



How to support and engage tertiary learners in an online environment, learning webinar

Held on 3 July 2020, 12:00pm – 1: 00pm

A complete set of questions and answers from webinar.

Question theme	Dr Cathy Stone	Dr Teri McClelland
Planning for online, blended and on campus delivery models		
<p>What real time data are we collecting that can be shared to improve the students' online experience and support their learning?</p>	<p>There is quite a bit of literature around about this. I can give you the link to a particular paper in writing, but there's a great paper that has come out of the University of Tasmania on teaching online, the Bachelor of Dementia Care. This is obviously very hands on work, working with patients with dementia. They had creative ways of caring in that environment. It certainly can be done. The use of video is particularly pertinent. All of us go to YouTube when we want to find out how to do something practical. So, you know, it's not impossible to do it in those sorts of ways.</p>	<p>One of the areas that we do a lot of hands on programmes, two that pop to my mind right away are horticulture and animal care. The engagement is slightly different. We use a lot of video assessment. So if a student has to, say, feed a dog a pill. What they will do is they will have a friend, it's usually cell phone or whatever, video the student who will say who they are. Here is what I've got to give the dog, and they will give it to the dog in one shot and that gets uploaded.</p> <p>The other thing in our horticulture area, one of the areas is plant identification. It's like having old fashioned plant books that you used to have with all the pressed plants in it. That has been replaced in the digital age with doing photographs of the plants, but to know that that student has done that photograph, the first thing they have to have is an identifier. First they will do a photo of their identifier, whatever it is. And then they will put the identifier on each plant that they photographed, and then give the description of it. Sometimes for the assessors and the facilitators it's like playing 'Where's Wally' with the identifier. But those are a couple of ways you can do that very hands on and replicate that in the online environment. I am sure Cathy will have more.</p>

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<p>What ideas are there for engaging with students online who are studying programmes that are extremely hands on e.g. Trades, Land Surveying?</p>	<p>In terms of the value of dashboards in learning management systems online teachers can quite easily see who is logging on when. And, you know, the uploading of assessments and all those sorts of things, and can then have a clue, perhaps, as to who is not engaging as much as other students, and then some sort of coordinator strategy can be used by picking up that online data through the learning management system dashboard.</p>	<p>So the real time data is the one is the first impressions. This is because it is done so often throughout the year with all the new cohorts. I can tweak or identify any issue that's coming up right away, and get a fix in place. That's sort of that analytic on the overall of the programmes at once type thing, because it's just a nice, simple report that gives me with all the programme stuff and also the overviews and comparison of intake to intake. And then I can get year to year. So that's real time happening that I can respond to quite quickly. The other one is with the outreach going on. Like when my liaison person is calling the all the Māori ethnicity students, if she sees a question is getting asked of her or an issue has come up more than twice. She will then relay that to me right then and there. So it goes into the analytics but, hey, this needs to be fixed now.</p> <p>And the same with our course and programme evaluations. During the course there's an online course evaluation that all students can fill in. This data goes through to the programme managers, who can during the running of a course see there's something that's coming up here that we can respond to right away. We respond to it, we analyse it all for the end of the year but we have that quick response. And then at the conclusion of every programme or study you know, multiple courses, programme or study, they get a how did we do type survey, and we can look at that. So we're collecting that on individual course and programmes all the time.</p>
<p>Now we know what good systems look like at larger tertiary organisations, as a small-medium PTE with no pre-existing online programmes before COVID-19, what are some technical recommendations to build and transition to online options [platforms/ a good process etc.]?</p>		<p>My biggest recommendation is to keep it simple. Start small with something that you can get fully off the ground and trial it, get feedback from your students and your facilitators, find out what works for them (and what doesn't), and keep moving forward. One of the first people I brought on deck was an IT person who was strong in systems and processes – not bells and whistles. It doesn't matter what learning system you go with, as long as it does what you need and you can work with it to continually improve from feedback.</p>

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<p>As COVID-19 has forced academia to react instantly to the dynamics of teaching and learning, how you have been able to transfer complex ideas that you would normally teach in person to a virtual learning environment?</p>		<p>A lot of the transference is from know the outcome being sought and then thinking through how to map out the journey to get there. As an example, you may raise a question in a discussion board and then follow your students as they work through it – adding to the question, maybe with a scenario, as the conversation develops. What I’ve found is that complex concepts may be grasped quicker, and more fully, in an online environment where students feel freer to contribute and have time to research and think through their contributions, as opposed to all being in one room at one set time.</p>
<p>How were you able to react quickly to support students during the COVID-19 lock down?</p>	<p>Keep a close eye on the data to see who may be struggling e.g. not logging in, late with assessments etc. Also outreach through emails/SMS and/or phone calls to make contact, let them know what help/support is available and how to access this. Personal approach.</p>	<p>The personal approach – during the COVID-19 response staff who were without usual work (e.g. hostel staff, campus cleaners) became part of our outreach support effort. This was coupled with multiple, quick, team leader video meetings every week so that as the feedback came in from outreach actions could happen quickly.</p>
<p>What is the optimum structure of an online class?</p>	<p>Would depend on the discipline etc but student feedback tells us that they appreciate varied content – e.g. short video, followed by interactive quiz, replying to each other’s’ posts etc.; most important is contact/communication from online tutor/lecturer; facilitating group discussion and giving feedback etc.</p> <p>There has been a trend to offer a lot of synchronous classes for those classes that were face-to-face – this can be very helpful but needs to be asynchronous activities as well as not all will be able to attend synchronous. Don’t want them to be left out.</p>	<p>There isn’t an optimum structure, as it’s not a ‘one-size-fits-all’. We aim for consistency in setout (e.g. folder naming conventions, menus in same place, etc.) and variety in content. Vast majority of our delivery is asynchronous as main requirement for our students is flexibility.</p>

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<p>What is the important factor to consider to implement online/distant learning or blended learning?</p>	<p>This is a very broad question, but certainly key to engagement is personal interaction and communication between students, teacher and other students. This needs to be included within the course design as much as possible. Also, material that is not too text-heavy, nor lengthy recordings that are not interactive. Very disengaging having to listen to or watch a lengthy recorded lecture. See above answer for alternative ideas.</p>	<p>I think too, it's looking at why you want to implement online or blended learning. Some questions we ask as part of determining whether or not to implement are, "Will this delivery benefit the learners" (coupled with 'what benefits' and 'how do we know'). Then we consider what the delivery would look like (the variety mentioned above), and then feasibility (e.g. do we have/can we source appropriate developers/facilitators; can delivery meet learner needs; etc.).</p>
<p>What advice can you provide about programming courses in an online environments as they require comprehensive one to one support?</p>	<p>Not sure what is really meant here – if a course requires one-to-one support, then this can be provided remotely in a number of ways – by phone, live chat, zoom etc. Peer mentoring can be very effective remotely as well.</p>	<p>Agree with what Cathy's has put. It's about having the support that matches the learner needs.</p>
<p>In course materials/contents development and delivery, what is the best model - in-house only or mixed? If mixed, how do you ensure consistency of quality?</p>	<p>Generally in-house design of material is ideal as can make sure quality is high and is disability accessible. However, using external content as well such as YouTube, Ted Talks and so on can also provide variety – just need to check the quality is good and has closed captions for accessibility. "home-made" videos recorded on lecturers' phones are also fine too for meet and greet, and for short intros. Not everything has to be professional recording standard. Students enjoy seeing their lecturers in an 'at home' relaxed environment – often better and more personal than high tech. Depends on context.</p>	<p>Again – totally agree with Cathy. We have gone down the in-house design which is augmented with external content to provide the variety, and reduce the need to re-invent the wheel. If a developer knows of a good video, then better to use that (same as you might play it in an onsite classroom) than using the time and resources to make one of your own.</p>

Addressing specific challenges

With a younger cohort (ages 17 -23 years) the engagement is less than those older. What advice or tips can I put in place?

I think a comment I would make is how are you measuring engagement? The younger age group may not appear to be very engaged if you're looking at. You know, whether they're posting to discussion boards, and the sort of conventional measures of engagement in online, but they may just be getting on with doing it. They may not be there to make friends, to have contact with other students. They've probably got a busy social life outside of their online class, but they may be getting the work done. And I think that, you know, sometimes we kind of have a funny idea about what engagement should look like online. We, I did some research recently with the University of Tasmania. That showed that a lot of students actually didn't really like doing the work that they saw as just ways of keeping them busy. Posting to discussion boards and so on. They just wanted to get on with the work. So I think probably, perhaps, the biggest indicator of engagement is whether or not they're staying, whether you're retaining them, whether they're getting their assessments done, whether they're passing their exams. I think that sometimes, you know, we need to be a bit wary of making assumptions that they're not engaged just because we're not hearing from them very much. That might be a question you could put to them, saying what sorts of things you like to do, would you like to be engaged with the class or just get on with the work, and maybe seeking their feedback about that.

The first thing, I suppose, is finding out where they're going, where are they native to. Where are they going to for fun, because if you can engage them through those channels, that's going to keep them through. And if you can imbed them into your learning management system.

So one of the things that we're trialling with different courses now, because it needs synchronous and we're predominantly asynchronous. One of the synchronous ones we're doing is something called cahoots. You can set up quizzes and they compete against each other. It's something that's used in the classrooms. We're looking how we can bring it into the online environment and we're also looking at how we can make it asynchronous. It's trying to bring the gaming side. I've answered it this quick, they've answered it that quick. Another technique if you have a cohort of students that likes text. So, say, the communications type course potentially, we've done a bit of a discussion board game. You can have many discussion boards all on the same topic. The first discussion board is, say, 500 words.

And then everyone after that has to re state the first one but using half the words. So as you work through the first thing you get is everybody wants to be early on in so they can have more words, because the last person always ends up with one word as they work through. So I suppose it's just trying to find particularly for the younger ones what's the fun component, and if you can get them hooked in early. The other thing we found is if you can't find a fun component - for me that would be accounting. I just never have found any fun in that, but that's me personally. It's getting an achievement, getting something they've done real quick run on the board. They think I can do this, and you engage them.

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<p>How did you deal with students who chose to turn their cameras off during class sessions? Did you have a set of etiquettes that online learners had to follow? How strict/ flexible were you in the way you ran your sessions?</p>	<p>Online students greatly appreciate flexibility – they may be multi-tasking such as giving kids dinner while they listen in to a class. Better that they try to be there even partially than not at all. You may want to ask students to let you know if they are not able to have their video on during the class, for whatever reason, so you are aware of this. Could be part of the etiquette. As mentioned in a previous answer, be wary of having too much synchronous content as many students will find it very difficult to attend in real time. Could be an optional extra and not compulsory attendance.</p>	<p>We are predominately asynchronous, so this isn't a major issue. For times when student is required to be on camera (e.g. for project presentations) this is stated in the course information so students know the requirement early on.</p>
<p>Are there any findings on how these approaches and/or strategies worked with online students undertaking industry-related short courses that are conducted over 1-3 days?</p>		<p>We haven't delivered any of these, but various staff have taken part in short online courses (e.g. for certification) and found those they liked most/were most successful in completing; were those which were asynchronous, so staff could go in when suited, and had all materials available, so staff could complete quicker if they wished.</p>
<p>What are some ways to help online students develop a sense of community?</p>	<p>This comes first and foremost from the teacher – modelling behaviour such as responding to posts and generating class discussion online. A great resource for this is www.fold.org.au - guide to fostering online discussion. I thoroughly recommend it.</p>	<p>Cathy's resource is a great one. There is also a lot of literature on establishing Communities of Learning (including that some students do not want to be in a community). We tend to talk more about connections (e.g. being connected with SIT, connected with colleagues, connected with course). What we find is that where the facilitator is engaging and visible in a course, the students are correspondingly more engaged and connected.</p>

Question theme	Dr Cathy Stone	Dr Teri McClelland
Addressing key literacy considerations		
<p>What is the optimum class size for an advanced language class? How large are your ESOL/EFL or other language classes?</p>	<p>I would say the Open University in the UK which teaches, you know, a range of right across all disciplines including languages, their class sizes are generally 20 to 30. And they consider that to be the optimum size pretty much across the board. And whether or not it would need to be less than that for a language class, I don't know. But certainly we certainly in Australia have online classes a lot bigger than 20 to 30. So I just offer that as what the Open University in the UK thinks of as best practice. They've been doing this for a long time.</p>	<p>I have supported English language classes that were being done offshore with the online component. But that was more support rather than the actual learning, you know they were still in the classroom.</p>
<p>What is your view on addressing language literacy and numeracy (LLN) in online curriculum?</p>		<p>While we haven't run any specific LLN courses online, we have worked with the developers and facilitators in our Level 3 courses to embed LLN throughout materials and for facilitators to have the numeracy and literacy certificate (either the previous National Certificate in Adult Literacy and Numeracy or the new, New Zealand Certificate). During the COVID-19 response we did have some students with LLN needs who received one-on-one support from our numeracy/literacy support staff through video conferencing and phone very effectively and successfully.</p>
<p>It is challenging to engage low computer literacy learners online. Especially when they are transmitted to online learning very quickly from face to face learning for example during COVID-19 situations. What are the approaches you recommend to engage these learners successfully?</p>	<p>This is a key issue as many students do have low computer literacy. Best in fact to assume this is the case and ensure that content is not too high-tech, that the platform is well designed and that there are opportunities for students to get IT assistance when they need it. Keep things as simple as possible technologically speaking, and make sure that they all know it is ok to ask for help. Explain clearly and don't expect people to all be at the same level.</p>	<p>Keep it simple and easy and ensure you have an engagement/support strategy that meets the student needs. During the first week of the COVID-19 response as students were getting used to new systems demand was very high for support via phone. Also need to remember that students may be working on a variety of device types, so just because something works well in the computer lab, does not mean it will translate into working well on an iPad or cellphone. The simpler you can keep the platform and the easier it is for students to access support (including IT helpdesks) the better.</p>

Implementing online assessment best practice approaches

<p>Assessment online is a big challenges that the teachers face as the students resort to unfair means. How can we control cheating?</p>	<p>There are a number of technology solutions to help with this, such as security log-ins and so on; however it may not be possible to control this completely in the same way as it's not possible to control every possibility for this in written assessments & take-home exams. Many online students routinely sit exams at other exam centres (which have been re-opening now with appropriate distancing), which can of course monitor this. Perhaps a mix of assessment types, so that discrepancies in performance can be picked up.</p>	<p>While we have the usual plagiarism, or cheat, checking tools, we have placed a strong emphasis on getting away from high-stakes assessments wherever possible and using authentic assessment strategies. Some of these that we have put in place for assessments are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply skills and knowledge to real world issues, concepts or problems • Variety of assessment types • Spread out point-earning potential • Provide low-stakes chances • Use open book to encourage higher level, critical thinking skills <p>And focussing on problem-based learning as described by Jim Hogan:</p> <p>“When solving a problem, a student, or group of students collaborating, critically use the knowledge they have collectively acquired to develop a solution to the problem, seeking and developing new knowledge as needed.” Jim Hogan, University of Auckland.</p> <p>Where we have a high-stakes assessment, such as a dissertation, we require the student to undertake a presentation followed by answering questions from the marker/panel.</p> <p>There are lots of resources about creating authentic assessments – one video we’ve found useful is this one from the State University of New York at Buffalo www.youtube.com/watch?v=OmiRPHi8o24</p>
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Southern Institute of Technology (SIT) specific questions		
The study calculator: Do you have an example or can we see what you refer to?	N/A	It's actually the back end base of it is Excel. A very simple Excel background put into the web form. But it was very simple to do and it is something that our students and our programme managers all really like having.
Do you have online charter for your students and how do you implement?	N/A	All of our online students are required to comply with SIT's Student Code of Conduct, same as if they were on-site students. Some components, such as treatment of on-site equipment, may not always apply; but others, such as using inappropriate language which may impact on another's wellbeing, apply the same in the online context as they do in the on-site context.
SIT's online teaching model: How does it work if there is practical component in the course which need face to face practical component? Does it becomes blended?	N/A	While SIT does have some blended delivery, such as the Wool Technology programme which has a required block course attendance; the vast majority of SIT2LRN delivery is fully online without any face-to-face practical component required.
Other questions		
We have heard a lot about the challenges students are facing but what do they say the benefits are? Are there other benefits that you have seen in the research, for example, in Bahrain, greater cross discipline engagement bringing innovation and problem solving?	Enormous benefits in terms of student equity – more students from diverse backgrounds able to study online. Many students prefer this especially those who are mature students, working, with families.	Agree with everything Cathy has said. Students have also told us that they appreciate online delivery as they do not feel they are 'put in the box' or 'categorised' which they may feel they are when they walk into a classroom. Because the diversity and backgrounds of students may be much greater in an online situation, feedback we've had from students is that they appreciate the opportunity to hear (and learn) from colleagues with whom they would never otherwise had contact.
Studiosity sounds a lot like 'outsourcing' the academic support reducing the opportunities for a personal connection with students from someone actually connected with the Tertiary Institution. Does this supplement what you currently do? Or has it replaced Student Support staff?	Studiosity is very specific for academic support – complements rather than replaces what academic support staff offer. They wouldn't have the time to go through every essay in detail as Studiosity does, providing detailed and thorough feedback.	Definitely compliments and doesn't replace any of our existing student support initiatives. Our students have found it to be a great tool in our support toolbox, as the majority of them are studying weekends and after 8pm at night and want someone available to send their essay to, or ask a question of, right then. It's all part of building as much flexibility and 'just in time' student support as possible.