



Teaching Online... Defining the New Normal

Zala Fashant

Currently, I am presenting online at the Accelerated Teaching Online Institute to faculty at a local university in Minnesota about redesigning courses for online delivery. I say local only because I live in Minnesota and yet I am doing this from Greece where I am tucked in safely riding out the Covid-19 pandemic. Online, we are only seconds apart via Zoom and the learning management system. I don't know many of these faculty, but I am getting to do so based on the activities presented at the institute.

As we move from emergency remote teaching to online teaching to delivery significant learning, I have seen a parallel to the scrambling efforts governments and healthcare systems have undergone these past few months. Faculty want to do their best. They want their students to succeed just as they had when they saw them in previous courses, some which were offered in classrooms on campus, in the online environment, or a combination of both.

But this is a new frontier, for faculty. In the past, they have had the option of the type of course delivery they preferred. In Minnesota, we would have to close schools and campuses due to winter temperatures reaching -30 degrees Fahrenheit or snowstorms of a foot of snow and winds up to 40 miles per hour; conditions that made survival dicey. However, in a day or two, we adjusted, cleared roads and parking lots and daily life resumed. Faculty could move to some quick assignments online or via email to get through the temporary emergency and learning would continue as normal.

Suddenly, the luxury of offering courses in a variety of deliveries vanished. With stay-at-home lockdowns in place, it was strongly recommended that only essential personnel went to work and only essential travel for food, medical and the like, was acceptable. For the first time, many faculty were stripped of choice and needed to continue student learning moving forward by meeting with their students virtually. With no real end in sight, this was the new normal – at least for now.

As I monitored some online sites, I noticed a graphic that was being copied from post to post with the subject: "Who do I want to be during COVID-19?"* I developed this graphic to share with the faculty at the Accelerated Teaching Online Institute. As with many changes, those who must change go through three stages or zones: Fear, Learning, and Growth. In early to mid-March, I began reading posts that reflected the fear comments. By this time, stay-at-home and school-closing orders had been given. With fear of the unknown, faculty and teachers questioned what to do and how to move forward. In facing the shock of disasters, some weren't as prepared as others to exist in this new landscape – Maslow's survival stages.

With time, and perhaps with the shock wearing off, the fearful- and emotional-centered statements turned into ways to adjust. Faculty moved to learning as a way to move forward. The idea of relying on their experience of the changes they dealt with in the past, and knowing that they had the skills and thinking to deal with this situation, would make them successful. This is the learning process itself. By uncovering content and finding the links to mental file folders holding previous learning, they could rely on what they knew to build new learning. The statements changed from emotionally-based to cognitively-based statements as they considered new possibilities. Students go through the same zones as they enter college or take your course on campus or online. They may fear the content or the way it is delivered. It is important to recognize the fear of this pedagogical challenge and design your course in ways to alleviate the threat so the learning can begin immediately.

Fear Not! Learning to Grow...



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As I write this, I know we are moving to the growth zone as we learn strategies to deal with this situation. The Accelerated Teaching Online Institute is helping faculty navigate through the Fear, Learning, and Growth Zones. Globally, we are all needing to get to this stage. This isn't a higher education problem alone. Almost every industry and person is growing through this. There isn't one answer or simple solution. Change requires a cloth of woven threads to problem solve our way out of this. For teachers and faculty, they will need to be able to provide courses and learning experiences that will be designed to quickly shift from the normal to the new normal by literally flipping a switch and designing parallel course delivery to do so. Community will be established in person regardless if it is seeing students on campus or "seeing" them online. Doing so will help our minds reach an equilibrium where we become comfortable with the new normal, knowing we have a designed solution in place. As with the swing of the pendulum during forced change, we often move to a complete 180 degree reaction first, as we move find a more permanent solution.



Will all education move to an online environment? I doubt it. We don't all read our books on a tablet. We like to pick up a book and flip through the pages. For some, it is holding the 3D object and placing a bookmark or dog-earring the corner of the page to mark our progress which helps the engagement. We don't all shop online. Many enjoy going to store, seeing and touching the merchandise and being social with the people who work there. Knowing that well-designed courses can move quickly, providing effective teaching and significant learning when it is necessary, will be the new normal. For faculty the energy of seeing the faces of students sitting in close proximity, light up when they understand something for the first time, or share new thinking, is irreplaceable. It is what drives us and why we get up in the morning.

Together, and individually, we will define the new normal. We will learn, and in turn, grow. In the words of T. S. Eliot:

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time*

For more information about the Accelerated Teaching Online Institute or to learn more about our book, *Designing Effective Teaching and Significant Learning*, used in ATOI go to [Encoreprodev.com](http://encoreprodev.com)

*Adapted from Canales, Cerina. March 25, 2020. PARTEAGUAS Podcast. www.parteaguas.org.