The Hard and Soft Sides of Remote Teaching and Learning

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The hard side. In each semester of my online introductory course, I delivered the content, and I was skilled in recorded lectures with PowerPoints, designing, and discussions. Each semester I tweaked the course, used a different textbook or used no textbook, changed assignments, and recorded new videos. In rereading the first line of this narrative, the problem is apparent.   I was delivering content. Sure, I engaged students in dialogues, but it is hard when everyone agrees with each other. Of course, I used quizzes, but when I looked at the analytics, students were not listening to the lectures; they were only downloading the PowerPoints. I was not saddened enough to stop supplying the PowerPoints because I did want the students to have access to information. Students reported when I used a textbook, they didn't buy it, so I could not deliver information that way. I don't think it was my voice they were avoiding; I think it was boredom that they were avoiding. When I teach face to face, I don't just stand there and talk, but virtually I was a talking head. I was saddened when a student from one of my classes stopped me and said, "I loved your class! All you have to do is print the PowerPoints, and you can pass any quiz or test and get an A." I was not pleased.

Enter Sarah Schroeder, The School of Education's digital design maven, and her Professional Certifications class. One of the assignments a student presented was completed with genial.ly. Genial.ly is a free (with purchasing options) online tool to develop interactive pages. Through genial.ly, I learned to develop beyond PowerPoints. The students could not just scroll through a PowerPoint looking for quiz answers; they had to click on icons to view further information. I could design games. I developed genial.ly presentations for any set of information that had been previously deemed by my students as a boring lecture. Though the genial.ly, the students had to at least click a link. Students increased both the number of page views and the amount of time they spent on the course in Canvas. First attempts on quizzes also improved. (I allow them a retake because I want them to understand what is being quizzed)

When I begin teaching face to face, I will again use these genial.ly presentations during lectures, hopefully having students click along with me as I explain the content as well as showing it. I'll be interspersing polling software to ensure we are all on the same "interactive" page. During synchronous instruction, less engaged students can answer questions for formative assessments - and I'll know who doesn't.   Polling software can tell me who is taking part, and

who turned off their video to go get a snack. Now I had an ongoing formative assessment that gave me information about topics I needed to reteach.

I had also been using Kahoot, and students had often used it before the university, so I needed something that students could view without a 'that again" responses. During quarantine I took a bite out of Pear Deck (forgive me), an app that provides response prompts to PowerPoint or Google.slides! Yes, it's icon is (duh) a pear. Through Pear Deck, presentations become interactive. Students can rate their understanding, agree or disagree with a concept, or even provide insights into their levels of stress. When we are face to face, I will use this tool to wake students up when they are drowsing through a PowerPoint presentation. With Pear Deck I plan to have a "bell ringer" posted as the students enter the room. Throughout any presentation, I'll be prompting students to answer questions. Through Pear Deck, answers can be displayed anonymously, reducing any threat associated with being wrong. Then at the end of class, student can use Pear Deck to submit an exit slip. No more scribbling on pages from notebooks or paper napkins (I'm not kidding). I learned and used these tools sitting at my kitchen table. I   am confident they will boost attention and engagement when we are face -to-face. I'll also plan to use these data as formative assessments to identify student confusion. Most importantly students will be doing and thinking about something rather than checking for texts.

The soft side.   For part of the quarantine put I worked with my seven-year old granddaughter on her "device" (her very correct word for the iPad given to her by Cincinnati Public Schools).   This was not as easy as it appears. The first issue was finding everything and being there on time, a problem also apparent in my university students. Sometimes things just didn't work. After about 20 minutes, Zoey, a good kid, just couldn't pay attention anymore, turned off the camera, and did her work much more quickly by herself, as did my university students! I increased my empathy with my university students being in the right place at the right time and focusing for any longer than twenty minutes. Any videos I have online now are fifteen minutes or less. I have a more lenient "late" policy. I have empathy for all students. Working remotely taught me that online "lessons" aren't always as clear cut as it seems, and patience and acceptance are essential.

Impact. What was the impact of going remote for me? I became even more of a nerd than I was face to face and will make changes to match that identity, such as exploring further game design software or provide individual virtual white boards that allow me to see how students are responding. Though I always had high evaluations for supporting students, I will now be more attentive to their online learning issues with the class materials. I hope to increase engagement by having greater empathy for the students' very complex lives. There should be both a material and relational change. I hope…