EDUCATION NEWS

An Interview with Curt Bonk, School of Education, Indiana University: Summer Training

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Michael F. Shaughnessy –

1. Curt, these are difficult times for teachers- and many millions of teachers need training- some need a refresher- and some need to adjust to new methods.

You are correct in your assertion; these times are complex, unusual, and highly difficult for anyone in the field of education. K-12 teachers, higher education instructors, corporate and military trainers, and all others involved in education woke up a few months ago to a new normal. Perhaps, when this occurred, some of them decided to get a job in other fields or take an early retirement. However, the vast majority of educators in North America and Europe were forced to switch gears in mid-March and to begin developing online curricula and pedagogical activities for courses that they were in the midst of teaching. Alternatively, for those in China, Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Japan, where the virus first broke out, it was courses that they were about to teach that were delayed. Wherever one was in the world, it was a full stop moment rarely, if ever, experienced in education.

Almost immediately, administrators, who have no real sense of the field of online and distance teaching and learning, referred to it as "emergency remote teaching." Implicitly they were telling the world that online teaching was second rate instruction and only useful when things are quite dire. In a well-timed response a couple weeks into the crisis, Charles Hodges, Stephanie Moore, Barb Lockee, Torrey Trust and Aaron Bond published an insightful piece in EDUCUASE Review, "The Difference Between Emergency Remote Teaching and Online Learning." In their thoughtful March 27, 2020 piece, they cautioned against equating well planned online and blended learning courses and experiences with those hastily designed to deal with a crisis or disaster like H1N1, Hurricane Katrina, Harvey, or Maria, or COVID-19.

Think of the psychological trauma that unfolded in the spring of 2020. Imagine having spent years, or, in some cases, decades, avoiding, ignoring, downplaying, or shortchanging online instruction. More plausibly, countless millions have been experimenting with online supplements to their courses or have taught one or more courses that were truly blended. In fact, blended learning was already becoming widely accepted during the past decade. And many instructors had already bit the bullet and taught a fully online course and lived to tell about it. Whatever they had experienced with Web-based forms of teaching and learning in the past, however, it was not as abrupt and extensive a shift to online instruction as what was now required during COVID-19.

Tens of millions of teachers around the world might have experienced a wide spectrum of emotions all at once; ranging from sadness that they will not see some of their students again to rage at those who ordered the new online-only policies to panic regarding the date by which they must prepare new lessons. They might also have experienced much nervousness regarding the types of assessments that they had to adopt, significant confusion as to the feedback mechanisms to employ and the course management requirements, and extreme bouts of jealousy of others who have fewer courses to teach or less students to grade.

At the same time, of course, many may have felt some surprise and happiness when delivering their first online class and bringing in their initial synchronous guest and finding that the technology works. Perhaps in such times they even felt a sense of thrill with these new forms of instruction. Along the way, disgust, joy, embarrassment, frustration, regret, curiosity, kindness, relief, amazement, love, hope, wonder, guilt, and many other emotions were likely on full display too. Suffice to say, early COVID-19 era teachers were riding a perpetual emotional roller coaster and still are.

Eventually in such situations, most teachers, being human, will implicitly or explicitly acknowledge that they need some training in a host of areas—online pedagogy, technology tools, and assessment practices, among them. Recent research published by one of my

teams indicates that many online instructors learn by browsing other online courses, watching tutorials, reading articles, taking advantage of technology training, and talking to colleagues. So, to answer your question, it is more than a refresher or an adjustment that is now required; online instruction, while extensive, was perhaps just 15-20 percent of all instruction before COVID-19 (Note: the exact percentage of online and blended courses will depend on where you are in the world and the level and type of the courses taught, among other factors). However, as we all just witnessed, literally overnight, online education or "emergency remote teaching" was the majority of instruction and, for many, it was the only viable method or approach.

Of course, given the quick pace of change and limited time available, many educators could only take part in small bursts of training when ramping up to teach online this spring. When this happened, the genie came out of the bottle after being pinned inside for decades with excuses and idea squelching statements like "It won't work for my subject area or discipline," "Face-to-face teaching is the best form of instruction, period!," and "We don't know enough about online teaching and learning yet." Masses of online course trials this spring have altered many such "we've never done that before" views forever.

To be clear, tough odds were faced by online educators as many students lacked Internet access or sufficient technology in the home, whereas others lacked basic digital learning competencies. Still others lacked confidence and appropriate levels of self-efficacy to succeed. Nevertheless, with the genie out, there will be consequences. Among them will be a renewed call for extensive and effective training programs for online instruction. That leads me to your second question.

2. What are you doing this summer to help?

Not answering the phone. Not opening email. At this time, I am on sabbatical. Well as much as I wish I could avoid all such connections to the outside world, I am enjoying the fact that my three decades of work in online and distance learning may be having a bit of an impact in these times. Since my sabbatical started a few weeks ago, I am continuously getting phone calls or emails with questions about online teaching and learning or requests to provide online training. Is there a stop button on life?

This past week, I have committed to a virtual training event for teachers in the New York City area in partnership with my former student Dr. Roberto Joseph at Hofstra University.

Also this week, I agreed to provide teacher training on online motivational strategies for teachers and counselors in the state of Indiana via the Indiana Youth Institute. In the higher education space, I will be involved in an event for instructors at California State University at Long Beach run by Dr. Sheryl Narahara. Sheryl is another Indiana University (IU) alum of my program in Instructional Systems Technology (IST).

But first on the radar is a session for Contact North, a distance learning organization in Ontario, Canada. "As a community-based organization, Contact North | Contact Nord helps underserved Ontarians in 600 small, rural, remote, Indigenous and Francophone communities get jobs by making it possible for them to access education and training without leaving their communities."

My old friend Maxim Jean-Louis is the President of Contact North representing Ontario's Distance Education and Training Network with employees located in Thunder Bay and Sudbury, Ontario but with activities and initiatives stretching across the province. Maxim has asked me to do a free one-hour Webinar Monday June 29 at 10:15-11:15 am EST on online motivation and retention (this event is open to anyone).

The session will be based on my free book, "*Adding Some TEC-VARIETY: 100+ Activities for Motivating and Retaining Learners Online*" (http://tec-variety.com/). The TEC-VARIETY book can be downloaded by chapter or the entire book. It is available as a free download in both Chinese and English. To date, that book has been downloaded more than 250,000 times. As I note in the next answer, Contact North has many other free Webinars lined up this summer. See Contact North | Contact Nord Webinars: Registration link. Hit that link and explore.

I should also note that in March, a team of five professors and I started a Webcast show in response to COVID-19 called "Silver Lining for Learning" (SLL). The group includes Chris Dede at Harvard, Yong Zhao at the University of Kansas, Punya Mishra at Arizona State University, Scott McLeod at the University of Colorado at Denver, Shuangye Chen at East China Normal University in Shanghai, and myself. As we note on the SLL website, the COVID-19 disruption offers "an opportunity to reimagine teaching and learning so as to create an equitable and humanistic learning ecosystem for all. Barriers and structures that have resisted much needed change are now in disarray, offering the chance for transformative improvements."

We air at 5:30 pm EST each Saturday. We have already had a dozen SLL episodes. We also have a blog for SLL. In fact, I recently blog posted information on the training event for Contact North. The show is streamed live to our YouTube channel at this link.

Clearly, I have committed to do too much already during my sabbatical. But it will be fun to be working with so many people in need.

3. When and where will this presentation take place and how much will it cost?

Due to the pandemic, the presentation for Contact North is virtual this time and will take place in Zoom. If you register, the system will send you the appropriate links to obtain access to the live event or the archive of the session. It is possible that Contact North event will be run again. Explore their list of pending Webinar topics and if you have particular needs or suggestions for topics not listed, let me know. Their line-up of event hosts and speakers is impressive including Ron Owston at York University who is repeating his very popular session on "How to Teach Effectively Online with Zoom" as well as his session on "How to Keep Zoom Classes Private and Secure." Other presenters include such notables as Tony Bates, George Veletsianos, Diane Conrad, Phil Hill, and Stephen Murgatroyd. Again check out their Webinars.

4. Do you know of any other trainings going on that would be helpful for teachers?

It seems like this summer everyone is asking that question.

First, check the websites of your favorite professional organizations as they may offer relevant and timely online learning leadership and training opportunities.

Second, instead of hitting the delete button, read or skim their weekly or monthly digital newsletters when they arrive in your inbox.

Third, explore the websites of other organizations and conferences in the online, flexible, and distance learning space. For K-12 teacher training, browse conference websites and homepages for SITE and ISTE. For higher education, the Online Learning Consortium (OLC) offers online teaching certificates.

In addition, the OLC Innovate Conference will virtually take place this summer from June 15 to June 26. Another favorite of mine, the Wisconsin Distance Teaching and Learning Conference (DT&L), which is normally in lovely Madison, Wisconsin each summer, but is online this year, will offer several certificates related to online learning August 3-7. Also well known is the PennState World Campus which offers an array of online teaching certificates, including one for K-12 educators and one for graduate students. There are likely dozens more online events, summits, podcasts, webcasts, and institutes that are being designed specifically for this coming summer and fall. I recommend people spend a few minutes searching for them and then take advantage of them.

5. Now, what are you currently writing or researching?

I am fortunate to have a couple of very productive and committed research teams. They are working me hard. In the past year or two, we have published many articles on such topics as flipped classrooms in Korea, scaffolded instruction in online learning, the educational technology competencies embedded in social media job postings like Twitter and LinkedIn, and an assortment of studies related to open education and massive open online courses (MOOCs). All my publications that are open access can be found at PublicationShare.com which can also be accessed in the "Articles" link on my homepage.

My MOOC research projects are extensive due to the fact that my team and I have a database of over 3,000 MOOC instructors.

To date, we have explored MOOC instructor motivation and innovation, professional development, gamification strategies (just published today, see https://rdcu.be/b4G6r), instructional design challenges and practices, work engagement, techniques for cultural sensitivity, and MOOC related personalization practices. My brilliant former advisee, Dr. Meina Zhu at Wayne State University, and I have recently conducted a couple of studies (Study #1; Study #2) on student and instructor perceptions of self-directed learning techniques in MOOCs. In an attempt to apply this SDL research to practice, we participated in an international webinar series on the development of e-learning courses and MOOCs coordinated by Dr. Sanjaya Mishra at the Commonwealth of Learning in Vancouver two weeks ago. In it, we summarized our key MOOC research findings and offered advice in designing MOOCs to foster learner SDL and overall engagement. Now, Meina and I are investigating MOOC learners' career adaptability and career change; we are joined in this effort by another highly productive former student of mine, Dr. Min Young Doo from Sejong University who is leading that particular project. Together, the three of us have published many MOOC-related research articles in the past year.

In addition, recently, my colleagues, Ke Zhang also at Wayne State, Tom Reeves at The University of Georgia, Tom Reynolds at National University, and I edited a book with 28 chapters on "*MOOCs and Open Education in the Global South*" that was published by Routledge in 2020. We have chapters from such places as Nepal, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Egypt, Brazil, Chile, India, Fiji, Kenya, and Thailand. The frontmatter for that book (which includes the foreword written by Dr. Mimi Lee from the University of Houston as well as the Preface and Chapter 1) is freely available and can be found online at MOOCsbook.com.

That particular book is a follow-up to a previously edited volume by Mimi, Tom, Tom, and I in 2015, "*MOOCs and Open Education Around the World.*" That award-winning book with 29 chapters was also published by Routledge. Both books have over 65 contributors. While I'm glad to be done with the second volume, it is always a wonderful experience meeting dozens of prominent

people around the world and having them become your friends.

At present, I am also knee-deep in editing a special issue of *Educational Technology Research and Development* (ETR&D) with Florence Martin of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and Vanessa Dennen of Florida State University. This particular journal issue theme is "Systematic Reviews of Research on Emerging Learning Environments and Technologies." It will have topics such as social media, wearable technology, mobile devices for language learning, adaptive learning, digital game-based learning, massive open online courses (MOOCs), and more. We are about done. Relief!

Once the special issue is off to press, I have at least two books to write. First, I plan to pen a follow up to my 2009 book, "*The World is Open: How Web Technology is Revolutionizing Education.*" The new book, "*The World is **Wide** Open*," will contain stories of people whose lives have been transformed from open and online educational opportunities in this open age. In effect, the book will explore how technology has enabled people to accomplish something through various online, blended, and open forms of education that a decade or two ago was next to impossible. In a nutshell, it will entail stories of life change.

I had also earmarked part of my sabbatical toward writing the book "Education 20/20" which is intended to detail my vision of powerful learning environments for the 21st century which some are calling Education 3.0. In terms of Education 20/20, I will describe 20 new roles of instructors (i.e., curator, counselor, concierge, consultant, etc. (all 20 starting with "C")) and 20 LAST Principles of Instruction (e.g., the principle of spontaneity, the principle of meaningfulness, the principle of support and feedback, the principle choice and options, the principle of flexibility, the principle of convenience, etc.).

These 20 principles coalesce to form my Learning Activation System Template or "LAST" Principles of Instruction; I should point out that the highly esteemed instructional technologist Dr. David Merrill famously crafted the First Principles of Instruction with five key principles a couple of decades ago. I should also note that I started writing the Education 20/20 book two or three years ago, but now that project is on hold as it is 2020 already and I have not come close to completion.

Additionally, in the coming months, I will edit a book tentatively called "*Making Impact.*" It will be a book of short stories of 30-40 award winning Fulbright teachers who came to IU during the fall semester for the past five or six years. These teachers were from Finland, Israel, Palestine, Singapore, India, Morocco, Mexico, Botswana, New Zealand, and Taiwan. They all audited my instructional strategies class for critical and creative thinking, collaboration, motivation, and technology integration and became fantastic friends of mine. They will write how they utilized one or more of the ideas or strategies learned in that class to make an impact in their local community or country since returning home.

Finally, on my personal reading list to complete this summer are the following books from three fabulous friends of mine, Bryan Alexander, Joshua Kim, and Sugata Mitra; actually, these books are all on my kitchen table right now waiting for me to finish. Each is insightfully written, well organized, highly current, and packed with thought provoking information. All three successfully take us on a pleasant, albeit a tad bumpy, ride into the exciting future of education.

1. Alexander, B. (2020). *Academic next: The futures of higher education*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

2. Kim, J. & Maloney, E. (2020). *Learning innovation and the future of higher education*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

3. Mitra, S. (2020). *The school in the cloud: The emerging future of learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

6. What have I neglected to ask?

Well, you did not ask my predictions for the coming fall of 2020 and spring of 2021 semesters. I am not Nostradamus, but there are signs all around us that schools, colleges, and universities are opening up to some degree because online learning is now an agreed upon safety net.

This safety net will come into action for older or at-risk instructors who will teach online as well as for students who do not trust health and safety measures on college campuses and will opt to learn online. Online learning options will exist for the winter months when COVID-19 outbreaks may reappear. Without a doubt, online and blended learning options will continue for some time to come.

Suffice to say, post-COVID-19, there will always be blended and fully online learning options. As such, there will be a resurgence in online teaching certificate programs, online learning books, videos on best online teaching practices, e-learning summits and conferences, and additional funding for training as well as research into virtual learning environments. Personally, I produced a series of 27 short online learning training videos for Indiana University and the world community a decade ago that have been downloaded more than 160,000 times. This project was called Video Primers in an Online Repository of eTeaching and Learning (i.e., the V-PORTAL). These video primers are likely too old now to be of much use. However, I predict a plethora of such resources will be created in the coming years by a host of online learning support organizations.

There will be increasing understanding of and respect for online education. As part of this reaction, job descriptions will change to emphasize experience teaching in fully online and blended environments. Along these same lines, there will be greater recognition and incentives for online teaching. As this occurs, mentoring and coaching programs will also come into prominence. Suffice to say, in addition to the challenges, problems, and barriers, many refreshingly innovative and exciting things will emerge in this new normal.

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