Surfing a Steep Learning Curve: Academics' experiences of changing teaching and assessment due to COVID-19

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Marco Solimene, Ragna Kemp Haraldsdóttir, Thamar Heijstra & Guðrún Geirsdóttir

UNIVERSITY OF ICELAND
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Background

- In March 2020 a four weeks assembly-ban was declared in Iceland in response to the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak
- Academic teachers had to switch to $Emergency$ $Remote$ $Teaching$ overnight

The aim of the study

To understand the way academic teachers dealt with the sudden shift in teaching practices during COVID-19 and the challenges accompanying such shifts.

Research questions

- What were the pedagogical and didactic challenges the academics faced while trying to adjust their teaching to the conditions created by COVID-19?

- How did the alterations made in response to the pandemic impact the teacher-student interactions?

- What are the implications of COVID-19 for academic teaching in the near future?

Theoretical background

- Studies on online teaching
  - (e.g. Hodges et al, 2020; Gudmundsdottir and Hathaway, 2020)
- Student/learner centred approach
  - (e.g. Clegg & Rowland, 2010; Mann, 2008, Klemenčič, 2021)
- Critical friends and significant networks
  - (e.g. Handal, 1999; Pataraia et al., 2014; Rienties & Hosein, 2015; Brookfield, 1995)

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Authors

- Three Social Science academics that were simultaneously teaching and learning during the Covid-19 outbreak
- Their supervisor from a Post-graduate diploma in Teaching Studies in Higher Education at the University of Iceland

Methodology

- Primary data: Q&A and shadowing logs
- Secondary data:
  - Written student-teacher interactions
  - Student Evaluations of Teaching
  - Email correspondence from the University of Iceland Rector to academic staff

Course demographics

Department	Course size	Students' age range	Program level	Distant learning students
Sociology	120	22-52	undergraduate	0%
Anthropology	24	27-70	graduate and undergraduate	40%
Information Science	14	28-61	graduate	60%

Findings

- **Emergency remote teaching:**
  - More workload for teachers
  - A tool for teachers' agency
  - A more equal participation between distant and on-campus students (as the boundaries of time and location were more flexible)

Findings

- ## A move to a student centred approach in assessment
  - More feedback on assignments,
  - Favouring formative assessment
  - Change of assignments and extension of deadlines

Findings

- ## We are all in this together: Interacting with care
  - Increased communication
  - Increase receptivity to students' needs
  - Increased workload, but also increased reciprocity (teaching/learning as a shared experience)

Reflections:

1. Emergency Remote Teaching was only partly successful as it lacked a carefully planned course design, and it implied increased workload
2. A change in power relations between teachers and students increased student engagement
3. Technologies cannot replace the presence of people "in the flesh"

Lessons learned

- ## Not all was bad!
  - There are benefits from using technology to improve the quality of teaching, but there is a need of a more organic effort
  - COVID-19 triggered a further move toward a student-centred approach
  - A flexible teaching approach is likely to continue
  - The importance of critical friendship ☺

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!