



FOR TEACHING



From the desk of the Teaching and Learning Scholar

Despite months of planning and the diligent effort of many administrators and faculty, we didn't have the start-up week that we had all hoped would happen. As a person who likes her "ducks in a row and not quacking," I can certainly relate to others who also don't like or handle change well. The topic of this teaching tip is how to navigate through some of this change as it relates to teaching your courses.

Although the chairs in your classroom have been rearranged to allow for social distancing, how have you realigned in your teaching? Have you determined how best to use your classroom or lab time and how to actively engage your remote learners? How will you build a learning community between and within these two isolated groups? By now you've likely spent time pondering and debating with peers how to teach your courses this semester. But I am also thinking most of us didn't plan to have to pivot so quickly to remote delivery during the first week of the semester. So now what? Quinn (1996) describes how deep change is often associated with the need to 'build a bridge as you walk on it.' I think this analogy describes well the struggle faculty face as we all try to figure out how to build or remodel our courses. As we learned this week, this task is further complicated by the real possibility of being forced into remote delivery or quarantine at any time.

Like many of you, I'm teaching in a socially distanced classroom this semester which NMU has named the modified on-campus course. Basically, this means only half of my students (group A) can attend physically in my assigned room during the scheduled time. It's up to me to decide what to do with the other half of my students (group B). Some of my options include having group B join me synchronously via Zoom or providing an out-of-class assignment for them to complete. During my next class session, group B is able to attend physically while group A completes the same activity. My condolences to those of you who were forced to split your class into three or more groups.

For this semester, I've decided to pilot what I'm calling a modified flipped model. Both groups A and B will have recorded lectures to watch before class or some other type of activity to complete such as textbook readings, e-books, or videos. During class, I will lead discussions based on the lectures and other assignments, complete case studies, and analyze practice questions. For these in-class activities, I plan to have some students physically with me as assigned and others joining remotely.

Since my class meets on Mondays and Fridays, unfortunately I have no tips at this time to share about how to best manage these two groups simultaneously while wearing a face mask for two hours. McClure (2020) noted that she felt physically and emotionally exhausted after teaching with protective gear so plan some break times for yourself and your students. McMurtrie (2020) discusses how the trauma related to this pandemic will impact our teaching and students' learning because it's more difficult to focus, manage our time, and make decisions. For specific information on trauma-informed teaching practices check out Dr. Stacy Boyer-Davis's four-part series in her Byte of the Week.

<https://nmu.edu/online/online-byte-week>.

During this unprecedented time, managing the transition through change is important to understand (Bridges & Bridges, 2016). First, it's helpful to acknowledge that many of the changes we've been forced to make in our courses are out of our control and may produce acute feelings of loss for both faculty and students. Emotions often associated with grief might be present such as anger, bargaining, anxiety, sadness, disorientation, and depression (Bridges & Bridges, 2016). Plan some time to acknowledge these feelings with your students and demonstrate empathy. Second, be sure to communicate clearly and frequently with your students as you reorganize your courses. Recognize that anxiety and trauma plus wearing face masks will likely hinder communication. Use emails and in-class announcements to remind students about schedule changes, assignments, and due dates. You might consider using the announcement function within EduCat so that all your related emails are housed in one place for students. Note, these messages will be archived at the end of the semester so you'll have a complete record of your course communications as well. Third, be prepared to gently remind students to follow the University's safety guidelines such as not moving chairs, wearing face masks correctly, using hand sanitizer, and cleaning their desk space (McClure, 2020). We need to ensure their safety as well as our own.

Although external change can happen very fast (for example the decision to delay starting classes and going remote the first week), the psychological transition takes longer. Bridges and Bridges (2016) describe the middle transition phase as the neutral zone. In this phase, the old is gone but the new isn't yet fully operational. In transition, everything is in flux, anything can happen, no one knows the answers, and people are overloaded, anxious, and fatigued (Bridges & Bridges, 2016). Sound familiar? However, in this challenging phase there's a silver lining. People will often have creative ideas birthed by the need to fix systems that are no longer working or to address new problems. Maybe now is the time to try some new ideas or pilot instructional technology you've been wanting to implement in your courses. What technology could you use to connect with your students or help them interact with each other? Some examples you might consider include discussion boards, VoiceThread with comments, virtual break-out rooms (Zoom), virtual white boards (Google Jamboard), and light board lectures in Studio 102. I'm excited to implement some new ideas and technology in my modified on-campus course and suggest you try only one or two new ideas at a time.

If one of your new teaching method works well, could you turn it into some type of scholarship such as a presentation, publication, or research study? Since we will be spending significant time on remodeling our courses this semester, so why not leverage some of this effort into related scholarship? For those of you who team teach with peers or GAs, you could work on a collaborative SOTL (scholarship of teaching and learning) project.

I am confident that our faculty will develop innovative ways to teach their modified on-campus courses. Within the next few weeks, the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) will be hosting a webinar for faculty to share their experiences. I look forward to hearing your stories and ideas. Feel free to email me (lflood@nmu.edu) about your unique experiences and any lessons learned. The CTL staff are willing to assist you with course remodels and use of instructional technology; please contact us via email ctl@nmu.edu or phone 906-227-2483. We really are building this bridge together as we walk on it. Hopefully, my ducks will fly south soon.

References

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- McMurtrie, B. (2020, June 3). How the pandemic will change teaching on campus. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/how-the-pandemic-will-change-teaching-on-campus>
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