LESSONS IN (ONLINE) LEARNING



Project: Future of Learning – [Link]
Pedagogy: a personal manifesto – [Link]

Let me try to cut through the avalanche of advice about online learning and summarize the essentials.



Blended learning – on location via iPad in Ghiora Aharoni's studio in Manhattan with a class in antiquarian thought shared locally and remotely between Bard Graduate Center (lead Peter Miller) and Stanford. November 2014.

Our schools and colleges have vacated their classrooms. The public high schools here in California seem to have just given up on any alternative. Others find themselves immersed in Zoom sessions, Canvas pages, Schoology assignments, Mural whiteboards, Google Docs, Slack chat exchanges, YouTube videos, Panopto lectures, Prezi interactions, Camtasia screen captures, and a lot more.

EdTech – educational technology. Let's think through the possibilities in this shift many are experiencing to online learning. Let's see through the tech to the learning and pedagogy.

We are facing questions about what and how we teach. To what end, with what object in mind?

In my field, Classics and Ancient History, Archaeology, Anthropology in the research university, such questions are long overdue. Traditional curricula, aiming at the transmission of body of knowledge and off-the-peg methodologies are falling

in demand and application, are part of a crisis in the Humanities and Social Sciences.

And the questions apply not just to schools and colleges. Communities, organizations, businesses are committing to lifelong learning. And online learning is a key aspect of the shift to working from home.

What are the implications of this current challenge?

Recommendations

Enough of the preamble. What's my message?

What is being called online learning is not necessarily better or worse than a teacher sharing a classroom with students. All learning involves the same issues. What differs are the options, opportunities, constraints.

What is needed is better *design* of learning programs, systems, experiences, opportunities.

Hybrid, blended learning is the future – mixtures of modalities tailored to the different needs and aptitudes of learners.

Background. Various projects and initiatives in my Stanford lab offer the research basis for my recommendations:

- development of wikis for research and pedagogy (from 2002 – *Traumwerk* – a pioneering version of a learning management system)
- project based learning (with Stanford Humanities Lab 2004-2009)
- online VR as a learning environment (Second Life for Stanford IHUM Program (Introduction to the Humanities) 2004-2006)

- research into effective distance learning (funded by the Wallenberg Foundation 2005-6)
- conversation as a paradigm for collaborative learning and strategic planning (Stanford Strategy Studio 2008-2011)
- studio-based learning (Stanford d.school 2008-2015)
- distance learning with Stanford Continuing Studies (various online classes from 2015).

Key principles for blended learning

Differentiation, learning differences, customization, accessibility

Learning, teaching, pedagogy are best when they are flexible and adapt to need, purpose, situation, different ways of learning. There are many ways to realize such customization, all of which can enhance inclusivity and accessibility:

- playlists (contrast the set structure of some lessons) – use menus of different materials and activities
- modules – break up the learning experience into mixable discrete components
- facilitate time shifting – the capacity to fit learning to the schedule of the learner
- combine synchronous and asynchronous activities – live text chat, for example, contrasted with an online discussion conducted over time.
- be multimodal – combine video with readings with chat with group discussion with show-and-tell …

Interaction and presence, dialogue, conversation

The heart of learning is dialectic, exchanges, interactions, constant ongoing conversation:

- stoke the conversation with introductory and wind-up activities that bring focus to the learning group
- prime learning with start-up leads and suggestions – for example, post opening comments in a discussion to encourage others to join
- encourage and facilitate many voices, polyvocality – make the most of opportunities to be modular, multichannel, multimodal

- manage overload – keep most contributions/materials of all kinds to 10-20 mins/2000 words at most
- disconnect presence in class from commitment to the whole learning process (it's ok not to turn up to every online live session)
- make the most of opportunities to present oneself in personal ways – names on screen, video backgrounds, video on or off, dressing up, role playing
- keep things moving with posts and feedback
- make equal and complementary the roles of teacher, coach, mentor, advisor, learner, visitor (leave behind the traditional didactic inequality of teacher-pupil)
- facilitate social networking and sharing in and beyond these roles – build learning communities.

Logistics, management

A sometimes underestimated component of learning is management and administration of materials, resources, time, interactions:

- look to the housekeeping needs of Learning Management Systems – putting things away, tidying and organizing
- set and work with the constraints of tech, time, skills, materials
- keep things as simple as possible – focus on the learning experience rather than fancy tech
- build and maintain scaffolds – frames for complementary, interoperable parts
- treat learning as project management – design thinking, for example, as creative project management, is a great model.

Performance, rhetoric, staging, scripting, planning, designing, improvising

A long standing foundation of pedagogy and learning is performance (design) with components of resourcing, scripting/planning, dramaturgy and scenography, production values, delivery, audience, and, perhaps above all, improvisation and play:

- clarity, argument, learning goals are key components of scripting/planning
- treat the classroom as stage; screen as proscenium arch – windows on worlds within and without

- take the class on location – use mobile devices and screen-shared recordings
- take care and concern for production values (for example, quality sound is more important than quality video)
- attend to features of co-presence and staging – for example, visiblity (video on or off), muting (when and how), transitions (how to introduce others, how to make smooth a shift to a shared whiteboard), exchanges (chairing a live conversation)
- be mindful of process – the *design* of learning experiences, involving foundational research, empathy with people and needs, exploring alternatives (one-size doesn't fit all), iterative improvement through evaluation and feedback
- ironically perhaps, the vitality of learning lies in unscripted, unplanned exploration, improvisation, play.



Sharing being there with Ghiora Aharoni.