Reflective practice

Leveraging Ed-tech in the Co-curricular Space: Reflections on Design and Development Aspects of the Class Representative Induction Programme at the University of Cape Town

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Abstract

Every year, class representatives are elected at the University of Cape Town to represent students on academic matters in relation to a specific academic course. A vital element of this representative role is to advocate for an enabling learning environment that promotes learning excellence. In preparing class representatives for their leadership roles, the Department of Student Affairs, in partnership with the Students' Representative Council (SRC) and the Faculty Councils, host and facilitate a class representative induction programme. The induction typically utilised face-to-face synchronous teaching methods. However, since the advent of Covid-19, adaptions to the induction programme had to be made in order to reflect the new normal imposed by the pandemic.

Against this backdrop, this article addresses various design-related choices encountered from an online education technology perspective. Key areas of reflection include working with the SRC Undergraduate Academic Co-ordinator and Faculty Councils as a design team in transitioning a, hitherto, synchronous programme catering for approximately 420 class representatives, from a face-to-face mode of delivery to an online mode of delivery. Particular attention is paid to the social constructivist design elements of the programme development process and how these elements were managed with regards to the enablements and constraints encountered in the virtual space by exploring the technological affordances of various ed-tech options available to student affairs practitioners.

This article contributes to the practitioner literature by demonstrating how ed-tech can be leveraged to aid in the preservation of existing practices as blended learning approaches continue to shape and augment the future of co-curricular programme delivery in higher education.

Keywords

blended learning; leadership development; online co-curricular programmes; online learning design; participatory curriculum development

Introduction

Annually class representatives are elected at the University of Cape Town (UCT) to represent students on academic matters in relation to a specific academic course. Class Representatives are formally recognised in the Students' Representative Council (SRC)

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Constitution which forms part of the UCT Institutional Statute. The SRC Constitution further recognises six undergraduate faculty councils, that represent students in each of the six academic faculties of UCT and tasks these faculty councils with ensuring "that there is a functioning system of class representatives" (UCT Council, 2016, p. 14).

The role of a class representative is to advocate for an enabling learning environment that promotes learning excellence. A class representative typically achieves this through regular engagement with the course convenor or lecturer on academic matters or challenges that may be faced by their class. Should the class representative not be able to resolve the matter at the localised class level, the class representative can escalate the matter to the faculty council to liaise with the Head of Department or Dean and if the matter remains unresolved can escalate the matter to the SRC to take up with the university executive (Figure 1).

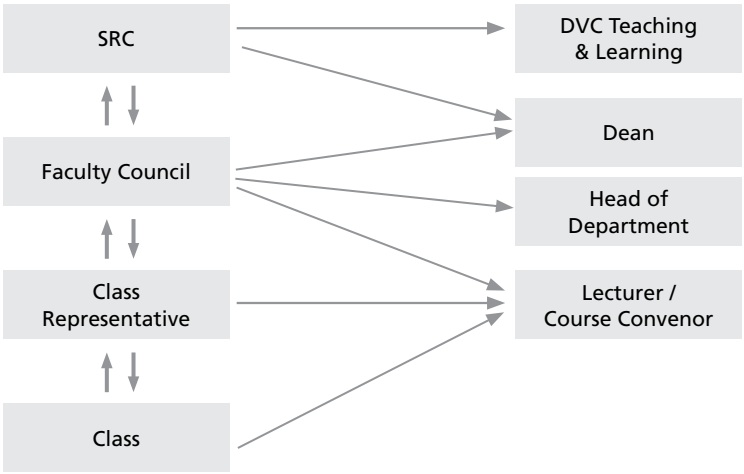

Figure 1: Class representatives' communication and complaint escalation channels

Further to this, a second responsibility of the role of the class representative is to facilitate the communication of important information to their class as well as refer their fellow class participants to the appropriate student support service should the need arise.

In an effort to prepare the class representatives for their critical role, the Department of Student Affairs (DSA) is tasked with inducting the class representatives. This is achieved through the development and implementation of the annual Class Representative Induction (CRI) programme. To facilitate the creation of a relevant and inclusive programme, the DSA utilises a participatory curriculum development (PCD) approach by partnering with both the faculty councils and the SRC Undergraduate Academics Co-ordinator to form the CRI design team (henceforth referred to as the design team). This multiple stakeholder approach is what distinguishes a PCD approach from a traditional curriculum development approach where subject matter experts and educators develop the curriculum. In drawing on the insights and experiences of stakeholders, a PCD approach essentially assumes that

each stakeholder is an expert with regards to their own reality in relation to the curriculum being developed. The appeal of a PCD process is that it increases stakeholder "motivation, commitment and ownership of the learning process" (Taylor, 2000, p. 95) thereby supporting the de facto social constructivist paradigm associated with student development in this co-curricular space (Schreiber & Valle, 2013). Furthermore, PCD's ability to facilitate the inclusion of usually marginalised voices results in the production of "relevant, flexible, diverse and integrated curricula, improving the chance of a successful, sustainable outcome [that is] manifested through effective learning" (Taylor, 2000, p. 95).

The 2020 CRI programme was scheduled for 14 March. However, the confirmed arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic in South Africa in early March resulted in the postponement of the synchronous and face-to-face programme. The manner in which the pandemic evolved worldwide soon made it clear that a face-to-face induction would no longer be possible. It was, however, crucial that the class representatives receive training, especially since their representative role gained in significance once the institution announced that the academic year would continue via emergency remote teaching. This required that the design team re-design and re-develop the CRI programme in order for it to be facilitated fully online.

This article serves as a practitioner's reflection in addressing various design-related choices encountered in the process of developing the fully online CRI programme from an online learning and education technology perspective.

Methodology

According to Schön (1992, p. 53) "real-world problems do not come well-formed", and this was indeed the case with the advent of Covid-19 in South Africa. Covid-19 resulted in most higher education institutions being forced to move both curricular and co-curricular programmes fully online. Consequently, the use of reflective practice, as originally advocated by Schön (1982), provides a method of making explicit the practitioner knowledge gained by those practitioners who were suddenly tasked with enabling this transition (Candy, 2020; Schön, 1982).

Luescher (2018) develops the concept of reflective practice further within the context of student affairs by providing a foundation for the use of reflective practice articles as a methodology for reflective scholarship within the student development practitioner community. More specifically, Luescher proposes a set of guidelines for practitioners to draw on when engaging in reflective scholarship, namely:

> **Contextual information** about the higher education system, the institution and its student body, and the student affairs department where a practice is housed;
>
> **Title and description of the practice**, i.e. an intervention, project, initiative, programme or service;
>
> **Reasons for the practice**: Why was this practice developed and adopted? What was its purpose and objectives? Who was the target group? What outcomes were envisaged?

> **Conceptualisation and implementation of the practice**: How was the practice conceived and developed? What was included/excluded? How was the practice implemented? What were its costs (including non-costed issues like time)? How was it managed, monitored and evaluated?
>
> **Reflections on the practice**: What were the outcomes in terms of achieving its purposes? What worked, what did not work, and why? What recommendations for improvement can be made?
>
> **Reflections on ethics and transferability**: What ethical considerations must be noted in relation to the practice? What is the potential of transferring the practice to other target groups or implementing it in different institutional and campus settings?
>
> **Reflections on the account**: What is the trustworthiness of this reflective practice account? What biases may be implicit? How does it contribute to a scholarship of practice in student affairs? What further research may be required?
>
> (Luescher, 2018, p. 68)

This article therefore proceeds by employing the use of reflective scholarship as a methodological approach given its well-suited relevance and hence also draws on both the structure and key components of Luescher's guidance outlined above.

This article draws on the following publicly available data sources:

- *Framework for remote teaching at UCT under Covid-19* (also referred to as the Emergency Remote Teaching [ERT] framework).
- Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Guide provided by the Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching (CILT).

The "new normal"

Having noted that the 2020 CRI programme would need to take place in a fully online environment, a re-development of the programme was required in order to accommodate and adapt to this new normal in accordance with the provisions of UCT's Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) framework.

In April 2020, the UCT Senate Executive Committee approved the *Framework for remote teaching at UCT under Covid-19*. The purpose of the framework is to ensure "an equitable experience of learning for all students" (UCT SEC, 2020, p. 1) in an effort to prevent "remote teaching [from] reinforc[ing] or increas[ing] existing inequalities" (UCT SEC, 2020, p. 1). This framework requires that "[e]mergency remote teaching […] be asynchronous and designed for low bandwidth and restricted access to the internet in order to include as many students as possible" (UCT SEC, 2020, p. 2).

Emergency remote teaching was further enabled by the provision of laptops by the institution to students who required a device, by the monthly provision of data to students, and finally by an agreement made between the South African Department of Higher

Education and Training and South African mobile service providers to zero rate a selection of educational websites. The result of the latter was that Vula, UCT's Learning Management System, was zero-rated and could be utilised without a data charge (ICTS, 2020).

The ERT framework made a point of distinguishing between emergency remote teaching and online teaching in that online teaching would allow for synchronous teaching activities to take place via platforms such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams (UCT SEC, 2020). In practice this meant that the face-to-face programme could not merely be moved online and be presented synchronously via an online platform. Instead, the framework challenged the CRI design team to design and develop a low-bandwidth asynchronous online induction programme.

Designing for the "new normal"

In keeping with Carpenter and Haber-Curran's (2013) recommendation of theory-based intentionality of practice, a deliberate attempt was made to draw on both education technology and online learning theory in the re-development of the CRI programme. In particular, use was made of the ADDIE framework, Affordance theory, the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles, the multimedia principle, and the Community of Inquiry (CoI) theoretical framework to inform the many design choices made for the programme. Each of these will now in turn be introduced and briefly discussed so as to provide the reader with the necessary background to make sense of the design choices upon which the ensuing reflections are based.

The Analyse, Design, Develop, Implement and Evaluate Model (ADDIE)

ADDIE is a five-stage instructional design model that systematically guides practitioners in the development of educational interventions (Allen, 2006). The five stages, from which it derives its acronymic name, are: Analyse, Design, Develop, Implement and Evaluate. Branch & Dousay, (2015, p. 17) characterise each of the ADDIE stages in terms of the activities associated with each stage as follows:

- [A]nalysis of the contexts and the needs of the learner;
- [D]esign of a set of specifications for an effective, efficient, and relevant learning environment;
- [D]evelopment of all student and course management materials;
- [I]mplementation of the planned instruction; and
- [E]valuation of the results of the design processes, both formative and summative.

According to Reiser and Dempsey (2007, p. 11) it should also be noted that when using the ADDIE framework "it is often necessary to move back and forth among the activities of analysis, design, and formative evaluation and revision" and by doing so the ADDIE framework reveals its greatest strength as being an "iterative and self-correcting" process (Reiser & Dempsey, 2007).

Affordance theory

In the education technology context affordance theory is interpreted as a maxim that states that when making choices about technologies, consideration must be given to both the manner in which the technologies support the learning task and how the technologies are experienced by the student (Beetham, 2007). The term 'affordance' is used to describe how a tool or technology might be used to enable online learning (Hammond, 2010; Aagaard, 2018). It then follows that by assessing what the various technologies, resources and tools may afford the student as they embark on the learning activity, learning designers are aided in determining which tool, technology or resource is best suited for the pedagogic strategy of the specific learning task.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

The UDL provides a framework for instructional design and curriculum development based on research from the learning sciences, the learning differences, and the creation of supportive learning environment domains. This framework consists of three principles, namely *engagement*, *representation*, and *action and expression*. These principles endeavour to optimise learning for all students (Hall et al., 2012; CILT, 2020). The *engagement* principle emphasises "the 'why' of learning" (CILT, 2020, p. 1) and requires that students connect with the content in a manner that motivates and stimulates them to learn. This can be achieved by contextualising content using local examples and the use of activities that encourage and welcome the student voice. The second principle of *representation* refers to "the 'what' of learning" (CILT, 2020, p. 2). This principle requires that students be enabled to make connections with the content in relation to their existing knowledge and understanding. The importance of this principle is that it acknowledges that students may interpret information differently based on their pre-existing knowledge and therefore requires that the same content be presented in multiple different formats as well as in smaller sections so as to allow for effective processing of the material. The third principle of *action and expression* refers to "the 'how' of learning" (CILT, 2020, p. 4) and entails "creating multiple opportunities so that a wide range of diverse students can have equal access to and a means to confidently express their learnings […] and participate in educational activities" (CILT, 2020, p. 4).

Multimedia principle

The multimedia principle states that human beings "learn better from words and pictures than from words alone" (Mayer, 2017, p. 404). Mayer (2017) however cautions that while multimedia can greatly aid the learning process, utilising too many elements within multimedia simultaneously can overload the cognitive processing of the learning and therefore impede learning.

Community of Inquiry (CoI) theoretical framework

A community of inquiry is defined as "a group of individuals who collaboratively engage in purposeful critical discourse and reflection to construct personal meaning and confirm

mutual understanding" (Garrison, 2017, p. 2). The CoI framework presents "a process of creating a deep and meaningful (collaborative-constructivist) learning experience through the development of three interdependent elements – social presence, cognitive presence and teaching presence" (Cleveland-Innes et al., 2019, p. 170). A presence, also referred to as a sense of being, is fashioned through interpersonal communication. Moreover, in order for a CoI process to result in an engaging and interactive learning community all three types of presence, that is the social-, cognitive- and teaching presence must exist in a balanced confluence (Cleveland-Innes et al., 2019). These respective presences are defined as follows:

- Social presence is defined as "the ability of participants to identify with the group or course of study, communicate purposefully in a trusting environment, and develop personal and affective friendships progressively by way of projecting their individual personalities." (Cleveland-Innes et al., 2019, p. 172).
- Cognitive presence is defined as "the extent to which learners are able to construct and confirm meaning through sustained reflection and discourse" (Cleveland-Innes et al., 2019, p. 174).
- Teaching presence is defined as "the design, facilitation and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realising personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes" (Cleveland-Innes et al., 2019, p. 177).

Design and re-development practice reflections

In approaching the re-development and design of the CRI programme, the decision to follow a theory-based intentionality of practice was to help ensure the adoption of best practices given the more general trend towards blended learning in the Higher Education space. This approach was also inspired by pre-Covid events such as the 2019 NASDEV Best Practice Summit where strides towards harnessing the benefits and opportunities of the fourth industrial revolution (4IR) were already being encouraged. Collectively, these driving forces continued to highlight the need for more urgency amongst student affairs practitioners in general to take steps towards ensuring that the co-curricular space does not get left behind. The arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic necessitated the acceleration of this hitherto emerging agenda.

ADDIE

Having pivoted into the online learning design space, the first important decision was to adopt an instructional design model. Given the novelty of this practice as a student affairs practitioner, and the unfamiliar new normal, a flexible and simple design process model capable of supporting and maintaining the participatory curriculum development approach was sought and found in ADDIE. As Clinton and Hokanson describe ADDIE as being one of the most widely used design frameworks, it was also considered as a step towards the adoption of a best practice (Clinton & Hokanson, 2012).

In following the ADDIE model, the design team's first task was to analyse the needs of the class representatives as well as the context in which they were going to perform

their role. This needs analysis resulted in the identification of a key theme sub-divided into four sub-themes, along which the design team could focus their efforts. The key theme adopted took account of the demands and voluntary nature of the class representative role. This overarching theme distilled the need and realisation that we were designing for approximately 420 class representatives from across the entire academic spectrum as previously trained class representatives needed to be re-inducted given the amended institutional protocols as a result of Covid-19. This meant that the programme had to cater for students ranging from first-year students to finalists representing all six faculties. The four sub-themes addressed the programme's content requirements and included: (i) the need for class representatives to gain an appreciation of what it means to be a class representative and how this position relates to the broader student governance structures, (ii) the need for class representatives to be well versed in the academic policies and rules of the institution so that they are well equipped to answer questions or to raise concerns when policy is not being followed, (iii) the need for class representatives to be aware of the student support services offered by the institution so that they are able to refer a student to the appropriate support service, and (iv) the skills training the class representatives will need.

Affordance theory

Once the content needs for the new induction programme were established, attention needed to be focused on how best to deliver it within an online environment. As Branch & Dousay (2015, p.17) suggest, "effective, efficient, and relevant [online] learning environment[s]" heavily depend on utilising the best resources and/or tools for enabling students on their learning journey, the design team turned to affordance theory. Given that the design team had first-hand knowledge, be it only anecdotal and implicit in nature, of actual student experiences in using the university's Learning Management System (Vula), the decision to house the CRI within UCT's Learning Management System was greatly simplified (Aagaard, 2018, p. 1).

Vula had been declared zero-rated which meant class representatives could access the site without incurring any data charges. This would ensure equitable access to the resources and content of the induction. Class representatives were also already well versed with Vula. Furthermore, the affordances offered by Vula included the fact that this Learning Management System has multiple tools for effective content delivery and is enabled with various communication tools that allow for collaboration and engagement. Noting that the design was underpinned by a social constructivist paradigm, the use of collaborative communication tools offered by Vula were an important consideration for the design. A further affordance offered by Vula is that site analytics can be utilised to determine how class representatives have engaged with the site. This would allow the design team to identify class representatives who have been inactive on the induction site so that a follow-up could be made with the class representative in question as well as allow the design team to determine if class representatives were experiencing any challenges with areas or aspects of the site.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

After having examined the affordances of Vula, the challenge now became for the design team to optimally exploit the affordances of Vula. This entailed collating the content of the induction for the purposes of instructional delivery. The Principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) served to guide the design choices pertaining to the content delivery. This enabled the design team to address unseen learning barriers in an inclusive manner.

To actualise UDL's engagement principle, the design team opted for short videos to be presented by the student leaders within the design team. For this task, the design team drew on further research that informed them of the specifics required for the making of effective instructional videos. For example, the work of Day, Foley and Catrambone (2006; as cited in Fanguy et al., 2019) which found that "videos where the instructor was shown led to higher retention of information and greater understanding and ability to apply the principles featured in the lecture compared to the same content presented using either audio and a slide deck" (Fanguy et al., 2019, p. 46) formed part of the considerations in creating videos. This led to the content creation and production of videos by the student leaders that covered sub-theme (i) on the institutional role of class representatives, and sub-theme (iv) that addressed the skills requirements. The actualisation of the engagement principle was ultimately achieved through the creation of relevant and interesting videos that were presented within the student discourse and from a fellow students' perspective through the use of local and relatable examples. This was done in an attempt to motivate and stimulate class representatives to engage with the content.

Further attempts at keeping the instructional videos interesting included the use of different formats. For example, the videos for sub-theme (ii) took the form of an interview. Over a period of one hour, the SRC Undergraduate Academics Co-ordinator interviewed a Faculty Manager on the various academic policies and rules that class representatives should be aware of and how these had been amended in the Covid-19 context. This lengthy interview was then cut into shorter videos whereby one video would cover a particular question or topic. This interview method provided for an interactive and engaging discussion. For sub-theme (iii), the presenter format was reused, however this time the videos were presented by staff members representing various student support services. This provided an opportunity for each of the respective student support services to showcase their offerings in a video as well as advise how their services remained accessible and available in the Covid-19 context.

In further applying the engagement principle, the design team opted for learner-led pacing. This meant that class representatives could work through the content in their own time and at their own pace. The main reason for opting for a learner-led pace was the fact that this induction was a voluntary programme and therefore would remain secondary to the class representative's academic commitments. This flexibility allowed for class representatives to engage with the material as they felt motivated to do so. The benefits associated with this design choice, however, did not come without its own risk. The main concern being that class representatives would simply not engage with the content and

would hence require dedicated monitoring of usage analytics and follow-up by the design team (Lowenthal et al., 2009; Hall et al., 2012).

The first step taken in incorporating the second principle of representation into the induction design was to provide an overview page within Vula that introduced the programme, stated the purpose of the induction, outlined the learning outcomes and explained the programme's methodology. A further principle of representation strategy employed by the design team was to release content in manageable portions. To this end, the content was released in accordance with the sub-themes and each sub-theme was presented within one Vula page. A further stipulation of the representation principle is that content be presented through multiple different file formats. Having noted afore that video had been chosen as the foremost tool for content delivery, the design team ensured that each video was accompanied by presentation slides, explanatory notes, a transcript of the video, relevant diagrams and images and, if applicable, additional resources and website links. The induction therefore provided for a multimedia approach that meant that the class representatives could view the video and take in visual and audio content or listen to the video and take in only the audio content or the class representative could engage with the content by reading the presentation slides accompanied by the explanatory notes and the video transcript.

The third principle of action and expression was incorporated into the design of the Vula site through the utilisation of the many tools Vula offers for asynchronous communication, collaboration and engagement. At the end of each sub-theme a comment tool was integrated into the page so as to allow for comments or questions to be posed in relation to the sub-theme. The site also featured a chat room, the question & answer tool as well as the forum tool. The forum tool was set up to permit faculty-specific discussions which allowed for discussions to ensue between faculty-specific class representatives and their respective faculty councils. The forum tool could be utilised by class representatives to pose questions and suggestions, seek and provide advice and debate policy. Returning class representatives or more senior student leaders could also utilise the forums to provide tips and guidance to their representative peers. The chat room tool was intended for class representative to connect and engage with each other. Finally, the question & answer tool, having the affordance and functionality to be used anonymously, meant that all class representatives could feel comfortable posing questions to the Faculty Councils, SRC or the DSA.

In a further strategy to incorporate the expression and action principle, the design team developed relevant and locally contextualised scenario-based questions that could be posed to a group of class representatives to solve. These questions were specifically designed to encourage collaboration as well as engagement with the content in answering the scenarios. The multiple and varied opportunities for communication and engagement integrated into the induction permitted the class representative's voice to be elicited within this asynchronous online space and resulted in class representatives being able to action and express their learning.

Multimedia principle

In further unpacking the opportunities that multimedia provides in online education, the design team noted the multimedia principle which asserts that students retain more knowledge from words and images than from words alone. By incorporating relevant content pictures in the static form such as graphics, diagrams and images as well as pictures in the dynamic form such as videos and narrated PowerPoint presentations into the induction, the design team ensured a more effective learning environment for class representatives (Mayer, 2017).

As per the UDL Guide provided by CILT (2020), all videos were kept below 15 minutes. Lengthier videos were edited and cut to cover a particular question or topic. Instructional text was incorporated within the Vula pages to illuminate the content of the video as well as additional materials. All videos were embedded into the Vula site which meant videos could be watched without data being used. Further to this, for students who had intermittent or limited Wi-Fi access, videos and resources could be downloaded, stored and watched or read offline at a later stage. For students with low bandwidth or who preferred not to watch videos, a transcription of each video was provided along with presentation slides and explanatory notes.

Creating a learning community

A key benefit of the participatory curriculum development process was that the design team could draw on their own realities in assessing the needs of the target audience of this induction given their high degree of shared experience. The uncertainty presented by the Covid-19 pandemic and the sudden shift from face-to-face teaching to remote emergency teaching left students feeling distressed and overwhelmed (Morgan, 2020). Moreover, the design team was cognisant that research on the experience of online learning had revealed that students "often feel isolated and alone in online learning environments" (Lowenthal et al., 2009, p. 162). In further noting that learning communities "act as academic and social support structures that allow students to learn in more authentic and challenging ways" (Dabbagh, 2005, p. 30) the design team set about ensuring the creation of a supportive and interactive online learning community within the induction programme. Class representatives needed to be enabled to perform their representative role as well as have a safe space where they could ask questions, seek guidance and engage with peers on the experiences of emergency remote learning as well as on being a class representative during these challenging times. The creation of a supportive learning community therefore was paramount to the success of the induction as well as the functioning of the class representative system as a whole (Ludwig-Hardman & Dunlap, 2003; Robinson, 2000; Morgan, 2020).

Most noteworthy was the manner in which the design choices hitherto described culminated in an environment that would be supportive of a community of inquiry. The social presence would be enabled through the various collaborative and communication tools integrated into the induction site. These tools would allow class representatives to

meaningfully and purposefully engage with one other. Furthermore, the ability of the Faculty Councils and SRC to be present in these virtual spaces would allow for ongoing motivation and support as well as serve as a continual reminder of the common purpose to advocate for the interest of students. The cognitive presence would be enabled through group activities and the release of scenario-based explanatory videos. The intention behind these activities is that they would encourage the "construct[ing] and confirm[ing] [of] meaning through sustained reflection and discourse" (Cleveland-Innes et al., 2019, p. 174). The third and final presence, that of the teaching presence, would be enabled through the sustained and ongoing facilitation and guidance of the design team throughout the induction programme.

Ultimately then, these design choices also served to maintain the confluence of the three presences required for the existence and maintaining of a community of inquiry.

Reflections to Aid Student Affairs Practice

In drawing on the experience of transitioning a hitherto face-to-face synchronous programme to an asynchronous online programme, the practitioner has noted five benefits that leveraging online learning and education technology could have for student development practitioners. These benefits are worthy of consideration as we shape and augment the future of co-curricular programmes in the new era of online and blended learning in a post Covid-19 world. The practitioner by no means claims that this list is exhaustive. The five benefits identified by the practitioner during the design of the CRI are:

1. **Scalability** – A co-curricular programme that is offered online can be presented to an unlimited number of students at no additional cost per student. In 2020, approximately 420 class representatives were elected. There are a limited number of physical venues that could accommodate that many students on campus and the cost of materials and catering for a group that size would be significant.
2. **Decreased risk of disruption** – The benefit of creating an asynchronous online programme has meant that we do not encounter the risks associated with running a synchronous programme. These risks would include presenters or participants being unable to attend the synchronous programme, load shedding rendering a venue unusable or a number of other possibilities resulting in a disruption to the synchronous programme. With students being able to access the content as is suitable for them, the risk of the content not being able to be presented or delivered is decreased significantly.
3. **Universally accessible programmes** – Designing the online programme according to the principles of Universal Design for Learning means that unseen barriers to student learning are automatically catered for and the content of the programme is accessible to all student participants.
4. **Student convenience** – The programme can also cater for student preferences in engaging with the content which would result in greater motivation to participate in the programme. These preferences could be in terms of when the student chooses to engage with the content, i.e. late at night or how the student

wishes to engage, i.e. via video, audio or readings. The student can also choose the communication channel they wish to utilise when interacting with other student participants or the programme design team, presenters or facilitators.

5. **Temporal affordance** – A further benefit is that the content can be revisited by a student at any time and as needed. Should a student wish to refresh their memory or knowledge of a certain topic, the possibility is available at the click of a button. Further to this, the induction of new class representatives as a result of resignations or vacancies or as new courses are initiated in the second semester can easily be added to the site and the induction material is immediately available for their use.

Conclusion

While the transition to a completely online programme was daunting at first, the exposure to the benefits of online education technology theories, practice and techniques has allowed for an enriched student development practitioner experience. This article has sought to compile a reflective account of how a design team managed to preserve the strengths of their pre-Covid-19 practice and make strides towards advancing an emerging agenda within student affairs practice by leveraging blended learning. These advances would not have been possible were it not for the adoption of a theory-based intentionality of practice. Consequently, this account also demonstrates how the use of conceptual frameworks and instructional theories can guide the development and improvement of practice when encountering conditions of uncertainty.

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Research Ethics

The following ethical principles, as advocated by Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2016), were observed during the writing and research of and associated with this article:

- Avoidance of harm,
- Maintenance of the anonymity of those taking part,
- Responsibility in the analysis of data and reporting of findings, and
- Respect for others.

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