

Chapter 73

Engaging Students in Emergency Remote Teaching: Strategies for the Instructor

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in emergency remote teaching taking place globally. Despite the abrupt and rapid transition as well as the temporary nature of emergency remote teaching, it is possible to implement quality online teaching. Instructors can benefit from a review of findings and strategies found in online learning literature. This chapter discusses the challenges of emergency remote teaching and recommends suitable teaching strategies that can be quickly implemented by instructors. The focus is on strategies that can help to engage students by promoting learner-content interaction, learner-instructor interaction, and learner-learner interaction. This chapter also discusses strategies that can build a community of inquiry during emergency remote teaching. Future research directions are proposed.

INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic has created a global crisis-driven experiment, forcing classes to move from face-to-face instruction to remote teaching (Govindarajan & Srivastava, 2020). While many may regard this as online teaching, the abrupt and temporary switch to online teaching may be better understood as emergency remote teaching and should be evaluated differently (Affouneh et al., 2020; Hodges et al., 2020).

It is important to make a distinction between online learning and emergency remote teaching. While online learning may allow and require months of preparation and design, instructors who have to move their classes online during crisis situations do not have such a luxury (Bao, 2020; Manfuso, 2020; Schlesselman, 2020). Because of the short timeframe, the transformation from face-to-face teaching to

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emergency remote teaching paled in comparison to the quality expected of well-designed online teaching (Lederman, 2020). Similar to the experience of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2003, instructors had to quickly redesign their teaching strategies to teach remotely while students stay home (Fox, 2007). Emergency remote teaching is also deemed as a temporary situation, with the expectation that everything will return to normalcy after the crisis is over.

In the rapid and urgent move to emergency remote teaching, instructors focused on replicating face-to-face instruction using technology. Teaching and learning centers in universities provided resources, workshops and technical support to assist instructors to move their classes online (Schlesselman, 2020). Although expectations may differ between intentionally-designed online teaching and emergency remote teaching (Manfuso, 2020), it is still important and also possible to maintain quality standards for emergency remote teaching (Dutton & Mohapatra, Forthcoming). Teaching and learning centers observed how instructors tried to move their face-to-face teaching online without any revision, yet it is clear that having a three-hour synchronous or asynchronous online lecture is not ideal (Schlesselman, 2020). The best practices in face-to-face teaching need to be adapted to the online context as it is not the case of “one-size fits all” (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020, p. iii; Gillett-Swan, 2017, p. 21). Although technology has made it possible to replicate face-to-face teaching through synchronous or asynchronous means, lectures should not be replicated without any adjustment in content, activities and even duration. For example, video lectures should be segmented into chunks which are less than six minutes (Guo et al., 2014).

While much research has been conducted on various aspects of online learning, not all are applicable to emergency remote teaching. Despite the short preparation time for emergency remote teaching, it is possible for instructors to achieve quality standards for teaching by implementing strategies that do not require significant planning and design. The purpose of this chapter is to help instructors who are unfamiliar with online teaching to review research findings and recommendations which can be quickly implemented in emergency remote teaching. As such, the focus of this chapter is not on strategies that pertain to the design of an online course, as design typically takes place before the start of the course and assumes that there is sufficient preparation time. Instead, the intent is to develop a systematic review of strategies and tools that instructors can employ immediately to improve the quality of their online teaching and emergency remote teaching. While websites and online articles may offer useful tips and sharing from experienced instructors, this chapter aims to present recommendations based on past studies and peer reviewed publications.

One of the most important aspects of teaching is student engagement. It is associated with positive outcomes of student development and success (Trowler, 2010). Due to the unplanned nature of emergency remote teaching, instructors and students alike may encounter obstacles and challenges in the shift to online delivery. One of the challenges faced by instructors is students’ engagement in the environment of emergency remote teaching (Affouneh et al., 2020). However, quality online teaching as well as emergency remote teaching requires student engagement in the form of collaboration and community (Schlesselman, 2020).

While student engagement may be related to various factors such as student’s personality, motivation and self-confidence (Mandernach et al., 2011), this chapter will focus on instructor strategies rather than student-related factors. Numerous studies have demonstrated the link between instructor practices and student engagement (e.g. Cardwell, 2011; Ma et al., 2015; Martin & Bollinger, 2018). This chapter aims to review recommendations that can improve student engagement in emergency remote teaching, particularly for higher education. As the strategies are derived from online learning literature, they are also useful and applicable to online learning during times of normalcy and can benefit online instructors

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