

Chapter 22

A Framework for the Redesign Principles That Improved Engagement in an Online Graduate Class

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ABSTRACT

At a large, Midwest university, the authors taught an online course to graduate students in an educational reading methods course. While the course covered compelling content, the user experience frustrated students as they struggled to navigate an outmoded online learning management system (LMS), which inhibited their ability to engage with course content. Recognizing that the course could be a powerful and relevant learning experience for students, the chapter authors drew on engagement theory, technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK), and the triple E framework to redesign the course. While maintaining the valuable course content, the chapter authors developed a framework to create an engaging and positive online learning experience. This chapter describes the framework and details how the course was redesigned, articulates the rationale for the course changes, and explores the positive impact it had on teaching and learning.

INTRODUCTION

According to the 2015 Distance Education Enrollment Report, nearly 30% of higher education students are taking online courses, and that number continues to grow (Allen & Seaman, 2015). Since online courses are not limited by time or location, they afford more flexibility and access to learning than ever before (Jacobi, 2017; Dixon, 2015). What's more, researchers found that there are distinct advantages to

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-8047-9.ch022

taking online courses, such as higher levels of academic achievement, more time on task, and increased engagement (Dixson, 2010, 2015; Rovai, 2002). As more and more students take online courses, it has become increasingly important to ensure content delivery is purposeful and engaging in these online learning spaces. However, while many traditional institutions of higher education are adopting virtual Learning Management Systems (LMS) (e.g. Blackboard, Canvas, or Moodle) and offering online classes, the instructional design of these courses often lack meaningful engagement, such as maintaining relevance, creating a positive user experiences and fostering student-centered learning experiences, which can negatively impact student engagement and academic performance (Dixson, 2010, 2015; Jacobi, 2017).

Because online courses are physically isolating, it can be challenging to create opportunities for meaningful engagement. Although many students report having positive experiences in online courses, others report having had less than ideal experiences often citing challenges such as the lack of interpersonal interaction (Jaggers & Xu, 2016). Employing best pedagogical practices for online environments is a critical component to designing successful web-based courses (Angelino, Williams & Natvig, 2007; Dixson, 2010). As online learning becomes an essential component of higher education, instructors need a framework that considers student engagement while streamlining content delivery, enhancing peer interactions, and creating real world learning experiences with activities and assignments (Allen & Seaman, 2015; Dixson, 2015; Jacobi, 2017; Jaggers & Xu, 2016; Lee, 2017).

This chapter will discuss the decisions two university instructors made in an effort to redesign an online course to offer opportunities for meaningful engagement. This case study describes how the instructors fostered engagement in an online course, while recognizing it was imperative not to simply duplicate a face-to-face classroom model in the online learning space (Huett, Moller, Foshay, Coleman, 2008). Social learning is a powerful and engaging pedagogical approach (Hewson & Hughes, 2005), which is apparent in many face-to-face learning situations, but it can be challenging to transition this pedagogical paradigm to online settings. To do so, the instructors aimed to increase the relevancy of the curated course content, improve the user experience by making a dynamic and authentic learning environment, and ensure that the course was student-centered.

BACKGROUND

This case study examines the redesign of an online graduate course that serves approximately 200 students yearly. The course was a reading methods course for preservice middle and high school teachers that was a requirement for state teaching licensure. Having earned their Bachelor's degree, the students enrolled in the online course were pursuing their M.Ed. in their respective teaching discipline, such as English, history, music, or P.E. These graduate students were enrolled in a one year teacher preparation program, and most of their courses were face-to-face. The online course was taught fall, spring, and summer semesters to several content areas simultaneously; for example, math and science preservice teachers were enrolled in the fall course together. The course was taught asynchronously and completely online.

This case study focuses on the redesign principles the two instructors employed to make the course more engaging and effective. Originally, the online course was created in 2008, and the instructors inherited the course and its curated content in 2014. For two years the instructors taught the original course, and throughout this time informal feedback and course evaluations evidenced that while the course content was informative, the course should be updated to reflect engaging online pedagogical

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