12 Key Ideas: An Introduction to Teaching Online

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UNDERSTANDING THE INTERNET AS PLATFORM

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Contents

Reframing the "problem" of teaching online

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https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/onlineteaching/?p=5

Moving your teaching to the internet is not a technology problem. That is, unless you make it one.

Becoming comfortable with teaching online is more of a conceptual challenge than it a technological one. There are things you can do face-to-face that can be super difficult online. There are other things you can do online that don't work as well face-to-face. Concentrate on how the internet is different, and work from there.

The technology is something you will figure out with repeated use. Don't worry about it. Just set aside enough time over successive days to use your online technology and it will come to you. If you choose to use too many platforms or try to be too fancy though, your technology could become a problem. So start thinking conceptually and keep the technology simple.

ACTION:

While you are working on the important conceptual work in the course, pick away at getting used to the technology. Create a schedule for yourself. Commit to going into the technology platform you're going to use at least 10-15 minutes a day for a few weeks. The only way to get used to the technology is to practice. Ask a friend/student to come with you. Practice using it.

OPTIONAL RESOURCES

- [Interview with Rolin Moe on how you can't solve online learning with a technology](#)

The impact of information abundance on teaching and learning

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Moving your teaching to the internet is about understanding information abundance.

One of the critical conceptual parts about teaching online is adjusting to the idea that your students already have access to all of the precious information you were planning to give them in class.

For the purposes of mere humans, the information available on the internet is limitless. There is more information (good or bad) on any subject than you will ever be able to read. There is an abundance, if you will.

Our classrooms typically create a 'cone of artificial scarcity'. We remove the abundance by telling students not to use their laptops and phones in class. That allows us to be 'in charge' of what information they get access to. (often for good reason)

When your students are learning online, that artificial scarcity disappears.

If you've asked a yes or no question, your students can easily Google the answer. If you've asked what may be a 'complicated' question, but has an answer that is fairly recognised in your discipline, your students are going to Google the answer.

As they should.

Those of us with access to the internet (through literacy, technological and financial means) can reach out for any piece of information we need by simply searching for it. Our learning experiences need to reflect that, and we need to help students develop the ability to sort through that information in a meaningful way. We need to use that abundance to our advantage.

ACTION:

Information abundance impacts all of our fields. Think of an activity for your learners that uses that abundance to your own advantage. You could get them to source a youtube video to help them learn a concept or find divergent opinions on a controversial topic. Circle back and help them evaluate the quality of their choices.

OPTIONAL RESOURCES

- A Pedagogy of Abundance – Martin Weller

Complicated vs. Complex Challenges

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https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/onlineteaching/?p=25

Moving your teaching to the internet probably means a greater emphasis on complexity.

A complicated challenge often corresponds with step-by-step responses. For example, it's something you could copy and paste. It's something 'most' people in your field would agree is the correct answer. Think of building an airplane. That's a complicated process, with potentially millions of steps. But it doesn't require, and indeed would probably suffer from, creativity. There are specific steps to take, and those steps should be agreed upon by various folks in the airplane-building industry.

But, asking these 'complicated' questions only really works in the zone of artificial scarcity that is our face-to-face classes, where students don't have a world of information at their fingertips (see chapter on abundance). In a classroom, the students would have to think hard to remember what step to take when. If this piece fails, what do I check first? What's the formula for that? Online, they can just copy and paste the answer from any number of websites.

Complex challenges don't have a single answer. They are difficult or impossible to measure. How much do you love cookies? What's the most ethical way to eat? Only one part of the challenge can be addressed at a time. Focusing on and assessing students' learning of complex challenges will necessarily engage students with the content and promote their autonomy as learners. If you are looking to evaluate students' work online, add some complexity; something that brings their perspective to bear. Instead of asking "what is…" or "how does…" ask "what does that mean?" or "why do you think that?".

We're not saying not to teach basic or complicated that learners need to remember; just make them part of other things that include complexity if you want to do an assessment.

ACTION:

Categorize some of your assignments into complicated and complex. Take a complicated question from your existing curriculum, ask yourself "how can I transform this question so that it can no longer be answered by copy/paste?" "How can I add complexity to this question?"

OPTIONAL RESOURCES

- [An introduction to the Cynefin framework](#)

Information Literacy and Learning on the Web

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https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/onlineteaching/?p=29

Learning to evaluate information on the internet is a core skill in any field, especially on the internet.

One of the big objections to embracing that giant, complex abundance of information is that students won't know what is good information and what is bad information(for lack of a better distinction). This is true. But learning to find, evaluate, and synthesize information in any field is a critical skill right now. We can't protect them from misinformation they might get on the Internet. They need to learn how to deal with it.

Our students are going to need more than information to address the challenges they are facing. They need to be creative problem solvers, and strategic thinkers. Try to situate your course in the abundance of the web as much as possible and include lots of time for guiding learners through the professional and ethical process of evaluating the things they come across.

ACTION:

Think about how you tell the difference between good and bad information in your field. Who are the trusted sources? How can you build your own information literacies into your assignments so that you can teach them to your students? Consider looking at https://webliteracy.pressbooks.com/chapter/four-strategies/ as a way to get started.

OPTIONAL RESOURCES

- [Michael Caulfield Four Strategies and a Move](#)

Teaching with Care

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https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/onlineteaching/?p=31

Moving your teaching to the internet really requires pedagogies of care. For your students, and for yourself.

One of the challenges of moving online is that we need to think more consciously about how we are going to 'care' for our students. A smile in the classroom can mean a great deal. As do the informal chats with students before or after class, or in the halls, or when you pass each other by on campus. There's also a deeper sense of caring that involves thinking about different learner needs and how you can design your course to be as equitable as possible. How are you going to incorporate that 'caring' in your messages? In your videos? In how you design your assignments?

At the same time, our face-to-face classes, and our face-to-face routines wrap some sanity around how much work we do as educators. It's easier to stop working when you leave the office and go home. It's harder to stop working when your home is your office. We need to balance the care we want to show to our students, and the care we are giving to ourselves.

Think about the first five minutes of class. You smile, you check-in with people, you chat with some students, etc. We need effective ways of doing this online.

ACTION:

Build yourself a communication schedule to connect with your students. Come up with ways to regularly connect with your students so that they know you care about their success. Build this into your syllabus as part of your social contract with the students.

OPTIONAL RESOURCES

- [Maha Bali on Pedagogies of Care](#)
- [Interview with Sundi Richard on Pedagogies of Care](#)

Content and Teacher Presence

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Moving your teaching to the internet really complicates the relationship between "content" and "teacher presence".

One of the most useful ways of thinking about content for online teaching is framing it as teacher presence. The distinction between your lectures, and the course textbook, and your comment in the discussion board, and the course assignment, was more obvious when teaching face-to-face. However, when we're online, all of these things kind of blend together. Now your curation of the materials *is* part of your presence. The assignment you post *is* part of your presence. Everything you do (or don't do) indicates something about your presence.

There is usually a direct relationship between perceived presence and student engagement. We say 'perceived' because your students need to know you're there. Simply reading their comments in a discussion forum and not doesn't indicate your presence. You could spend two hours going through the whole discussion, but if you say nothing (or don't otherwise indicate that you have seen them), they won't know that. And then it seems like you're not around. You need to 'be present' in the same way you need to 'pay attention'. It's an action.

You can easily write one post, or create one quick video, responding to all the posts on a given subjects, highlighting themes, and correcting misconceptions. Less duplication for you, and it still shows students that you're involved.

ACTION:

Record an introductory video for your course. Let students know who you are as a member of your field so that they can 'hear your voice' when you are writing them responses.

OPTIONAL RESOURCES

- [Are you teaching content or teaching thought?](#)

Keep it Simple

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When moving your teaching to the internet, keep it simple. The tech *and* the content!

Our fields all contain an abundance of information, and I get that its tempting to want to "cover all the content". But you don't need to. Seriously. It's your course. You can teach fewer concepts, but work to make those concepts stick at a deeper level. It's all too easy to fall into the traditional way of thinking: must. cover. content. Resist. Keep it simple.

This is a chance to rethink the structure of the concepts in your course. How many major concepts are necessary? What's most important? Do away with the rest. Better yet, make them optional for students who want more (there are always a few).

Same goes for the tools you use. No need to get all fancy and have 5 applications going to run a 1-hour session, or record a 5-minute video. Keep it simple. Your students, and your future self will thank you.

ACTION:

Take a look at your goals/objectives and ask yourself if you really need that many of them. Review the different technologies/platforms you are going to use – will they cause confusion? Simple is usually better.

OPTIONAL RESOURCES

- [Simple, Equitable and Engaging](#)– one hour video introduction

Keep it Equitable and Accessible

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Moving your teaching to the internet, especially during a global crisis, brings about new concerns for equity and accessibility.

Part access. Part care. FULLY about your context. Equity and accessibility issues can't be addressed in a couple of paragraphs, they are about committing yourself to understanding all of your students, and meeting them where they are.

The accessibility issues that your students have are not going away because they are working from home. In fact, for some, they have been compounded.

Online learning, for instance, often increases the impact of economic disparity on the classroom. If a learner doesn't have a dedicated computer in their house, they are going to struggle to participate in synchronous activities. If you only have a phone or tablet, you are going to struggle with multitasking. If you don't have a strong wifi connection, your experience with many online learning things will be worse. Think about alternatives for students who cannot attend your synchronous sessions. Think about different ways you can design your assignments to allow for students to complete them in multiple ways.

Equity is a commitment, we've included some links below to get you started. Engage with your students, get to know them. Examine yourself, understand how your own privilege.

ACTION:

Take an existing assignment and imagine how it will impact students in different situations. Will they be able to do it with a weak internet connection? What about students who have difficulty hearing? Imagine alternate submission approaches that could benefit those learners.

OPTIONAL RESOURCES

- [What is Universal Design for Learning (UDL)? – Amanda Morin](#)
- [The Edtech Imaginary – Audrey Watters](#)
- [Digital Redlining Access and Privacy – Chris Gilliard](#)

Keep it Engaging

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Moving your teaching to the internet necessitates more intentionality behind your student engagement.

You need to be interesting. Be realistic about what you're expecting students to do. "But I have a lot of content to cover" is not an excuse for not putting the effort in. If you've recorded a super long video to send to students, force yourself to watch it first. When you get bored and want to turn it off... cut your video and send that. ANY content/concept 'can' be engaging.

One of the biggest concerns from instructors moving online is that they struggle to get students to do the work in the regular face-to-face context, how are they going to get students to do the work online? Part of helping students be engaged is to create the scaffolding they need, to understand HOW to be ready to do the work. HOW can they be successful online learners?

If you're assigning readings before class, give them a 200-word reflection to hand in the day before. Scaffolding doesn't mean you oversimplify the material, it means you structure the workload to make it more manageable.

ACTION:

Watch one of your recordings or read one of your readings, imagining you're a student. Put on your critical eye. Think about how you could make it more compelling for students.

OPTIONAL RESOURCES

- [How Much Work Should My Online Course Be For My Students (and Me)](#)
- [The Human Element in Online Learning](#)

Design Activities and Assessments for the Web

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This concept seems to be helpful to people thinking about the advantages of teaching online. If you're going to have an essay or a project or any kind of long term work with students, think of

those projects as an iterative process. If you were doing this face 2 face, you might have them submit something halfway through the term. You might even get them to journal in a workbook that they hand in to you and that you hand back. It's an organizational nightmare. Online you can create any number of spaces where learners can check in and post their progress. The web is very good at keeping track of student work for you. It also makes it very easy for students to share with each other.

For this to work, you can't think of grading EVERYTHING. Setting up discussion for students and having them submit 'their five favourite posts' can be a great way to keep discussion open and also introduce curation.

ACTION:

Design one week of activities for your class. Start from the beginning and ask yourself how each step will be done by students working from inside their homes. Are there ways you can use the abundance of the internet to improve it? Are there challenges to any of the activities that are about how the web works?

OPTIONAL RESOURCES

- Spotlight on Alternative Assessment Methods: Alternatives to exams
- Ungrading – a bibliography (a series of resources about alternatives to grading)

Work Together

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Please don't try and do this alone. You are not the only person trying to do this. It is not a

competition. Don't try to create all your resources alone. Don't try and learn alone. Don't try to find your resources alone. Make a team. At your school or with others.

There are tons of Open Education Resources (OER) out there you can use. It takes a while. And some deep searching… searching with a team will make it much faster.

ACTION:

Find yourself a few partners. You could also find some people to follow and work with on Twitter. Reach out to colleagues that you have met at a conference and ask them what they are doing. Start forming community. Share. Work together.

OPTIONAL RESOURCES

- [List of resources about teaching online](#)
- [List of virtual labs](#)
- [List of review of online tools for teaching (The Open Page)](#)
- [Online Learning in a Hurry](#)
- [ECampus Ontario OER Repository](#)

The Community is the Curriculum
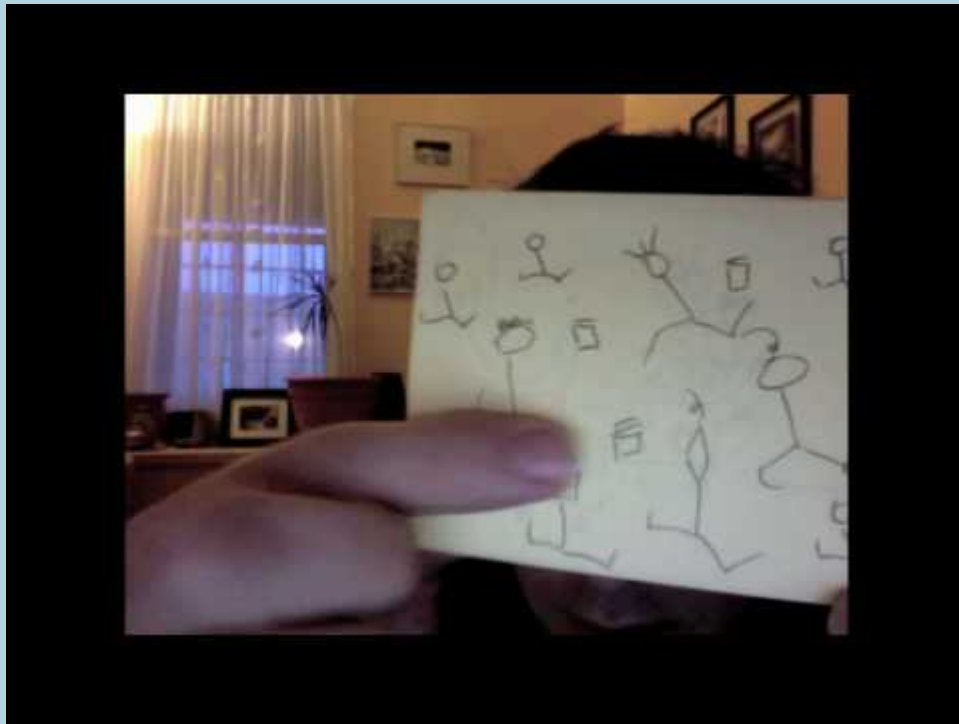
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https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/onlineteaching/?p=161

Moving to teaching online could mean thinking of the community as the curriculum. Encouraging the participation of learners with other professionals in their field as (part of) the

curriculum in your course. This could mean that learners are engaging with ongoing research in the field, or reading new research as it develops. The goal is to develop the literacies of your field.

ACTION

Find the online presence of a number of experts in your field. Incorporate their social presence into your course.

OPTIONAL READINGS

- [Making the Community the Curriculum](#)

Appendix– Resources

Resources:

Credits

This work comes out of many conversations inside of the [Office of Open Learning at the University of Windsor](). It is based on the lessons learned from repeated versions of a one-week intensive course taught to university faculty to help them prepare for moving their learning online.

The core group Ashlyne O'Neil, Alicia Higgison and Dave Cormier came to these conclusions through evaluating learner feedback and through their own musings.

The first draft of the text of this book was written on [Dave Blog]().

And it is, as always, the result of our participation with the excellent folks in the broader Open Education Community.