

Designing and Co-Facilitating Online Graduate Classes: Reflections and Recommendations

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ABSTRACT

This paper reflects on the experiences of two colleagues who co-taught a larger-than-traditional online graduate class in a Master of Continuing Education program in the fall of 2002. Their goal was to test a number of design and facilitation assumptions that had been successful in smaller online graduate-level classes. They began with a set of agreed-upon design and facilitation principles acquired from several years' experience teaching online graduate classes. Their experiences in the larger online class and their subsequent recommendations are presented here in three phases: pre-course design, mid-course

RÉSUMÉ

Dans cet article, l'auteur se penche sur les expériences de deux collègues en automne 2002 qui ont coenseigné à un groupe plus nombreux que la norme, un cours intensif en ligne en études graduées dans le programme de maîtrise de Formation continue à l'automne 2002. Leur but était de mettre à l'épreuve un certain nombre d'hypothèses de calcul et de facilitation ayant bien réussi au sein des cours interactifs en ligne en études graduées avec de plus petits effectifs. Les deux collègues ont commencé avec certains principes convenus en calcul et en facilitation acquis par l'intermédiaire de leurs

design modifications, and post-course evaluation, with reflections on their original assumptions and design/facilitation strategies. The paper closes with their thoughts on this novel experience of co-teaching a larger online graduate class.

expériences d'enseignement de cours en ligne en études graduées. L'auteur nous présente en trois étapes, les expériences subies dans le cours en ligne, où l'effectif était plus grand que la norme, et les recommandations subséquentes : le prédesign de cours, les modifications du design à la mi-session et l'évaluation de fin de cours. À la suite, on trouve des réflexions sur les hypothèses originales, sur des stratégies de facilitation-design, sur cette expérience originale en coenseignement d'un cours interactif en ligne en études graduées ayant un effectif pour grand que la norme.

INTRODUCTION

The reflective journey described in this paper began in the spring of 2002 when two colleagues decided to co-teach a fall 2002 graduate online course called "Research Methods" in the Master of Continuing Education (MCE) program. Previously taught in sections of no more than 24 students, this exploratory larger-class format combined two small sections to create a class of 40. The colleagues, who had successfully and skilfully taught in this program since its inception, were interested in learning how to best facilitate effective learning in graduate classes larger than those typically offered in this program. They were also aware of the pressures within their institution to offer larger online classes due to shrinking post-secondary institutional budgets (Werry & Mowbray, 2001). In this pilot, they retained the traditional MCE teacher-student ratio (1 instructor to 24 students), while combining their two different teaching styles and research perspectives to enrich the learning experience for both students and themselves. From the onset, they strongly believed that co-teaching is mutually beneficial when both instructors trust and respect each other's professional integrity and competence and are willing to put in the extra time and effort required for this collaboration. This paper describes how their experience of co-teaching this larger online class both affirmed and challenged their key assumptions about

teaching and learning in this environment, as well as broadened their understanding of co-teaching in general.

The MCE program was developed and offered by the Faculty of Continuing Education at the University of Calgary about 10 years ago as the first Canadian graduate program in “workplace learning” (Garrison & Kirby, 1995). Constantly evolving, this program’s key target students are workplace learning specialists responsible for promoting and facilitating learning in the workplace in various settings and organizational contexts. The program’s four key goals for graduates are that they attain a broad and critical perspective on the field of workplace learning, an appreciation for linkages between theory and practice, a range of intervention skills critical to facilitating workplace learning, and an understanding of themselves as individual, team, and organizational learners (Wiesenberg, 2000). The three key assumptions that guided the original design of the MCE program, as well as its ongoing evolution, were that quality or depth of understanding is derived from critical discourse, that individuals integrate new knowledge with previous understanding through private reflection upon their own individual context, and that learners must go beyond reflection to the application of core program content in specific and practical ways in order to fully integrate their learning (Wiesenberg, 2000).

The co-instructors’ learning journey evolved over three phases of the program development process: pre-course design; mid-course design modifications; and post-course evaluation and reflection. As experienced adult educators, both have a “reflective-researcher” perspective on teaching and program development (Jarvis, 1999) and regarded their decision to co-teach a larger online class as an opportunity to learn more about their design and teaching assumptions and abilities. They went about this by reflecting before co-teaching (in the pre-course phase), reflecting while co-teaching (in the facilitation or mid-course modification phase), and reflecting after co-teaching (post-course evaluation phase) (Schoen, 1983). Their reflections are offered here as one illustration of issues faced and subsequent lessons learned from this larger online graduate course within the context of a large post-secondary institution of learning. They believe that this paper and its recommendations contribute to the current gap in the literature on program design and delivery within any online co-teaching/learning context.

Pre-course Design Phase (Spring 2002 to September 2002)

An effective “theory of practice” requires continuous reflection on one’s current espoused theory in order to integrate new experiences and revise key underlying assumptions (Jarvis, 1999). When faced with completely new

teaching challenges, experienced instructors generally begin by transferring what has worked in previous, similar contexts (i.e., test old assumptions), while being open to revising old and adopting new ways of thinking about the teaching/learning enterprise (Wiesenberg, 2000). In this case, both instructors began this process of “theory testing” by first clarifying their existing assumptions, identifying which of these they shared (see Four Key Shared Assumptions), and strategizing about how to apply them to the new co-teaching experience that they faced.

FOUR KEY SHARED ASSUMPTIONS

1. Deeper understanding of one’s self results in deeper understanding of workplaces and society in general.
2. Program/course planning is a non-linear and complex interaction of different stakeholders’ priorities, tasks, and perspectives.
3. All programs/courses are planned within a unique set of social, economic, cultural, and political circumstances.
4. A safe learning community encourages more critical and meaningful discussion and understanding of issues.

In this pre-course phase, the instructors tried to imagine how their shared assumptions about online teaching/learning might transfer from smaller to larger online classes. The teaching/learning assumptions outlined in Four Key Shared Assumptions were derived from the instructors’ collective expertise in adult learning and development (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999), their understanding of students’ intersecting roles of practitioner-researcher (Jarvis, 1999; Wenger, 1998), and their beliefs about the nature of program development (Caffarella, 2002), teaching adults (Pratt, 1998), and facilitating online learning (Salmon, 2000).

In the process of identifying their assumptions, they began to notice interrelationships amongst their shared teaching/learning models and principles. For example, using Salmon’s five-stage model of teaching and learning online as the framework (access and motivation, online socialisation, information exchange, knowledge construction, and development of interdependence and self-directedness), it became apparent that novice learners focus on mastering the technical system, while expert learners focus on using the system in innovative ways, and that moving novice learners toward this expert approach was consistent with Pratt’s developmental perspective of teaching adults, as well as Wenger’s philosophy of building a collaborative sense of community online.

Since helping students to adopt a practitioner-researcher work role was a key goal of this course, the instructors also focused on helping students transfer their learning to their respective workplace learning contexts by encouraging them to use their own workplace issues in their assignments and online discussions.

The instructors' first shared assumption was that students' understanding of themselves as individual learners results in changes in self-understanding, as well as in how they view their workplaces and their society. Both felt this is best accomplished through "learner-centered" (Steeple, 1993), "experiential" (Kolb, 1984), and "application of theory to practice" (Wiesenberg, 2000) teaching methods that move students from teacher dependency toward mutual interdependence in the learning process. They agreed that this translates into encouraging critical discourse that builds knowledge (as opposed to disseminates information) and providing private reflection time (to integrate new knowledge with previous understanding) through learner-centred instructional techniques such as "tell us your theory of practice or what you do now in terms of workplace learning research." Complementary, experiential, and knowledge-building instructional techniques would include asking students to "tell us where your approach came from," "tell us how will you demonstrate this new learning about research in your workplace practice," and "show us how you critically analyzed this course article." Essentially, they both agreed with the original three key assumptions upon which the MCE program had been founded and that their role was to design instructional techniques that successfully applied them in their classrooms.

Their second shared assumption was that the program/course planning process is a complex interaction of stakeholders' priorities, tasks, and perspectives that is best addressed in a flexible, non-linear manner. Using time-tested approaches in the course pre-design phase (Cranton, 1996; Gagne, Briggs, & Wager, 1988), being prepared for last-minute and ongoing changes to the design as you move through it, and recognizing that there is no single method of planning educational and training programs that will ensure success (Caffarella, 2002; Sork, 2000) are all critical to the design of effective learning events. This often requires cycling backward to redesign a particular aspect of a course if it appears not to be working for students (Caffarella, 2002). Being appropriately more or less directive with students and setting clear and reasonable guidelines for assignments, marking criteria, and ground rules for weekly participation are two additional strategies consistent with this belief (Wiesenberg & Hutton, 1996).

It is often necessary to be more directive in the first few weeks of a class and then less so when students are fully and confidently interacting in critical discourse. Engaging students in modifying original guidelines as new issues emerge and collaboratively creating a class community charter that

demonstrates flexibility and sensitivity to the diverse set of needs and characteristics present in any group of adult learners are critical. Program planning is very much a "learning process" for the planner, even when a proven model is used, and it requires an open-minded, flexible, and collaborative approach (Caffarella, 1998). Co-designing and co-teaching courses adds another layer of complexity to this already challenging process.

The co-instructors' third shared assumption was that all programs are planned within social (students, instructors), economic (institutional, individual), cultural (communication characteristics), and political (institutional, individual) contexts (Cervero & Wilson, 1996). This means it is important to socially connect students with instructors and with each other; to give lots of feedback to postings via private mail (when confidentiality is needed), as well as within public discussion conferences; to minimize extra costs such as long-distance phone calls and course materials; to be sensitive to communication differences amongst students/groups; to not require the disclosure of confidential workplace information during collaborative exercises; and to use as many different kinds of communication modes, exercises, and outcome measures as possible to take the many forms of cultural diversity (ethnic, gender, geographic, and idiosyncratic) into account.

Their fourth shared assumption was that a safe and supportive learning community will encourage students to engage in more in-depth thinking, risk taking, and meaningful discussion (Wenger, 1998). This means guiding students in the co-creation of this learning community by supporting openness about ideas, feelings, risk taking, and learning from "mistakes" with positively constructive feedback. Ultimately, this is also how students learn to become "co-learners/knowledge builders" and "practitioner-researchers" who are self-directed, interdependent as learners, and critically reflective thinkers (see Jarvis, 1999). Salmon's (2000) stage five describes learners who need little if any support from a formal instructor to reach their learning goals; instead, they work together to solve learning problems, build knowledge, and act as resources and guides to one another. Such a learning community (with the instructor on the side) takes over the learning process and takes whatever leadership is required from within its membership.

One of the most critical pre-course design issues facing the instructors involved developing a high-quality co-teaching relationship based on their identified shared teaching/learning assumptions. Shared assumptions do not necessarily imply shared facilitation styles and approaches. Thus the next step was to agree upon an approach that creatively combined their style and approach differences and then develop new procedures and processes for dealing with this larger class by trying to anticipate the learning needs of the adult learners in it.

Both instructors also appreciated that if the course was to be successful, the complex personal and institutional requirements linked to this course would involve careful negotiation of the needs of the program, the co-teachers, and the students (Caffarella, 2002; McLean, 2000; Sork, 2000). From the MCE program's perspective, the course in research methods needed to prepare students for an upcoming major project that required them to apply workplace learning theory to practice. From the instructors' perspective, the course represented the risk of failure to meet this need, as well as their professional responsibility. From the students' perspective, the course was typically viewed with some trepidation as most had little or no formal grounding in research methods. To address these different needs, the co-teachers developed the course to be workplace based and to offer abundant technical, managerial, social, and pedagogical support (Berge, 1995). Each instructor also modeled either a quantitative or qualitative approach to doing practitioner research in real workplace settings as a method of illustrating these two distinct research paradigms.

They also agreed that effective program development models for professional education stress the complex social and political nature of the program-planning process (McLean, 2000; Sork, 2000). For instance, Caffarella's (2002) most recent version of her interactive model of program planning acknowledged the role of power and politics, as well as the need for a complex range of interpersonal skills, in recognition of "the new knowledge we have about adult learners, the importance of context in planning, the influence of technology on both the planning and delivery of programs, and the global and diverse nature of our world" (p. 374).

It was equally clear to both that the literature on online learning (Palloff & Pratt, 2001; Salmon, 2000), adult learning (Jarvis, 1999; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Pratt, 1998), and communities of practice and learning (Wenger, 1998) collectively points to the importance of taking a developmental/nurturing approach to teaching online in order to build a sense of community amongst classmates. Recognizing that this course was only one of many priorities in adult students' busy lives, as well as the first online course that some will have taken, they decided to use Salmon's (2000) five-stage model of online learning to guide this community-building process.

This model delineates five key tasks that new online learners face. The first task is to learn how to access the course online and stay motivated to persist through the initial steep learning curve, which is when supportive instructors carefully build on prior knowledge to increase confidence and encourage classmates to collectively build a community of learning. The second task is to learn how to socialize and network online, which is when instructors model how to interact sensitively and appropriately with each other and with students. The third task is to learn to access and manage the

broad range of information that is available online, which is when advice and direct assistance from instructors and other more technologically experienced classmates are key. The fourth task, learning how to build new knowledge from one's own and others', occurs when learners engage in an active collaborative-learning process, by sharing different perspectives on key concepts and stretching their previously held individual ones. The final task is for learners to become responsible for their own learning and independent from the instructor, who becomes a resource, mentor, and co-learner (as opposed to expert). This is nurtured by gradual and careful encouragement and constructive feedback from instructors.

Another major pre-course design issue is the time pressures faced by adult learners who typically enter this program in mid-life, work full time, have several other home and community roles to fulfill simultaneously, and have been away from a formal educational setting for several years. As such, they face a number of transitional issues that can make adding the role of "student" to an already full life very challenging—acquiring a new identity of graduate student, entering a new peer group, and often becoming an online learner for the first time. As a result, some new students are very teacher-dependent at the beginning of this transitional process. Over the course of their many years teaching in the program, the co-instructors have observed that with supportive guidance, most of their students can successfully move from "teacher-directedness" to "student- or mutual-directedness" (Cranton, 1996) in a carefully designed, student-directed learning environment.

Mid-Course Design Modifications Phase (Mid-October to Mid-November 2002)

By mid-course, it became obvious to the instructors that they needed to revisit their assumptions in order to address students' formative feedback about what was working and not working for them at this point. A content analysis of students' critical-incidence feedback, which had been requested in the form of an anonymous survey based on Brookfield's Critical Incidence questions and submitted to the program administrator (Massey-Hicks & Wiesenbergh, 2002), revealed four themes, all of them relating to the four assumptions in various ways.

The first theme came from students' comments that they felt most engaged with the course when, within the more comfortable smaller-group forums, they found a way to meaningfully connect it with their own workplace practices. This theme appeared most closely related to the instructors' first and fourth assumptions (see Four Key Shared Assumptions). The highest levels of engagement happened when students worked in small teams on group activities, as they saw how their ideas contributed to a larger picture and gained a vision of themselves as practitioner-researchers. Working

closely in these teams helped many to feel involved, to feel part of a collaborative effort, and to feel committed to the goals of the course. A teleconference organized for the second week of class also contributed a great deal to making students and instructors feel connected—both to each other and to the course. As they mastered the computer-conferencing system, geographic distance between students and between students and their instructors seemed to disappear. This typifies Salmon's stage one (gaining access and becoming motivated).

The second theme of disengagement came from some students' initial feelings of being overwhelmed by the course readings and online postings from classmates, and it appeared most closely related to the instructors' second and third assumptions (see Four Key Shared Assumptions). As well, a perceived lack of clarity regarding assignment requirements created some confusion for a small group of students who had difficulty getting themselves organized and who repeatedly requested the instructors to be more directive. Others were puzzled by this small group of students, who were constantly questioning the student-directed teaching/learning process that they were growing to appreciate. This was not helped when some home computers crashed, log-ons failed, typing speeds proved too slow for effective online chats, and rural Internet services did not meet the demands of the online classroom or teleconference. Many students continually struggled to balance coursework with demanding workplace and family/home schedules. This also typifies Salmon's stage one (access and motivation).

The third theme emphasized that community building came from instructors' and classmates' supportive comments on students' individual ideas and contributions; together, these created a sense of belonging and trust. This was particularly helpful when the technology became a barrier, and it appeared to be most closely related to the instructors' second and fourth assumptions (see Four Key Shared Assumptions). As students risked sharing their thoughts and ideas in their teams and began to feel reassured that they were "on the right track" with supportive postings from them, a growing sense of excitement about the course's learning process and goals emerged. Peers provided supportive notes—both in team discussions and postings to private mailboxes. At the same time, some discovered that they could only gain a sense of connection with classmates through telephone calls. To address this, a second teleconference was arranged to help reduce confusion, create collective strategies for minimizing future confusion, and generate shared performance and communication expectations. These reactions are typical of Salmon's stages two (online socialization) and three (information exchange).

The fourth theme came from students' surprise at becoming "architects of their own learning" as knowledge building became collaborative, as well

as their surprise about how the collaborative teaching/learning approach facilitated the formation of strong relationships within the class. This theme appeared most closely related to the instructors' first and fourth assumptions (see Four Key Shared Assumptions). That strong relationships can form online without face-to-face contact was a huge revelation to many students. Many had entered the largely online MCE program thinking that a distance program would be impersonal and take less time than a face-to-face one, only to find that online interaction between/amongst students and instructors is much more time consuming and sometimes more intimate than face-to-face interaction. These reactions are typical of Salmon's stage four (knowledge construction) and somewhat of stage five (development of interdependence and self-directedness).

RELATIONSHIP OF THEMES TO FOUR SHARED ASSUMPTIONS

Theme 1: Engagement with the course appeared positively related to students' sense of "safety" within it and to a new aspect of self-concept as practitioner-researcher in their workplaces. (Assumptions 1 & 4)

Theme 2: Disengagement with the course appeared positively related to students' feelings of being overwhelmed by the course content, which appeared to be a function of the complexity of online communication combined with lack of experience with a student-directed teaching approach. (Assumptions 2 & 3)

Theme 3: A sense of belonging or community within the course appeared positively related to the amount of support received from instructors and classmates. (Assumptions 2 & 4)

Theme 4: The emergence of a new sense of self as "knowledge builder" appeared positively related to co-building a community of learners. (Assumptions 1 & 4)

Post-Course Evaluation and Reflection Phase (Winter 2003)

In the process of thinking about their co-teaching experience in this larger online class, the unexpected communication dynamics, and the mid-course formative and end-of-course summative course feedback, the instructors gained a number of insights. These assumptions are framed below in terms of how some of their original shared assumptions about designing and facilitating larger online graduate classes were both affirmed and challenged.

Their assumption about the value of a learner-centred and experiential approach was affirmed, as this pilot reinforced the importance of using classic adult learning principles as the design and facilitation foundation for both small and larger online classes. Although this was most evident in the mid-course Critical Incidents' formative feedback, it was also reinforced in the end-of-course standard summative course evaluations.

Their assumption about these adult students having adequate levels of self-directedness, technical expertise, and confidence about their ability to learn how to learn online was seriously challenged. This larger group of online learners was less skilled in online learning than expected and subsequently less self-confident within this environment. Adopting a more teacher-directed approach than originally planned addressed much of this initial angst, although a small group of students who remained instructor-dependent continued to feel that the deliberately student-directed approach lacked clarity and structure. "On your feet" mid-course design modifications, along with adopting a more teacher-directed approach, reassured many that they were on the right track by giving them the explicit instruction that they initially requested.

When the two instructors individually dealt with some student concerns quite differently at the beginning of the course, even more confusion resulted. However, as the instructors subsequently worked on devising a co-teaching system that complemented (rather than contradicted) their different facilitation styles, most students' initial frustration levels quickly dropped. This is when trust, respect, and open-mindedness between co-teachers, as well as between students and teachers, become critical.

Their assumption about the increase in numbers bringing an increase in diversity of adult learners was not only affirmed but "stretched," as this larger group of online learners brought more diversity to the classroom than either instructor expected. Some became "lost" when the course did not proceed in the traditional transmission format that they were used to in previous teacher-directed classes, while others had difficulty making the transition from face-to-face to online debate and discussion. Students who found the computer technology difficult to master incurred unnecessary long-distance phone costs by bypassing the computer to accomplish group tasks, while a few reacted by becoming unconnected from the course, the instructors, and their classmates altogether.

Nonetheless, the majority of students began to enjoy online learning, some so much so that their prolific postings raised concerns amongst others about the increased amount of time then required to open/read/respond to all of their long postings. Those who preferred to "listen" more than "talk" online were disconcerted with those more prolific online communicators who sought input from all classmates on all postings. More spontaneous

communicators posted without thinking about the consequences of their sometimes unclear impulsive messages, while other more reflective communicators read and reflected on postings off-line before posting generally more-structured and thoughtful replies.

Although a few students persisted in their belief that authentic connection could only happen face-to-face and that online communication lacked personal connection, most did successfully learn how to connect meaningfully in their virtual classroom. At times, a certain friction developed between those in these two groups who had difficulty understanding each other's point of view, sometimes interfering with the larger community-building process. To address these issues, the instructors modeled how to organize postings and communicate clearly and respectfully, as well as guiding students to collaboratively create a class charter of agreed-upon and appropriate non-offensive communication norms. Enlisting the help of those who were more skilful in the online environment to teach those who were not also contributed toward this community building. In the end, encouraging open communication (online, voice-to-voice, face-to-face) and open-mindedness about different perspectives helped most of this very diverse group of students learn to communicate with each other and with their instructors in a respectful and clear manner.

The instructors' assumption about the importance of a supportive learning community to critical discourse and cognitive growth was affirmed, but required more direct nurturing than expected. The instructors needed to become more present and directive online with this larger group in order to facilitate the community-building process. As well, helping students redefine their roles as self-directed, interdependent learners required more explicit modeling of authentic and supportive communication and of how to co-learn, co-research, and collectively engage in critical reflection than anticipated. The instructors put a great deal of energy into moving gradually toward Pratt's (1998) "developmental" approach to teaching, as well as guiding students toward Salmon's (2000) fifth developmental stage of interdependent online learner. The fact that some students did not appear to reach this desirable interdependent-learner stage gave rise to much post-course critical reflection.

RECOMMENDATIONS ABOUT COURSE DESIGN AND FACILITATION

This section's recommendations were derived from the instructors' post-course reflections on how this experience of co-teaching a larger online graduate class challenged their individual theories of practice about teaching/learning online. (For recommendations related to moving from face-

to-face to online graduate teaching, see Wiesenberg & Hutton, 1996, and Wiesenberg, 2001). Each recommendation is related to the program design and facilitation phase to which it appears most relevant, as well as to the instructors' initial shared assumptions about designing and facilitating online courses and online teaching/learning in general. Although created with larger online classes as the key focus, these recommendations apply to any online class of adult learners.

Recommendations for the Pre-course Design Phase

1. When co-teaching, spend as much time as possible before the course begins exploring and looking for both differences and shared assumptions and approaches to teaching/learning between co-teachers. For all of the reasons discussed in this paper, the time spent doing this will reduce the number of potential problems once the course is underway.
2. Do not make assumptions about the learners enrolled in any one course based on previous experience teaching this course, but research each new group's unique profile prior to its start. This means finding out about their general degree of self-directedness, online learning competence and confidence, and teamwork skills by looking at student application or program progress files, by asking other teachers who may have taught these students prior to the course in question, or by surveying the new students before the class begins.
3. If building in a face-to-face component to course delivery (i.e., blended learning) is not possible, use as many communication modes as possible to address the diverse communication preferences and skill sets of students. This means using voice-based (i.e., audio-conferences, telephone calls) and text-based (i.e., online, faxed, mailed) methods. Use both synchronous and asynchronous communication and make every effort to allow students located in different time zones to participate in the synchronous sessions.
4. Make student-friendly technical support available during times when full-time working adult students are most likely to need it (i.e., at the beginning of the course and then after 5:00 pm and on weekends in all time zones in which students reside). Although technical online manuals may be helpful to those already experienced in computer conferencing, access to "live" student-friendly technicians is most desirable for first-time online learners or those not able to effectively utilize online manuals.
5. Before the course begins, make sure students are aware of how much time is involved in effective and meaningful online communication. This offers them an opportunity to make room in their lives for the

extra time required by dropping, or putting on hold, their less-urgent non-student roles and responsibilities.

6. Before the course begins, co-design and agree to follow an effective and foolproof (i.e., with built-in backup strategies) set of strategies for dealing with different kinds of student concerns. Although not all concerns can be anticipated beforehand, a strategy for co-instructors to address them together off-line as they arise before addressing them as a co-teaching team online with students is critical to reducing student confusion, frustration, and anxiety.
7. Schedule online courses that contain complex content (i.e., graduate-level courses that require Salmon's stage-five skills) after students have gained some skill and confidence learning online (i.e., Salmon's stage-one skills). This should help ease their transition into a challenging new learning environment if they are returning to learning after a considerable length of time away from a formal educational program. Offering a mandatory pre-course online learning skills workshop, ideally face-to-face, just prior to the students' initial online course can be invaluable.
8. Assign one tutor or teaching assistant with good online facilitation skills, and course-content expertise if possible, for every small group (i.e., 8 to 10 students) in larger online classes to maximize each student's ability to benefit from this complex mode of learning. If feasible, conduct a research project to assess the optimal student-to-teacher ratio in your teaching/learning context, which may differ from that demonstrated in current research on credit courses, to provide a rationale for additional teaching resources.

Recommendations for the Course Facilitation Phase

Co-teaching, complex in traditional face-to-face classrooms, becomes considerably more so online, and even more so when co-teachers are located in different geographic locations (as were these instructors most of the time). Given this, shared beliefs, assumptions, and approaches regarding the teaching/learning process become the cornerstone of a successful co-teaching relationship.

1. Spend considerable time at the beginning of the course deliberately teaching appropriate online communication skills to facilitate the collaborative building of a safe learning environment. This may not be necessary if students have already taken online courses, but do not assume that they will naturally bring these skills into a new classroom as "experienced" online learners. In this respect, co-teachers' highly developed online communication skills are critical, as is a strong com-

mitment to spending the additional time and effort actively communicating with each other and with the students, using a number of different media, to start building this safe learning environment.

2. In the first week of the course, engage students in collaboratively creating a set of class norms that clearly state what mutually respectful communication looks like. Revisit this charter on a regular basis (frequently in the first few weeks) and update it as new circumstances arise. Demonstrate respectful communication style and constructively confront any breaches of this charter throughout the course, as students are not always aware of how easily online communication can be misunderstood. In this respect, instructors who effectively model mutually respectful online communication can deal quickly with communication that violates the charter.
3. Early in the course, put students into smaller groups with private discussion boards for most discussions and all projects, while having whole-class discussion boards for each key course topic discussion. Make sure that all students feel "heard" in both smaller- and larger-group communication forums. Again, consistent, regular, and respectful communication to students individually and in groups from both instructors is critical.
4. Be as teacher-directed at the beginning of the course as required for any new group of students, giving complete and clear instructions about: class structure and schedule; all larger- and smaller-group activities; assignment-marking criteria; and communication routes (private or public) for anticipated and unanticipated issues. Move toward a student-directed teaching approach in a manner that allows students to attain Salmon's fifth stage of interdependent online learning. Appreciating how students need to "learn to learn" independently from instructors' constructive feedback and continuous support is critical to successfully meeting this goal in any kind of learning environment.
5. Deliberately and systematically teach the skills required to successfully negotiate Salmon's five stages of online learning as students move through them, recognizing that not all students will move through them at the same pace. Use those students who attain higher stages more quickly to teach those who are struggling as a way to move students away from teacher dependence toward self-dependence and mutual interdependence. Consistent with the previous recommendation, co-instructors need to trust and rely on each other's professional competence (specifically, online facilitation skills) and belief in this learning goal.

6. Solicit formative feedback from students regularly as you move through the course, by guiding them through a critical reflective-analytical process (such as one of Brookfield's Critical Incidence exercises) that allows them to understand what works and does not work for them in this new learning environment, as well as why. Help them to relate new self-awareness to their own continuing professional development as a critically reflective practitioner-researcher in the workplace.

CONCLUSIONS

The experience of co-teaching this larger online class resulted in both instructors spending considerable time individually, as well as together, critically reflecting on what worked and did not work in terms of the course design and co-facilitation. Although they began the planning process before the course started, it continued throughout the course, immediately after the course, and over a number of subsequent months. Each time they discussed their experience in formal professional conference presentations, and in informal gatherings with colleagues, new understandings of this experience emerged. Overall, they have come to value this co-teaching experience in terms of what it revealed to them about their individual evolving theories of practice and assumptions regarding the teaching/learning process at the graduate level within any-sized online learning environment.

The instructors recommend the experience of co-designing and co-facilitating courses (both online and face-to-face) as an invaluable way to test old assumptions and reveal new perspectives about the ever-evolving teaching/learning process in many different contexts. They have both integrated their learning from this experience into their subsequent individually taught course design and facilitation situations. In order to stay actively engaged in the teaching/learning process and to enhance the quality of their students' learning experiences, and in anticipation of shrinking education budgets, it is critical for teachers to experiment with communication technologies and different ways of facilitating learning in any classroom.

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