How Teaching Online Enhances Residential Pedagogies: The Big Picture

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I spent most of my early teaching online trying to figure out how to make key aspects of residential teaching and learning—interactive lecturing, organic discussion, respect for diversities—possible in online contexts. I've sometimes wondered: "Will teaching online at some point begin to enhance what I think I already know about teaching well residentially?" The answer is yes. And the scope is surprising.

Most educators work out their teaching pedagogy and practices in residential spaces. How educators teach is shaped by how we were educated, mentored, and seasoned by residential teaching practices. So it is natural to picture a one-directional flow of impact: finding adaptive ways to bring the best of good residential teaching into online course design. Yet the enhancements can flow in reverse, making room for fruitful bi-directional cross-fertilization. There is more to say, but here is a big picture view to whet the appetite.

Supporting More Equitable Conversations:

Teaching online has matured the strategies I use for fostering more robust and equitable conversations in the residential classroom. Discussion dynamics online become more democratic when each student is equally invited and expected to contribute to conversation. In those moments, the peer-to-peer learning intensifies because all voices are heard even in the

midst of sometimes hard gender and racial dynamics. In residential spaces, minority, international, and women students frequently aren't given adequate space to enter into large group conversations. And some of the brightest male and female students process internally or in writing. I know the power of each student's voice because I read assignments. But the most trenchant student perspectives in a residential course are often not heard by peers. Online teaching has prompted me to experiment with residential teaching strategies that mimic the more democratic online discussion. One successful strategy is to invite every student to write three sentences on a discussion topic; then open the discussion with each student selecting and reading the sentence of their choice. Another tactic is to have a less vocal student "unlock" a discussion with a first word on the topic, and another less vocal student "close" the conversation with the concluding word.

Resourcing Complex Life Contexts:

Online teaching has also widened my view of the resources students bring to a residential classroom from their own backgrounds and life contexts. Online course assignments and learning activities ask students to connect what they are learning to their professional, personal, or cultural contexts. This makes learning more meaningful and applicable, and expands the contextual awareness of both peers and educators. Residential classrooms are full of the same kinds of resources which often go untapped. I have become more intentional about utilizing free-writing moments in class or pair and share opportunities for students to connect learning to their life contexts. In residential course assignments I am now more explicit about expecting and rewarding innovative connections to life contexts that expand the contextual awareness of the entire class.

Prioritizing Desired Competencies:

Teaching online has also challenged me across teaching contexts to be more explicit not only about what I want students to know, but what I want to see students be able to do. For example, in an online theology course I want students to learn how to respectfully engage one another online around complex aspects of Christology. I realized I had a similar "hidden" objective in the residential version of the course which is now in the syllabus. Prompted by online experimentation, I have also reframed some residential course objectives as desired competencies a student must demonstrate by the end of a course. For example, I added three prayer competencies in a residential course on Trinitarian themes: a well-crafted pastoral prayer, a memorized scriptural benediction, and an unscripted blessing and anointing. In these competencies, students could see the beauty and pastoral impact of Trinitarian language. And I could celebrate and more accurately evaluate not only maturing knowledge but also new capacities and skills.

Respecting Complex Life Contexts:

In residential courses I am now more intentional about respecting students' time by selecting strong but accessible readings, scaffolding assignments with straightforward expectations, and affirming good communication around the life challenges impacting their learning. Online

courses are tailored to professional and working adults who must multitask across layered responsibilities: child or elder care, volunteer work, job commitments, full or part-time pastoral leadership, *and* graduate theological education. I remind students online that my own life is similarly complex. Mutual kindness and reasonable expectations are essential; I do not expect them to be online 24/7 and I deserve the same consideration. This has alerted me to the ways in which *all* of my students, including residential, are adults with complex life commitments and circumstances. I need to honor time on all sides and promote clear and open communication in both kinds of teaching spaces.

These are some of the ways fruitful bi-directional cross-fertilization can happen between online and residential spaces of teaching and learning. There is much more to say. Stay tuned.

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