A spotlight on...

Online Pedagogy

Centre for Innovation in Education & Centre for Higher Education Studies

Overview

Online pedagogy offers us an opportunity to think differently about what makes for good learning. The constraints on face-to-face teaching are different to those in place for teaching that occurs within a fully online or hybrid learning environment. This means that any move to online learning will benefit from a creative approach, even as adjustments are required for both staff and students.

Benefits

The introduction of online pedagogy into a degree programme that had previously been offered on a wholly face-to-face basis can result in significant enhancements to student learning. It is the active engagement of learners alongside each other in constructing knowledge (supported by suitable resources and facilitation) that constitutes a key aspect of what makes for effective hybrid learning.

Focusing on students

Explanation of content is often central to the delivery of face-to-face teaching, but a transformative online pedagogy involves integrating explanations (e.g. a video-recorded lecture) and other resources into a process of students constructing their own knowledge.

- Ask students to engage with an online resource prior to activity that enables them to build their own knowledge, e.g. prior to an online discussion or group activity.
- Consider how each activity, resource or tutor input supports the overall process of knowledge construction.

Social interaction

Social interaction is important for student wellbeing, whether through group discussions or exchanges with a teacher (DEMOS, 2020). Hybrid learning is most effective where there is high quality interaction and where a sense of engagement arises in a community of inquiry (Garrison and Kanuka, 2004).

- Get students to connect with the entire cohort, e.g. require them to make an initial posting to a discussion board, with follow-on postings that respond to the insights of other students.

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- Synchronous learning builds a sense of community. In a webinar participants can contribute through chat or be unmuted if they have an insight that would benefit everyone.
- Get students to work in groups on specific tasks, e.g. reviewing and commenting on each other's draft work, producing a short video, creating a poster, and so on.
- Activity with a social dimension is often informal in face-to-face settings. Consider making such activity a requirement or something that contributes to a summative assignment – if students are to value it online.

Controlling one's own learning

It has been argued that online learning gives learners greater control over their learning and how they fit that learning into their lives, but are your students used to managing their time and sequencing activity?

- Particularly in the early period of online study, it can help to break things down so that students have a clearly specified set of familiar activities to do each week, with changes in the pattern only introduced gradually.
- McGill, Beetham and Gray (2016) recommend that students 'set goals, make and monitor plans'. Students should become 'proactive in information finding, help-seeking, initiating communications'. How can you get students to do this?
- What opportunities are present for students to clarify uncertainties? Use regularly updated FAQs. Set up a discussion forum where general questions can be posed.
- It takes work for students to learn how to support each other online. Kahn et al (2017) encourage students to learn to invite each other to respond to postings, challenge each other's ideas, identify common interests, reach out to those who might be missing out, and so on.
- Can you integrate an expectation or requirement for students to review their online study habits?

Supporting Resources

Resources that are accessible and inclusive are important in enabling online learning.

- Introduce variation into the way that explanatory resources are incorporated to maintain interest. Consider using case studies, audio files, narrated powerpoint files, excerpts from lectures, and so on.
- What suite of e-books or other e-resources do you have in place?
- How can students share with each other relevant resources that they have identified as useful? Require students to use resources recommended by their peers in an assignment, providing them with a means to share.

What fits with your students?

Harnessing the student voice is a key aspect of effective digital learning (Ferrell, Smith, and Knight, 2018). Given that students prioritise use of their own preferred technology (Sharpe, Benfield, Roberts and Francis, 2006), it is important that online learning is designed in a way that takes account of your students and their interests.

- How can students be involved in adapting courses to a more substantively online approach?
- What technology or software would your students prefer to use? How can you find that out?
- Can you integrate learning analytics into your provision to help find out what features and resources your students actually use?

Additional Resources & References

Can you help us improve this resource or suggest a future one? Do you need this resource in an alternative format? Please contact us at cie@liverpool.ac.uk

A full list of references are available on the Centre for Innovation in Education website.

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