

Teaching in a Digital Age Webinar Series

The first webinar in this series was held on Tuesday, September 29, 2015, on the topic of Teaching with Technology - How to Use Best Practice Models and Options with Dr. Tony Bates.

There were four questions Dr. Bates was unable to respond to due to time considerations. All other questions posed during the webinar were responded to by Dr. Bates and are included within the recording of the webinar. Click [here](#) to access the recording.

We are pleased to share the four questions and Dr. Bates' response below.

Q1: If multiple choice is not great for applied learning assessment - could you please give us some tips for more effective assessment in the virtual environment?

Big question! There are several ways to assess applied learning, and their appropriateness will depend on the subject area and the learning goals (Look particularly at Appendix A, Section 8 of Teaching in a Digital Age). Here are some examples:

- Via project work, where the outcome of the project is assessed. (This could be either an individual or group project). Marking a project that may take several weeks work on the part of students helps keep the marking workload down, although this may be offset to some extent by the help that may need to be given to learners during the project.
- Through e-portfolios, where students are asked to apply what they are learning to practical real-life contexts. The e-portfolio is then used to assess what students have learned by the end of the course.
- Use of online discussion forums, where students are assessed on their contributions, in particular on their ability to apply knowledge to specific real world situations (e.g. in contemporary international politics).
- Using simulations where students have to input data to solve problems, and make decisions. The simulation collects the data and allows for qualitative assessment by the instructor. (This depends on there being suitable simulations available or the ability to create one.)

Q2: I am finding in my post-graduate online courses the professor is interacting less and less in the online weekly forums, while I know there are competing theories as to how much they should interact with students, do you have an opinion on whether or not professors should or should not interact weekly? Personally, I enjoy their interaction I find it furthers my learning.

This is another big issue. In general, the research is pretty much consistent: in online learning, instructor ‘presence’ is critical to the success of many students. Look particularly at Chapter 4, Section 4 and Chapter 11, Section 10 of Teaching in a Digital Age. However presence alone is not sufficient. The online discussion must be designed properly to lead to academic learning and the instructor’s intervention should be to raise the level of thinking in the discussion (see 4.4.2 in the Teaching in a Digital Age). The instructors should in my view be checking daily their online discussion forums and should respond or intervene at least weekly. Again though this is a design issue; the better the design the less they should need to log in.

Q3: Can you give an example of how a MOOC can supplement a face-to-face or fully online course?

I think the best way is to consider a MOOC as an open educational resource (OER). There is a whole chapter (Chapter 10) in Teaching in a Digital Age on OERs. Thus MOOCs (or more likely parts of MOOCs) might be used in a flipped classroom context, where students study the MOOC then come to class to do work around it. But be careful. Many MOOCs are not OER. They are protected by copyright and cannot be used without permission. They may be available only for a limited period. If it is your own MOOC, on the other hand, that’s different. My question is though: is the MOOC material the best OER material available or are there other sources that would fit the class requirement better, such as an open textbook?

Q4: Would better learning analytics reports help teachers have a more relevant role in MOOCs?

Learning analytics can be helpful but usually they are not sufficient. Analytics provide only quantitative or measurable data, such as time on task, demographics about successful or unsuccessful students, etc. This is always useful information but will not necessarily tell you why students are struggling to understand or are not continuing. Compare this with a good online discussion forum (or a webinar!) where students can raise questions and the instructor can respond.

Students’ comments, questions and discussion can provide a lot of valuable feedback about the design of the course, but require in most cases some form of qualitative analysis by the instructor. This is difficult in massive open online courses and learning analytics alone will not resolve this, although they can help, for instance, in focusing down on those parts of the MOOC where students are having difficulties.

Click [here](#) to read Teaching in a Digital.