

Going Online At Higer Education: Some Initial Thoughts And Considerations

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The emergent request for “going online” has come to significantly add stress and workload to the already demanding work and strive for balance between teaching, research and service of the university academic staff, not to mention the work-life balance. Teaching staff of all backgrounds and ages have been obliged to prepare and deliver their classes from home, with all the practical and technical implications this might have, and often without on-location technical support. On top of that, the most important challenge for University teachers has been their lacking pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) when it comes to teaching online versus face-to-face teaching. Such PCK includes not only the technical (e.g., using platforms and tools) and administrative (e.g., workflow organization) aspects of teaching online, but also and mainly the pedagogical foundations and principles of what it takes to be an online teacher.

Online learning is a type of teaching and learning situation in which 1) the learner is at a distance from the tutor/instructor, 2) the learner uses some form of technology to access the learning materials, 3) the learner uses technology to interact with the tutor/instructor and with other learners, and 4) some kind of support is provided to learners. Much of teaching and learning in an online environment is similar to teaching and learning in any other formal educational context. “The pervasive effect of the online medium, however, creates a unique environment” based on “the capacity for shifting the time and place of the educational interaction” (Anderson, 2011, p. 344). For such creation of a *unique learning environment*, instructional design and organisation play an essential role.

The actual situation (COVID-19 crisis) is driving educational institutions to apply an online model when in fact they are applying an emergency model that is not based on the online educational principles. To ensure that educators have the necessary PCK they need to provide quality online teaching is crucial. To invest time and resources regarding the course design, especially for online environments, will guarantee the coherence of the whole training action and also that the principles of the online approach are considered. Learning (instructional) design for online courses should be taken into account more than ever.

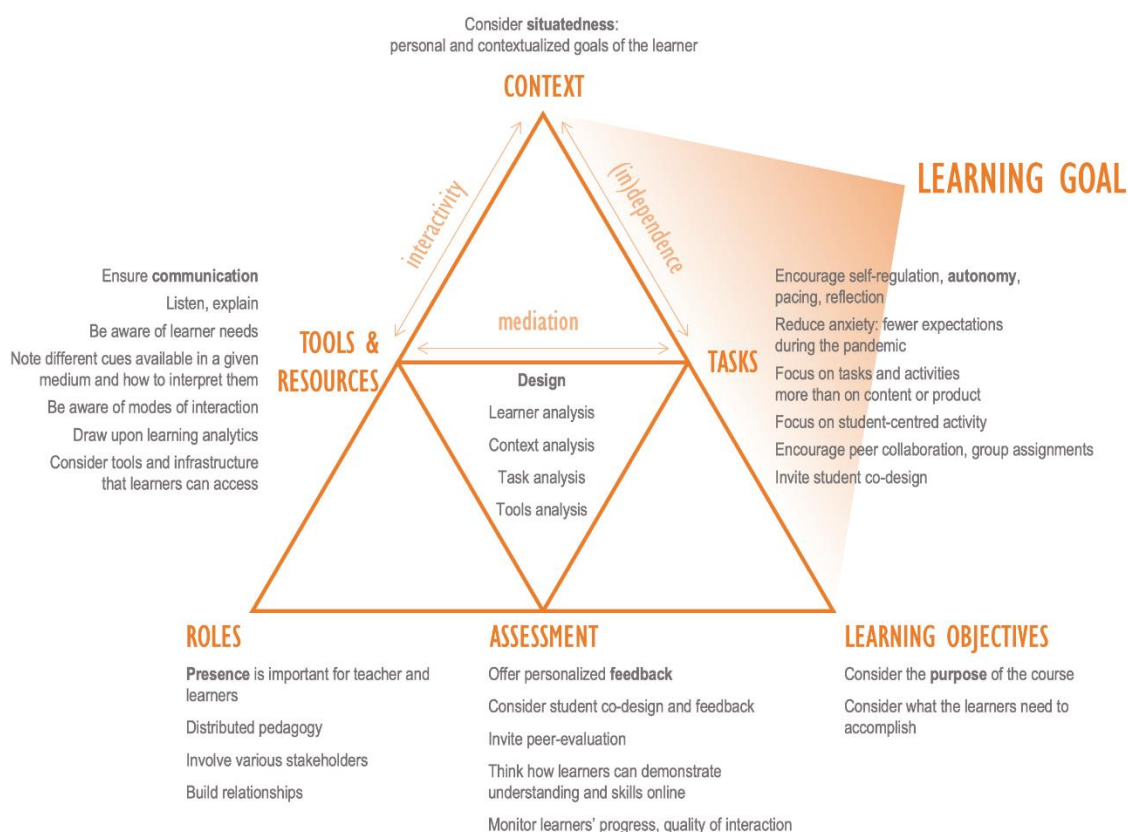
A main “what to do”, or piece of pedagogical knowledge (Kali et al., 2011) is the careful design of activities. According to Carr-Chellman and Duchastel (2000), “the essence of an online course is the organization of learning activities that enable the student to reach certain learning outcomes” (p. 233). These activities or tasks should be based on a mix of design approaches (synchronous, asynchronous, online, offline), be described and communicated in an accurate and clear manner, have an adequate level of difficulty for students’ capabilities and expectations, be related to authentic contexts to increase students’ engagement, and be accessible to everyone taking into consideration the various practicalities that lie behind, for example, having a stable internet connection or access to resources.

With a focus on examining the specific components that the design and delivery of an online learning activity implies, an experts’ online panel was organised by Dr. Chrysi Rapanta (IFILNOVA, NOVA FCSH). The four experts invited to the panel were representing different geographical regions (Central Europe, Southern Europe, Canada, and Australia) and all had proven theoretical and practical expertise in the pedagogy of online teaching and learning. The questions asked were the following:

1. In what aspects do you think online learning design and delivery is different than f2f teaching and learning?

2. What do you think makes online teaching and learning successful?
3. What would you say to non-expert colleagues who follow a materials-based approach to online teaching, e.g. sharing materials with students or asking them to produce materials?
4. What would you say to colleagues who follow a tools-based approach to online teaching, e.g. teaching online equals using a videoconference tool?
5. What are some effective ways of monitoring students' engagement and learning during online courses? How can they inform assessment?

The main themes and relations emerged from the panel are represented in the Figure below.



For a full access to the study reported here, use the following reference: Rapanta, C., Botturi, L., Goodyear, P., Guàrdia, L., & Koole, M. (accepted). Online university teaching during and after the covid-19 crisis: refocusing teacher presence and learning activity. *Postdigital Science and Education*.

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