Bridging the Gap: Exploring Instructional Continuity in Undergraduate Fashion Courses in the Age of COVID-19

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Background: The novel coronavirus (COVID-19), a new infectious respiratory disease in humans that spreads primarily through contact with droplets from an infected person's cough or sneeze, has been labeled a global pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO). As of April 5, 2020, there were 1,133,758 confirmed cases of the disease in 183 countries, with 62,784 confirmed deaths (Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID 19) Situation Report -76, 2020).

To curb the spread of the disease, many public schools, colleges and universities closed their campuses and opted for fully remote learning platform (Levenson, Boyette & Mack, 2020). On March 10, 2020, a large public university in the northeastern region of the United States used the week following Spring Break, to adapt all in-person courses to online delivery. Eight days later (March 18, 2020) the university extended this alternative delivery of in-person classes through to the end of the Spring 2020 semester. University administrators called for instructional continuity. Instructional continuity is the process of maintaining teaching and learning objectives during short or temporary campus closures (Coyer, 2011). However, some instructional re-design was necessary as courses rapidly migrated to an online platform. What follows is the first phase of this three-part study on teaching practice and student learning in the age of COVID-19.

The purpose of this study was to understand the impact current situational factors have on an instructor's delivery of three undergraduate classes. In the design or re-design of any course, it is critical to assess the teaching and learning situation carefully. According to Fink's (2003) model of an integrated course design, situational factors include the specific context of the teaching/learning situation, general context of the learning situation, nature of the subject, characteristics of learners and the teacher. These factors inflict limitations and guidelines to the design or re-design of a significant learning experience (Fink, 2003). The following research question was developed: How do current situational factors constrain instructional continuity?

Faculty were given the option of delivering their remaining course content online asynchronously or synchronously. Although moving instruction online can enable flexibility of teaching and learning at any location. The speed at which faculty were required to adopt a new content delivery modality had never been done before. The university focused on providing

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trainings on using their learning management platform, but did not provide any trainings on Zoom usage. Pulling from past online teaching experiences at other colleges, the researcher was able to set up and use the online learning management platform to post short sewing video tutorials and other presentations for her students. Due to a lack of experience using Zoom, all three courses were delivered asynchronously for the remainder of the Spring 2020 semester. Knowing that the course delivery mode was vastly different from the way all 3 courses had been taught in-person, the researcher collected quantitative and qualitative data from her students, weekly. This data helped the researcher ascertain whether the new course delivery and re-design was still meeting course learning objectives. Based on student survey responses, the researcher was able to make real time adjustment to her course content delivery.

As described earlier, the situational factors that constrained instructional continuity were important to ascertain. The delivery for courses that are completely online, requires the instructor play an active role. The asynchronous modality did not allow for active participation in the courses, other than participating in discussion boards, uploading new video tutorials and presentations, and grading assignments. The nature of the studio class versus the lecture class, undermined the ability to put into practice some of the requirements of the studio classes. For example, final projects in studio classes that would test students' abilities to apply patternmaking and garment construction concepts were shortened to ensure that students completed other course competencies. The lack of formal class meetings meant that there was decreased interaction between the students and the researcher, and between the students themselves. Decreased in-person interaction also translated to giving students feedback that was not as fast as it would have been in-person. This was more evident in studio-based classes versus lecture classes. In addition, a lot of extra time was spent prepping for classes, delaying grading and posting of students' assignment grades.

Although university administrators encouraged instructional continuity, situational factors presented significant constraints, especially in studio-based courses. Given the new class content delivery mode, the researcher was compelled to re-design the remainder of each her courses.

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