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Reshaping the educational landscape: During and after the COVID19 pandemic

Extended summary

The aim of this paper is to describe and analyze the response to COVID-19 and evolution through different models of online instruction during the pandemic at a large Canadian university. It examines the praxis of an educational technology support team during the period between March 2020 to September 2021, from the first lockdown of the University to the opening of the in-class instruction after 18 months of remote teaching and learning. The shift in teaching and learning through the different phases of the pandemic leading to today's changed reality in the educational landscape is primarily seen through the lens of the learning designers, based on their work with instructors. The paper looks at the organizational changes due to pandemic-imposed needs, the adjustments to hiring, professional roles and responsibilities and how those impacted the continuation of instruction. The activities of the unit in relation to the ongoing demands have tremendous impact on the workload of the staff members (e. g. emails, workshops, design adjustments to meet the changing challenges).

The data was organized into semesters which represent three distinctive phases: 1) remote teaching, 2) fully online using a combination of synchronous and asynchronous instruction, and 3) a diversity of hybrid approaches. These were examined to accurately describe the modifications made between the phases and compare the differences. The phases were viewed through Puentedura's SAMR model, as a journey from substitution to redefinition of teaching and learning (2010).

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To explore the findings in depth, the authors provide graphs to get a visual representation of the shifts in workload, the analysis of the organizational structure of the unit from one semester to the next, and also the contextual background for the shifts (such as student and staff feedback, funding, and university factors). A narrative approach was adopted for the writing of this paper as its authors' lived experiences as members of the unit (director and learning designer) make valuable contributions to the understanding of the results.

The paper highlights a number of challenges experienced with online education during the pandemic. Each one of them presents both barriers and opportunities. The process has made way for a potential transformation of educational practice at North American universities. This will likely come as a combination of increased knowledge and practice of online learning during the pandemic, and as a need to reshape traditional institutional structures to reflect the shifted landscape of education. It has opened discussions on equity and accessibility, learner-centered design, and the potential for change in the classroom and educational programming.

Keywords: Online learning, educational technology, learning design, pandemic, organizational change, support

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