



New Zealand Political Studies Association

Ako Network Roundtable Meeting 30th March 2022 SUMMARY

Teaching Professionals Discuss Online Challenges

This Ako Network Roundtable discussion was the first of monthly meetings which generally discuss issues pertaining to teaching and learning in universities. This particular meeting was a discussion of online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic:

Increased Teaching Burden on Those Precariously Employed

- A lot of the increased burden of teaching during the pandemic has fallen on those that are precariously employed.

Synchronous/Asynchronous Online Teaching

- Many teaching professionals have raised the issue that synchronous teaching online feels disconnected as students often attend online lectures with their cameras off (teaching to ‘black tiles’). The alternative, asynchronous teaching (e.g. powerpoint slides with voice-over recordings), however, is also problematic in that many students find it boring and disengaging.
- When the first COVID-19 lockdown was imposed some teachers found it easier (due to technical difficulties, among other things) to simply present slides with a voice-over recording. However, students found this hard to engage with.
- One teacher has now changed her teaching style to better suit online delivery by providing students with 50 minutes of video content, broken down into 10 to 15 minute blocks. This content includes some traditional lecturing from the teacher, but also includes professionally made, external material such as podcasts.
- This teacher said that students find these smaller blocks more digestible. However, breaking traditional lecture content down into these chunks has created more work for teachers.

Increased Accessibility of Recorded Lecture Material

- Recorded lectures are very useful for students who need to fit education around work and other commitments. There is a space in the New Zealand teaching landscape for such accessible resources. It is a major challenge however to create whakawhanaungatanga with an online class.
- There are many benefits of online delivery – particularly, improving access to learning resources for students that deal with social anxiety, workplace bullying and

harassment, limited mobility, etc. Previously, these people were being really poorly served in more traditional face-to-face pedagogies. This needs to be kept at the forefront of teachers' minds, whilst acknowledging how unsatisfactory the online learning experience is for many students (and teachers).

Transfer of In-Person Teaching Techniques to the Online Context

- There was shared agreement that a major challenge has been transferring teaching techniques that are useful in-person to the online context.
- Teachers need to develop techniques which make content much more accessible for a wider range of students. For example, enabling students to access material from different places is really important. Providing teachers with the tools to do this has been under-resourced.
- It has been a great challenge translating what gave teachers great satisfaction in face-to-face environments to the online context.
- One teacher has tried to maintain the face-to-face structure of students working in groups for two hours, in online classes. She has used many tools she will take back to in-person teaching, such as Google Docs and Google Slides, to allocate different groups different sections to work on so at the end of the class they have a collective story about their discussion to reflect on.
- The main challenge has been trying to reproduce the dynamic of being able to watch groups in a room and see who is struggling and knowing who you need to provide help to. Breakout rooms on Zoom are not an adequate replacement for this. What has made this easier, however, is having the students publicly work on a shared Google Doc during the class so that the teacher can see when a group is going off course in their discussion and enter their breakout room and provide help.
- After class, the teacher removes the students' access to the Google Doc and uses it as a record of where the class has got to. They then provide it to the class so they have notes to refer to.
- In the online context, teachers often have no idea if a new technique they plan to employ is going to work or not.

Dual Delivery (Online and Face-to-Face Simultaneously) Teaching

- The move to dual face-to-face/online delivery has been very challenging. There is an implicit idea that all teachers have to do is lecture to students face-to-face, and then record the lecture and provide it to students online. This is not even close to adequate for the experience that teachers want to provide to online students.
- Dual delivery teaching is very difficult. When you have some students in front of you in-person and others online simultaneously, it is difficult to deliver a teaching style which caters to both sets of students. This compromises the learning experience of both sets of students.
- Online teaching can work well when it is fully online, as you can shape your teaching and feedback to students in a singular manner. One teacher suggested that for dual delivery to work there needs to be a second teacher who can help the online class and respond to their problems while the primary lecturer focuses on the in-person calls.
- One teacher in the discussion who works at a university in South Australia shared that at their institution, workshops are provided which teach teaching staff how to provide dual delivery classes. It is possible for teachers to design dual delivery classes in a way in which the in-person and online students can mingle with each other.

- It was also raised that online teaching requires different skills to in-person teaching. One teacher has struggled with in-person teaching since returning from online. They believe that due to this difference in the skills that are required, dual delivery classes do not make sense.
- Another teacher shared that one way they have dealt with dual delivery is by providing students with different forms in which to complete the same assessment. There is a different form of assessment for those only doing the course online, but in-person students also have the option to choose this form.
- This creates a lot more work for teachers however, as they have to ensure that there is equivalence between the two different forms of assessment. This teacher stated that they provide students with a video explaining the overall driving aim of the assessment, and the rationale behind the two different options.
- The teacher in South Australia added that dual delivery has affected discussion assessments at their institution. Students who can only partake online have been provided with different assessment types. Although this is not as engaging as in-person activity, it still allows teachers to see how well students have understood the class material.
- It was also recognised in the discussion that group work and creating relationships between students is very important in education, and that online and dual delivery has made this difficult.

Equity Concerns

- Concern was raised that precariously employed teaching professionals are having to do a disproportionate amount of work in trying to alleviate disparities between the quality of teaching delivered online and face-to-face.
- Some teachers are having to do a lot more work dealing with online technical issues than they are potentially rightfully being compensated for.
- The point was also made that it is likely that student disengagement which appeared during the pandemic will continue over into in-person teaching.
- There is not only inequity between students in relation to online delivery, but also between teaching staff. With some disciplines it is possible to just reuse recorded lectures year after year because the content does not constantly need updating, unlike a subject such as politics which requires constant content updating.
- One teacher then raised the point that many student inequities predate the pandemic, such as that some students have parents who have gone to university while others do not.
- This teacher was already trying to address these inequities by introducing peer review to level out inequities pertaining to the access to external help different students have. They then brought up the idea of ‘colleague points’ as a mode of assessment, in which students are given points for doing specific things that facilitate learning for the whole class, such as taking class notes and sharing them, timekeeping the lecture, emailing an author of a text and sharing how it changed their thinking, writing a letter to future students of the class with tips and tricks, or for simply being an ‘awesome person’ who facilitates the learning of others in a general way.
- It was highlighted that some of the issues that the most vulnerable students face are that they feel isolated, don’t know how to ask for help and that their presence in class is not valued.
- It was agreed that more needs to be done to address other student inequities such those who are in inadequate housing or who do not have enough food.

- Another teacher then suggested that the idea of ‘colleague points’ may be a powerful way to deal with a lot of the stuff that is problematic with university behaviour, and that teaching students how to be nicer to each other will bear fruit in the workplace.

Guest Lecturers in Online Teaching

- The final discussion pertained to guest lectures in the online teaching context. One teacher stated that they have had guest lectures in their online lectures, but only guests that they can return the favour to.
- The idea was put forward that it may be easier to invite as guest lecturers people who have just written a book, as it is not much extra preparation for them to give a lecture on its content, and they get the reciprocation of increased exposure for their book.
- It was also noted that in the online context it is now possible to get international scholars as guests.
- It was also pointed out that there are ways to lighten the burden on a guest lecture online, for example by just getting the lecturer to do a question and answer session where the students have submitted their questions in advance.
- Finally, it was noted that there are inequities in the ability of different teaching professionals to act as guest lecturers. Established lecturers can better afford to give guest lectures than those who are precariously employed.