OMEGA

EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS, LLC.

*"The End Solution to **YOUR** Technological Challenges"*

Unlocking your Students' Potentials in the Virtual Learning Environment

Virtual Symposium

JULY 28, 2020

Dr. Nedra Allen

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I would like to acknowledge the OETS Editorial Board and the Editor Dr. Jocelyn Moore for their hard work. I would like to thank the contributing authors and presenters of the virtual symposium.

Welcome Letter

Dear Fellow Faculty and Colleagues,

Thank you for registering for the Omega Educational Technology Solutions Virtual Symposium entitled, *Unlocking your Students' Potentials in the Virtual Learning Environment*. When I first had the vision for this virtual symposium, I never dreamed that I would have the participation that I have received. We received papers from all over the world for consideration. I am truly grateful that people choose our symposium to showcase and highlight their talents.

The purpose of the virtual symposium is to provide teachers both K-12 and higher education with tools to foster the highest level of student performance and progress in a virtual learning environment. It is my sincere hope that you will take away from this virtual symposium strategies to help you optimize your ability to provide education to your students. Many of the schools, colleges and universities are turning to virtual learning due to the Coronavirus. With this said, some instructors were prepared to switch from face-to-face instruction to online instruction, but others were not as ready.

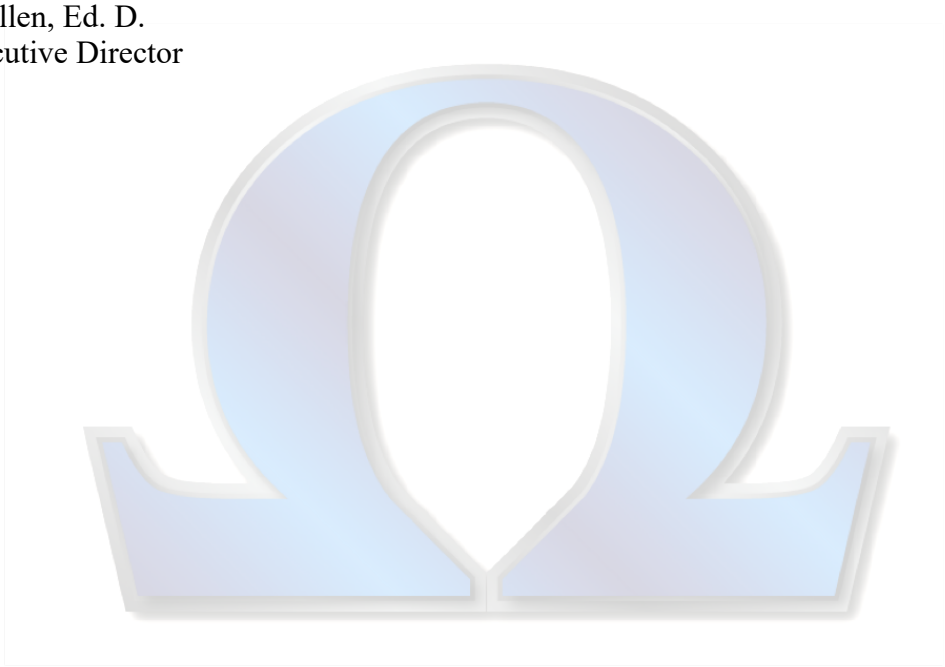
I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the OETS Virtual Symposium Editorial Board members for their hard work. My dream became a reality because of your sacrifice of time, talent, and resources. Further, I would like to thank the patrons that purchased advertisement space in the virtual symposium. It is my prayer that God will bless you richly beyond measure. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Sandra L. Walker for her Keynote Address and Ms. Monique R. Battles for her Plenary session.

Feel free to contact me for future projects or if you need more resources for virtual learning. Let **Omega Educational Technology Solutions** be the **End** solution to your technological challenges.

Sincerely,

Nedra R. Allen

Nedra R. Allen, Ed. D.
OETS Executive Director



Omega Educational Technology Solutions

Virtual Symposium Proceedings

Editorial Board Members

Nedra R. Allen, Ed. D. – Omega Educational Technology Solutions Executive Director

Dr. Nedra Allen lives in Little Rock, AR with her son Jaylen Sims who is a college student at Wiley College. She has a B.A. degree in English from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. She earned a M. Ed. in Instructional Technology from American InterContinental University. She earned an Ed. D. in Higher Education and Adult Learning from Walden University. She is currently an Assistant Professor and Chair of the Literacy Skills Department in the General Education Division at Philander Smith College. Dr. Allen is also the Executive Director of Omega Educational Technology Solutions, LLC. She is also the founder of From Defeat to Victory Training Associates nonprofit organization. She is a member of the National Association of University Women Little Rock branch and the National Sorority of Phi Delta Kappa, Inc. She is the author of *From Cope to Hope: My Life, My Struggles, God's Way*. Her personal motto is: if God can do it for me, then surely He can do it for you.

Kelvin Rachell, Ph. D. – Editorial Board Chair

Dr. Kelvin Rachell is an experienced higher education administrator with over fifteen years of experience. His expertise includes budget management, student development, first-year experience programs, at-risk students, academic program support, multicultural student affairs, student retention, organizational leadership, curriculum development, the politics of higher education, distance education student persistence, and mentoring. Dr. Rachell earned a Bachelor of Science degree in management and marketing, a Master of Science in leadership in higher education, a Master of Business Administration in quantitative analysis and a Doctor of Philosophy in leadership for higher education.

Angela Miller, M. S. – Editorial Board Co-Chair

"If we ever find our light dimming in a dark world, we can always switch to a higher wattage by showing more love and humility."

Angela's life experiences have taught her the art of self-reinvention from a personal as well as a professional standpoint. Shortly after receiving a Business Management degree from Georgia Tech, Angela realized that corporate America challenged her belief systems in reference to success, fulfillment, and happiness.

An entrepreneurial mindset motivated her to own two distinct traditional businesses: a restaurant in the late 90's and a custom blinds business from 2007 until 2011. Later in life after receiving an MSEd in Mathematics Education, she became an adjunct mathematics instructor in 2017 at Philander Smith College in Little Rock, Arkansas. She transitioned to a full time faculty member in 2018.

Angela is a dedicated educator with a strong work ethic and commitment to excellence in teaching evidenced by departmental evaluations, student evaluations, classroom observation, and student success stories. Graced with a sincere love of mathematics, computational reasoning, and problem solving combined with a true passion for helping others eventually led her to the field of education.

Angela specializes in delivering quality direct classroom instruction to first-year college students in the areas of Math Foundations, Pre-algebra, and College Math. Her teaching methodology has recently converted to online instruction with the use of Zoom, Google Meet, OpenBoard Interactive Whiteboard, Cengage e-Textbooks, and more e-Learning platforms.

Working in different venues has enabled Angela to correlate mathematics to the real-world. Relating mathematics to real-life scenarios allows her to teach abstract mathematical

concepts within the context of making them more concrete for students who struggle with learning mathematical objectives.

She believes mining individual strengths/weaknesses in the academic environment is a necessary component of achieving desired outcomes. Ultimately, Angela is passionate about helping others move forward in life through post-secondary education as well as through entrepreneurship.

Jocelyn Moore, Ph. D. – Virtual Symposium Proceedings Designer and Editor

Dr. Jocelyn Moore is a Louisiana native and a graduate of the University of Louisiana at Monroe, where she received a Bachelor of Science in Microbiology, in 2006. She went on to pursue a Master of Science at Louisiana Tech University in 2008, there she studied Cell and Molecular Biology and worked on High Throughput Fingerprinting technology and use of bacterial artificial chromosome (BAC) libraries to study plant genomes. Following her MS, she took time to explore education while working at a private Christian school in a suburb of Atlanta, Georgia for a year. During this time, she rediscovered her passion for science and returned to Louisiana to pursue a Doctorate at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette in Environmental and Evolutionary Biology, with a concentration in Molecular Biology, completed 2016. There she worked on several United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) funded projects aimed at identifying synthetic antimicrobial peptides to help control pest spread on crops and ultimately increase crop yield. She focused her efforts on understanding the effects of D4E1 on *Aspergillus* flavus and other fungal pests, while exploring the control of aflatoxin production.

Dr. Moore is currently a tenured Associate Professor at Philander Smith College in the Department of Biological Sciences. She works with undergraduates on characterizing cellulosic nanoparticles and enhancing the antimicrobial properties as a part of the NSF EPSCoR grant as well as serving as a Program Coordinator for the Arkansas Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation (ARK-LSAMP). She is working to expand the undergraduate research experience on the campus of Philander Smith College through on campus research and off campus REU experiences.

Michele Grice, M. A. – Virtual Symposium Moderator

Michelle Grice is a ‘success concierge’, voice over artist, program facilitator, speaking coach, and author with Opportunity Speaks, Inc. She is also a success coach/adjunct instructor at Philander Smith College in Little Rock, Arkansas. She served the students, faculty, and administration at Grambling State University, the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff Arkansas Baptist College, Southeast Arkansas Community College, Elgin Community College, College of DuPage, Saint Peter’s Catholic School, and Saint Joseph Catholic School. “Real World 101” is one of her best-like projects used to assist at-risk youth in making wise decisions that endorses advance level education. Michelle, with her husband DeArthur Grice, Jr., are actively involved training their 18-year old son and their 16-year old daughter.

Khalia Phillips – Virtual Symposium Technical Support

Khalia Phillips is a native of Little Rock, Arkansas raised by her mother who was an educator in the Little Rock School District. She was a student in the Little Rock School District and graduated from McClellan High School. Her interests in videography and communications led her to a Bachelor of Arts in Radio, Television, and Film from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock where she graduated Magna Cum Laude. She is currently in the last year of studies at Webster University obtaining a Master of Art in Leadership and Management while also chasing after her 18-month-old son.

Symposium Abstracts, Papers and Author Biographies

The T.E.A.C.H. Model: Best Practices for K-12 Educators Transitioning to Teach Online

Elizabeth J. Barker, M.Ed., MBA and Catherine M. Blanco, Ph.D.

Abstract

T.E.A.C.H. Model for Online Teaching With many K-12 teachers across the nation transitioning to an online presence amidst the pandemic, there is a great need to provide resources and tools for these teachers. Successfully transitioning to the online classroom environment, expectations of teachers and students during this transition, considering a learner's perspective of this change, collaboration with others, and helpful materials for teachers are topics to consider during this change from teaching primarily face-to-face in a traditional classroom to online teaching, whether full-time, part-time, or as a supplement to a teacher's current teaching model. In this paper written by full-time, experienced online faculty, these topics are addressed to help K-12 teachers make a smoother transition from traditional face-to-face in classroom teaching to instructing in an asynchronous online learning management system. Whether teachers are new or experienced in teaching their students through an online modality, this paper addresses the topics of the T.E.A.C.H. model to meet teachers where they are at through best practices to excel in the online classroom. Following the TEACH model, the authors developed strategies to assist K-12 educators in making the physical and mental shift to online learning. The TEACH model focuses on becoming tech savvy, redefining expectations, course design from a learner perspective, collaboration, and helpful materials for students. The ideas contained in the TEACH is model are already supported throughout education literature and research. The authors bring these elements together, seamlessly, for use by the K-12 educator, in an easy to use model of instruction.

With many K-12 educators across the nation transitioning to an online presence amidst the pandemic, there is a great need to provide practical advice, resources, and tools for educators (Ko & Rossen, 2007). Whether K-12 educators are new or experienced in teaching online, the authors of this paper address topics in their T.E.A.C.H. model based on a collective review of literature related to online teaching and learning. The transition to tech savvy teaching, expectations of educators and students, a learner's perspective, collaboration with others, and helpful materials are topics to consider. Following the T.E.A.C.H. model and current research, experienced online faculty address these topics with best practices and strategies to help K-12 educators make a smoother transition from traditional face-to-face classroom teaching to instructing in an asynchronous online learning management system. The authors bring these elements together for use by the K-12 educator in this model of instruction:

T - Transition to Tech Savvy
E - Expectations
A - A Learner's Perspective
C - Collaboration
H - Helpful Materials

Transition to Tech Savvy

There may be a misconception that educators must be experts in technology, a.k.a. tech savvy, to teach online. A tech savvy individual is one who is "well informed about or proficient in the use of modern technology, especially computers" (Lexico.com, 2020). Therefore, competency in using a computer is a good start for educators transitioning to tech savvy online teaching. Most educators already have some basic training in using computers so they just need to further understand how to use specific online teaching tools of their schools, specifically the school's choice of learning management system (e.g., Blackboard, Google Classroom, Moodle) and any relevant computer programs that could enhance the quality of online teaching (e.g., Microsoft Office for creating worksheets, spreadsheets, and PowerPoint presentations).

Educators should seek out online learning opportunities through informal, need-driven professional development that begins with searching relevant websites to find video tutorials, online articles, and step-by-step courses on the computer programs and learning management systems they will use to teach, thus enhancing their transition to tech savvy (Schmidt et al, 2016). For example, Google offers a free educator training to learn the how to use the tools available within G Suite for Education, which includes Google Classroom, Gmail, Google Meet, and more (Google for Education, n.d.).

Transitioning from teaching in a traditional, face-to-face classroom with curriculum designed for direct-instruction to a more inquiry-based learning approach of online may require creativity on the part of the educator (Teach.com, 2020). The academic standards and lesson objectives may not change when teaching online, but the way the curriculum is presented will probably need enhancements from the originally created content designed for teaching in-person (Cuellar, 2002). Online educators should take as much time as possible to confidently navigate and utilize the learning management system their school has chosen as well as know how to add or upload content. Once educators are familiar with these basics, they should consider how their lessons plans could be presented in this environment. Free lesson plans on a variety of educational topics to be taught online are readily available for educators to use and apply promptly in their own online classes (Online Learning Consortium, 2020).

Expectations

Expectations of educators and students during the transition to online education may differ based on resources and level of experience with technology. It cannot be expected that students learning from home will have all the tools they need to learn, nor should students be expected to already know how to use the tools. It should also be considered that homes where

students reside may be deficient in high-speed Internet and/or may not have the minimum computer requirements and resources needed to complete course objectives (Beasley & Holly, 2013). Empathizing with students struggling in these areas should be expected and educators may be expected to be readily available to help students gain access to technology required for class and assist students with using the technology (Blanco, 2007). Although expectations of technological challenges do arise, educators should still hold students accountable to meet learning objectives even if it means getting creative and working with the student to problem-solve a solution in completing class requirements (Blanco, 2007). For example, brainstorming with the student alternative ways to submit an assignment if a student is struggling or if a student is unable to view a required class video due to unreliable internet, the educator could email the video transcript or provide an alternate assignment option with a website link to read a related news article. A teacher should never allow hindrances with technology be an excuse for lack of personal responsibility or missing/late assignments. Even so, expect that challenges with technology will arise creating hindrances for both students and educators (Blanco, 2017).

For continued job satisfaction and effective teaching, educators should set reasonable expectations and boundaries with students and parents (Hansen & Gray, 2018). Although students have the ability to contact an online educator at any time of day (or night) through the online classroom, this does not mean the educator should be expected to be available all hours of the day. It is highly recommended that each educator posts a contact information note within their online classroom that includes specific ways to contact the educator (e.g., email, classroom message, phone, and/or text) and a schedule of consistent classroom office hours (e.g., Monday through Friday 7:30 AM to 3:30 PM). Students and parents should only expect to reach the educator during the posted office hours and the only times that the educator should be expected

in the online classroom as well as handle administrative tasks, such online meetings, answering phone calls, replying to emails, and grading papers. Also, an educator should avoid providing a personal phone number and inquire if their school can offer an office phone number with voicemail that the educator can access from home and is only answered during office hours to help the educator keep healthy work and personal life boundaries.

Educators also need to set expectations upon themselves to take time for self-care (Hansen & Gray, 2018). For example, eat a healthy breakfast, follow good personal hygiene habits, and take a walk outside, exercise, or meditate before beginning "class." An educator should also take reasonable breaks away from the computer and use prep time wisely. When an educator takes time for self-care and creates healthy work and personal boundaries, the educator will likely focus better in the classroom. Overall, a culture of caring within reasonable expectations for the educator as well as students and parents more likely enhances connections within the online classroom environment (Blanco, 2017).

A Learner's Perspective

Designing classroom learning from the learner's perspective is critical to increasing student self-esteem and self-efficacy (Schultz & Higbee, 2007; Scherrer & Preckel, 2019). Research shows that "distance learning quality standards must first be focused on the students' perspective to develop comprehensive and efficient standards for evaluating distance learning (Valai, Schmidt, Crawford, & Moore, 2019). When the student's point of view is not considered during the instructional design phase, the learning process becomes burdensome and students question their ability to be successful under the current conditions. Known as learned helplessness and developed by Seligman and Maier in 1965, this condition causes students to give up, when they feel that a situation is beyond their control (Seligman, 2011).

For many educators, new to online learning, a major shift in thinking must occur to design courses that facilitate learning and reduce frustration. Under the best conditions, students have a limited attention span (Bunce et al., 2010) and a desire to engage in learning activities that are perceived as valuable (Davis, 1989). Instructors should seek to provide a range of opportunities to master the materials and demonstrate learning. Best practices include a variety of learning activities, that appeal to a wide range of learning styles. This can be accomplished through brief, engaging videos, reading materials, and hands on activities. Individual exploration, which consists of students locating and sharing their findings in the online classroom, also have the benefit collaborative learning, for the general learning community. Gamification has a strong appeal for learners of all ages. DuBravac (2012) states, "Gamification is more than earning points, winning badges, or gaining reputation. Gamification implies the use of game mechanics to guide participant behavior toward autonomy, mastery, and purpose" (p. 75). Platforms such as Toolwire, Kahoot, Prezi, and Edutopia provide free gamification resources for educators.

Collaboration

Based on the social constructivism theory, "when you engage with people, you build your own insight into what's being discussed. Someone else's understanding complements yours, and together you start to weave an informed interpretation" (Bingham & Conner, 2010, p. 10). Creating a virtual community of practice brings educators together to share experiences and resources, best practices and pedagogies of engagement, across institutional and geographic boundaries (Carney, Dolan, & Seagle, 2015). Collaborating with other K-12 educators is an effective way to fill in teacher skill gaps and capitalize on the vast amount of technology resources and online strategies available. As schools all over America scrambled to shift to distance learning, teachers found themselves collaborating with their peers as a necessity. This

enabled educators to fill the technology and strategy gaps that existed. Moving forward however, communities of practice will ensure that K-12 educators are proficient with emerging technologies, learning strategies and classroom development in a distance learning setting (Online Learning Consortium, 2020).

Best practices in this area include becoming active in educational communities of practice focused on K-12 educational technology, subject matter expertise, and emerging trends in distance education. A good starting point for educators are the resources created specifically for the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE) is one such resource bringing together technical assistance providers and expert practitioners to provide resources, guidance, training, and ongoing professional learning for schools and districts. Professional organizations provide additional networking and collaboration opportunities, as well as education communities on social media platforms such as LinkedIn. The goal is to identify a personal learning network, focused on bridging the gaps that exist for each educator. This network will organically change, as new skills are acquired and student needs change.

Helpful Materials

The goal of the online educator is "to reduce the number of those who struggle and increase the number of those who grow" (Seilgman, 2011). Even though today's learners are highly skilled with technology, they are not necessarily accustomed to using technology in a learning environment. This combined with the rushed move to distance learning, across a variety of technology platforms, makes distance learning problematic for all students.

While many students might be familiar with Google Classroom, the user experience will vary from course to course. Depending on the subject taught, distance learning students are

expected to access new learning technologies and manage the daily workload, from a time and practical perspective. The best practice here is to develop helpful materials, which provide all the necessary information and resources in one place. An example would be a weekly calendar that provides a descriptive link to the daily math lessons, expected time to complete each lesson and a supplemental resource, providing additional guidance and instruction. Writing assignments should include descriptive links for proofreading and citation resources, as well as instructions for submitting the assignment. Consistency and repetition is key here, so that students know what to expect and become confident in completing the activities and assignments.

Conclusion

While K-12 educators are transitioning to teach in an online classroom environment amidst the pandemic, the need for practical advice, resources, and tools is increasing (Ko & Rossen, 2007). Through a review of literature on online teaching and learning, experienced online faculty shared their T.E.A.C.H. model for K-12 educators transitioning to teach online. The T.E.A.C.H. model focuses on the transition to tech savvy, expectations of educators and students, a learner's perspective, collaboration, and helpful materials. Whatever level of experience educators may have in online teaching, the authors of this paper addressed the topics in their T.E.A.C.H. model to provide educators with best practices and strategies for teaching in the online classroom based on current research.

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Biography

Elizabeth Barker holds Master of Arts degrees in Education and Business. She has been a post-secondary educator since 2008, with a passion for teaching first year college students. Her publications include Instructional Design that Makes Sense to all Learners and English Language Learners and Special Education. Elizabeth is currently working with local K-12 school districts, to assist in the transition to online learning, in response to the nation's health crisis. Elizabeth resides in Menifee, California with her two children.

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Dr. Catherine M. Blanco holds a Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration and Master of Arts in Teaching. After experience as a K-12 educator in a traditional classroom, she transitioned to post-secondary education online instruction. Her publications include Narrative Inquiry on the Motivations of Persistence for Online Community College Students (dissertation) and Reaching the Rural College Student. Dr. Blanco has a passion to impart her knowledge to educators and provides professional development trainings sharing her expertise of innovative online education with college faculty and K-12 educators transitioning to online teaching. Dr. Blanco resides in Payson, Arizona with her husband and four children.

Lessons on supporting and engaging learners from Covid19 emergency remote teaching and learning: A case of language teaching at the University of Eswatini

Prof. Karen A. F. Ferreira-Meyers, University of Eswatini, Institute of Distance Education
Dr. Virginia T. Dlamini-Akintola, University of Eswatini, Department of English Language and Literature

Abstract

In this paper, the authors reflect on the challenges and successes encountered by the students of the University of Eswatini, both those usually taught through traditional modes of delivery and those who, as registered Institute of Distance Education students, normally benefit from blended teaching and learning.

As an emergency measure, the University decided to go online which meant a complete shift in educational paradigm as well as the unlocking of new skills. This paper details the strategies used to ensure that learners are on board and benefit from the virtual learning environments (Moodle, WhatsApp, Zoom and Google Meet, email, etc.). Through the authors' participation and a reflexive methodology, various strategies were employed in line with Bloom's digital taxonomy (Churches, 2007) and the 4Cs (Collaboration, Critical Thinking, Communication, Creative Thinking) (Plucker *et al.*, 2016) to ensure enhanced student participation were evaluated. This paper describes the strategies used in teaching and learning language-related subjects (English, Portuguese). One of the reasons for this choice is that it is often said that one cannot learn a language effectively online; hence, face-to-face interaction is essential. It is our view that this is not necessarily so, but technology-enhanced teaching and learning is an appropriate solution, not only in times of pandemics or natural disasters, but also as a means to reach more students and to allow all students to engage in learning at their own pace and ability.

An important section of the paper examines the need for lecturers to be capacitated in order to unlock their students' potential in virtual environments. At the University of Eswatini, prior to the pandemic outbreak, the Institute of Distance Education trained staff on blended learning. With the onset of the pandemic, the need to train staff on online teaching and learning was strongly felt, and

an online course on online teaching was set up. A large portion of the university staff has now been trained regarding the interactions of content, technical and pedagogical knowledge. This will surely have a positive influence on students' learning skills (and attitudes). However, further work has to be done on online facilitation skills.

Keywords: emergency or remote teaching and learning, COVID19, English, Portuguese, online teaching and learning strategies, student capacitation.

Introduction

It is commonly accepted now, after several months of the pandemic, that COVID-19 has had devastating effects on the education. In all countries worldwide, education continuity was recommended. Similarly, in the Kingdom of Eswatini (Southern Africa) when schools and campuses were physically closed in March 2020, the general idea was to continue providing education online (radio, TV, via the internet). This was accompanied by important challenges, especially in developing countries such as Eswatini, where poor infrastructure coupled with sporadic connectivity continues to pose questions about the effectiveness of remote online learning for the benefit of all, including rural-dwelling students.

Study rationale

Even though many online language learning sites exist since at least 30 years, there are still comments from various instances noting the impossibility of *really* learning a language in an online environment. Does that mean that no language learning occurs during periods of pandemics or natural disasters? Surely not!

In this brief study, the authors focus on strategies for improving language learning (English and Portuguese) in online environments at the University of Eswatini, the oldest and one of the main universities in Eswatini.

Study methodology and data collection method

In this participatory study, the authors were also the participants and observers; hence, we had to employ a methodological concept technically referred to as 'reflexivity' throughout the data collection process. Downing *et al*. (2013: 480) describe reflexivity as a methodological concept that enables a researcher to be "relationally present … in the course of their own sharing of narrative accounts [concerning their research theme]". They further note that reflexive thinking adds texture into the research, and is best facilitated by acknowledging and understanding the

space-time context of the research location. Therefore, this methodological concept requires that the researchers themselves do not only reflect on themselves, on their own practices, but also "open[ed] themselves to the emotions and needs of their respondents, reacting organically rather than according to script or protocol" (Downing *et al*., 2013: 481).

Research findings

The groups of students, lecturers and tutors, the researchers interacted with come from different programmes and different levels: Certificate in Portuguese students who learn basic language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) in Portuguese as a Foreign Language, students in a Certificate in Psychosocial Support programme who need to fine-tune their academic and professional English skills, and Bachelor of Arts in Humanities students specializing in English language and literature. English is one of the official languages in Eswatini, and the primary language used for business and education. It generally functions as a second language. Portuguese is used as a foreign language mainly used by the minority immigrants from neighbouring Mozambique. However, for economic reasons, the University of Eswatini adopted the teaching of functional literacy in Portuguese since interaction between citizens of the two countries has been encouraged by business and tourism.

Universities were closed towards the end of March 2020, at least physically, meaning that no students or staff were allowed on campus and all face-to-face learning was thus stopped completely. As March 2020 was in the middle of the second semester, students in the Certificate of Portuguese were already used to working on the WhatsApp platform (the programme is offered through the Institute of Distance Education (IDE): limited face-to-face classes are from the onset combined with autonomous distance learning which is inherently online as the lecturers reside in Mozambique and only come to the Eswatini campus once every 6 weeks), it was hoped that the switch to fully online learning would run smoothly, especially as, in line with Damanik's 2019

study results, which indicate that students' attitude towards the use of WhatsApp for learning and teaching is generally positive, and the fact that here earlier on already strategic thinking about online teaching and learning had been started (Ferreira-Meyers, 2010).

However, this was not really the case in practice. Learners soon reported a number of obstacles to the finalising of assignments and continuation of learning. Some students had this to say: "we are weary and scared of online learning as sessions seem to be based on time out sequences" (the student was referring to synchronous sessions). Even then many were not even accessing the content uploaded for them on the Moodle platform. This is because students reported that, due to the lockdown, they were unable to get to internet cafés or get additional data or airtime because of financial constraints; some problems with the acquisition of smart phones. Even though the coordinator, lecturers and tutors kept on encouraging students to continue interacting and learning (for example, by sending resources, asking questions and providing additional reading), the fear and stress related to the coronavirus spread made it difficult for many students to participate meaningfully. This anxiety added to the capacity limitation on using online learning tools. Thus, Oriji *et al.* (2019) noted, in their paper, that both staff and students need to be trained effectively in order to assist each other on so-called social media. To address this limitation, we used various strategies which the next section addresses, in part through the lens of one of the researchers' experience as a lecturer.

A transition from face-to-face to online teaching: a personal experience

This is what one of the researcher-participant-observer noted: "I teach Professional English and English language and Linguistics for certificate and degree programmes respectively. The transition from face-to-face to online learning has been a process for me, and this process has

impacted the way I have been attempting to reach my students through the Moodle LMS from August 2019 to date. When I was first introduced to e-learning through a Saide (South African Institute for Distance Education) workshop years ago, it looked exciting, and the fact that one could reach many students online was exciting. However, as a young academic then, I was still focused on developing myself in my field; hence how I taught my courses was not my focus. Though I have been teaching students enrolled through the Institute of Distance Education (IDE), who are supposed to be taught using the blended mode, and despite having the knowledge on e-learning taught in the Saide workshop, I never took online teaching seriously. I used the face-to-face sessions and rushed students through the content in the allocated, but limited time. It was last year, after IDE conducted several workshops that I was motivated to attempt using the Moodle LMS. But on reflection, I notice that I have been anxious about incorporating technology in my teaching. The breakthrough came when IDE continuously capacitated us on blended learning which developed my understanding of the need of three main competencies: *content knowledge, technical knowledge and pedagogical knowledge* (based loosely on Mishra and Kohler's 2006 TPACK model) for one to use online teaching at university level".

Significance of the Three Competencies in Handling Online Teaching and Learning

In this paper, we argue that the lecturers' capacity in all three competencies is essential for unlocking students' potential in the virtual learning environment. Many of us have content knowledge but lack technical and pedagogical knowledge. Even if we have some pedagogical knowledge (having taken a post-graduate course in education), we note that many facilitators passively use such knowledge, and as such, its use may not necessarily be effective when it comes to course delivery. In addition to content knowledge, the technical and pedagogical notions have to be applied in both face-to-face and online teaching environments. This constitutes a challenge,

in particular the selection of the appropriate online strategies and tools for language teaching and learning.

Strategies used to teach language in the online space

Teaching or learning a language is considered tedious, but the technical and pedagogical knowledge indicates the importance of explaining concepts, exemplifying and commenting on them. In our language courses, content is presented to students in various forms – as (1) slides or detailed notes on Moodle and email, (2) follow-up explanations using Whatsapp voice note ranging from 10 to 15 minutes, and (3) using the national radio for the professional English certificate course. Reflecting on pedagogy and applying Bloom's Digital Taxonomy has been useful when one transitions from face-to-face to online learning, during both preparation and delivery phases. In particular, the following has been the focus of course delivery planning and preparation:

a) aligning learning objectives and course content;

b) preparing course-specific notes and uploading them on Moodle, and

c) preparing activities that would help students achieve the learning objectives.

In order to minimize the distance between students and facilitators, short videos have been beneficial. Collaboration activities such as the joint development of Wikis, podcasting – especially in a language learning setting – should be the focus. These are possible on Moodle and on WhatsApp. In the Certificate of Portuguese, students share short videos of visits to museums or shops with each other. Lecturers and tutors send then links of situations where real-life language is used.

Here are some comments made by one of the participant-observers who teaches English: "Despite my limitations in using technology to engage students actively in the virtual space, I attempt to do so through reflective engagement, giving them tasks to read from e-books, uploaded texts (notes),

online articles and then giving the students specific questions that require them not only to lift answers from the given material (i.e. content frames – exact, fixed knowledge), but to also use display schematic knowledge (applied/extended to related topics or contexts) (Paltridge, 2001; Swales, 1990) of what they have learnt by providing locally sourced examples or those drawn from the relevant structure of English to display their understanding of grammatical or linguistic concepts being explained.

In the Certificate in Portuguese programme, both lecturers and tutors use all language skills (speaking, reading, listening and writing) with the students, mainly via WhatsApp. WhatsApp appears to be the most popular discussion forum in both the English and Portuguese language learning programmes offered by the University of Eswatini, but the challenge is that not all students actively participate. Some just complain about data costs. Another limitation of this platform is that as a facilitator, it is not possible to see how many students are online at a set time, so it functions best for teaching and learning asynchronously. A live discussion has not been effective. It is only very useful if after uploading notes and an activity on the Moodle LMS, followed by short voice note explanations which are sent to the group. The students have reported that this is useful since they can hear the facilitator's voice explaining the content, and they can access both content and explanation anytime unlike in class where once they miss the point, they cannot retrieve it unless they record the lesson themselves.

Besides discussion forums, email has been used extensively to encourage communication and participation between students and facilitators, to share notes, to send out assignments (followed by students' submitting their work) and distributing graded assignments and tests. The challenge with email is that the facilitator cannot keep track of student interaction. The main advantage of the email has been that it enables lecturers to interact with each student and attend to their questions

individually. Unfortunately, this is time-consuming. In order to respond to student queries and give them appropriate feedback, time needs to be set aside every week. The students are aware, and if they do not get a response after a commonly agreed time, WhatsApp is used to send a reminder. Communication is therefore important between lecturers and students. Explaining class management procedures clearly on the virtual space is an important part of such communication strategies. The strategies used to teach language virtually have been guided by a variety of underlying principles and good practices. Below we briefly look at assessment of learning objectives and essay-writing skills' development,

To assess whether learning objectives have been achieved, students are given a course outline that has three components: the topic and sub-topics of each unit, the learning objective(s) for each and reference for further reading. The exercises given are aimed at achieving these objectives, and the students use all resources provided to do the exercises. Since the question types vary, students are given assessment rubrics that illustrate the expectations for the depth of the responses and presentation structure whether short answers or detailed descriptions are required. Prior to going online, students were given only a printed list of topics to be covered in the course and the rest was explained during face-to-face lectures. This was not effective for student learning because they never knew the learning outcome for each topic nor did they receive references for further reading. In addition, the assessment rubrics were not systematically provided to the students. The shift to online learning has therefore enabled more student-focused planning and delivery of the language courses.

Developing students' essay writing skills – Language students also need to demonstrate their ability to write an essay as they respond to discursive types of questions. The online environment provided an opportunity for giving students individual attention. For example, each student is

awarded for a satisfactory opening statement that clearly introduces the theme and focus of the essay. If a student struggles to write an opening statement the use of track changes make it easy to scaffold the introduction, and to give comments which the student has to incorporate when writing corrections (or writing an introduction in the future). The essay content should reflect the students' further reading (a guide that is given in the assessment rubrics). Here, students are encouraged to use paraphrasing and in-text referencing to illustrate not only their ability to select relevant content, but also to display their academic writing skills by, among other things, presenting their content coherently. Giving examples of well-written essays or sections thereof is easier online. Technology helps to enhance the students' language skills: they seem to read more, listen to audio and use online spell-checkers, thesauri and dictionaries.

Students also benefit from the online quizzes which uses short answers and multiple-choice options which add value in motivating students to read and respond to objective questions. And the idea of mixing question types for all content is easy to manage on the Moodle platform which also supports not only the grading of such questions, but also the varying students' abilities where some are good with short answers types of questions while others are more comfortable with extended text types of answers. So the use of Moodle has enabled a balanced approach to content assessment.

Conclusion

This paper shows that the virtual learning environment has become an important space for student learning at the University of Eswatini not only as a way to address the requirement of social distancing demanded by the coronavirus pandemic, but also as a means to reach more students both synchronously and asynchronously ensuring that university graduates acquire not only content knowledge but also technical skills for professional online presence. The paper has also demonstrated that using the virtual space for teaching and learning is an ongoing process that requires both lecturers and students to progressively learn the required technical skills to teach and

learn with ease, and also to manage time and communication. It has also been noted that the virtual space also enhances not only students' content knowledge and technical skills, but also their language skills – reading, listening, writing as well as critical thinking, without which language learning cannot be achieved.

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Biography

Associate Professor Karen Ferreira-Meyers is Coordinator Linguistics and Modern Languages in the Institute of Distance Education (University of Eswatini). Having taught different courses in French and English, today she ensures the smooth running of the Certificate in Portuguese programme. She has published extensively (a book and more than 60 papers and the same amount of book reviews), she peer-reviews and edits for several scientific journals. She is keen translator and interpreter. Her scientific interests include distance and e-learning, teaching and learning of languages, autofiction and autobiography, crime and detective fiction. She holds 4 Master's Degrees and a Ph.D. in French and Francophone literature

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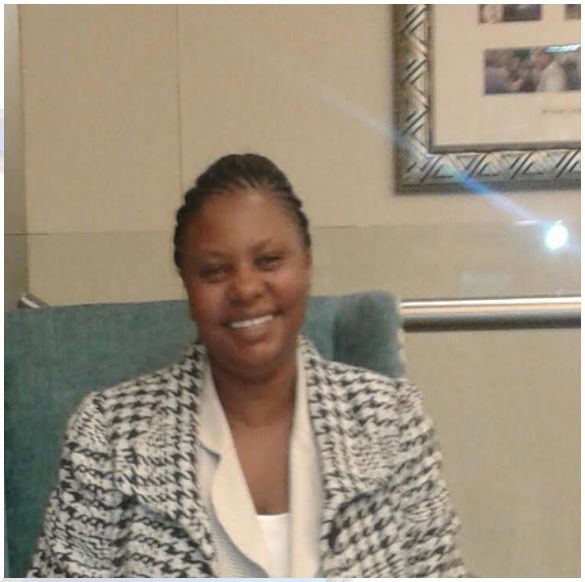

A Literature Review: Virtual Learning Experiences of Non-Traditional Students Enrolled on HBCU and on PWI Campuses

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Abstract

This paper reports on a literature review that captured the social and academic experiences of nontraditional students enrolled on historically Black college (HBCU) and predominantly white institutions (PWI) campuses and how the use of a virtual learning environment (VLE) impacted their learning. The literature revealed that 1) without good faculty support institutions may have results in greater levels of student attrition 2) students indicated that they feel a higher level of self-efficacy in their studies and relied on faculty more for moral support 3) students reported a greater achievement of independence related to life-long learning and 4) the need for human service professionals that are able to assist students outside of the classroom deal with non-classroom related issues that have traditionally been dealt with by faculty members in the classroom. These findings suggest insightful implications for the historically Black college campus (HBCU) and predominantly white institutions (PWI) looking to change in the areas of nonacademic services which is believed critical to the success of faculty, student support, and success that lends a hand in student motivation and retention.

Keywords: virtual learning, online learning, persistence, social and academic experiences, student motivation, higher education, success coach

Introduction

Many studies have been conducted to examine the impact of student retention, attrition, and success factors of students enrolled in traditional "face-to-face" frequently referenced as brick and mortar courses; however, during the past few years there has been more research that focuses on the experiences of nontraditional students enrolled in on-line courses. Online "virtual" learning has gained momentum over the past twenty years with both traditional and non-traditional students. To comprehend the success factors and the demise of this student population enrolled at HBCUs and at PWIs further studies have been conducted to better understand the social and academic factors that led them to persist. Therefore, knowledge of nontraditional online student experiences can result in greater retention, higher graduation rates for the institution and personal achievement for the individual (Jackson-Golden, C., 2013). In addition, included in this study are thoughts of instructional approaches to promote learner motivation and satisfaction in online-virtual learning environments.

Literature Review

Online virtual learning is defined by the United States Department of Education as "learning that takes place partially or entirely over the internet" (Fisher, 2015). Virtual learning and education can be defined as instruction in a learning environment where the Instructor and students are separated by time and space, and the Instructor provides course content through the use of methods such as course management applications, multimedia, written format and other formats all delivered over the internet often with no face-to-face or physical interaction. Virtual and online learning will be used interchangeably. With such a demand for virtual learning, according to Twigg (2003), every college and university in the United States is discovering exciting new ways of using information technology to enhance the process of teaching and

learning and to extend access to new populations of students, building communities of learners nationwide. With increased access to technology online learning has proven to be as good or in some instances better than traditional education as most are familiar with thus improving the quality of the learning experience. Virtual learning brings forth great opportunities as students have the opportunity to study and to communicate with a broad group of students and faculty. Virtual learning allows for the student to plan their course of study to coincide with life, family, and work responsibilities. Flexibility allows for a greater autonomy learning at their own pace and style. Online classes rely heavily on self-motivation, self-discipline and the ability to write effectively. Thus, as with opportunities there are challenges as quality of the courses and academic integrity is explored. According to Kibal Sabil (2012), virtual education will lend an opportunity for a new approach that puts effectiveness and student outcomes at its center.

Online education has increasingly become an alternative to face-to-face instruction. A 2005 survey of 2,200 U.S. colleges and universities disclosed nearly 3.2 million students taking at least one online course (Allen & Seaman, 2006) and this number has increased to 6.7 million in 2012 (Allen & Seaman, 2013). To better explain the importance of online virtual learning, 69.1 percent of chief academic leaders said that online learning was a critical component of their institutions' long-term strategy (Allen & Seaman, 2013) perhaps to compensate the declining enrollment trends in higher education institutions or to handle the growing student demand for "anywhere, anytime" learning through online classes or both.

Traditional and nontraditional students both experiences direct and indirect academic challenges with online virtual learning, remarkable reductions have been shown for males, younger students, Black students, and students with lower grade point averages. Additionally, online performance gaps were also wider in some academic subject areas than others. (Xu &

Jaggars, 2016). Additional research concluded that while these factors are significant to academics and institutions there were additional factors that affected the students' ability to effectively focus on academics. Factors included the students' inability to time management and assignments were missed due to the lack of knowledge in navigating learning platforms. Additional problems included work, family and life balance challenges which can be a large contributory factor (Jackson-Golden, 2013).

Methodology

Smith & Yeboah conducted a mixed-methods approach as a means of inquiry about students' satisfaction experiences in online courses as related to academic achievements. Combined were both qualitative and quantitative forms of research (2016). For this literature review focus will be on the qualitative analysis thus helping the reader to better understand the students' perspective and satisfaction in online virtual learning.

Data Collection Methods

A total of 149 students were asked to answer open ended questions regarding their experiences in online courses. A total of four open-ended questions were asked:

1. What are your primary reasons for choosing online courses?
2. What do you like most about online courses?
3. What do you like least about online courses?
4. What advice would you give to students new to online courses?

After thorough reviews of all responses, the researchers identified the following categories from the open-ended response questions: flexibility and time convenience, self-confidence in discussion posts, lack of support, language and linguistics differences (cultural), and lack of self-regulated learning skills through the iterative and analytical examination of the data.

Results

Findings from the 2016 research by Smith & Yeboah qualitative research open-ended questions indicated that minority students' experienced flexibility and time convenience, confidence in discussion posts, language and linguistics differences, lack of self-regulated learning skills and lack of support. The majority of students (136 out of 149) agreed that online learning offered them flexibility and time convenience, which helped them to improve their academic performance in online courses. Additional research indicated that online virtual instruction reduces cost of instruction, time, provides convenience, and the ability to be comfortable in being proactive in discussion posts. (Twigg, 2003). Students spend more time actively involved in learning versus listening to someone talking about the learning process often interacting with computer based learning resources. Nontraditional students reported difficulty in self-management with life, work, school, and family getting into the college scene while focusing on an education through online classes. Students felt a lack of faculty support, due to the lack of familiarity with computers attempting to complete assignments were challenging and confusing and were missed thus grades were low, language and cultural barriers caused "frosty" relationships with faculty. Overall, the lack of support, language and linguistic differences, and lack of self-regulated learning skills affected the academic achievements of students negatively.

Conclusion

The purpose of the literature review was to explore factors that contributes to the success or demise of students enrolled in online virtual class on university campuses. The researcher's purpose was to study and expand knowledge of factors that affect student attrition in online virtual courses. Academic services and student retention are at the heart of institutions of higher

education, and is paramount to the graduation rates and existence of brick and mortar and online college and university campuses. The findings of this literature review provide lived experiences of social and academic experiences of students enrolled in online virtual courses. The research also suggests that without good faculty support that institutions may have results in greater levels of student attrition; however, improvement in the areas of nonacademic services is deemed critical to the success of faculty support that lends a hand in online virtual learners. Quality academic and support services can contribute to the success of both the traditional and nontraditional students enrolled on online virtual learning.

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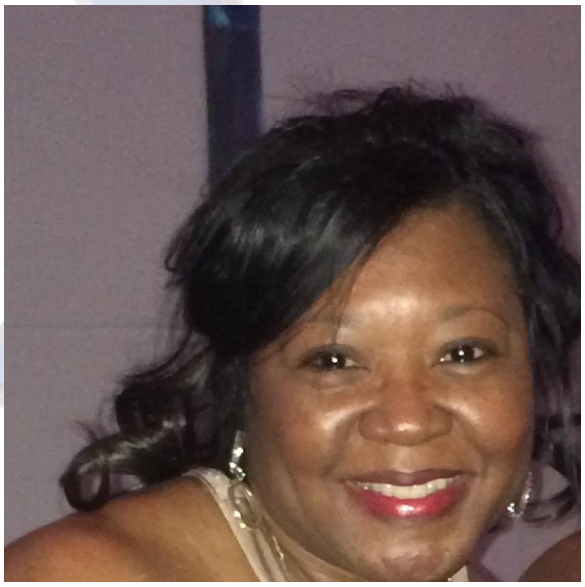
Biography

Cheryl Jackson-Golden is a native of Pine Bluff, Arkansas. She currently resides in Little Rock, Arkansas, and is employed as a Graduate Level-Assistant Professor teaching face-to-face and online as a fulltime faculty member at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, where she currently teaches graduate level courses in Addiction Studies. She has a Ph.D. in General Human Services - Pubic Service Leadership from Capella University, an MA in Addiction Studies from the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff. Cheryl has spent the last thirteen years working in the field of higher education. She has taught undergraduate and collegiate level courses and served as a department chairperson.



Changing Technology in Online Platforms Distract Faculty and Students from the Prime Directive—Teaching and Learning—Amid COVID 19 Chaos

G. Stan Reeley, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

While *bells and whistles*, so-called upgrades, are continuously being added into the online Learning Management System (LMS) as part of the schools' commitment to offer the most updated platform, a recent survey paired with current research revealed that too much rapid and ongoing change is creating havoc for both students and professors alike. Most universities are sensitive to this matter and work with everyone involved to help make changes and transitions easier to manage; however, data indicates that faculty members spend excessive amounts of time helping students *learn the technology* to perform even simple tasks, such as submitting assignments, than teaching the subject matter of the course. This is problematic because faculty members must stay abreast of ongoing changes, amid COVID 19 disruption, which often distracts focus away from their basic teaching duties. Recent research shows how and why this issue is occurring, matters, and offers up pragmatic solutions to help university administrators to better understand why the best *deal* with LMS designers and vendors may not be in the better interest in the longer-term for students and faculty members.

Changing Technology in Online Platforms Distract Faculty and Students from the Prime Directive—Teaching and Learning

Changing technology in online platforms distract faculty and students from the prime directive, teaching and learning**;** yet, these so-called *bells and whistles*, most often referred to as upgrades, are continuously being added into the online Learning Management System (LMS) as part of each schools' commitment to offer the most updated platform. A recent survey paired with current research revealed that too much rapid and ongoing change in technology is creating havoc for both students and professors alike. Most university administrators are sensitive to this matter and work with users involved to make changes and transitions easier to manage; however, responses from the survey instrument constructed and administered by these writers indicate that faculty members spend excessive amounts of time helping students simply *learn the technology* than teaching the topic content of the course. Further, responses showed that both faculty and students prefer change not occur as frequently so that subject matter teaching and learning synergy might be restored as the primary tenet in higher education.

About the Survey Instrument

The survey instrument was crafted by this writer and distributed using two social media outlets to a broadly targeted audience of faculty members, current students, and graduates as ten relevant questions in a five-point Likert Scale format using Survey Monkey for data dissemination, collection, and analysis. Specific universities were not targeted because of IRB restrictions; however, the number of clustered responses were sufficiently revealing with outliers considered to make reasonable assumptions in support of information provided in this article. While the instrument was not validated prior, data corroborated with previously published materials, some cited in this piece, strongly indicate that results obtained are reliable.

Metaphors, yes--but Relatable

Who can forget the always ambitious Lucy Ricardo from the classic episode of "I Love Lucy" working in the candy wrapping factory? At first, she kept up with the unending stream of candy that needed wrapping as it progressed slowly along the line; however, when it sped up, she panicked and began eating the candy she couldn't wrap in time, or she began stuffing it into her clothes, and eventually, both. While hilarious to watch, this writer proposes that some students and faculty members feel they are unable to keep up with the rapid pace of technology as it is perpetually reintroduced and sped up into each learning platform by university leaders. Similarly, when Henry Ford developed the automobile assembly line, his objective was to mass produce cars rapidly, reduce labor costs, and make cars more affordable. While an excellent business model of the day, workers inside Ford's car plant were no longer expected to be skilled, but rather an ordinary link in the chain to speed up the assembly line process. Technology, even then, reduced the value of the worker by transforming a craftsman into a mechanic. Ford's assembly line, and Lucy's chocolate factory fiasco may be *metaphors* for what is happening in colleges and universities today as high tech is allegedly transforming scholars into systems operators.

Let's ask respondents.

My college or university often changes how technology is used in my education
42% agree or strongly agree
I spend major time adapting to new technology when it is changed at my college or university
55% agree or strongly agree
I wish that my college or university would spend less time on teaching how to use the technology and more time teaching the subject matter
38% agree or strongly agree
I feel that each time new technology is added my focus shifts to learning it rather than learning the subject matter
54% agree or strongly agree
Just when I am comfortable using the current technology, my college or university makes another change
42% agree or strongly agree

Back to the Future

The late economist Peter Drucker predicted that by 2025 traditional bricks and mortar academic institutions would be dinosaurs, mostly due to the untenable costs to attend them, combined with the surge in popularity of online classes resulting from new technology (Wartzman, 2012). Today it's ironic that many universities are requiring faculty to use the online grade book in their LMS with an assortment of other features in their *onsite* synchronous classes, so there is no escaping technology interface in modern classrooms regardless their construct. While digital record keeping is better for our environment (paperless) and easier to share and store, it seems that all of us are compelled to accept technology as a part of how colleges and universities operate today; consequently, there will be related glitches that distract from teaching the subject matter. This writer receives scores of phone calls and e-mails from both online and onsite students asking if their assignment uploaded successfully, *not* if it met criteria for covering the course objectives or was well-written. Focus has seemingly shifted to piloting the plane rather than learning how it flies.

The struggle of learning how to navigate technology among all ages is real. When students register for online courses, they are not given a crash course in navigating the LMS. Instead, the student is provided with all the necessary login information and let loose to tackle their degree. The inability to effectively use or access the technology is a major drawback to an LMS (Clarke-Okah, 2009). Both faculty members and students must *master* how to facilitate or access synchronous online meetings, engage in live chats, make videos, audio threads, respond to automated progress trackers, IMs, access external outsourced testing sites—to name a few—while at the same time teach and learn the subject matter within the LMS.

Just like Lucy, many students are unable to keep up with these fast-paced changes. Online students have no face-to-face interaction with their peers or instructors. As a result, there is

seemingly more focus on the LMS and its functionality than the topic-related content of the course. Online courses are basically self-paced, and many of them are completed in eight weeks compared to sixteen weeks terms offered at many traditional colleges and universities. Speed it up! (Lucy's boss' last comment in the video clip).

No Book in Hand

What about books? Books are virtually no longer available in the physical form. Instead, textbooks are now in digital format through providers such as VitalSource Bookshelf and RedShelf. Students who want to highlight, turn down the corner of a page, or jot notes, now must learn how to navigate yet another piece of software within the LMS. Recently one book distributor closed its doors three days before the term started at a university. The closing had a major impact on the student experience. Without access to physical or digital books, students were left scrambling with how to complete assignments and participate in the online forums. It led this writer to quickly develop alternative ways to provide information to students, which included creating videos explaining where and how to access the textbook. But wait! Didn't this unanticipated scramble become even more technology added into an already overloaded technology-driven environment where students are frustrated and confused? Indeed, it did. Lucy had a similar struggle in that she could not *eat* all the goods on the belt. The student is not able to *eat* the goods either. Instead, they are reaching out to their instructors, IT help desks, advisors, and tutors to assist in educating them on how to use all these pieces of technology. The LMS of today is designed to interface with smart phones so that classes can go wherever a phone signal reaches; however, not all students are comfortable going to school by phone—and the quality of work faculty members receive from students who *text* their discussion responses or assignments is characteristically not the best of quality. At the end of the day, students seem to be double majoring in both IT savvy *and* their concentration but receiving only one degree.

Lastly, because of COVID 19 and on-site campus closings, both students and faculty together took a crash course in online learning. While most students better adapted to the technology, a plethora of face-to face faculty members, not previously trained in using online LMS platforms, were thrust into unfamiliar waters and wrestled with the tools and gadgets needed to develop effective delivery methods that most aligned with their teaching style. Consequently, all faculty members should be trained regardless in using online modalities to establish a better relationship between technology and themselves, being the future remains uncertain for many campus-based colleges and universities (Drucker, 2007).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Most changes in LMS technologies are cost related. Companies advertise their product as more superior but at a lower cost. However, is the lower cost more beneficial or harmful to the overall student and faculty experience—in the longer term? Is user-friendliness a variable that's even considered? As Lucy said to Ethel while they stuffed chocolate in their mouths, clothes, and under their hats, "I think we are fighting a losing game" (History104WWU, 2010, May 19). Students are losing the battle at keeping up with the ever-changing world of technology, and faculty who love to teach are often piloting the plane or adding a part in Ford's auto assembly line rather than focusing on what they do best.

When university administrators are asked *why* they changed the LMS or added more tech-tools, their reply may fail to satisfy; therefore, the goal of this research is to raise awareness on this issue and show how it adversely impacts significant ratios of both student and faculty populations across the United States. Consequently, faculty who solely teach in-seat, face-to-face students must become familiar with their university's LMS so that if challenged with having to use it, such as during the COVID 19 pandemic or another unexpected crisis, the transition will

be simpler. Lastly, it is recommended that university administrators require all faculty be *trained* to teach online, as this method for delivery is growing in popularity and is fiscally sagacious. Training and online engagement, particularly when changes are made, should help to build confidence with faculty so they can better assist students, and may ameliorate concerns about failing to teach the subject matter because of evolving technological interface.

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Access to survey analytics: https://www.surveymonkey.com/results/SM-8JQSGVN6L/

Biography

While working 18 years in healthcare administration, Dr. G. Stan Reeley was invited to guest lecture at the University of South Carolina for students in its MHA program-and the teaching bug bit. He returned to school (at age 50) and earned a Ph.D. in Leadership and Organizational Change and has been teaching college professionally now going on 19 years. Prior to teaching with multiple online universities, he was a full-time professor and the Associate Campus Dean at Strayer University in Greenville, South Carolina where he taught both graduate and undergraduate courses in class and online. Dr. Reeley loves business, but also the arts. He draws, paints, sculpts, and acted on stage in scores of community theatre productions. He is an active member of SHRM (Society for Human Resource Managers), and a consultant to a number of boards. Dr. Reeley graduated from the University of South Carolina with a BA in Journalism, and later earned his MA at Webster University in St. Louis in Management—and in 2006, he graduated from Walden University where he earned his doctorate.

Engaging learners in the virtual environment

Michael J. Turley, M.S., ABD

Abstract

Active learning in the online environment requires one thing: active participation on behalf of the learner. As instructors and professors, we must build online opportunities and digital platforms to invite that participation in such a way that the learner engages with both the process and the content (even if the learner does not realize s/he is engaging with either). The only certainty of the situation is that the instructor/learner relationship is equivalent to a leader/follower dynamic; therefore, instructors must realize that we lead our learners through our course content rather than push the course content onto our learners for them to digest and regurgitate back to us. Although our higher-ed learners are adults, many are also adolescents fluent in technology and casual conversation but less fluent in formal, scholarly conversation and the self-discipline required to engage in the course content in their own time and space. Before we can engage our students online, we must bridge the brick-and-mortar gap most of us prefer to use to build inspiring relationships with our students. Building inspirational relationships in a virtual environment is more than modeling online etiquette; we must also model and build appropriate, secure adult relational attachments with and for our learners. Once the professional atmosphere and personal tone can be established in synchronous or asynchronous settings, instructors need to vary both the content delivery and assignment collection so that we tap into our learners' learning preferences. The more we learn about learning preferences and mindsets, the better we are able to provide engaging lessons, projects, assignments, and assessments that truly measure our learners' mastery of the course content. Three of the most recognized theories on learning preferences are Neil Fleming's VARK, Howard Gardner's Multiply Intelligences, and David Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle. Several excellent digital practice and educational platforms enable us to expand our delivery repertoire and provide meaningful engagement in creative ways. We recommend that instructors visit and explore the websites for these programs and applications, then determine which may be most appropriate for instructor personality, content delivery, engagement opportunities, and collection of learner deliverables.

Keywords: Leader, student engagement, adolescent development, attachment theory, adult learning, technology, online delivery, learning theory

Engaging learners in the virtual environment

Active learning in the online environment requires one thing: active participation on behalf of the learner. No matter how interesting we think we are as instructors, we must transfer that interest into active engagement, participation, and production by the learner. We can invite learners to explore content, answer questions, solve problems, and return assignments, but the self-teaching reality of online learning is that learners will comply with our instructions and do little more unless we properly and robustly engage them beyond our content delivery.

The Leader/Follower Dynamic

As instructors and professors, we must build online opportunities and digital platforms to invite learner participation in such a way that the learner engages with both the delivery process and the course content (even if the learner does not realize s/he is engaging with either). These opportunities and platforms will not engage our learners unless they engage us first; in other words, what works for this instructor will not work for that instructor. The more excited any instructor is about both process and content, the more exciting will be his/her invitation to the learner(s) to engage with the material in more rigorous exploration (Brooks & Brooks, 1999).

The only certainty of the situation is that the instructor/learner relationship is equivalent to a leader/follower dynamic; therefore, instructors must realize that we lead our learners through our course content rather than push the course content onto our learners for them to digest and regurgitate back to us. Many instructors may have heard the adage about being “the sage on the stage”, while current pedagogy emphasizes a paradigm shift to being “the guide on the side” (Witkowski & Cornell, 2015). Instructors who see themselves as leaders engage with learners as

followers in a relational dynamic that has shown positive correlation with learner achievement (Mosley et al., 2014). Instructors who may have previously seen learners as vessels to be filled are challenged to see learners as fires to be kindled – and the course material is the kindling.

Reaching Adolescents, Teaching Adults

Although most higher-ed learners are adults, many are also adolescents fluent in current technology and casual conversation but less fluent in formal, scholarly conversation and the self-discipline required to engage in the course content in their own time and space (Bear et al., 2018). To best balance this dichotomy, instructors should consider deepening our understanding of adult learning theories while also exploring theories of adolescent development (Kovacs, 2008). We offer no sources here other than naming the icons of adolescent development and educational psychology: John Bowlby, John Dewey, Erik Erikson, Paulo Freire, Jean Piaget, and Lev Vygotsky (Cross & Cross, 2017; Pittman et al., 2011; Seider et al., 2017; Tanner, 2016).

Before we can engage our learners online, we must bridge the brick-and-mortar gap most of us prefer to use; we still need to build inspiring relationships with our learners (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2011). As we consider how to engage our students, we must simultaneously (or even first?) consider how to improve our own delivery (Witkowski & Cornell, 2015). We owe it to our learners/followers to be real with them beyond the content, especially to convey our passion to help them succeed in their learning journey. Instructors may also consider using technology-based applications that allow professional engagement and personal interaction in a semi-public forum, such as Edmodo (Edmodo, 2020), Google Meet (Google Meet, 2020), Remind (Remind, 2020), VSee (VSee, 2020), and Zoom (Zoom Video, 2020). Instructors need to model and be ready to teach online etiquette for professional settings (Farmer & Ramsdale, 2016).

Building inspirational relationships in a virtual environment is more than modeling online

etiquette; we must also model and build appropriate, secure adult relational attachments with and for our learners (per Bowlby). Many of our learners are in their home environments, and we are unable to determine if the relational attachments in those environments are secure, constructive, and supportive of or distracting to our learners' educational journeys (Pittman et al., 2011).

Differentiated Delivery, Tiered Complexity

Once the professional atmosphere and personal tone can be established in synchronous or asynchronous settings, instructors need to vary both the content delivery and assignment collection so that we tap into our learners' learning preferences. This does not mean changing difficulty for students who are ahead or behind; it means connecting with student preferences. Even websites and best practices confuse and interchange the word "differentiated" both in context and concept simultaneously (Reading Rockets, 2015).

The more we learn about learning preferences and mindsets, the better we are able to provide engaging lessons, projects, assignments, and assessments that truly measure our learners' mastery of the course content. All learners bring previous experiences and perspectives to their current learning journey, so we owe it to them to either reinforce previously positive experiences or overcome previously negative experiences to help them adjust and update their current mindsets as required to thrive during and after their college experience (Zeeb et al., 2020). Even in courses where the content is considered "fixed" (such as mathematics or physics), learners can still be encouraged using a growth mindset approach by the instructor (Nguyen, 2020; Sun, 2018). In addition to mindset, instructors should examine our own sense of grit, which is defined as perseverance and passion for long-term goals (Barbouta et al., 2020). As we understand our propensities toward grit, we will be able to inspire and convey the value of grit to our learners.

Three of the most recognized theories on learning preferences are Neil Fleming's VARK,

Howard Gardner's Multiply Intelligences, and David Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (Haswell, 2017). Each of these theories presents complementary but distinct approaches to learning, and each offers the instructor several techniques to incorporate into how we deliver content, engage our learners/followers, and appreciate nuances of learning preferences such as silence, collaboration, and activity level. Even in the virtual environment, learners can easily complete the VARK questionnaire online in a few minutes, then transmit the analysis results to the instructor to assist us in delivering content tailored to individual learners (Fleming, 2020).

Several excellent digital practice and educational platforms enable us to expand our delivery repertoire and provide meaningful engagement in creative ways, such as Flipgrid (Flipgrid, 2020), IXL (IXL, 2020), Kahoot (Kahoot!, 2020), Padlet (Padlet, 2020), Plickers (Plickers, 2019), Prezi (Prezi, 2020), and Voki (Voki, 2020). We recommend that instructors visit and explore the websites for these programs and applications, then determine which may be most appropriate for instructor personality, content delivery, engagement opportunities, and collection of learner deliverables.

360° Engagement

Regardless of the content we instruct, engagement is essential. The better leaders we are in guiding our learners through our content, the better followers they will be in exploring and mastering our content. The more we work to understand our learners, the more they will believe our efforts to understand them, and the harder they will work to deliver content mastery to us. The better we vary our delivery and tailor it to individual learning preferences, the better our students will feel about being reached in the exploration of the content. As a whole, our learners will better appreciate our efforts, and their efforts will reflect that appreciation.

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Biography

In the Air Force, Michael served on four continents in 14 different time zones, where he had the privilege to build relationships with local military and international civilian populations. Michael flew C-130 Hercules cargo aircraft, delivering humanitarian supplies to refugees in Honduras and coordinating relief efforts for refugees from Kosovo. During Michael's military career, he served as an interpreter in French and Italian for sustainment efforts in Bosnia- Herzegovina and Afghanistan; additionally, Michael served as a bridge by connecting US military members with French and Italian colleagues; he taught English classes for foreign military members and foreign language classes for US military personnel.

After retiring from the Air Force in 2007, Michael served as a developmental math specialist at a community college, where he also served as the college's tutoring coordinator. In this position, Michael implemented use of Fleming's VARK to tailor instruction delivery for every student. Michael then served as a junior and senior high school math teacher for all students from special education through honors level. While in this capacity, Michael taught ACT Prep for hundreds of area high school and non-traditional students. Michael currently serves as an instructor of mathematics and student development at Philander Smith College.

Plenary Speaker

Topic: Self-Care for Educators, Finding a Balance in your Work Life

Monique R. Battles, LMSW, RIST

Abstract

As an educator you may think of yourself strictly as a teacher, but if you expand your thoughts, you are also a caretaker of many things. Not only are you responsible for educating your students, you are also responsible for calming the fears of parents, caring for their child's safety and their overall health needs. Balancing a multitude of responsibilities at work, in addition to caring for yourself, it is possible to be facing family difficulties, religious activities, and social commitment. So, what is finding balance. How are we able to make commitments and uphold pressure during such times as now? It is imperative to be able to understand self-care and identify ways to implement the techniques. Limitations on time and how interactions are allowed has caused an additional level of stress for educators, therefore self-care must be a priority.

Plenary Speaker
Biography

Monique R. Battles is a Licensed Master Social Worker currently practicing in Little Rock, Arkansas. She graduated from University of Arkansas in Little Rock with a Master's (2013) and Bachelor's (2008) in Social Work. Monique has over 10 years of experience in serving the community, resolving conflicts, and providing guidance for those in need. She is a Registered Integrative Sandtray Therapist who has worked with children, adolescents, and adults who have struggled with domestic violence, sexual abuse and mental health complications. Monique currently holds board member position with Delta Community Based Services for at-risk girls. She is passionate about mental health, assisting people with overcoming barriers, and discovering new ways to adapt to environmental stressors and life alternating situations. Experienced in crisis intervention and providing support for mental health and serving as the resource and liaison between health plans, facilities, members and families for member intakes and initial evaluations.

Keynote Speaker

Beyond the Books: The Future of Holistic Student Support Services

Dr. Sandra L. Walker

Abstract

Despite decades of redesigning the student experience, institutions of higher learning within the United States still struggle to improve completion rates. Research reveals students that attend 2-year institutions have the highest drop-out rates. Student retention, human motivation, and adult learning theories link these outcomes to significant numbers of low-income, first generation and students of color. These students are described in the professional literature as *historically marginalized, underserved, underrepresented, or under-resourced*. Low retention rates for students at risk of dropping out are attributed to academic unpreparedness, lack of access to resources to meet basic needs, family obligations, and social deficits. More attention needs to be given to institutional barriers that negatively impact student outcomes including insufficient advising, counseling and career development resources. Change is inevitable, yet, institutions of higher learning are notorious for resisting change and remaining deeply rooted in traditions. On March 11, 2020, everything changed when the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19/Coronavirus a global pandemic. The "new normal" prevailed over "business as usual." Businesses shuttered and institutions of higher learning were forced to rapidly pivot to teaching and learning online. Campus dorms, dining halls and food pantries closed—leaving the most vulnerable students without a place to live, or a way to access subsistence and technology resources. The future of higher education remains uncertain. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

positions stakeholders to surmise that hungry and homeless students cannot focus on learning or reach their full potential. Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab cautions that failure to adopt a "humans first" approach to student engagement will result in students leaving and not returning, and decreases in new enrollments. Viewed through multiple lenses including diversity, equity, inclusion, and access, the purpose of this presentation is to explore holistic student support services "beyond the books." Participants will be asked to engage as "critically reflective educators," as posited by Dr. Stephen Brookfield, by demonstrating "the courage to challenge one's own assumptions, in an effort to improve student outcomes, which makes educators the invaluable role models that our students need to reach their full potential." Participants will gain insights on a shared, common language that is necessary to address students' non-academic and basic needs. Participants will listen to students' testimonies of basic needs insecurity including food, housing, mental health, and transportation. Participants will examine data on students' basic needs insecurity including #RealCollege surveys (2015-2019) and #RealCollege, During the Pandemic survey. Participants will meet "champions"—individuals that prioritize "humans first" approaches to student engagement. Participants will explore student-centered initiatives that leverage research and data. Participants will examine change management theories as anchors to explore the future of addressing students' needs beyond the books. This endeavor will be undertaken with an abundance of caution, given the evolving COVID-19/Coronavirus global pandemic.

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Keynote Speaker
Biography

Dr. Sandra Walker serves with Virginia's Community College's Chancellor's College Success Coach Initiative at Camp Community College (CCC). Additionally, Dr. Walker is an Associate Professor (Adjunct) for Student Development at CCC. Dr. Walker is the recipient of the College's Excellence in Education Award (EIE), 2014 (Educator of the Year). Dr. Walker also received the President's Commendation Award and Teaching Excellence Award, as an adjunct faculty, in 2019. She earned a Bachelor of Arts Degree from Western Illinois University in General Studies (minor in Family Sciences), a Master of Science Degree from Troy University (Postsecondary Education, concentration in Foundations of Education), and a Doctorate in Higher Education and Adult Learning from Walden University. Dr. Walker has earned the following state and nationally recognized credentials: Virginia Career Coach Certification, Facilitating Career Development, Global Career Development Facilitator, and aha! Process/College Achievement Alliance Trainer (The Implications of Poverty, Higher Education Track). A native of Southampton County, Virginia, Dr. Walker served on active duty in the United States Army; her duty assignments include Baumholder, Germany, The National Security Agency (NSA), and the Defense Information Systems Agency (DISA, PENTAGON). She is the graduate of several military training and professional development programs including Basic Military Training ("Boot Camp"), Advanced Individual Training, Primary Leadership Development School, and Basic Non-commissioned Officer School. Dr. Walker attained the rank of Sergeant during her military service. Her military service awards include the several Army Achievement Medals (AAM) and Army Commendation Medals (ARCOM), in addition to the National Defense Service Medal (NDSM, the oldest service medal in use by the United

States Armed Forces, in support of the Gulf War). As a first-generation college student, Dr. Walker's research interests include promoting access to higher education, retention and advocacy for historically marginalized populations. Most importantly, Dr. Walker is mother of Olivia N. Walker, Paul D. Camp Community College (PDCCC), Associate's Degree in Nursing (ADN) class of 2015. Olivia is currently employed as a travel nurse (registered nurse), in the area of emergency medicine, in addition to pursing a Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing (BSN) at Western Governors University (WGU).

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