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Defence Education Enhancement Programme (DEEP) eAcademy

e-Instructor Insights:

Applying the lessons of Pandemic Learning

Edited by:
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This compilation of insights is intended to stimulate the teaching team in the Defence Education Enhancement Program (DEEP) community to apply the lessons of the NATO DEEP e-instructors course and to enhance our online teaching community.

The NATO e-Academy is a virtual community. The nucleus of authors met online in the second iteration of the NATO DEEP e-Academy e-Instructors Certification Program. This program aimed to develop online competence to respond to the extraordinary circumstances of the pandemic.

As institutions begin to return to normal operations, many of the insights of pandemic teaching can be applied to on site teaching. During the pandemic students from more than 20 NATO and partner countries learned together and found opportunities to share their experience and specialized knowledge.

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Chapter 2. Teaching Online: Lessons from the Pandemic and End of the Teacher-Priest

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Summary

Teaching at higher education institutions relies traditionally on ex-cathedra methods—those based on the authority of the professor's position. The COVID-19 pandemic blasted online education years into the future and exposed its many challenges. Technology has provided smart and innovative solutions for distance education, which have opened new teaching methods and techniques and boosted the internationalization of higher education. While critics of these innovations denounce alleged flaws, the benefits are likely to be greater than the costs, a turning point in teaching that is difficult to reverse.

Lessons from the COVID-19 Pandemic

There are a few lessons we have learned from the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic.[5] I am not talking generally, but specifically, about teaching. We, teachers, academic staff, and students, had to experiment with a new model and we had to learn to use unfamiliar tools that already existed. It was a real "revolution" for everybody. The classic paradigm of the teacher, seated or standing behind the desk, and the class listening to the lesson, was over. Old times have been archived by the pandemic and will never come back.

The teacher has always been seen – and has always perceived him/herself – as a "guru". The position was that of the priest who officiates at mass *ex cathedra*. No model was more false and outdated than this. It was resisted only through inertia, due to the authority exercised by the academic system towards students.

According to my personal experience, this revolution has brought enormous benefits, largely due to the computerization and digitization processes already underway. We have achieved great savings in time and money and more opportunities to participate. To give an example, in the two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, international scientific conferences have all been held in a remote format due to travel restrictions. I thus had the opportunity to participate online in many scientific events in various countries without spending money or moving from home, thus saving time and money. My scientific activity, as a researcher, has benefited greatly from this context, in terms of dissemination, learning, and networking. The same about the lessons; I had the opportunity to give lectures from home in distant countries without having to bear travel costs. All of this has led to an increase in activities and savings in time and money. Google, one of the world's most innovative companies,[6] was a forerunner in the application of new learning technology to teaching.

Teaching Online

In the aftermath of the breakout of the pandemic, Google launched an initiative called "Google University",[7] where, for 300 USD, you can obtain a certificate equivalent to university studies. The "University of Google" is a term invented by Brabazon[8] referring to education in the (post) information age. Brabazon is against the

[5] Elisabeth Sylvan and Sandra Cortesi, "What we learned about the future of education from COVID-19", *Fast Company*, June 25, 2021, https://www.fastcompany.com/90650121/what-we-learned-about-the-future-of-education-from-covid-19.
[6] Forbes, "The World's Most Innovative Companies", *Forbes*, Oct. 10, 2021, https://www.forbes.com/special-features/innovative-companies-list.html.
[7] Google, "Grow with Google: Google University", *Google*, 2021, https://grow.google/university/.
[8] Tara Brabazon, *The University of Google: Education in the (post) information age* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

role of new learning technologies in tertiary education. She believes that the impact of Google on education, teaching, and learning is similar to instant food and fast data environments, a mere mouse-click away, and therefore, attendance at lectures is necessary. Brabazon simply argues that students at the University of Google lose the capacity to sift, discard, and judge. Accordingly, Google has been accused of having a plan to disrupt the college degree in this way.[9]

The "University of Google", officially the Google Career Certificate program, is a completely online training program that offers professional certificates in fast-growing, high-demand technology fields like data analytics, digital marketing and e-commerce, information technology (IT) support, project management, and user experience design. Currently it does not provide tertiary education, but in the future it could, thus challenging higher education institutions.

Among the most innovative Companies, there are organizations that seek to supplement traditional schooling and democratize access to education.[10] With everything from online classes and digital textbooks to artificial intelligence tutors, the most innovative education companies like Coursera are providing products and services for higher education online, transforming how we learn.

Distance learning is the teaching method employed and pioneered by some universities to provide education to students who may not always be physically present at a school.[11] Today, it usually involves online education (e-learning) and is mostly synchronous. A distance learning program can be completely distance learning or a combination of distance learning and traditional classroom instruction (called hybrid[12] or blended[13]). All teachers should incorporate modern trends into their teaching styles since traditional teaching methods and techniques are used more often than IT-supported ones.[14] The common methods of teaching *ex-cathedra* can be integrated by using online forms of teaching methods and techniques.

A report published by the UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (IESALC)[15] suggests that the rapid return to in-person teaching and learning will not lead to a fundamental transformation of higher education as a face-to-face experience after two years of pandemic but concludes that higher education institutions are likely to take forward at least some digitalized practices in the long term.

Early (asynchronous) distance higher education courses, broadcast on television in the 1970s,[16] responded to the need to connect territory with remote students, consistently with the principle of "universal teaching". Learning should not be limited to those who live near a university, or to families who have the funds to support their children when studying away from home.[17] All this would be profoundly classist and undemocratic and would benefit neither the economy nor the development and progress of society as a whole.

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[9] Justin Bariso, "Google Has a Plan to Disrupt the College Degree", *Inc.*, Aug. 19, 2020, https://www.inc.com/justin-bariso/google-plan-disrupt-college-degree-university-higher-education-certificate-project-management-data-analyst.html.

[10] Pavithra Mohan,"The 10 most innovative education companies of 2022", *Fast Company*, Mar. 8, 2022, https://www.fastcompany.com/90720370/most-innovative-companies-education-2022.

[11] Andreas M. Kaplan and Michael Haenlein, "Higher education and the digital revolution: About MOOCs, SPOCs, social media, and the Cookie Monster", *Business Horizons* 59, no. 4 (2016): 441–50, doi: 10.1016/j.bushor.2016.03.008.

[12] Sharon W. Tabor, "Narrowing the Distance: Implementing a Hybrid Learning Model", *Quarterly Review of Distance Education (IAP)* 8, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 48–49.

[13] Norman D. Vaughan, "Blended Learning", in *An Introduction to Distance Education: Understanding Teaching and Learning in a New Era*, eds. Martha F. Cleveland-Innes and D. Randy Garrison (New York/London: Taylor & Francis, 2010), 165.

[14] Marina Dobrota and Slađana Benković, "Comparing 'Ex-Cathedra' and II Supported Teaching Methods and Techniques: Policy of Teaching Practice", *Croatian Journal of Education* 16, no. 3 (2014): 91-108.

[15] Dana Abdrasheva, Mauricio Escribens, Emma Sabzalieva, Daniele Vieira do Nascimento and Clarisa Yerovi, *Resuming or reforming? Tracking the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on higher education after two years of disruption* (Caracas: UNESCO-IESALC), https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381749.

[16] Bizhan Nasseh, "A brief history of distance education", *Adult Education in the News*, 1997, https://wenku.baidu.com/view/e325af4ee45c3b3567ec8b4b.

[17] Daniele Vieira, Takudzwa Mutize and Jaime Roser Chinchilla, "Understanding Access to Higher Education in the Last Two Decades", *UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (IESALC)*, Dec. 21, 2020, https://www.iesalc.unesco.org/en/2020/12/23/understanding-access-to-higher-education-in-the-last-two-decades/.

Conclusions

The use of IT and new teaching methods and techniques entails significant benefits for teachers and students: ease of participation, time and financial savings, and a decrease in drop-out rates. Academies and "old school" teachers should be open to innovations in teaching and learning. The age of the teacher-priest is over; get over it. Online teaching has become a reality; there will be no turning back. It is part of the digital revolution, as is the digitization of textbooks.

Marco Marsili graduated in Political Science and International Relations and in Institutional communication, both cum laude. He holds a PhD in History, Security Studies and Defence, and two advanced post-graduate diploma degrees in History, Security Studies and Defence and Political Science and International Relations: Security and Defense. He holds research positions in major civil and military institutions in Portugal, where he carries on his research in the broad area of international relations, security and defense, with a specific focus on international law, international humanitarian law, fundamental human rights, terrorism, counterterrorism, hybrid warfare and unconventional conflicts. He is the recipient of international grants, fellowships, prizes and awards (www.marcmarsili.it – info@marcomarsili.it).