



Learning and Teaching in a Pandemic: Opportunities, Challenges and Lessons Learned

Stephen Downes
TILT Annual Learning and
Teaching Conference
(ALTC) 2021
September 14, 2021

The Three Conference Themes

1. Active, **Collaborative** Learning (ACL)—a continuum of practice(s):
Stories from Lockdown / Socially Distanced Classrooms;
2. Teaching, Technology and the Pandemic: Everyday **Scholarship**
Stories of Digital Tools and Technologies; and,
3. Being Together, While Apart: Sustaining Learning **Communities**
through and beyond Covid.

Collaborative

Active, **Collaborative** Learning (ACL)—a continuum of practice(s): Stories from Lockdown / Socially Distanced Classrooms

Are we really ‘working together’ toward common outcomes?



Image: <https://www.itweapons.com/tips-for-improving-office-communication-collaboration/>

Collaborative

Active, **Collaborative** Learning (ACL)—a continuum of practice(s): Stories from Lockdown / Socially Distanced Classrooms

By ‘collaboration’ do we not just mean ‘better communication’?



Images: <https://www.sinnaps.com/en/project-management-blog/collaborative-communication>



Collaborative

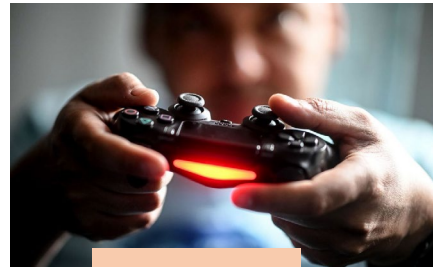
Active, **Collaborative** Learning (ACL)—a continuum of practice(s): Stories from Lockdown / Socially Distanced Classrooms

What do we mean by 'active'?



Pushing buttons?

Choosing?



Playing?

Finding?

Competing?



Creating?



Breaking?

Liking?

Scholarship

Teaching, Technology and the Pandemic: Everyday **Scholarship** Stories of Digital Tools and Technologies

What is 'teaching' anyway?



- Teacher is dead. Teacher to a mentor, guide and facilitator.
- The curriculum needs to be revisited to incorporate hybridity.



- Students can be working on projects in virtual contexts with other students from around the world at any given moment.
- Smartphone applications and project collaboration apps like Slack could help teachers interact and assess students' progress, collaborate real time.



- The formal classroom will be replaced by learning areas that allow individuals, small groups or larger groups to collaborate face-to-face or virtually on learning projects.
- Specialised training for teachers in hybrid, blended and online education

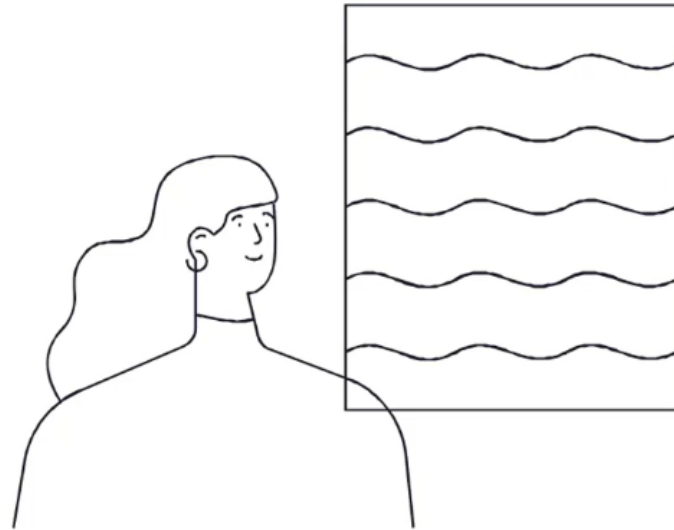
From: Meha Jayaswal and Mahima Hasija (ALTC Frings)

Scholarship

Teaching, Technology and the Pandemic: Everyday **Scholarship** Stories of Digital Tools and Technologies

Is this really true?

“Technology is not the learning outcome. It is the medium. It’s a tool. And learning has to be platform agnostic. It is just a tool in our hands.”



From: Meha Jayaswal and Mahima Hasija, quoting George Couros (ALTC Fringe)

Scholarship

Teaching, Technology and the Pandemic: Everyday **Scholarship** Stories of Digital Tools and Technologies

Does there *have* to be a learning objective?



From: Shish Malde (ALTC Fringe)

Scholarship

Teaching, Technology and the Pandemic: Everyday **Scholarship** Stories of Digital Tools and Technologies

Is this *learning*, or propaganda?



CREATIVITY HOUSE



CASINO HOUSE



BREAK EVENT POINT
HOUSE



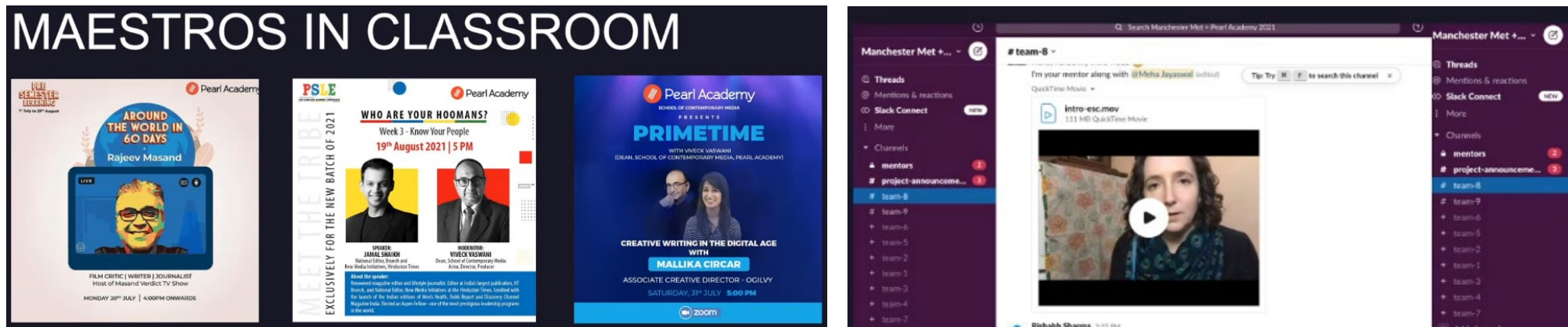
START-UP HOUSE

From: Entrepoly discussed in <https://isgee.eu/> Shish Malde (ALTC Fringe)

Communities

Being Together, While Apart: Sustaining Learning **Communities** through and beyond Covid

Who is in our community? Who isn't?

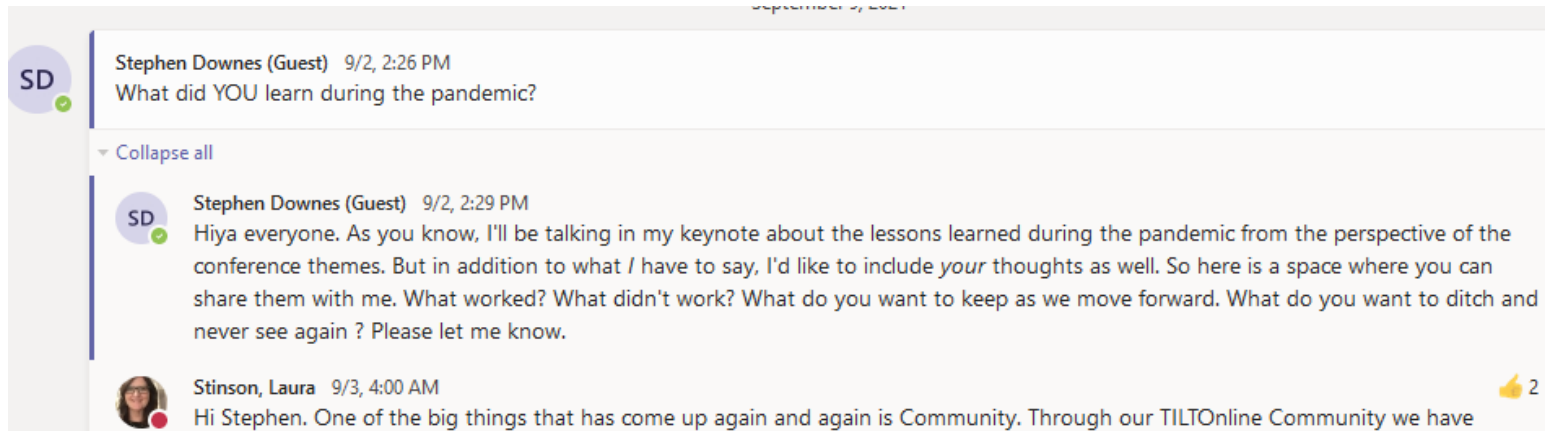


From: Meha Jayaswal and Mahima Hasija (ALTC Fringe)

Communities

Being Together, While Apart: Sustaining Learning **Communities** through and beyond Covid

Can we actually *create* community?



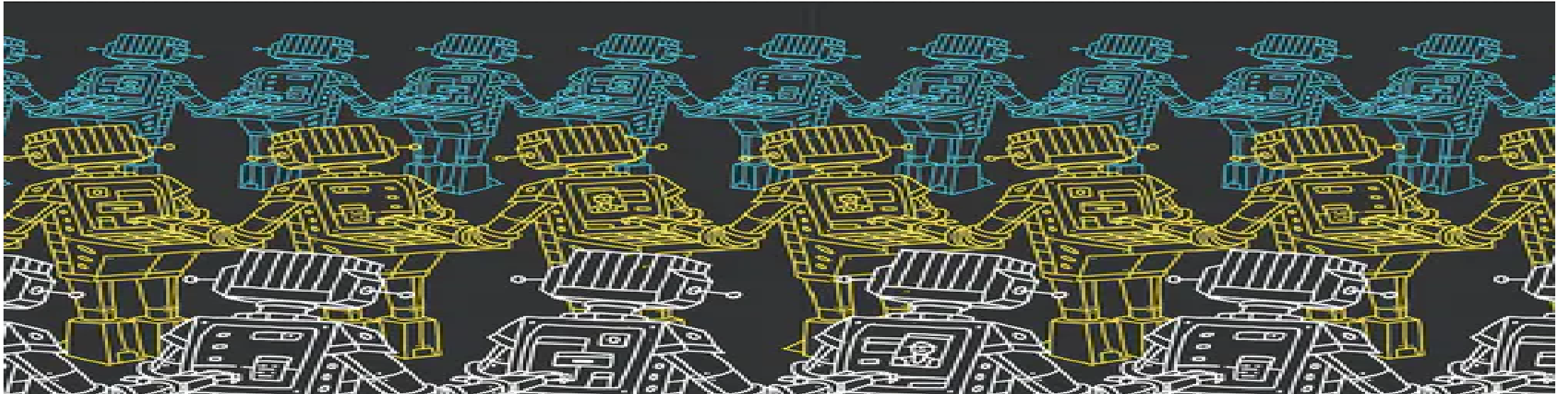
The screenshot shows a Microsoft Teams chat interface. At the top, a header bar indicates the date as September 2, 2021. The chat history includes three messages:

- Stephen Downes (Guest)** 9/2, 2:26 PM: "What did YOU learn during the pandemic?"
- Stephen Downes (Guest)** 9/2, 2:29 PM: "Hiya everyone. As you know, I'll be talking in my keynote about the lessons learned during the pandemic from the perspective of the conference themes. But in addition to what *I* have to say, I'd like to include *your* thoughts as well. So here is a space where you can share them with me. What worked? What didn't work? What do you want to keep as we move forward. What do you want to ditch and never see again ? Please let me know."
- Stinson, Laura** 9/3, 4:00 AM: "Hi Stephen. One of the big things that has come up again and again is Community. Through our TILTOne Community we have" (The message is partially cut off at the bottom). This message has two thumbs-up reactions.

<https://teams.microsoft.com/?tenantId=8acbc2c5-c8ed-42c7-8169-ba438a0dbe2f#/conversations/Live%20Fringe%20Sessions?threadId=19:96ca032d06d7413fa57ecbe3d4dcca60@thread.tacv2&messageId=1631176852970&replyChainId=1630607217581&ctx=channel>

As faculty and instructors...

- What are we learning?
- What can we build on?
- What changes can we make?



10 Lessons



Any change will be hard at first.

- We can't directly compare the new thing with the old thing.
- We need to give ourselves some time



Image: <https://medium.com/mind-munchies/why-is-change-so-hard-807eae0b2dcb>

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De Ste Croix, Megan 9/8, 10:50 AM Edited



I've learnt a few things:

1. Everything online takes longer than you expect, plan and prepare for that
2. Online group work is challenging but if you stick with it can really pay off
3. Never assume past experience with an online platform, always take the time to signpost and explain (it will save time in the long run).
4. Not everyone has reliable wifi
5. Sometimes changing the plan is essential to succeeding

Any change will be hard at first.

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Richards, Nicola 9/8, 2:09 PM



I learned to roll with it! I'm more adaptable than I knew. I also quite enjoyed the roller coaster that was digitally up-skilling seemingly overnight.

Learning is social.

- We knew that already
- Some outcomes are social
- We learn as a community
- We exchange ideas, conduct trade, and develop networks



Image: <https://www.td.org/insights/how-to-be-a-catalyst-for-social-learning>

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Stinson, Laura 9/3, 4:00 AM



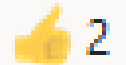
Hi Stephen. One of the big things that has come up again and again is Community. Through our TILTOnline Community we have supported staff during the pandemic but also student community has been so important and we don't want to lose that when we move forward.

Learning is social.

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Loughlin, Michael 9/8, 1:17 PM



I learnt i am really looking forward to the energy produced from a live face to face session, and the innumerable benefits of lab classes

Learning is social.

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- We learn as a community
- We exchange ideas, conduct trade, and develop networks
 - DL students are geographically distributed, and so may feel isolated and lack peer social support. This can led to lack of engagement with their studies.
- Attempted to use chatrooms through the university VLE.
 - Think I was the only one to post in them!



Teaching is not a solitary profession.

- Teachers need buildings, etc.
- Now they need a support team.
- Like when we watch the news



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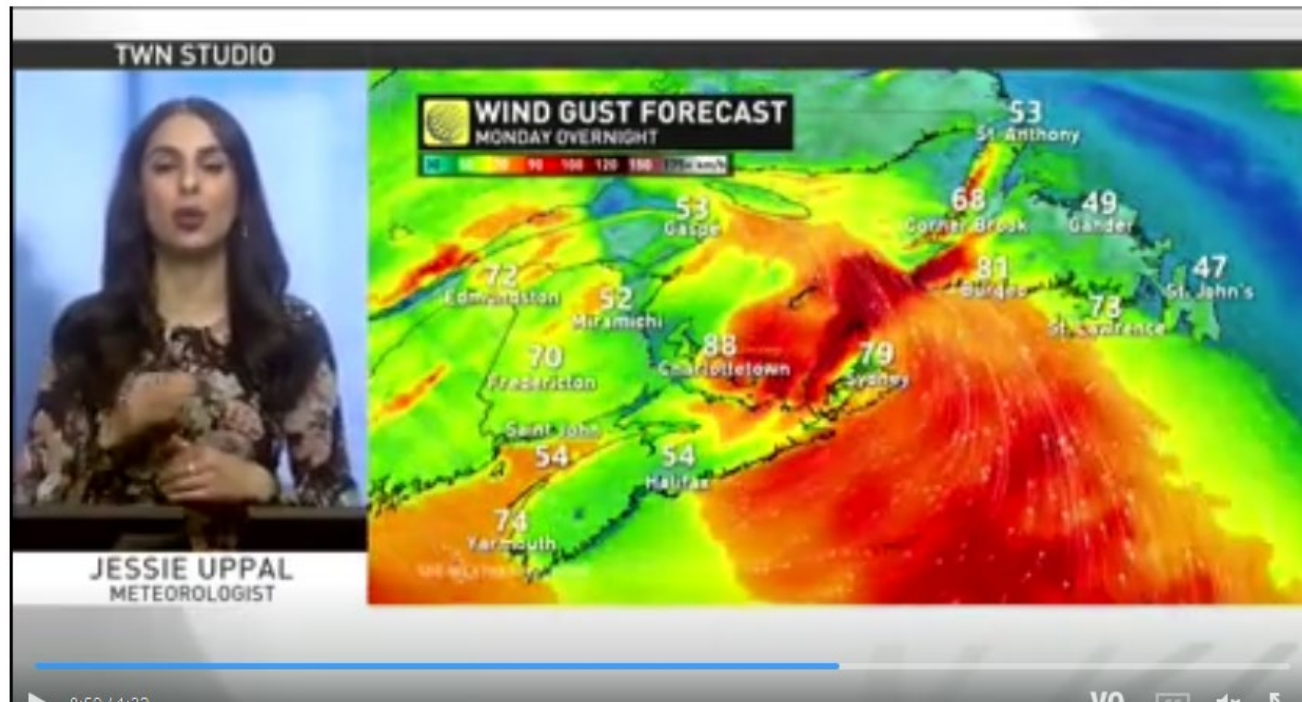


Image: <https://ca.news.yahoo.com/ge-2020-psp-prizes-character-not-just-academics-when-selecting-candidates-tan-cheng-bock-043855531.html>

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We need live events.

- Not for everything, but live events draw us in
- They stimulate planning and anticipation
- They provide interaction, presence



Image: <https://www.dacast.com/blog/virtual-events/>

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Skoyles, Laura 9/9, 4:30 AM



I learnt that teaching a language online is like teaching blindfolded with one arm tied behind your back. 😂 Active tasks like writing and speaking lend themselves well to collaborative online working. However, passive tasks like reading and listening were much more difficult for me to gauge Ss comprehension. so creating a safe environment where Ss didn't feel judged was vital to empower them to speak up when they didn't understand something.

We need live events.

- Not for everything, but live events draw us in
- They stimulate planning and anticipation
- They provide interaction, presence

In the independent league known as Fan Controlled Football, they take play calls from strangers on the internet, who are watching the contest on the gaming platform Twitch, voting in real time via the league's app.

<https://expmag.com/2021/09/in-this-football-league-the-fans-call-the-plays/>



Open media plays a key role.

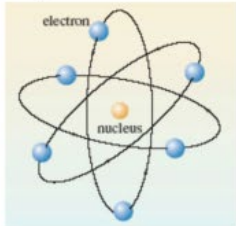
- We can't learn without it
- We need an alphabet
- We need words, we need data



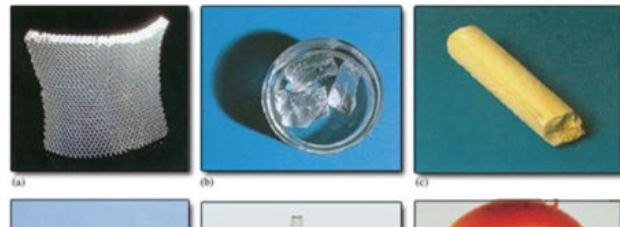
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'Figure 1 The Rutherford model of the atom.'



'Figure 2 The chemical elements may be solids, liquids or gases at room temperature: (a) aluminium (symbol Al, atomic number 13); (b) sodium (symbol Na, atomic number 11) is kept under oil to prevent reaction with air or water; (c) sulfur (symbol S, atomic number 16); (d) bromine (symbol Br, atomic number 35) is a dark-red liquid; (e) chlorine (symbol Cl, atomic number 17) is a yellow-green gas; (f) copper (symbol Cu, atomic number 29).'



What assets are actually reusable?

“What are the granular things that take time to produce, that can be hard to get right, and that someone may have already done? And what other spin-offs or benefits might there be from being able to reuse the asset?”

Tony Hirst: <https://blog.ouseful.info/2021/09/03/reusing-educational-assets/>

Open media plays a key role.

- We need responsibility
- We need ownership

Learning to Devolve our 'MAKING' Spaces

Increasing student numbers; student confidence;
core skills

Curriculum heavy reliance on access to
CENTRAL facilities and/or support

Staff confidence in 'giving over'
responsibility/ownership



'Hidden/off curriculum' opportunities

SPACE/PLACE/PEOPLE

Lockdown[s] / COVID-19



Quality matters,

- It's not guaranteed
- We have to make our own judgements
- We have to be critically-minded



“There was a lot of misinformation in the 20s; some of it came from Russia, some of it came from advocacy groups, some of it was advertising, and some of it came from our own governments. The development of trust networks, zero-knowledge proofs and crypto-addressing helped a lot, but we still have to be critically-minded.”

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The Cult of Quality Matters

Jesse Stommel, Martha Burtis, *Hybrid Pedagogy*, 2021/09/03



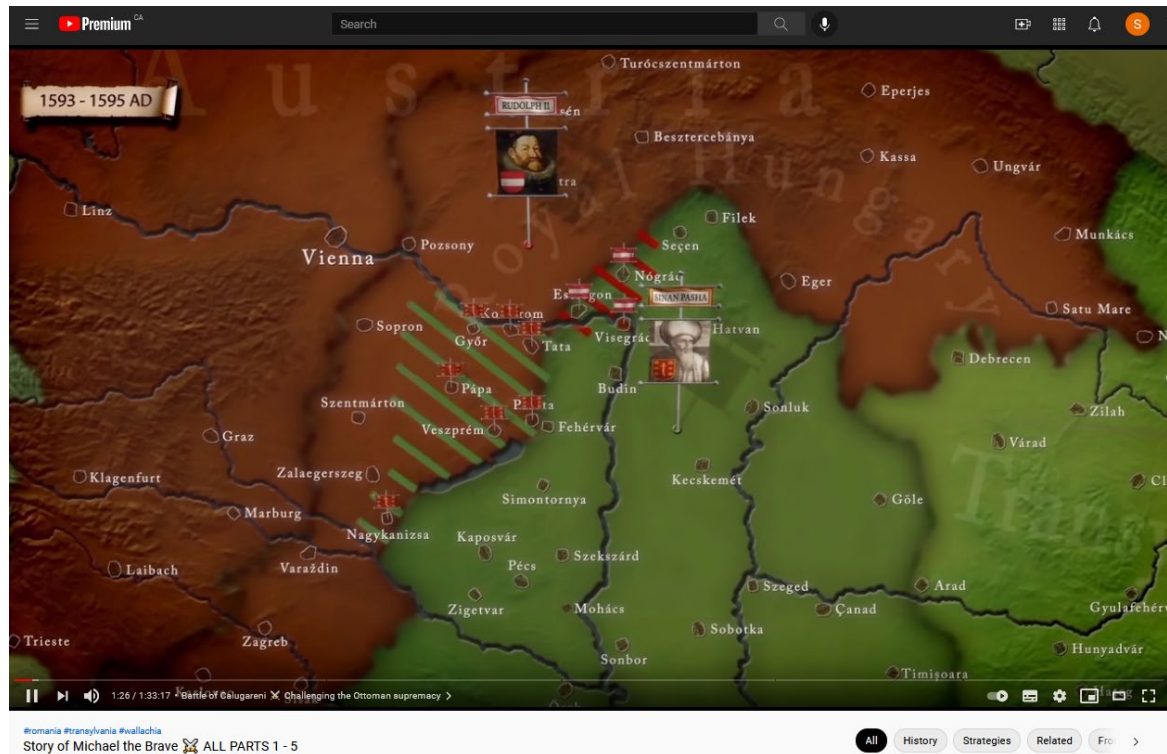
Jesse Stommel and Martha Burtis argue that "stock, prescriptive models for online learning exacerbate problematic power dynamics and structural inequities, and they deny students, faculty, and staff the agency necessary for the work of education." They make a good case, and what they argue is probably true. I would argue, though, that the argument against quality metrics should go further. First, it's not clear that the metrics employed *are* conducive to quality. Second, the detail and complexity of the metrics create barriers against the creation of new works. Third, a focus on the quality of resources distracts from other matters, such as access to resources.

Web: [\[Direct Link\]](#) [\[This Post\]](#)

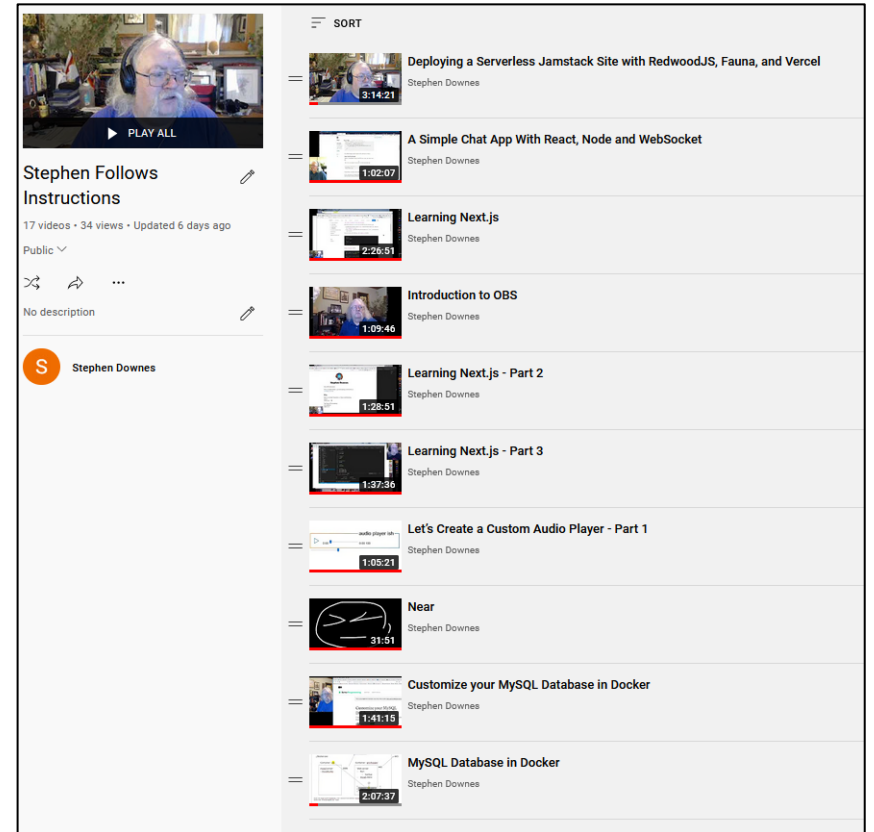
<https://www.downes.ca/post/72700>

Teaching is more than broadcasting.

- 8-hour videos (sometimes) bad
- Get us away from the keyboard
- Still true when we return to the classroom



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AVZNTJ7RL80> - Story of Michael the Brave



<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLeBQHgzQN9x3Ef-JuV-HQw2on-RkjTBM>

Reading the room is harder.

- We can scan a classroom and observe how students are reacting
- Online, it's a lot more difficult
- This needs to become a deliberate practice



Image: <https://www.istockphoto.com/photos/broadcasting>

We need structure, order and routines.

- A respite from uncertainty
- Balance our work with our play, rest and self-care.
- That's what school often provides



It's not just school subjects

- Not just schools and universities
- Beyond traditional academics
- Support in-home workers, self-employed, new careers



3 Challenges



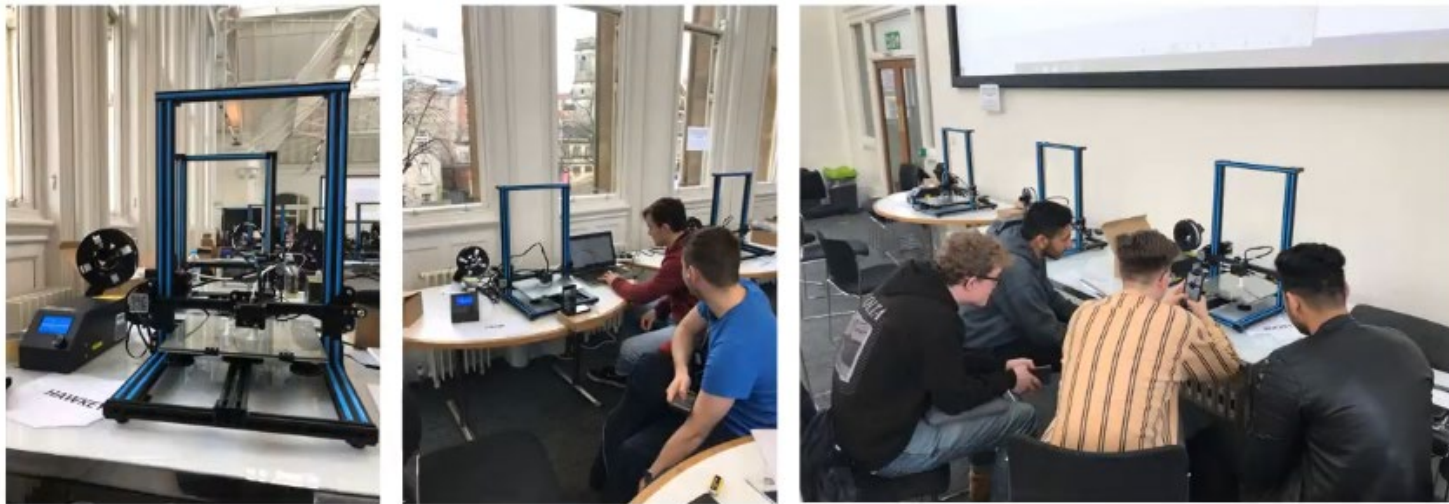
Motivation matters.

- Educators have always known this
- Online we haven't the same tools
- We can't force them; we need people interested and engaged



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Democratic
manufacturing
- Giving students
independence and
confidence in their skills
- Adapted by creating
video induction series

People have diverse needs.

- Designed for the mainstream
- Built-in, systemic discrimination
- Everyone has special needs



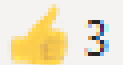
Image: <https://www.klook.com/en-IN/activity/24658-museum-senses-ticket-bucharest/>

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Henderson, Pamela 9/8, 11:09 AM



Materials need to be more visually appealing than the ones we might use in the classroom. There's a lot of easy software that can be used to enhance the presentation of documents e.g. Sway.

Inequities harm learning.

- School mitigated some of the worst inequities
- This disappeared online; people in need just vanished.
- We need the will to solve it



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Radical Eyes for Equity: Moving from “All Students Must” to “Each Student Deserves”

▲ INCREASE	▼ DECREASE
Writing for real audiences, publishing for the class and wider communities	Finished pieces read only by the teacher
Teacher modeling of writing—“writing aloud” as a fellow author to demonstrate <ul style="list-style-type: none">• drafting, revising, sharing• writing skills and processes	Teacher talks about writing but never writes or shares own work
Learning grammar and mechanics in context, at the editing stage, and as items are needed	Isolated grammar lessons, given in order determined by the textbook, before writing is begun

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Q VISUAL THINKERY

Awareness

- Respect the autonomy and interests of different stakeholders
- Be mindful, reflective and reflexive
- Think critically about your practice and consider the wider environment(s) you can influence
- Recognise the limits of one's own knowledge and the possibility of unconscious bias

Professionalism

- Demonstrate accountable, evidence-led practice
- Commit to ongoing professional development and enhancing your skills
- Act with integrity and honesty
- Ensure practice complies with relevant laws and institutional policies
- Apply knowledge and research to advocate for and enhance ethical approaches

Care and Community

- Practice care of oneself and others
- Promote collegiality and mutual understanding
- Minimise the risk of harms
- Recognise responsibilities and influence beyond your institution
- Share and disseminate best practice



Association for Learning Technology (ALT) 2021 [go.alt.ac.uk/EdTechEthics](https://www.alt.ac.uk/EdTechEthics)

Values

- Support the agency and development of learners
- Promote fair and equitable treatment, enhancing access to learning
- Develop learning environments that are inclusive and supportive
- Celebrate diversity as a route to innovation
- Design services, technologies to be widely accessible
- Be accountable and prepared to explain decision-making
- Be as open and transparent as is appropriate

3 Ways to Improve



We need to learn how to learn.

- It's really hard for people to learn on their own.
- If nobody there to teach them, they wouldn't try to learn
- This applies to both teachers and students

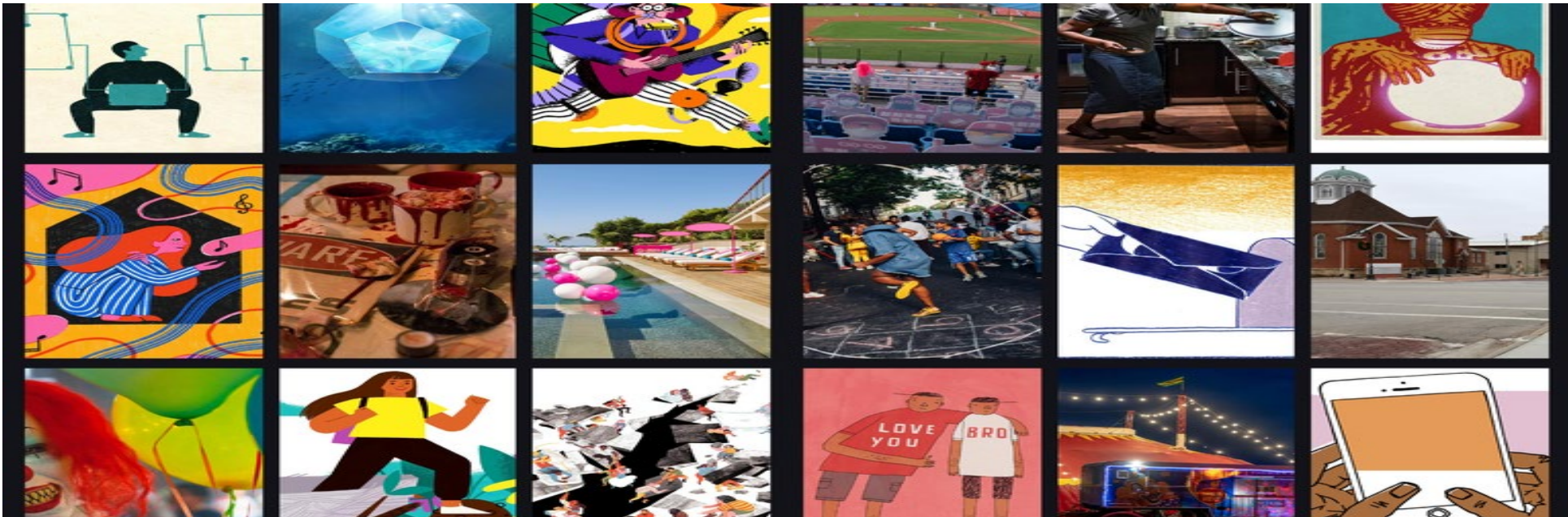


Image: <https://www.nytimes.com/spotlight/learning-english-language-arts>

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Henderson, Pamela 9/9, 4:40 AM



Richards, Nicola I think you are so right. Although there were challenges, overall I really enjoyed it. My modules have benefited from my improved confidence with tech, and fora such as this one have been genuinely inspiring. I love to create new learning objects, but I lack imagination or knowledge of relevant software. I have made so many unexpected discoveries, as a result just from our collective use of Teams during covid. For example, I would not have discovered Videoscribe had it not been for a query someone else raised on the Org Dev Team. It was exactly what I needed for an idea I've had for some years, but thought I could never implement myself.

Employ a range of strategies.

- Develop 'hybrid learning' but not doing both at once
- Meet the different needs of people at different times and in different ways



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Cuthbert, Kate 9/8, 9:50 AM



2

Hi Stephen I like to think I "learned" more engagement tools and techniques for my kit bag. I learned about being more transparent as to why I am suggesting a particular way to learn and engage. The circumstances prompted me to reflect on people (I did do before honest!) and the contexts in which they arrive at sessions and maintain engagement in learning in lots of different ways- I am learning to be comfortable and more confident at that.

Assessment needs to be flexible.

- Traditional testing has become dysfunctional
- Depending on surveillance
- Instead, show work directly to employers



Stephen Downes

<https://www.downes.ca>

