

Chapter 3

Thriving Through Disruption: COVID-19, Online Education, and Innovation

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the authors will explore the ways COVID-19 initiated widespread reform in how faculty approach online teaching. The researchers will focus on how they addressed the shift from emergency remote teaching to faculty empowerment, centered on best practices in online learning. The change, like many campuses around the nation, happened quickly and with limited resources. A central argument of this chapter is that the pandemic created unexpected opportunities for collaboration and innovation across the divide between face-to-face and online instructional design. In tackling this challenge, the researchers were inspired by the community of inquiry framework. The framework is a social constructivist model describing the learning environment as the intersection of three key “presences”: teaching, social, and cognitive. Combining this framework with social-emotional learning theory suggests that online instructional designers consider the trinity of feeling, doing, and creating when designing and delivering faculty professional development.

INTRODUCTION

Three words that undoubtedly define the higher education landscape now and perhaps long into the future: COVID-19, disruption, and online. The changes to instructional design, implementation, and assessment in college classrooms, even after the return to normal campus operations, feel permanent. They foreshadow a deeply changed instructional landscape. When and if things return to “instructional-normal,” students and faculty will have developed, experimented with, and refined forms of online education that just a few months ago seemed unlikely and unwarranted. The COVID-19 pandemic initiated previously improbable changes. Take for example the heretical thought, on many campuses, that massive open online courses (MOOCs) and online program management companies (OPMs), would be the universal norm across the nation and world. This time of pandemic-driven instructional disruption is opening new ways to approach teaching and learning in online spaces. The new normal is online education since there are no real scalable alternatives. And post-pandemic, many faculty and staff will likely continue working remotely. The conceptual and practical dominance of face-to-face education has been disrupted, dislodged, and separated from notions of the status quo in higher education classrooms.

In this article, the authors will explore the ways COVID-19 initiated widespread change in how faculty approached teaching in a College of Education. The researchers will focus on how they addressed the shift from emergency remote teaching (Hodges et al., 2020) to faculty empowerment centered on best practices in online pedagogy. Our shift, like many other campuses around the nation, happened quickly and with limited resources. A central argument of this article is that the COVID-19 pandemic created opportunities for collaboration and innovation in the College across the instructional cultures of face-to-face and online instruction. In making this argument, the researchers will rely on the Community of Inquiry (CI) framework (Garrison, et al., 1999) and its three key “presences:” teaching, social, and cognitive.

BACKGROUND

The three authors represent three distinct roles and voices in the College: an online instructional designer, a faculty hired to teach in partnership with an OPM, and a faculty teaching primarily face-to-face classes. Examples of educational planning in times of crises show that creativity is important but often hard to foster when there is high-stakes pressure to quickly retool. Within the context of the College making the rapid transition to fully online education, the authors investigate the question: What is required in faculty professional development to move from survival instincts of “how to do” online instruction to the creative flourishing of “now, what can I try?”

In tackling this question, the researchers were inspired by the widely researched framework for designing learning experiences in online environments, the Community of Inquiry (CI) framework developed by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (1999). The Community of Inquiry framework is a social constructivist model describing the learning environment as the intersection of three key “presences:” teaching, social, and cognitive. Combining CI with the authors’ shared experiences in leading reform in a time of rapid change, three operational frames resulted that instructional designers can consider when designing and delivering faculty professional development: feeling, doing, and creating. Later in this paper, after the authors provide context and historical background, the researchers will connect the Community of Inquiry framework to the three instructional frames of feeling, doing, and creating. What

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