.infoagepub.com/quarterly-review-of-distance-education.html>

[Tobin's \(2014\) article](#) provides information for instructors who are interested in implementing Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles, which are suggested to increase student retention. Tobin comments that it is helpful to consider access for students with disabilities, but that UDL strategies could help all students, including those using mobile devices more to access classes.

“UDL is an approach to the creation of learning experiences that incorporates multiple means of engaging with content and people, representing information, and expressing skills and knowledge” (p. 14). The article outlines five strategies and provides ideas for what instructors can do in the next 20 minutes, 20 days, and 20 months to incorporate UDL into teaching practices. Resources are provided in the article.

Article 4

Russo-Gleicher, R. J. (2013). Qualitative Insights into Faculty Use of Student Support Services with Online Students at Risk: Implications for Student Retention. *Journal Of Educators Online*, 10(1). Retrieved from <http://thejeo.com/>.

[Russo-Gleicher's \(2013\) article](#) provides the results of 16 in-depth qualitative interviews with faculty who teach online. The focus of the interviews was on how faculty use student support services in the classes they teach. A variety of approaches were discovered. While some instructors may refer students to support services, other instructors may not. The conclusion of the article included three recommendations that would attempt to create more of a consistent approach to using student support services. The suggestions were to provide training for faculty that includes information on prevention of attrition, insure that online referral forms are available, include details in the faculty handbook about student support

services, and have the e-learning department reach out to faculty with student contact information.

Article 5

Cochran, J. D., Campbell, S. M., Baker, H. M., & Leeds, E. M. (2014). The role of student characteristics in predicting retention in online courses. *Research in Higher Education*, 55, pp. 27-48. doi: 10.1007/s11162-013-9305-8

This article by Cochran, Campbell, Baker, and Leeds (2014) looked at student characteristics and whether or not they were correlated with student retention. Out of the several factors considered, recommendations were made. First, policies and guidelines should be developed “to provide increased support for and monitoring of students at the lower level, e.g. freshmen and sophomores, who are enrolled in online courses” (p. 46). Also, policies and guidelines should be developed “for students with lower cumulative GPAs (<3.0) that enroll in online courses and in programs with more analytical or technical content, such as those in business, science and math” (p. 46). Those involved in online education are encouraged to “be cognizant of gender differences in withdrawal rates in field that have predominant gender roles as those in the minority are more likely to withdraw” (p. 46). Lastly, institutions should “follow-up with students when they first withdraw from an online class to mitigate future withdrawals” (p. 46).

Article 6

Hart, C. (2012). Factors associated with student persistence in an online program of study: A review of the literature. *Journal of Interactive Online Learning*, 11(1), 19-42. Retrieved from <http://www.ncolr.org/>

If there is any one article to be read, [this article by Hart \(2012\)](#) might be it. Although it was published in 2012, it contains a comprehensive review of literature pertaining to “student persistence.” The results of the literature review were categorized into the following areas: persistence as a phenomenon, facilitators of persistence, quality of interactions and feedback, satisfaction and relevance, self-efficacy and personal growth, social connectedness or presence, support, and barriers to persistence.

Facilitators of persistence that were reviewed were college status, graduating term, comfort with online coursework, flexibility, asynchronous format, time management, goal commitment, GPA, quality of interactions and feedback, satisfaction and relevance, self-efficacy, personal growth, self-motivation, social connectedness or presence, and support. Barriers that were reviewed were auditory learning style, basic computer skills, college status and graduating term, difficulty in accessing resources, isolation and decreased engagement, lack of computer accessibility, non-academic issues, and poor communication. As is stated in the article’s abstract, “factors associated with student persistence in an online program include satisfaction with online learning, a sense of belonging to the learning community, motivation, peer, and family support, time management skills, and increased communication with the instructor” (p. 19).

Conclusion: Student Retention

After reviewing the above six articles, I have been left with more questions than answers. In fact, the questions listed in the introduction still stand. With so much time and so many resources being invested into techniques that are meant to improve student retention, it would be useful to insure that the techniques themselves are improving student retention. However, it might be that a particular practice is not proven to increase retention, but it still creates a more positive learning atmosphere for online students. If that is the case, the practice may still be warranted. More research is likely needed in this area to learn what does

and does not work.

What are your theories? Have you done your own investigation into this issue? If so, it would be great to hear more and continue this conversation about student retention, success, and persistence.

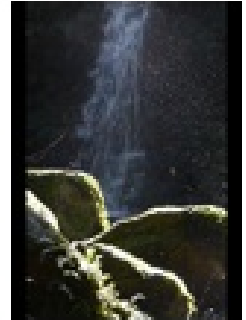
Culture skills – reflections on the online Umwelt

mccpot.org/wp/2015/05/culture-skills-reflections-on-the-online-umwelt/

Ross Kendall, Waikato Institute of Technology, New Zealand

In 2013, using WordPress, I put ‘Critical Thinking’ online as a semester-long elective in Wintec’s Bachelor of Media Arts (BMA). This second-year paper, using a blended learning/flipped classroom approach, followed my popular ‘Introduction to Psychology’ and attracted a large number of students, so that it was offered in parallel as two identical papers. The approach had immediate benefits:

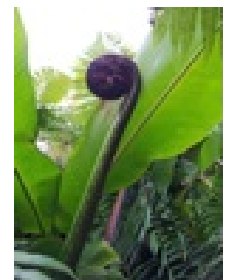
- First, students compared, collaborated, combined and reflected on their work across the classes,
- Second, students were encouraged to comment on blogs from their fellows in the other class and frequently did so,
- Three voluntary Saturday classes (9am-2pm), offered as enhancement, attracted full attendance and engendered much spontaneous fun, new friendships and laughter and creativity – learning at its best. These Saturdays were festive occasions, with pizza ordered in, impromptu discussions about positionalities in the NZ context, and imaginative presentations at the end of each session.



My aims in the class were pretty much the same since I first began teaching in higher ed. I’ve tried to develop and apply strategies that connect the autonomy of persons and their communities with the objectivity of facts about the world and the systems within which people operate. The operative understanding is that immersion in particular learning environments should take account of the constitution of persons as both biophysical and sociocultural organisms in fields of relationships. On this view – informed by the theories of Engeström, Mezirow, Uexküll, Gibson, Esbjörn-Hargens and by Lacanian psychoanalysis – profound learning occurs, and attributes of learners *emerge*, under particular conditions, through certain processes and at different levels, in a wonderfully spiral looping.

The point is to conceive learners as individual loci of creative growth within continually unfolding phenomenological spaces of varying human and (other) environmental relationships.

What does this mean exactly? For the learner, it means that her individual beliefs need to be connected to appropriate skills practice, developed by knowledge of her cultural and ecological milieu, performed in a structured environment of her current surroundings and at a level consonant with her level of ability and potential achievement. Conscious perception of these things involves the acquisition of narratives grown by a deep engagement with, and understanding of one’s identity: students need to be able to *tell* their own stories; they need to *tell* what others’ behaviours imply, to *tell* what sensory experiences signify, and to understand that understanding does not end at the skin’s boundary.



Indigeneity is significant in this respect: it is essential, I believe, to know and to be able to perform the rituals and traditions of one's heritage. For me, claiming descent from colonialist *Pākehā* (Southern England) and defiant *Māori* (*Tūhoe*), it means not simply possessing knowledge of my genealogical lineage but also being able to enact the customs and practices of both cultures and being familiar with the vastly different landscapes. It is important to me to see through two sets of eyes, to speak both languages, to assert my ancestral homes as London and Ruatoki.

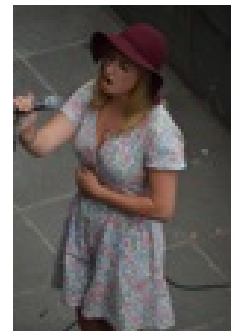


Big expectations for an online course, considering the considerable diversity among students, especially for those who lack a well-defined sense of their culture, ethnicity, class, culture or ways of being! Especially considering that the course demands crackling debate, sizzling intellectual fervour, outrageous creativity, wondrous collegiality and large dollops of fun! Especially considering that New Zealand currently boasts the world's grossest per-capita pollution output, worst intimate partner violence (IPV) records, hideous child poverty statistics and greatest inequality movement over the last decade.



Under a tough (some might say brutal) neo-liberalist government, the institution is encouraged to market its programmes aggressively overseas, and accordingly, in my classes, the proportion of International to home-grown students runs at about 80:20%. Consequently, the imperative to provide safe and encouraging activities for students to engage and reshape their experiences in the development of new meanings is paramount. The students in the course, I hoped, would engage in the exercises in ways that enable them not only to tell the various accounts of who they are by threading activities in the Western theoretical, rational tradition to their customary affective and signifying practices but also in ways that provoke a creative confidence in constructing new knowledge and effecting change in their lives. In Saussurean (1959: 102ff) terms, I wanted a mapping of systems of differences on the plane of concepts to a system of differences on the plane of physical events and objects; in Gibsonian terms, (1979:129) I tried to engender an awareness of what the social and physical environment offers as *affordances*. In these processes, the collective is enhanced and experience is generated, offering greater meaning and clarity. A *poetics* of learning, you might say.

Phew! But maybe not so hard. When students are given permission to freely engage in new experiences, their "becoming' [is like] a creative advance into novelty' (Whitehead, 1929: 28). So exercises included sociological field-work (conducting an audit of household energy costs, the 'making-st range' by performing unusual activities in public spaces, the examination of unconscious racism in the academy, the revelation of dressing as the other gender); analyses of ideological frameworks in mainstream media, the Western family, traditional logical and non-traditional reasoning, deviance, corporatisation; a pair investigation into a local environmental concern; and debates. Some of these exercises were conducted online, others required students to self-organise into groups of particular numbers and some (e.g. debates) were held in class.



The course was configured thus:

- online journal (8 entries and 5 commentaries on other students' work: 40%)
- research essay (30%)
- multi-choice test (10%)
- debate (20%)



Lectures were recorded and placed on line as Screenflow videos with accompanying slides, readings and review questions. VoiceThread was used twice as a synchronic strategy: it proved too unwieldy for large numbers and was discontinued. The test was conducted online, available for an hour on a particular evening.

What were the positive outcomes? WordPress is very user-friendly and feedback indicated that students greatly enjoyed the freedom to engage in learning at times that suited them, that the exercises were stimulating and fun, that the opportunity to engage with and learn about other cultures (one requirement of group work) was exciting and led to the formation of new friendships, that the anthropological approach was one that could usefully be incorporated into other courses, that they wished other classes were like this ... I welcomed the opportunity to allow learners to generate emotional valencies that the usual classroom approach ignores.

The downside? A few (International) students wanted more structure and direction. Novices' practical engagement and attention to new experiences was difficult to assess and monitor; nor could I determine the extent of learners' involvement with, and learning from one another. It was impossible to identify the different levels of ability and involvement that makes teaching so much a mentoring role. (I can only hope that behaviour rose to a level where agents felt they were achieving something useful to add to their repertoire and that all learned some appropriate strategies to use in relationships with people and objects in the environment.) The work required was significantly more than the f2f classroom style. It cost a fair bit of money. And of course, I felt a keen sense of lack of control, but I'm getting over that.

Will I do it again? I think online learning depends on the nature of the learning, the expectations and commitment of students and the competence and desire of the teacher. In many ways, the anonymity and autonomy of the Internet allows for a degree of intimacy and engagement that is often overlooked in the classroom. Furthermore, on a personal note, I live in paradise, a 35 minute drive from work and it's wonderful to work in my office with the view above and not be in the city five days a week! Moreover, I was prohibited from further use of WordPress (the less inviting Moodle is the institution's preferred platform). But online delivery lends itself so much to contemporary students' desire for meaningful and interesting educational experiences, so yes, I'll continue, perhaps using a flipped classroom approach, where tutor and students meet fortnightly, in class or one-to-one. Meantime, I'm working on those aspects of integral andragogy that I find so difficult to elicit via the Web. Ka kite ano!



 mccpot.org/wp/2015/05/moocs-a-tool-for-re-imagining-our-teaching/

Cris Crissman, Phd, Adjunct Assistant Professor, North Carolina State University; Independent Education Consultant

... MOOCs have proven to be simply an additional learning opportunity instead of a direct challenge to higher education itself. — [Preparing for the Digital University: A Review of the History and Current State of Distance, Blended, and Online Learning](#)

... the debate over MOOCs helped us all think about ways to re-imagine our own teaching” (Lisa M. Lane, [Follow-up to POT 2013-14, Week 21: Web-Enhanced, Hybrid, and Open Classes](#))

I just signed up for another MOOC, “The Brain and Space,” led by Jennifer M. Groh, author of [Making Space: How the Brain Knows Where Things Are](#). It’s a Coursera MOOC, an xMOOC where content rules (See Lisa M. Lane’s post on “[Three Kinds of MOOCs](#)” and don’t skip the comments). Understanding the content is my goal, and that of my friend who is taking the course with me. You see, he has Parkinson and is experiencing the “lost in space” phenomenon that Parkinson patients often have. Together we can work through the readings and videos to learn something about what’s happening in his brain. And we have the author of the book to guide our study and interact with.

This MOOC is the latest in a long line of MOOCs I’ve participated in (or not) over the past five years. It’s from a different universe as my very first MOOC, PLENK 2010 (Personal Learning and Network Knowledge). And my goals are totally different. PLENK 2010 was my effort to learn how the social Web worked and how I could be part of it. For someone new to blogging, webinars, and tweeting, it was scary. I remember posting my first comment and vowing that even if, in [Dave White’s model](#), I became a resident, that I would never forget that fear of the unknown I experienced in this alien world.

That was many MOOCs ago and I feel personally responsible for giving MOOCs the high attrition rate that many see as problematic. But if you’re MOOC veteran, then you know that it’s much like going to a conference and quietly skipping out when you find the session isn’t what you’d hoped for. Life is too short to not spend your resources on what you really want.

I was drawn to PLENK 2010 like a moth to a flame. Yes, it was scary as hell but so exciting to be part of something so, well, massive, and seemingly revolutionary. So now the Preparing for the Digital University report officially recognizes MOOCs not as revolutionary but as simply new learning opportunities. I like to think that they are evolutionary (much as Derek Muller sees technology in general, “[This Will Revolutionize Education](#)”) and that they inspire new forms of learning opportunities yet to be re-imagined. For me, beyond guided learning about totally new content (The Brain and Space), and learning how to thrive in the digital ecology, one of the greatest values of MOOCs has been learning how I learn best and how I can become the teacher I want to be. MOOCs represent a powerful source of professional learning and, hence, re-imagination for our teaching.

Design for Online Courses

One of the first criteria I look for in a MOOC is space for me to learn. Open space. I once bailed on a MOOC after working through the pre-survey because the goal was me to compare my views on learning

with that of the professor. What? A bit professor-centric, don't you think? Now a pre-survey with all the participants' responses would have been interesting and indicated openness. Openness has become the holy grail in my quest to become a better teacher and so a strong theme in my blogging — the latest of which is [“Opening Up”](#). Though openness in learning and teaching is nothing new, I think the digital world gives us tremendous opportunities for exploring openness.

Perhaps the most burning and lasting question I took from PLENK 2010 was how to achieve the balance of openness that gives me and my students the space we need. In Dave Cormier's work I saw a thoughtful, fearless quest for openness that inspired me to begin my own.

I see openness as the structural element that Claire Major has identified as “pathway” in her Classification Chain of Online Course Structures published in her new book, [Teaching Online](#). I learned of Claire's work through [MiraCosta College's Program for Online Teaching](#) and find this model to be tremendously useful in understanding what attracts me to a course and the kind of courses I want to design. Here's a brief video introduction to Claire's classification chain:

Lessons Learned

I've learned lessons about teaching from many MOOC leaders. From Cathy Davidson, with first her [“Surprise Endings”](#) open course (co-led with Dan Airely) and later her [“History and Future of \(Mostly\) Higher Education” MOOC](#), I learned much about the potential of crowdsourcing with an official university class so that the products can be shared with all.

Sarah Kagan and Anne Shoemaker with their [Old Globe MOOC \(Growing Old Around the Globe\)](#) managed to foster a surprising degree of community, accomplished in part by having forum leaders who facilitated warmly and wisely. I've reflected on [my Old Globe experiences](#) using [Conole's interesting framework for mapping MOOCs](#) across twelve dimensions.

With Jeannene Przyblyski and [“A History of Art for Artists, Animators and Gamers”](#) I learned to admire critique as an art and to understand the value of modeling critique for peer review.

Jim Groom, Alan Levine, and Martha Burtis of the infamous [DS 106 \(Digital Storytelling 106\)](#), which, granted, is not a MOOC, but a community helped me experience the power of creating, of making art, within a nurturing, supportive community that is passionate about their art-making and have a good time creating together.

Beyond the MOOC

I got this note today from a colleague at UNC Chapel Hill, and it got me thinking — I'd love to see some great examples of what folks are doing in the online, non-credit space. Has the MOOC grown to be the predominate format? What other approaches are working for folks? Where are the great ideas in this space?— Larry Johnson, New Media Consortium, April 17 email to listserv

The key to the MOOC (as I've always said, not that anyone listens) isn't the massive scale, though it is scalable, it's the return of education to individual autonomy, of localized knowledge production, of the integration of community-based learning with other social values (diversity, openness, etc.). (Downes, [OLDaily](#), May 14, 2015)

I've blogged about my efforts to open up my open course, ECI 521, “Teaching Literature for Young Adults” often with [“Opening Up the Garden”](#) being one of the latest posts. I feel there's much potential, especially

with a topic like young adult literature that is constantly evolving with new books and new trends each year. That's why I love it — I never facilitate the same course twice. It's always evolving.

Could opening up bring rewards to your university students? Could it help you make a connection to the larger community? Perhaps even make a contribution? If more online courses opened up, could the university evolve as more of the public sphere rather than the walled garden?

What lessons do you bring from MOOCs? What ideas do you have for courses that might embody the MOOC principles that Downes describes while meeting the needs of your students, of your community/communities? Do you have any innovations to share with Larry Johnson and the New Media Consortium?

Have you experienced MOOCs as a way to re-imagine your own teaching?

Resources

Major, C.H. (2015). Teaching online: A guide to theory, research, and practice.
<https://jhupbooks.press.jhu.edu/content/teaching-online>

MOOC List. An aggregator of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) from different providers.
<https://www.mooc-list.com/>

New Media Consortium. Larry Johnson (in May 14, 2015 email) confirmed that he has received many responses to his request for innovative formats in online, non-credit space and that he will share soon.
<http://redarchive.nmc.org/about/board-directors/larry-johnson-chief-executive-officer>

OLDaily. A daily newsletter from Stephen Downes covering/uncovering the world of online learning.
<http://www.downes.ca/cgi-bin/login.cgi?action=Register>

Program for Online Teaching. Led by Lisa M. Lane, MiraCosta College. <http://mccpot.org/wp/>

The tyranny and comfort of “best practices”

mccpot.org/wp/2015/05/the-tyranny-and-comfort-of-best-practices/

Lisa M. Lane, MiraCosta College

According to [Wikipedia](#), a “best practice” is one that “has consistently shown results superior to those achieved with other means, and that is used as a benchmark”. The page also notes that it is considered by some to be a business buzzword “used to describe the process of developing and following a standard way of doing things”.

Without knowing this, I became hostile to the term “best practices” about online teaching early on, for a number of reasons. It hadn’t been around that long, and I couldn’t help but notice that most of the people touting “best practices” were not, themselves, practitioners. And yet, the literature abides:

- Hanover Research Council, [Best Practices in Online Teaching Strategies](#) (2009)
- Judith V Boettcher, [Ten Best Practices for Teaching Online](#) (2006-11)
- Faculty Focus, [10 Principles of Effective Online Teaching: Best Practices in Distance Education](#)
- Brown University, [Best Practices for Teaching Online](#)
- Penn State, [Best Practices and Expectations for Online Teaching](#)

And that’s just the first few entries in Google.

So what’s wrong with all this?

Such lists, which vary from each other, can easily become prescriptive.

Taking the Penn State list as an example, everything sounds, at first, quite reasonable. Everyone would appreciate the need for the teacher to monitor submissions, but it is apparently a “best practice” to “remind them of missed and/or upcoming deadlines”. The professor is thus responsible for providing reminders, even if the course is already set up with clearly established deadlines. Perhaps I would be expected to send out text messages every week to remind them of every quiz, even if my pedagogy were designed to encourage them to monitor their own workload.

“Provide meaningful feedback on student work”, it says, and tells us not to say “good job”. This could be interpreted in a number of ways. With my weekly assignments, it could require me to provide full textual feedback to every student every week, which would be impossible. Instead, I use a qualitative scale.

I notice that the Penn State list includes matters of college policy rather than pedagogy, all mixed in to “best practices”.

Or there’s this example:



- [Moving Online: A Best Practice Approach to Achieving a Quality Experience for Online Education](#) (2014)

Here the best practices are all put together into a template used by all teachers in the system, in order to reduce “the cognitive stress students report in navigating educational materials”. And yet many students want similar systems as a convenience, regardless of the learning experience the professor is trying to create. We are heading toward the “canned” course model, where academic freedom runs a distant second to standardization.

There is a fine line between “best practices” (meaning some good ideas that you might use), and “college x’s best practices” (the rules which you must follow). The buzz-phrase makes it sound as though these practices have been proven to be “best”, when what’s best is actually affected by instructor personality, discipline, pedagogy, technical knowledge, and other variables. I’ve seen very little agreement on what constitutes what’s best in *any* sort of teaching, much less online teaching.

Limited knowledge, as usual, leads to efforts to reduce the cognitive load, not of students, but of instructors. It is much easier to follow administratively-led best practices than to determine how to develop one’s own online pedagogy. For many faculty, it’s more comfortable to do what you’re told than to develop your own way. We struggle with this with our students – developing inquiry-based exercises and problem-based learning can be difficult when students insist they want to just be told what they’re supposed to learn.

I think it’s wrong to encourage a limited view of teaching online, supporting it with selected (and often very small sample) “studies”, and calling it “best practices”. Doesn’t seem like good practice to me.

Images by [Barry Dahl](#), cc Flickr



 mccpot.org/wp/2015/05/some-big-issues-in-online-teaching/

Jenny Mackness, United Kingdom

Pedagogy is often defined as the method and practice of teaching, but is that all it is? And what do we understand by teaching? What is a teacher's role? These are questions that have always engaged educators, but with increasing numbers of learners taking online courses in the form of massive open online courses (MOOCs), teaching online has come into sharp focus again. In my recent reading of research into MOOCs, I have noted reports that there has not been enough focus on the role of the teacher in MOOCs and open online spaces (Liyanagunawardena et al., 2013).

Years ago when I first started to teach online, I came across a report that suggested that e-learning was the Trojan Horse through which there would be a renewed focus on teaching in Higher Education, as opposed to the then prevailing dominant focus on research. It was thought that teaching online would require a different approach, but what should that approach be? Two familiar and helpful frameworks immediately come to mind.

1. Garrison, Anderson and Archer's [Community of Inquiry Model](#) (2000), which focuses on how to establish a social presence, a teaching presence and a cognitive presence in online teaching and learning.

Establishing a presence is obviously important when you are at a distance from your students. Over the years I have thought a lot about how to do this and have ultimately come to the conclusion that my 'presence' is not as important as 'being present'. In other words, I have to 'be there' in the space, for and with my students. I have to know them and they me. Clearly MOOCs, with their large numbers of students, have challenged this belief, although some succeed, e.g. the [Modern and Contemporary American Poetry MOOC](#), where teaching, social and cognitive presence have all been established by a team of teachers and assistants, who between them are consistently present.

1. Gilly Salmon's [5 stage model for teaching and learning online](#) (2000) which takes an e-learning moderator through a staged approach from online access, through online socialization and information exchange, towards knowledge construction and personal development in online learning.

I have worked with this model a lot, on many online courses. Gilly Salmon's books provide lots of practical advice on how to engage students online. What I particularly like about this model is that it provides a structure in which it is possible for learners and teachers to establish a presence and 'be present' in an online space, but again, MOOCs have challenged this approach, although Gilly Salmon has run her own MOOC based on her model.

In both these frameworks the teacher's role is significant to students' learning in an online environment, but these frameworks were not designed with 'massive' numbers of students in mind. The teaching of large numbers of students in online courses, sometimes numbers in the thousands, has forced me to stop and re-evaluate what I understand by pedagogy and teaching. What is the bottom line? What aspects of teaching and pedagogy cannot be compromised?

The impact of MOOCs

The 'massive' numbers of students in some MOOCs has raised questions about whether teaching, as we

have known it, is possible in these learning environments. In this technological age we have the means to automate the teaching process, so that we can reach ever-increasing numbers of students. We can provide students with videoed lectures, online readings and resources, discussion forums, automated assessments with automated feedback, and 'Hey Presto' the students can teach each other and the qualified teacher is redundant. We qualified teachers can go back to our offices and research this new mechanized approach to teaching and leave the students to manage their own learning and even learn from 'Teacherbots' i.e. a robot.

Is there a role for automated teachers?

Recently I listened (online) to [Sian Bayne's](#) very engaging inaugural professorial lecture, which was [live streamed from Edinburgh University](#). Sian is Professor of Digital Education at the University of Edinburgh, here in the UK. During this lecture, Sian spent some time talking about the work she and her team have been doing with Twitterbots, i.e. automated responses to students' tweets. The use of a 'bot' in this way focuses the mind on the role of the teacher. The focus of Sian's talk was on the question of what it means to be a good teacher within the context of digital education. Her argument was that we don't have to choose between the human and non-human, the material and the social, technology or pedagogy. We should keep both and all in our sights. She pointed us to her University's [Online Teaching Manifesto](#), where one of the statements is that online teaching should not be downgraded into facilitation. Teaching is more than that.

Manifesto for Teaching Online * Distance is a positive principle, not a deficit. Online can be the privileged mode. * The possibility of the 'online version' is overstated. The best online courses are born digital. * By redefining connection we find we can make eye contact online. * 'Best practice' is a totalising term blind to context – there are many ways to get it right. * Every course design is philosophy and belief in action. * The aesthetics of online course design are too readily neglected: courses that are fair of (inter)face are better places to teach and learn in. * Online courses are prone to cultures of surveillance: our visibility to each other is a pedagogical and ethical issue. * Text is being toppled as the only mode that matters in academic writing. * Visual and hypertextual representations allow arguments to emerge, rather than be stated. * New forms of writing make assessors work harder: they remind us that assessment is an act of interpretation. * Feedback can be digested, worked with, created from. In the absence of this, it is just 'response'. * Assessment strategies can be designed to allow for the possibility of resistance. * A routine of plagiarism detection structures-in a relation of distrust. * Assessment is a creative crisis as much as it is a statement of knowledge. * Place is differently, not less, important online. * Closed online spaces limit the educational power of the network. * Online spaces can be permeable and flexible, letting networks and flows replace boundaries. * Course processes are held in a tension between randomness and intentionality. * Online teaching should not be downgraded into 'facilitation'. * Community and contact drive good online learning. * Written by teachers and researchers in online education. University of Edinburgh MSc in E-learning 2011.

Sian and her Edinburgh colleagues' interest in automated teaching resulted from teaching a MOOC (E-Learning and Digital Cultures – [EDCMOOC](#)), which enrolled 51000 students. This experience led them to experiment with Twitterbots. They have written that EDCMOOC was designed from a belief that contact is what drives good online education (Ross et al., 2014, p.62). This is the final statement of their Manifesto, but when it came to their MOOC teaching, they recognized how difficult this would be and the complexity of their role, and questioned what might be the limitations of their responsibility. They concluded that *'All MOOC teachers, and researchers and commentators of the MOOC phenomenon, must seek a rich understanding of who, and what, they are in this new and challenging context'*.

Most of us will not be required to teach student groups numbering in the thousands, but in my experience even the teaching of one child or one adult requires us to have a rich understanding of who and what we are as teachers. Even the teaching of one child or one adult can be a complex process, which requires us to carefully consider our responsibilities. For example, how do you teach a child with [selective mutism](#)? I have had this experience in my teaching career. It doesn't take much imagination to relate this scenario to the adult learner who lurks and observes rather than visibly participate in an online course. In these situations teaching is more than 'delivery' of the curriculum. It is more than just a practice or a method. We, as teachers, are responsible for these learners and their progress.

The ethical question

Ultimately the Edinburgh team referred to Nel Noddings' observation (Ross et al., 2014 p.7) that 'As *human beings we want to care and be cared for*' and that '*The primary aim of all education must be the nurturance of the ethical ideal.*' (p.6). Consideration of this idea takes teaching beyond a definition of pedagogy as being just about the method and practice of teaching.

As Gert Biesta (2013, p.45) states in his paper 'Giving Teaching Back to Education: Responding to the Disappearance of the Teacher'

.... for teachers to be able to teach they need to be able to make judgements about what is educationally desirable, and the fact that what is at stake in such judgements is the question of desirability, highlights that such judgements are not merely technical judgements—not merely judgements about the 'how' of teaching—but ultimately always normative judgements, that is judgements about the 'why' of teaching

So a question for teachers has to be "Why do we teach?" and by implication 'What is our role?'

For Ron Barnett (2007) teaching is a lived pedagogical relationship. He recognizes that students are vulnerable and that the will to learn can be fragile. As teachers we know that our students may go through transformational changes as a result of their learning on our courses. Barnett (2007) writes that the teacher's role is to support the student in hauling himself out of himself to come into a new space that he himself creates (p.36). This is a [pedagogy of risk](#), which I have blogged about in the past.

As the Edinburgh team realized, we have responsibilities that involve caring for our students and we need to develop personal qualities such as respect and integrity in both us and them. This may be more difficult online when our students may be invisible to us and we to them. We need to ensure that everyone, including ourselves, can establish a presence online that leads to authentic learning and overcomes the fragility of the will to learn.

Gert Biesta (2013) has written that teaching is a gift. '*....it is not within the power of the teacher to give this gift, but depends on the fragile interplay between the teacher and the student.* (p.42). This confirms Barnett's view, with which I agree, that teaching is a lived pedagogical relationship. Teachers should use all available tools to support learners as effectively as possible. Pedagogy is more than the method and practice of teaching and I doubt that teaching can ever be fully automated. As teachers, our professional ethics and duty of care should not be compromised.

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by Joanne Carrubba

OK. I am a bit behind on posting this. Lets just admit the end of the semester, and the planning of new courses for the summer and fall got the better of me.

BUT, that being said, I would like to talk about my pedagogical philosophy. As I have gained experience and embraced online teaching, I find that my pedagogy becomes increasingly student-centered. I want to do more group work, which is challenging online, and I want to have actual discussions, not just have them write weekly essays. I want them to have to find their own information, so I tend to give bits and pieces, rather than giving all of the facts to the students. I believe firmly that giving them structure, and scaffolding to help them understand your expectations, then setting them loose to complete the assignments on their own increases their learning. Beyond that, it gives everyone in the class a better experience.

I find I do less testing in a traditional sense as well. I have always struggled with testing as a gage of actual learning. I have been assigning more projects, which, for me, as an art history and humanities instructor, prove learning in a more well-rounded sense. Yes, they can memorize enough vocab to fill in the blanks, but what if they have to do a Thinglink, with at least 10 links, 3 of which must be either audio or video, and 3 must be their own talking points?

My goal has changed from just teaching them the material I am to cover to teaching them how do exist, work, and do research in a structured online environment. I think that will be more helpful to most students down the road, as they will be working and interacting in that environment daily.