Supporting Online Teachers: Moving Pedagogical Know-how into Virtual Classrooms

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CIDER Session

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Session Objectives

- To explore the concept of virtual pedagogies
- To identify the shifts in thinking and doing which happen between face-to-face and online teaching
- To reflect on the impacts virtual teaching has on philosophies of teaching and learning
- To discuss ethical issues of conducting research via online technologies

Context

- Instructional Designer at St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, NS

- Doctoral student, University of South Australia

- Researcher exploring ways individuals – both professors and students – come to online classrooms as learners

Who's here?

Are you a(n):

    A. Instructional Designer

    B. Researcher

    C. Professor of Distance courses

    D. Just plain curious!

    E. Other *(respond in the Chat area)*

Research Questions

- Do MEd professors change perspectives on teaching and learning when they move to an online teaching environment?

- How do they negotiate identity and build community online?

- Is it necessary for online professors to redefine teaching style and content to match the online learning environment?

Framing Definitions

Pedagogy:

The act, process, or art of imparting knowledge and skill

Instructional Design:

The practice of maximizing the effectiveness, efficiency, and appeal of instruction and other learning experiences

Pedagogical Benefits of Elearning

- Technological advances can change the educational landscape significantly.

    - Part of the success incorporating new technology and tools lies in the **rationale**, the **willingness to change**, and the **supports** needed to make that change.

Learning Design

"The field of learning design seeks to describe educational processes in a standardized way that can be shared, and hence adapted and improved. ...It is based on the concept of a standardized 'language' or framework to describe educational activities."

(Dalziel, 2008, pp. 376–377).

Shifting Paradigms

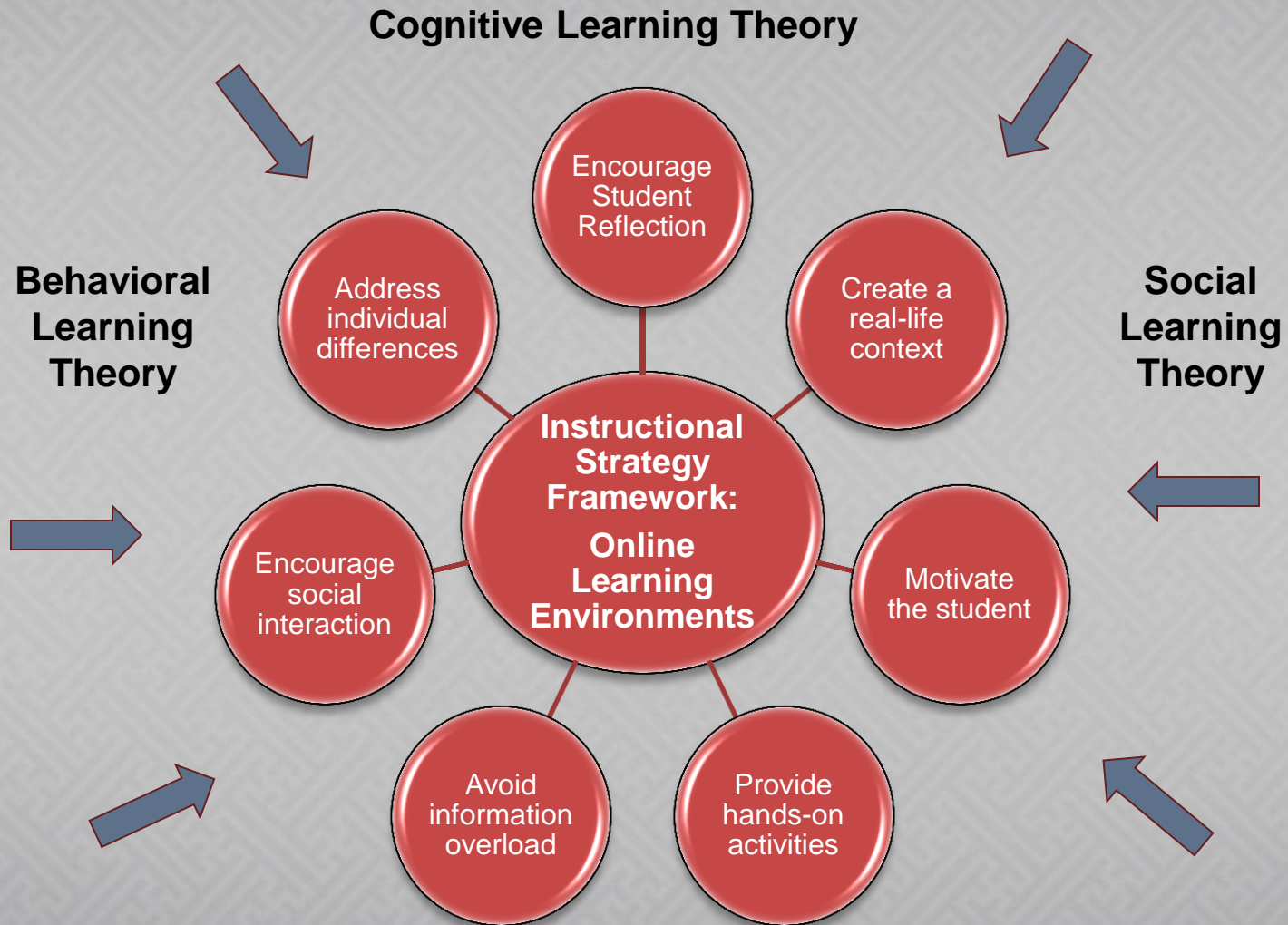"Instructors need to be open-minded and realize that there will be frustrations."
(Fein & Logan, 2003, p. 45).

- Teaching in a virtual classroom requires learning and application of new skills and, as Naidu (2006) observes, may also require "de-skilling" (p. 61) of ingrained face-to-face practices. Throughout the transition, the instructor (as learner) must be encouraged and supported to reflect on the changes and emerging issues which may impact on their teaching (Dalziel, 2008).

Interview Participant

"I'm finding it frustrating ... some of the lacks of understanding ... and wondering why it is that some things seem so simple that normally have been really easy to teach, aren't, and what it is that is causing the problems."

Learning Theories at Play

Cognitive Learning Theory

Behavioral Learning Theory

Social Learning Theory

Encourage Student Reflection

Address individual differences

Create a real-life context

Instructional Strategy Framework:

Online Learning Environments

Encourage social interaction

Motivate the student

Avoid information overload

Provide hands-on activities

Johnson & Aragon, 2003, p. 34

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Instructor Role

"The instructor must shift from the role of content provider to content facilitator, gain comfort and proficiency in using the [tools and technology] as the primary teacher-student link, and learn to teach effectively without the visual control provided by direct eye contact."

(Fein & Logan, 2003, p. 46)

Interview Participant

"I almost feel like sometimes I am trying to manage too much in the online world. ... you are multi-tasking to the extreme. ... It is almost overwhelming sometimes. There are so many beeps and whistles going on at one time, I just can't, it is hard to wrap your head around it sometimes."

Focus Group Participant

"That first [virtual] *class is kind of like being a first year teacher, sort of everything is new, and yet you have this memory...recent memory of everything going successfully, and so there is this huge frustration well of knowing that you're a good teacher, and this is all kind of a mystery."*

Focus Group Participant

"My whole life I have been a really good teacher and now I have a really deep sense that the students did not experience the best of me and what I have to offer."

Focus Group Participant

"The next time around, there would be much less technological stuff getting in the way, and I will be able to really focus on the pedagogical. It [took] much more energy ... going into this technological environment."

Focus Group Participant

My teaching style … changed to be a bit more student-centred online and that in turn seems to have influenced my teaching style in my face-to-face classes. I tend to make them more interactive, more student-centred now."

Focus Group Participant

"I feel connected to my students, but in a very different way. You're right, it is kind of weird, I wouldn't recognize any of them if I met them."

Andrew, StFX Professor

"The majority of my thinking and energy has [now] *gone into pedagogical considerations: how my students are doing and the quality of the learning— are they learning and if so, what? I now believe the will to learn can find a way to express itself anywhere if the instructor attends to the climate and expectations are clear."*

My Journal Excerpt

"They were no longer trying to make their classroom practice fit into an online environment; instead, they were allowing their orientation to teaching and learning shape the experience. They were placing the learning back into the hands of their students."

Pedagogical Benefits (... of Elearning)

- The ability to cultivate a strong sense of community,

- Effective small group possibilities, excellent and responsive partners working on projects together

- Collaborative constructivist learning in our online courses.

Mode doesn't matter!

It's more about effective teaching practices

Ethical Considerations

- Ethics approvals from UniSA and host site granted without revisions
  - The nature and location of electronic data was an ethical consideration in terms of access to data transmitted over the Internet (Anderson & Kanuka, 2003).
  - I advised participants in writing and verbally that I could not "absolutely guarantee that data would not be accessed, used, changed, or destroyed" (Anderson & Kanuka, 2003, p. 62) by individuals with the authority to access the data (i.e., network administrators) or unauthorized personnel (i.e., hackers).

Maintaining Privacy

- Elluminate's recording function was set to remove individual names on playback, further addressing concerns over confidentiality.

- Once the raw data was collected and analyzed, it was transferred to a DVD, stored in a locked cabinet in my office, and removed from the external server.

A Few Research Lessons Learned:

- The importance of selecting methods and data collection tools which the researcher and participants are each familiar with cannot be emphasized enough.
  - I recommend that researchers invest time in learning the tools.
  - If research participants are unfamiliar with the platform, the researcher must honour this and spend time with participants building skills and confidence.
  - The researcher cannot assume that since participants are joining him or her online that they are technologically skilled.

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Some Final Thoughts

- Connection between research and practice are multifaceted and the outcomes of teacher-based research need to be of **practical value.** (Kincheloe, n.d.)

- The study is unique because it is focused narrowly on professors of education—experts in the field of education—who are learning to teach in an online environment, an environment that requires these educators to use traditional, synchronous, face-to-face classroom teaching tools as well as the asynchronous capabilities built into online teaching and learning tools.

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