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The CHAMELEON approach to change: adapting to new educational conditions

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The challenge

Disruption, displacement and the sudden shift to online learning

With China at the forefront of the global pandemic, institutions based there led the way in shifting teaching and learning online at short notice. Although online teaching and learning is not a new phenomenon, the speed with which change was required, coupled with the stressors and anxiety of the pandemic, led to a set of circumstances requiring resilience, skill development, and mutual understanding from stakeholders. Furthermore, at this Sino-US joint venture university, the shift to online learning came mid-way through courses, with faculty, staff, and students dispersed for the Chinese New Year holiday. Consequently, the challenge of supporting dispersed faculty to survive and thrive, whilst providing the best possible higher education (HE) experience during the pandemic emerged.

A Community of Practice (CoP) constitutes a group of people with a shared concern for a topic, craft, or profession (Wenger, 1998) which arises out of learning, and involves participation (including conversations and reflections) and reification (including artefacts, documents, processes, and methods) (Wenger, 2010). With specific reference to our own English for Academic Purposes (EAP) CoPs comprising internal EAP faculty and external EAP faculty at other Sino-Joint venture institutions, we examine shared participation and

reification to derive a 9-point framework for supporting faculty adapting to sudden educational change.

The response

Micro-level and macro-level reflective collaboration

Internally and externally, EAP faculty adapted to the pandemic differently, and there was much to learn from within our CoPs. Although there is a body of literature supporting both change management and online learning, Pundyke (2020) notes that existing educational change management theories are not designed for crisis management or use at short notice. Furthermore, Shah (2012) recommends peers talk, share, and collaborate, at micro-level (peers and course groups) as well as at macro-level (institution or sector-wide) to help minimise negative impacts on faculty wellbeing. Therefore, the authors collaborated with internal and external EAP faculty peers to develop CoPs that acted as faculty support networks.

Initially, author A and four internationally-dispersed internal EAP faculty colleagues, decided to work collaboratively for the remainder of the semester, pooling resources, materials, and wellbeing tips. Weekly Zoom meetings, regular email, and group-chat conversations were used to maximise efficiency, collectively develop pedagogy and learning resources and mentally support one another (see L. Davies et al., 2020 for more details). At the end of the academic year, macro-level collaborative reflections were carried out amongst six teachers from five EAP courses, across four Sino-foreign universities based in China, working towards a variety of written and oral based learning objectives. Through collaborative reflection, comprised around three specific written prompts, we shared areas of good practice, and the key challenges faced when transforming EAP courses to online delivery at short notice in our respective contexts. Using shared written reflective documents and combining these reflections into a comparative paper, we were able to share the CoP's experiences internally and with the wider EAP community to further support faculty during ongoing times of change (see J. Davies et al., 2020 for more details).

Recommendations

9-Point CHAMELEON Framework

Based on these micro- and macro- level reflections about our rapid shift to online teaching, we have highlighted the key takeaways from our CoPs and compiled a user-friendly framework to support higher education practitioners faced with sudden uncertainty, crisis, or change. The 9-point CHAMELEON framework (see Table 1), as the name suggests, is designed to be flexible, and adaptable for different educational contexts.

Table 1. 9-Point CHAMELEON framework for faculty support when adapting to sudden educational change.

	Factor	Explanation
C	Communicate	Communicate with colleagues and Communities of Practice regularly and openly. Collaborate and form teams to share and divide tasks and responsibilities where possible. Connect with your scholarly community as time allows (conferences, working groups, chats).
H	Humanise	Be kind, supportive and responsive to learner and peer needs, interests and capabilities, and your own! Try personalising teaching materials and class input to show you care/help reduce learner anxiety. Be patient and understanding of others' circumstances.
A	Assess	Assess the needs of your learners in this new educational context. Evaluate what has changed and how this will impact your learners. Assess your own capabilities operating under these new conditions – you must first survive, before you can thrive. Assess the needs of your colleagues, offer expertise, and support where you can.
M	Motivate	Motivate students by delivering classes in a positive and dynamic way that inspires learners to take part. Develop tasks that appeal to various learning preferences and provide opportunities for autonomous learning. Motivate yourself and your team through regularly checking in with peers and developing a Community of Practice.

E	Engage	Actively encourage student engagement with your course and their wider interests where possible to promote a shared sense of community. Enable students to meta-cognitively reflect on their learning and progress to set regular learning goals. Where possible, facilitate group work, peer support and utilise different feedback methods (peer review, voice and video feedback) to promote academic and peer engagement and a sense of connectedness.
L	Localise	Strongly consider the contextual norms and expectations of the local teaching environment. Familiarise yourself with restrictions that students, colleagues, or you may face if geographically dispersed, and ensure online tools and resources are appropriate and available to all who need them.
E	Evolve	As internal and external, personal and professional needs and circumstances change, ensure to plan for flexibility, allowing for evolving needs. Scaling back may be necessary.
O	(be) Open	Be open to new ideas, trial new tools and techniques. Use change as a learning and development process for teachers and students.
N	Negotiate	Regularly consult and discuss with learners and peers about their changing needs and expectations while studying and working in a new environment. Ensure course workloads are manageable for both students and yourself, and be willing to adapt if necessary. Re-evaluate priorities.

It is hoped that as educators progress from emergency to online and hybrid instruction (Hodges et al., 2020), practitioners can draw upon this framework for course enhancement and faculty wellbeing support. Additionally, as the pandemic-stimulated restrictions on international mobility continue to disrupt and reshape education globally, the future remains uncertain. Not only pandemics, but global political shifts, climate, and technological change can all impact the education sector – particularly within transnational education contexts. Consequently, the sector needs to be prepared for sudden change. We therefore conclude that although there is no one-size-fits-all approach to successful sudden online transition,

willingness to experiment using the CHAMELEON framework as a baseline for adaptation and faculty support can be beneficial for practitioners, and in turn, for students and HE institutions.

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