

SoTEL Symposium 18-19 February 2021

## ‘Unfreezing’ traditional teaching: The challenge of teaching online during Covid-19

Philippa Smith  
Auckland University of Technology  
[Philippa.smith@aut.ac.nz](mailto:Philippa.smith@aut.ac.nz)

Helen Sissons  
[Helen.sissons@aut.ac.nz](mailto:Helen.sissons@aut.ac.nz)

**Keywords:** Online teaching, Covid-19, change management theory.

### Abstract:

Teaching online is not an unfamiliar phenomenon for university lecturers evidenced by the rapid rise in the number of those who “want to teach online”, “have been told to teach online” and “are training and encouraging others to teach online” (Ko & Rossen, 2017:xx). Nevertheless, the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic in 2020 caught many teachers from elementary to tertiary level unprepared and in some cases led to the collapse of educational systems in countries around the world (Mishra, Gupta & Shree, 2020).

Moving lessons online, creating virtual classrooms, accessing appropriate software and online tools, as well as being competent in the use of them within a very short time period not only required “adjustment” but also had a “mental health impact” on both the educators and the students (Etchells et al, 2020). Attempts have been made to assess the success with which lecturers have been able to transition their classes to online. A survey of students in the United States (USC Center for the Digital Future, 2020), for example, asked about their remote learning experience during the pandemic and found that only around one-third enjoyed it better than in-class instruction. In addition, almost one half of them felt they learned less online than in person, and only around half of the students believed that their teachers were good at adapting their courses for online construction. This raises the question of whether educational institutions and their staff were up to speed enough with online learning to make this sudden transition.

For those running practical teaching programmes that require face-to-face contact, the thrust into the isolation of Covid-19 lock-down was most challenging. This presentation documents our learning experiences as two Auckland University of Technology lecturers whose respective programmes involving journalism practice and student collaborative movie-making were caught midway by lockdown when the government commanded us to “Stay Home, Save Lives”. Viewing our teaching experiences through the lens of change management theory (Lewin, 1958) that divides the process of change into the three stages of unfreezing – changing– refreezing, we discuss how the *unfreezing* of our standard methods of instruction forced us into *change* where we had no other choice but to learn to adapt our courses and teach online. We provide insights in this presentation as to how well the new methods of the virtual classroom worked for us based on the resources we were given, and whether they are now *refrozen* and maintained in our classes for the future, or will we simply change back to our original methods. We also offer feedback from the students and their experiences of our lessons in lockdown.

### References

- Etchells, M., Brannen, L., Donop, J., Bielefeldt, J., Singer, E., Moorhead, E. & Walderon, T. (2020). Synchronous Teaching: Asynchronous Trauma. *Social Sciences and Humanities Open*. <https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3637828>
- Ko, S. & Rossen, S. (2017). *Teaching online: A practical guide*. New York: Routledge.
- K. Lewin, K. (1958). Group decision and social change. In E. Maccoby, T. Newcomb, & E. Hartley (Eds.), *Readings in social psychology* (pp. 197-211). Holt: Rinehart & Winston.

Mishra, L., Gupta, T., & Shree, A. (2020). Online teaching-learning in higher education during lockdown period of COVID-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Educational Research Open*. [online issue].  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedro.2020.100012>

USC Center for the Digital Future. (Sept, 2020). *Online college instruction has improved since the pandemic began, say college students, but instruction on the internet should cost less, reports Center study*. Retrieved from:<https://www.digitalcenter.org/online-education/>