

Teaching in Online, Distance, and Non-Traditional Contexts



edited by

Cary Roseth | Penny Thompson

Teaching in Online, Distance, and Non-Traditional Contexts

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

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The field of educational psychology has undergone profound transformations in recent years, driven primarily by the rapid integration of technology into the realms of teaching and learning.

One result of this rapid expansion of technology is the growth of online, hybrid, and blended learning. Enrollment in online courses has increased steadily for more than a decade, with the COVID-19 pandemic only accelerating this trend (Hamilton, 2023; World Economic Forum, 2022). While some online course design is grounded in the 20-year history of research on effective online instruction, including appropriate selection and integration of technology and facilitation of communities of learners in the online classroom, the pandemic prompted what is more appropriately called *emergency remote teaching*, where courses that were designed to be taught in-person were abruptly converted to an online format to respond to the emergency (Hodges et al., 2020). This period of rapid change has expanded the horizons of education but has also posed unprecedented

challenges to educators, students, and researchers. These challenges are especially salient to university faculty in teacher preparation programs, who must simultaneously adapt their own teaching to the changing conditions and provide guidance for their students who will soon need to do the same in their own classrooms.

Building on the other volumes in this series, this edited book, *Teaching in Online, Distance, and Non-Traditional Contexts*, provides a comprehensive exploration of the evolving landscape of educational psychology within the context of the digital age, focusing specifically on the increasing prevalence of online, blended and hybrid educational psychology courses in teacher preparation programs. So doing, this book complements the other volumes in this series by situating educational psychology theory and research within the dynamic and multidimensional context of online technologies.

In this introductory chapter, we set the stage for an exploration of these chapters, summarizing their key findings and elucidating their implications for both educational psychology theory and practice. While many chapters address more than one aspect of online teaching and learning, we have grouped them into five sections: “Designing Effective Online Educational Psychology Courses,” “Unique Characteristics of Teaching in Online and Hybrid Environment,” “Facilitating Student Engagement in Online Courses,” “Inclusive Online Courses,” and “Assessment in Online Courses.” Below we provide brief summaries of each chapter, followed by a discussion of the common themes we see permeating the volume as whole.

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

Section I of this volume focuses primarily on the process of designing effective online educational psychology courses.

In Chapter 2, Bhattacharya presents a comprehensive analysis of an undergraduate educational psychology course offered as a planned online course during Fall 2021, and contrasts it with an emergency online course implemented in the Spring 2020. This comparison highlights the significance of design cycles, incorporating both asynchronous and synchronous activities, assignments, and materials. The chapter demonstrates that merely transposing activities from in-person to an online modality does not facilitate effective student learning. Instead, the transition to online instruction only becomes productive when online activities align with students’ learning needs and are supported by interactive teaching strategies (Oltean, 2021).

By highlighting how the activities and materials in the planned online course were thoughtfully selected and structured to align with the learning needs of teacher candidates, Bhattacharya shows the critical role of adequate time for course preparation. Bhattacharya also underscores how all

elements of a course work together synergistically to create a virtual learning environment and, ultimately, a community of inquiry.

In Chapter 3, Cestone et al. also emphasize the careful planning that goes into a fully online asynchronous course. They present a case study of an instructor who worked closely with an instructional designer to design and build a graduate level course on the theoretical foundations of teaching and learning. Using the ADDIE framework (analyze, design, develop, implement, evaluate), the instructor and instructional designer worked together to develop learning objectives, materials, activities, and assessments that were grounded in educational theory and targeted to the needs of learners.

In addition to demonstrating the benefits of thoughtful planning when designing an online course, this chapter also shows the value of making supportive resources available to course instructors. For example, on many university campuses there is a center (e.g., the “Center for Teaching and Learning”) whose mission is to assist instructors in developing excellent courses. Echoing Bhattacharya, however, Cestone et al. again emphasize the importance of adequate time and advance planning for faculty to take advantage of this service. And accordingly, in their case study of an instructor who was new to online teaching, they illustrate the important role that an instructional designer from the campus teaching and learning center played in helping the new instructor design and build an engaging, student-centered online course.

To provide further guidance for instructors during this design process, Clark and Hunzicker (Chapter 4) introduce their student success and fulfillment model. This model demonstrates how foundational education theories, which have historically served educators well in face-to-face classrooms, can also be applied effectively in online and blended learning environments. The model illustrates that, regardless of course delivery mode or academic discipline, both classical and contemporary educational theories can be applied to engage students, ensure intellectual rigor, and provide academic support. The chapter’s organization aligns with the phases of course development, offering an ambitious attempt to integrate various theories and educational jargon into a coherent framework for online instruction that addresses the challenge of integrating multiple, sometimes overlapping theories in course design and instruction.

The final two chapters in this section provide course-design guidance at a more granular level. In Chapter 5, Horner and Matuga focus on designing for self-regulated learning in online environments, emphasizing the importance of self-regulation strategies and skills. The chapter outlines how instructors of online educational psychology courses can design their courses to enhance students’ use of self-, co-, and external regulation strategies. By illuminating the critical role of self-regulation in online learning, this chapter provides educators with evidence-based guidance on how to

scaffold, model, and assess self-regulation skills in their online courses. It also discusses the potential challenges that students may encounter in the online environment and offers strategies for mitigating these challenges through targeted self-regulation instruction.

Kennedy and Seli (Chapter 6) explore the process of selecting instructional technology, with a focus on how educational psychology theories can inform these decisions. In doing so, they provide educators and instructional designers with a systematic approach for evaluating and choosing appropriate technology tools to support learning. They emphasize the importance of considering cognitive theories when selecting instructional technology, offering practical insights into how technology can align with andragogy, inclusivity, equity, and organizational capacity. By presenting various real-world case studies, they also illustrate how different technologies can be strategically chosen to support specific learning objectives.

In Section II of this volume we turn our attention to the unique characteristics of teaching in online and hybrid environments.

Borasi et al. (Chapter 7) shed light on the significant role played by an instructor's professional identity, defined here as "the kind of online teacher one aspires to be." The chapter offers concrete ideas on how to support the development of an online teacher identity through an online teaching and learning professional development course that articulates specific tenets of online teaching and learning. Borasi et al. also illustrate the effectiveness of this professional development through a case study that narrates one student's experience translating the tenets of online teaching and learning to practical application. The chapter also highlights the ways instructors can leverage online technologies, especially in a hybrid approach that combines synchronous and asynchronous elements. It underscores the significance of robust online professional development, where learners are exposed not just to information about instructional design principles and pedagogical practices but also to explicit reflections on the learning theories and pedagogical approaches that underpin those experiences.

Section III focuses specifically on how to facilitate student engagement in online courses. Student engagement is a critical component of courses in any setting, but the online environment can pose challenges in this area that are distinct from those faced in in-person courses.

Brown et al. (Chapter 8) explore the symbiotic relationship between self-determination theory and cognitive load theory and their relevance to engagement in online learning. Drawing on concrete examples, this chapter elucidates how cognitive load can be managed through course layout and instructional content, while self-determination can be supported through activities that facilitate relatedness, autonomy, and competence. The chapter positions self-determination theory and cognitive load theory as foundational frameworks that can enhance online learning experiences.

By meticulously examining the interplay between these theories and online pedagogy, the chapter provides valuable insights into optimizing the design of online courses.

In Chapter 9, Kim et al. address the multifaceted challenge of enhancing student engagement in online educational psychology courses. They acknowledge the importance of instructor efficacy, effective course design, and various strategies for fostering engagement, including diverse activities, formative assessments, and community building. This chapter advocates for a dynamic approach to online instruction, incorporating interactive elements that empower students to become active participants in their learning journey. By drawing on a wealth of research and practical experience, the authors offer concrete strategies for optimizing engagement in the online classroom, with a keen eye on enhancing the educational experience for both instructors and students.

In Chapter 10, Liu et al. focus on student engagement within the specific context of synchronous blended learning environments. Drawing on the community of inquiry framework, the authors explore how instructors can foster meaningful engagement in these settings and highlight the importance of instructor presence, social presence, and cognitive presence to create dynamic and interactive synchronous blended learning experiences.

Section IV presents ideas on making sure that online courses are inclusive and welcoming to all learners.

In Chapter 11, Eschelman and Highfill highlight the importance of culturally responsive online classrooms. They present a protocol for reflection that guides educators toward a deeper understanding of their cultural identities and prompts an assessment of how these identities may inadvertently influence their assumptions about online learners. The chapter underscores the responsibility of online educators to establish culturally aware and equitable digital learning environments. It also offers invaluable tables throughout the chapter, serving as practical reminders and checklists for designing, teaching, and evaluating online courses.

Thomas et al. (Chapter 12) also focus on cultural relevance and provide a comprehensive framework for educators seeking to create inclusive and culturally responsive digital learning spaces. This chapter highlights the significance of understanding the cultural identities of both educators and students, stressing that these identities play a central role in shaping online learning experiences. By offering concrete examples and strategies, the chapter equips educators with the tools to create learning environments that honor diverse cultural perspectives, promote student engagement, and enhance self-efficacy.

Finally, Section V of this volume features a chapter focused on assessment. Kulo et al. (Chapter 13) emphasize the importance of aligning assessment strategies with course goals, content, and instructional design,

thereby ensuring that assessments are meaningful and reflective of student learning. The chapter navigates the intricacies of designing fair and valid assessments for online courses while addressing challenges such as academic dishonesty and providing timely and constructive feedback. It also offers practical guidelines for educators, helping them navigate the nuanced landscape of online assessment with confidence.

COMMON THEMES

Taken together, these 12 chapters highlight several common themes.

Adaptation to Online Education

All of the chapters in this book share a keen focus on the challenges of making a transition from in-person to online education. While the need for emergency remote teaching (Hodges et al., 2020) greatly exacerbated these challenges, the authors in this volume emphasize that this transition has never been simple and underscore the need for educators, instructional designers, and institutions to adapt their practices and pedagogies to align with the unique demands and opportunities presented by digital learning environments (Greenhowe et al., 2022).

Student-Centered and Constructivist Learning

All of the chapters emphasize the principles of student-centered learning and constructivist pedagogy (Jonassen et al. 1999), emphasizing active engagement, critical thinking, and the cultivation of a supportive learning community. They demonstrate that these principles hold true in both face-to-face and online contexts.

Challenges and Opportunities

Throughout this book, the authors acknowledge the particular challenges inherent in online education, such as maintaining student engagement (Greenhowe et al., 2022), mitigating cognitive load (Caskurlu et al., 2021), and ensuring cultural inclusivity. They also emphasize the opportunities afforded by digital learning environments, such as increased flexibility, accessibility, and the potential for innovative instructional design.

Technology Integration

The book's chapters elucidate how technology can be thoughtfully integrated into educational psychology courses. They highlight that technology should not be an end in itself but a means to achieve pedagogical goals (Koehler et al., 2013), always grounded in educational psychology theories and practices.

Cultural Relevance and Equity

Several chapters emphasize the importance of cultural relevance and equity in online education (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Young, 2014). They stress that educators should create inclusive and culturally responsive digital learning environments, honoring diverse perspectives and promoting student engagement.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This edited book provides a comprehensive exploration of the challenges and opportunities presented by online educational psychology courses. Each chapter offers valuable insights and practical recommendations for educators and instructional designers, emphasizing learner-centered approaches, appropriate technology integration, and the importance of instructor preparation. These insights have far-reaching implications for the field of educational psychology. Educators and instructional designers should consider the need for thoughtful course design that leverages technology while maintaining a focus on student-centered and constructivist learning. Additionally, the importance of instructor preparation, adequate time, and ongoing professional development in online teaching cannot be overstated.

Moreover, this edited book highlights the importance of cultural relevance, equity, and inclusion in online education. Educators must strive to create learning environments that honor diverse cultural perspectives and ensure that all students have access to quality education.

In short, this book provides a roadmap for navigating the digital age in educational psychology. It challenges educators and researchers alike to embrace technology while staying true to the foundational principles of effective teaching and learning. As we move forward, it is essential to continue exploring innovative approaches that enhance online education and empower students to succeed in the digital age.

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