

Take i-heart in the Journey

Online Learning and Theological Education

(A drafty-draft of my ideas and learnings on online teaching)

Elias Ortega (Meadville Lombard)-3/12/2020

Dear faculty members,

The next few weeks will be challenging, demanding, and taxing. Our students, just like the rest of us, will be juggling many concerns, life-situations, caring responsibilities, leadership roles, among others. From the start, I would like to urge us to be mindful, grace-filled, and adaptive, with ourselves and others during this season. At this moment, we should also presume that the members in our community of learning may not be fully present in the ways that may be presuming them to be. In fact, we will struggle with this as well. Perhaps the best teaching-lesson during this season might be to lead our community into a deep reflection of theological education as tooling for ministry in crisis. I take it that this was the spirit of our August 2019 ingathering and now we are living into a particular period in [world-ending times](#).

In these pages, I wish to share some ideas of my experiences with online learning. I hope there may be some-thing in here some-where of help to you. It seems that new resources and ideas are popping up by the hour, the challenge might be what to prioritize, include, and how, in such a limited time. Be patient and grace-filled with yourself. Also, I would like to myself available to you to be a resource, thinking partner, and of help in this migration to the digital space.

INTRO

These intensives (our courses) are part of a larger sequence of learning opportunities that continue throughout the semester. These intensives also afford us with a moment of experimentation and playfulness as we think of our new curriculum and where we are going. In fact, let's fingerprint with the idea of how we can take this opportunity to explore fuller ways of teaching and learning with an eye towards students preparing for ministry in an increasingly digital society. This is not easy, the timing less than ideal, and yet, it is a real opportunity to envision a more connected future.



Teaching and Learning Face-to-Face (f2f) vs Online (Synchronous/Asynchronous)

Overcoming the fallacy of Presence:

One of the biggest challenges I have found in teaching and learning online is what I call the **Fallacy of Presence**. Often we assume that there is more "noise" in on-line communication than in face-to-face interactions. But face-to-face spaces are also being flooded by technology not to say a word of how our attention wanders off down greener pastures. SO it is not so much about the technology mediation but the level of intentionality that matters. In a traditional face-to-face (f2f) environment, we assume that because the learners are physically in the room, that they are fully engaged. We know that this is not necessarily the case, and yet, we tend to take it for granted. In f2f learning environments, one can "act one's way" through a course through engaging, asking clarification questions, sharing opinions in ways that signal engagement and even potential progress towards mastery of material without it being necessarily so.

On the other hand, online learning spaces, because they often thrive in the creation and assessment of learning artifacts in writing, or, audio/vision form, preceded by a time of reflection and work, offer no such opportunity of "acting one's way through." As a learner, you either put in the time and work, or you did not; either way, it will be on display.

Online learning spaces require that learners take charge of their learning. This is actually a good thing. With some creative design and strategy, online learning leads to better engagement and student performance because they are afforded the opportunity to showcase their learning.

Practices I have found useful

SETTING UP EXPECTATIONS

From the outset, your expectations for the course, all activities, participation, and processes should be made clear to the learning community. Unlike f2f spaces, there will be a time-lag

between the cycle of question raise and response. Therefore, setting up those expectations at the start is important. Somethings to include may be:

- Synchronous Meeting Times: When the class will meet in the zoom room. Explain how this time will be organized: Lectures, Q&A, as well as the prep-work required to make the most out of these times.
- Asynchronous Times: These are the moments when learners will be engaged in the entire cohort or independent work.
- Artifact Creation times: What will the learners be submitting for the assessment? When?
- Faculty Availability: Set us times when you will be available for discussion, questions, etc. These are times other than Synchronous Sessions.
- Assessment Report Back: Make clear when can students expect to hear back from you in terms of assessment. Will you be providing feedback to work they submit on a daily basis, every other day, at the end of the week, etc.? This goes a long way to ease anxiety in the learners and also helps you manage your workload.

NOTE: We will be dealing with learners joining in different time zones, being explicit of the “time of the class” is central to success.

STRATEGIES 4 TEACHING:

I recommend that you start by easing anxiety on your students? This shift is unforeseen and you realize that it causes disruption on the regular schedule programming AND it is also an opportunity to explore critical thinking, learning, and the shape faith communities can take in online environments.

FIVE things to keep in mind:

1. **For online learners**, unlike f2f classrooms, the experience of the digital classroom is a **one to one** between learner and instructor. For this reason, it's important for your students to see you in some fashion: a video call, a voice recording, a video recording. And it could be as simple as a 3 min or less audio/video file in which you introduce the material and pose some probing questions and then send them to their work. Online learning spaces due to their malleability and multiple entry points, whether synchronous or asynchronous, are user-driven. This malleability marks a significant shift in how the teacher creates learning opportunities, disseminates content, and assesses the work of the learning community. There is a degree of openness and

opportunity for self-directed learning present in online learning environments that I would like to learn to maximize.

2. As instructors, we need to be mindful of not creating endless work for us. That is to say, it is important to create different types of assignments with different assessment expectations. In online learning, we spend more time reading, listening, and/or viewing various types of learning artifacts and we can slide easily into trying to provide comprehensive feedback on every piece. In doing so, we can more than triple the amount of work done.
 - **Discussion Boards:** Check for reading, but may not require comprehensive feedback.
 - **Cohort Base Assignments:** Cohort members offer feedback to each other, instructor comments on the cohort or report part to the whole class.
 - **Scaffolded Artifact Assessment:** (Focuses on Process) Offer formative assessment throughout the process of the creation of an artifact instead of a final summative assessment. Because feedback has been given throughout the process, the final assessment is shorter.
 - **Self Assessment:** Promoting opportunities and habits of self-assessment are integral to formation whether as a student or as a professional.

3. **Build Towards Something instead of Busy Work:** A major complaint from online students is that the work given is often seen as busywork. This is likely to happen when assignments are given are meant to replicate the f2f environment, feedback is not provided in a timely manner, or there are no connections between learning activities and the overall aims and goals of a course. Successful learning activities in an online environment lead the learners through a progression of mastery of content and application. It makes explicit the connection between, “This theory (say, Weberian social change) helps us understand this particular social phenomenon,” to “how does the social dynamics this theory helps us explain manifests itself in your particular ministry context.” All the steps involved in getting from one end, understand the theory, to the other, applying the theory, offer opportunities for formative assessment.
 - a. To Recap: As much as possible, assignments should build-up to the final artifact (or artifacts) you are constructing for the class. That is to say, you are chunking and scaffolding the learning and assessment. It is a more formative assessment than cumulative.
 - b. You can center assignments/discussions based on skills and learning goals you wish to impart: say critical reading for argument analysis. Engagement with the

author 's use of sources, etc. You create manageable chunks to work with as students build to something more.

- c. Finally, it may be helpful to remind students that digital fluidity is important for

4. **TIME Flow:** You probably get the sense that in an online learning environment time is different than in f2f. In my experience, one of the advantages of the way time flows in online learning environments is that it can be slowed down for deeper learning. Thus, prioritizing what we want to be sure is covered and what proficiencies are being developed is important. Are we focusing on skill-building? Are we more interested in theoretical knowledge? Are we aiming for an application of concepts? How we answer questions such as these will help us think about the kinds of assignments and learning activities we chose for delivering our course content.

5. **RUBRICS** are an integral tool that will promote your success and save on your grading time.

Sample instructions I have shared with students in the past.

Cohorts' Work (15%)

As a course that puts a premium in understanding the nature of faith formation and the impact of digital communication technologies in the social lives of congregations, a significant portion of this course will take place in a cohort group. This provides opportunities to think how are we socialized together. Furthermore, the ability to work in groups, being able to manage tasks in a timely fashion, design an action plan and execute it, and assess personal strengths, as well as areas of development, comprise an important "labor-skill." Whether in a ministry setting, a non-profit, or other types of employment, collaborative work is essential for success. Students will be assigned to a precept cohort (3-5 per group depending on class size). You will find your group on the google classroom site before our second scheduled session.

These cohorts will form the basic unit for group discussions and work. In these discussions, the cohort will think about how to start with a sociologically informed perspective about

issues of faith formation and technology in connection to ministry. During weekly assignments, you will engage with your precept cohort to perform certain tasks. As a reminder, you are required to be in compliance with etiquette of participation and privacy guidance to be provided by the Lead Learner. A breach of this policy will be considered a serious breach of Academic Integrity and it will be responded to according to the guidelines provided by the integrity policy, including the failure of the course. The work and assignments done during the cohort groups will provide the basis for the final Curriculum Writing Project.

Note on use of technology in the classroom and other iThingies

I believe in the responsible use of technology in the classrooms, whether they are face-to-face or online learning environments. Technology has the potential to both enhance the teaching environment as well as to create unnecessary distractions. In this course, you are encouraged to use technology in a way that will further your learning - you may use your laptop for notes, as well as other in-class activities. In our **face-to-face sessions**, non-educational use of technology, checking FB-status updates, surfing the internet for non-pedagogical purposes, instant messaging, text messaging, playing games, among others are not allowed. To further that end, I request that all iThingies—iPhones, iPods, “Blackberries,” etc, be stored in a way that they did not become a distraction to once you enter the classroom unless necessary for in-class work. During our **online-sessions**, you need to take care that you remain on-task and engage and take measures not to be distracted by technology. For example, while in Zoom session, you may want to silence your phone or leave it away from your working area so as to not to be distracted by notifications, games, etc.

If you are a primary caregiver and need to be available, or if you are an MD, EMT, Firefighter, or Chaplain on call during the time of class, I kindly request that you notify either the instructor or teaching assistant in advance. You should also note the ways in which your use of technology both furthers and hinders your workflow as you carry on the work for this course.

Artifact Created to introduce a course:

Adobe Spark can be used for free. ([Spark.adobe.com](https://spark.adobe.com))

<https://spark.adobe.com/page/FxFdhVb2iVSQ5/>

OTHER RESOURCES

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/unify/2013/12/10/how-technology-has-changed-workplace-communication/>

<http://science.opposingviews.com/technology-affected-communication-1432.html>

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1sVI7O3FrFzQFyeiYUQzsGvJWnW MxPY-NedI1kio_OpY/edit?fbclid=IwAR38xn-Mel44uXu6DThynnYVlssxJVZjEl MHUAQE975FzuKgnbPif6ONqbM#gid=499998950

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1skxl8D70Ed34x6cjjVxCGzIZro64ef QRTZXOdEt_7eg/edit?fbclid=IwAR3XuMy7Cb4VnFVwlp60uX5bMGxZhGWJJy oc1Wm_kpuX_N2WcTO3e87odfo#gid=261107201

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3sYk5u0wwwuw&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR1SU5kLuOkqHnrA1k-q16Fr3p74jvCtYz6-pUc-nRUNe3peebzh-EtsGww>

<https://academic-resources.williams.edu/movingtoremoteinstruction/?fbclid=IwAR2aIGawHp5-lyY15Wp7qRyMpn0b2dlTplQgfttK2h-Cs489NFahUQYbYT0>

<https://anygoodthing.com/2020/03/12/please-do-a-bad-job-of-putting-your-courses-online/?fbclid=IwAR0kuu6YXheAFd4teTHZx0hJDtmL1X-RRjyrEXGo>

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WHAT IS e-LEARNING?

E-learning is an approach to administering education and training through the use of modern technology. Videoconferencing, shared chat, and digital course materials make it possible for entire classes to be held in the cloud rather than in a lecture hall. Below, we explore the two common types of e-learning and how they can be implemented at organizations.

ASYNCHRONOUS e-LEARNING

Asynchronous e-learning occurs when students begin and complete a training course at different times, according to their own schedule. Common features of asynchronous e-learning include:



- **Message Boards**
Many such courses are augmented with message boards, allowing learners to post questions and comments on a central board for other users to see.
- **Discussion Groups**
Going one step further than message boards, discussion groups allow students in the same course to discuss the material in real time.
- **Self-Paced Courses**
These are courses that can be completed at one's own pace. There may be assignments and checkpoints along the way, but there are no deadlines for completion.

Asynchronous e-learning materials are commonly offered through the following mediums:



ONLINE

Course materials can often be downloaded or streamed at will.



CD-ROM

Less common in this day and age, course materials can be stored and distributed on CD-ROM.



DVD

Many e-learning courses, such as language and music instruction, are offered through DVD videos.

SYNCHRONOUS e-LEARNING

Synchronous learning occurs when remote students enroll in a class that is paced at particular intervals that must be attended/completed according to a specific schedule.



- **Shared Whiteboard**
A shared environment allows multiple students/instructors to collaborate on a discussion with text and drawings.
- **Virtual Classrooms**
Instructors lead classes that are broadcasted in real time to remote students over an Internet connection.
- **Scheduled Online**

Benefits & Limitations of Asynchronous Learning

Benefits

Learn at own pace

Employees can hone their skills at their own pace, without the fear of failing to catch the pace of the instructor.



No time constraints

Employees can interact with peers through emails or chats without any time constraints.



Limitations

Cannot get instant feedback

Employees who have doubts in the course material have to wait until the instructor replies to their emails. This wastes a lot of valuable time.



Does not motivate

Employees get demotivated due to a lack of competitiveness, interaction, and live training environment.



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