



Sınrsız Eđitim ve Arařtırma Dergisi



The Journal of Limitless Education and Research

Mart 2021
Cilt 6, Sayı 1

March 2021
Volume 6, Issue 1



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Mart 2021, Cilt 6, Sayı 1

The Journal of Limitless Education and Research

March 2021, Volume 6, Issue 1

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Journal of Limitless Education and Research(J-LERA) is an

international refereed journal published three times a year.

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Dear Readers,

We are delighted to present you the March 2021 issue of the Journal of Limitless Education and Research.

Our journal has been published continually by the Limitless Education and Research Association (SEAD) since 2016. The aim of our journal is to publish theoretical and applied studies in the field of education and research, to share scientific information at national and international level, create an environment for the production of new information, announce innovations and thereby contribute to scientific production in our country. For this purpose, priority is given to qualified research and review publications in our Journal.

In our journal, the Editorial Board, the Scientific Committee, and the Referee Board members, who meticulously evaluate the manuscripts, are formed by academics that are prestigious experts in their field. Our journal that is strengthened much more with the priceless contributions of the scientists who serve on the boards, authors and you readers, continues to be published without compromising its academic quality.

The Journal of Limitless Education and Research is published three times a year, scanned in various national and international indexes, and it receives numerous citations. Our journal, which had a SOBIAD impact factor of 0.3 in 2019, will be published both in Turkish and English languages as of this issue. Thus, it is aimed at reaching wider audience.

We wish our journal to contribute to the scientific field, and acknowledge all editors, authors and referees who contributed to its preparation. With our best regards.

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Sevgili Okurlar,

Sizlere Sınrsız Eđitim ve Arařtırma Dergisinin Mart 2021 sayısını sunmaktan byk mutluluk duyuyoruz.

Dergimiz, Sınrsız Eđitim ve Arařtırma Derneđi tarafından 2016 yılından bu yana kesintisiz olarak yayınlanmaktadır. Amacımız, eđitim ve arařtırma alanındaki kuramsal ve uygulamalı alıřmaları yayınlamak, bilimsel bilgileri ulusal ve uluslararası dzeyde paylařmak, yeni bilgiler retilmesine ortam hazırlamak, yenilikleri duyurmak ve bylece lkemizdeki bilimsel retime katkı sađlamaktır. Bu amala Dergimizde nitelikli arařtırma ve derleme yayınlarına ncelik verilmektedir.

Dergimizin Editr Kurulu, Bilim Kurulu ve yayınları titizlikle deđerlendiren Hakem Kurulu yeleri alanında uzman akademisyenlerden oluřmaktadır. Kurullarda grev yapan bilim insanları, yazarlar ve siz okurların deđerli katkılarıyla her sayıda biraz daha gçlenen Dergimiz, akademik kalitesinden dn vermeden yayın hayatını srdrmektedir.

Sınrsız Eđitim ve Arařtırma Dergisi yılda  sayı olarak yayınlanmakta, eřitli ulusal ve uluslararası dzeydeki indekslerde taranmakta, ok sayıda atıf almaktadır. 2019 yılı SOBİAD etki faktr 0,3 olan Dergimiz, artık hem Trke hem de İngilizce yayınlanmaktadır. Bylece daha geniř bir okur kitlesine ulařılmaya alıřılmaktadır.

Dergimizin bilimsel alana katkılar getirmesini diliyor, hazırlanmasında emeđi geen btn editr, yazar ve hakemlere teřekkr ediyoruz. Saygılarımızla.

SINIRSIZ EĐİTİM VE ARAŐTIRMA DERNEĐİ

TABLE OF CONTENTS

İÇİNDEKİLER

**Article Type: Review
Makale Türü: Derleme**

Todd Alan PRICE

Blended Learning and the Videoconferencing Modality for the Teaching and Learning Doctoral Candidate 1-10

**Article Type: Research Article
Makale Türü: Araştırma**

Firdevs GÜNEŞ

Riddles for Kids 11-40
Çocuk Bilmeceleri

İbrahim Halil YURDAKAL, Ayşe YURDAKAL

First Reading and Writing Teaching in Turkish Teaching Programs Between 1924-1981 41-77
1924-1981 Arası Türkçe Öğretim Programlarında İlk Okuma Yazma Öğretimi

Nevin AKKAYA, Buse GÜLLÜ, Esra ÖZDEN

Educational Messages and Effective Communication Factors in Children's Literature Works 78-118
Çocuk Edebiyatı Eserlerinde Yer Alan Eğitsel İletiler ve Etkili İletişim Unsurları

Osman SÖNER, Hazel DURU

An Investigation into the Articles Published in Turkish Psychological Counseling and Guidance Journal Between 1990-2019 in Terms of Various Factors 119-151
Türk Psikolojik Danışma ve Rehberlik Dergisinde 1990-2019 Yılları Arasında Yayımlanan Makalelerin Çeşitli Faktörler Açısından İncelenmesi

Emine TEPE, Gülden TÜM

The Reflection of Basic Principles in Course Books for Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language 152-178
Temel İlkelerin Yabancı Dil Olarak Türkçe Öğretimi Ders Kitaplarındaki Yansıması



DOI: 10.29250/sead.866425

Posted Date	Article Type	Acceptance Date
22.01.2021	Review	15.03.2021

Blended Learning and the Videoconferencing Modality for the Teaching and Learning Doctoral Candidate

Prof. Dr. Todd Alan PRICE, National-Louis University, USA, TPrice@nl.edu

Abstract: This paper simply documents the changes to a foundations course for teaching and learning doctoral candidates at a Midwest university, required due to the recent pandemic conditions and subsequent healthcare precautions. The main change to this already blended modality course, *Critical Policy Analysis*, involved modifying three face-to-face (F2F), in person sessions, essentially transforming them into three videoconferencing sessions using the ZOOM application. My reflection provides what can only be considered to be a discussion of very basic findings, but amongst those findings are that digital tools often appear to ‘work’ very seamlessly and hence exceed our collective expectations. The breakout sessions structured into the course, for example, provided a real-time experience comparable in most ways to small group discussions held previously when the course was offered in a physical classroom. However, some of the students struggled with the online portion of the class (course modules, with electronic reserve readings, discussion posts, and crafting a white paper/report, all online) and felt at times less than proficient working online. A few indicated preference for classes in person.

Also included in this paper are some of my observations as a long-time online instructor and researcher in the *educational communications technology* field. I argue that this latest iteration of blended learning is here to stay, and that this change will pose both promise and peril for education in the years ahead.

Keywords: Education, blended learning, videoconferencing

1. Introduction

During the summer of 2020, my doctoral course, *Critical Policy Analysis*, was required to go entirely virtual. The pandemic that had swept the nation created a new challenge for higher education, as well as K-12 public education that had come to a “hard stop”. Fortunately, my university was prepared for such an eventuality as we had already become early adopters of the videoconferencing technology and frequent users of one such application, ZOOM, for nearly all of our meetings. Furthermore, our faculty in the Teaching and Learning doctoral program had already committed to designing our courses for blended learning, meaning that a portion of the coursework would be held in real time/synchronous face to face (F2F), and another portion would be convened in an asynchronous manner using online modules. The main adjustment this summer, therefore, was to maintain the synchronicity real time modality of F2F instruction by converting to a ZOOM or video conference format.

This essay describes some of findings from that exercise, to convert the synchronous F2F modality to a still synchronous videoconference modality for three sessions. Further, I offer an historical perspective concerning the rapidly changing nature of education due to both the pandemic, but even more significantly due to already-in-motion changes in *educational communications technology* as a social construction. I assert that society itself has already made its move to virtual learning and thus this current move to virtual learning appears to be an ‘inevitable’ eventuality. I will argue, however, that nothing is inevitable when it comes to human agency and the decision to invest. For example, untold billions of dollars into the movement of education online, could equally have been employed in an investment in students and schools and teachers for the last several decades, which might have, one could easily speculate, all but eliminate the so-called achievement gap by providing the necessary resources to close the more important “opportunity gap” that communities experience today when it comes to access to education.

I also argue that the movement to all social activity including, of course, education online, has equal parts promise and peril. I describe this cultural phenomena as *virtuality* and *virality*.

This essay is further inspired by my current publication, “As the Virtual Dust Settles looking Back at and Beyond AAACS 2020”, which speaks to the virtual as a qualitatively different phenomenon needing further scrutiny, discussion, and reflection by serious researcher

practitioners. If we are collectively moving toward the truly educated society, we will need to make these technologies available for all, and become proficient in using them.

1.1. Background: From *Information Superhighway* to *The Cloud*

It is necessary to provide some kind of historical context to get a handle on the current moment, which might seem so radically different from the past. There is a rich, historical background to the 'golden age' of technology infusion into society as well as technology integration into education; powerful insights might be drawn from naming here just a few: *Technics and Civilization* (1934) by Lewis Mumford, and *Forces of Production* by David E. Noble (1984). To summarize these vast tomes is beyond this paper, but suffice it to say there are a few incredibly important and complimentary insights to this paper that bear repeating. The first meta-observation from Mumford, very roughly summarized, is that the technology tool emblazoned by the mechanical clock did not cause humans to become more orderly, rather, humans discipline themselves, had indeed over time already opted to make themselves dance to the rhythms of the modern age. This social construction initiated by humans *made* the mechanical clock appear to be *necessary*, replacing the sun dial. Additionally, the second observation made by critical theorist David Noble is that technology is not even a tool per se, nor does 'it' merely evolve of its own accord. Rather, technology is a reflection of human interventionism into, and creation of, the very social conditions that make certain instrumental tools and processes (ways of doing work for example) dominant. As a result, technology tools that are created and subsequently deployed are an effect, not a cause.

A more contemporary version of these observations calls into question the very idea that technology is an ever greater tool and/or a more sophisticated set of tools. Technology as reified, reduced to such an idea doesn't work because the tools themselves do not fit perfectly into the purpose they were supposedly intended for. It would have been very hard, for example, to have once imagined a future where the telephone would be used primarily to send text messages.

Ultimately, insights such as these from serious historians like Mumford and Noble imagine technology *not as a tool or product*, and more as a reflection of the evolving human condition that makes certain applications seem ubiquitous. Their insights were specific and brilliant then and no less relevant now in the late 20th century with the advent of the "information superhighway" and in the 21st century with the reliance on WIFI and "the Cloud". My own life-long scholarship has spoken of the promise and pitfall in "Wiring the World" (Price,

2000). The point being made here is as follows: every speedier, larger and more powerful technology development is followed by certain already pre-formed purposes behind their use. For example, if schools are deemed *inefficient*, technology tools are already assumed to be more *efficient*, hence a built-in justification is already available to call for their usage. One idea is that technology tools are more efficient than human calculation and judgement. Mumford, Noble, and myself speak consistently on these issues, providing a critical analysis of the usage of technology discourse past to technology discourse present and speculate over what are potential problems for the future. This paper provides simply a practitioner view taken from one course that was required to go “virtual” for one term at a Midwest university using the videoconference to replace F2F learning.

2. Method

As befits the format for this journal, I am keen to point out the unique conditions under which this inquiry, this small-scale study emerged. First this is entirely a qualitative study in as that it is not replicable nor generalizable to a larger population. That being said, the anecdotes are rather interesting and generative of needed discussion as curriculum moves online. Second, neither the students nor the instructor were able to choose the videoconferencing conditions, rather, faculty at large in consultation with the administration opted to keep the university ‘open’ by relying on videoconferencing to replace face-to-face learning. As a consequence, the students were not solicited to partake in a study, however, they were required (as university policy) to evaluate the course, infused with videoconferencing technology as it were. Thus this study conforms more with the conditions of an inquiry with anecdotes rather than a peer reviewed research project with generalizable results. Still, I maintain, this type of close to the classroom work opens up the possibility of significant research into the field of blended learning, curriculum and instructional design, but that is for another paper.

Critical Policy Analysis is a required foundations course in the Teaching and Learning, EDD. This course has gone through several iterations, meaning that it has undergone curriculum revision and instructional design as has the Teaching and Learning, EDD program itself. In essence, the course is designed to be offered through blended learning with online modules for the asynchronous portion of the class, and synchronous or real-time F2F sessions held at our Chicago campus.

The course has significant asynchronous online work using a range of assignments, activities, and resources to help students become more critical analysts of policy. The course description I provide is as follow:

This course is designed to provide the participant with an improved understanding of educational policy, policy discourses, and critical policy analysis, particularly the analysis of policy ideology, politics, and policy consequences. Students will be given opportunities to analyze and critique educational policy from their chosen field (e.g., curriculum, special education, teacher education, literacy, leadership); critique policy making in action; develop a scholarly stance toward policy analysis; recognize the connections between justice, social action, policy, and practice; and formulate ideas and strategies for being policy change-agents in their chosen field of education.

The course is set up with a series of modules that contain, respectively, the assignments, activities, and resources. The primary activity is of course the discussion where students respond to a prompt following the reading and at time a recorded lecture or presentation that is available as a video stream.

An example of how the asynchronous course format “works” is provided. Students in this instance were asked to read two articles: (Lakoff, 2014), *Don't think of an elephant! Know your values and frame the debate* and (Smith, Fey, & Heinecke, 2004/2014), *Political spectacle and the fate of American schools*. Furthermore, they were asked to “identify characteristics”, and respond to one of the questions to create a discussion post. See below:

3. Discussion/reflection

In this discussion post, the idea is to draw from the readings some of your personal and professional reflections concerning the topics for this module. For this module, please

Identify characteristics of

- Ambiguity in policy making
- Specificity in framing policy

The following are a few questions you could use to build your reflection. You are also at liberty to create your own question, or present your own observations in referencing the materials for the entire module.

Sample question: Smith outlines something called "symbolic policy" in contrast to "instrumental policy"; what are the differences and what are the implications for understanding the characteristics of policy?

Sample question: Lakoff speaks of frames and how these are used to convey meaning and draw in support for policy agendas. Admittedly, he makes a big distinction between "conservative" and "progressive" frames. What are they? How does he use, for example, the family to explain their differences?

Respond to at least two classmates' initial posts and follow up on the responses to your own initial posts.

The asynchronous portion of the course proceeded exactly as previously planned, with students engaged with the readings and prompts to craft their discussion post, reply and respond to others.

The major change to the course was in the usage of ZOOM videoconferencing to replace the F2F sessions. I will describe one of the lesson examples that was made possible due to the intentional usage of a virtual synchronous session: the invited guest speaker. Each session with the lecturer, whether myself, the two senior scholars, or the medical doctor translated (with the breakout sessions) roughly three hours in total (which comprised the morning session).

Face to Face (F2F) Sessions

As the lead instructor and course designer, I started first F2F session as a lecturer and scheduled the next two F2F sessions with invited guest speakers. The F2F sessions were as follows: **Policy roles, Democratic education, and Virology, immunology, and pandemics.**

Policy roles was the theme of our first presentation F2F meeting. During this session I provided the students with a broad overview of the educational policy studies as a field, describing different roles or "hats" the students might wear on their journey to engage with policy and practice. The union organizer, the thought leader, the lobbyist, the elected official represent these different hats, and the students were encouraged to consider each, what role they play now, and what role they might aspire to play in the future.

Democratic education was the second presentation during our second F2F meeting by two senior scholars in curriculum theory. In this session, the two senior scholars presented the students with information concerning "developmental pathways" to a more humane, social just, and deliberative democratic conversation. These scholars have been working on developing

these ideas for a popular medium, such as newspapers and magazines in order to help provide a means for our citizenry to have conversations that are generative instead of divisive. I opted to have them provide this information and then to have breakout sessions where the students could engage in conversation as modeled by the two scholars.

One of the invited guest speakers struggled with the technology and we needed to wait until he was able to turn up the volume on his microphone. It was a struggle to listen but the other invited guest speaker compensated by filling the parts that were hard to understand. Nonetheless, what was successful concerning the presentation was the used of prepared notes concerning dialogue and deliberation and this was modeled in the breakout sessions.

Virology, immunology, and pandemics was the third presentation provided during our third F2F meeting by a medical doctor, researcher, and former classroom teacher for one of our classes. In this class, students were made aware of the provided information concerning viruses in general and the COVID-19 in particular. Highlighted was how this virus compared with viruses of the past. The doctor presented also how popular culture stories like “Contagion” and/or “World War Z” provided some context, even if dramatically so, to real questions for consideration, including viral transmission, vaccines, and cures. Again, the process followed with the presentation of the theme and having students go into breakout sessions where the students could engage in conversation with the selected scholars and myself and another colleagues as discussants to facilitate the conversation.

4. Findings

One measure of the success in conveying course goals for our university is the IDEA protocol. This protocol I’m well versed in and can speak to by providing a summary evaluation of teaching effectiveness. There are three *quantitative* measures: summary, progress on relevant objectives, and ratings of summative questions. In each of these areas, my course was rated highly with, respectively, scores of 4.5, 4.3, and 4.7 out of 5 possible points. Another major measure was *qualitative*. Captured below are the anonymous comments:

- *The class inspired me to work and think beyond the norm, and to see opportunities to help others through policy making. I enjoyed the course immensely.*
- *Dr. Price is a brilliant and caring man. I believe [however] that this course would've benefitted from fewer modules and more in-depth discussion. We never fully discussed anything because it felt as though all of the work was a goal post to meet, not information to*

gain. I do not believe that NLU has fully adjusted to the reality of the pandemic and virtual learning and this course, though full of excellent information, demonstrated that.

- *The instructor was well versed in the subject matter. The course provided me with the information needed to understand the policy, how policy has a direct effect on public education, and how advocacy can change policy.*

- *Dr. Price . . . organized excellent online classes via ZOOM. He is knowledgeable, and he has a high mastery of the course. Dr. Price is a good listener, and he provides the best responses to the questions. He is always available to talk to his students, and he replies with prompt emails. He gives feedback on courses on time. Dr. Price is very active in responding to students' discussions post every week. He [engaged] the student in group activities, and then he invited different teachers [into] our class to teach for various topics, and I learned a lot from those visitors [the invited guest speakers]. He encouraged me to work hard.*

- *Too much content for the amount of time not enough explanation on the final and major graded assignments*

- *This was a wonderful course. Dr. Price did a really nice job of relating the content to real life situations. Every assignment was educational and connected to the real world, and the diversity of the class made it more valuable. The in person (on ZOOM videoconferencing) classes were long, but worth it, especially with the breakout room work.*

5. Discussion

The feedback provided by the students provided several insights. One, the quantitative scores indicated that the students valued the course and acknowledged its importance to their program and learning. The design of the course seems to make sense to the students and they found the objectives and overarching goals to be understandable.

In responding to the qualitative feedback there are several different takeaways. Examining the first comments, *the class inspired me to work and think beyond the norm, and to see opportunities to help others through policy making, and the course provided me with the information needed to understand the policy and how policy has a direct effect on public education and how advocacy can change policy.* These comments indicated that students understood that the course was intended to empower their own ability to inform policy as advocates, irrespective of the modality used (this course was previously offered with three F2F in person sessions; over Summer 2020, that was as stated replaced through videoconferencing.)

Other comments indicated an appreciation of my own teaching skill and responsiveness to them in this online, virtual videoconferencing course. Crucial often to the students' success is the need or feeling of being seen and heard in online courses. This calls for regular "feedback". A student remarked: *Dr. Price is very active in responding to students' discussions post every week.* The same student recognized the strategy of the invited guest speakers and breakout sessions as beneficial: *He [engaged] the student in group activities, and then he invited different teachers [into] our class to teach for various topics, and I learned a lot from those visitors [invited guest speakers].* To reiterate, moving to videoconferencing allowed for these invited guest speakers to join our class even from distant locations. It would have been unlikely to have been able to have brought them to the in person class to speak (although one of the invited guest speakers had indeed visited my class before).

A second comment reflected a need for more discussion but less content: *I believe that this course would've benefitted from fewer modules and more in-depth discussion.* This is a not infrequent reflection. Courses that are convened with an online component require no less work than the same hours, same amount of reading, and actually more discussion work (because a student must write down their thoughts) than in a F2F in person class. It is not unusual for students to find the online component to be more work in general.

Another student seemed to echo this feeling *Too much content for the amount of time not enough explanation on the final and major graded assignments.* One of the changes to the course next year does indeed respond to the feeling among some students that they need more time to complete the final project. To that end we have opted to lengthen the course from a 6-week term, to an 8-week term, providing additional online, asynchronous time and maintaining the same 3 synchronous sessions. We are not yet certain of whether we will return to the F2F in person sessions or continue with the ZOOM videoconferencing. Either way, the content and curriculum of the course is consistent across both modalities.

A final comment related directly to the usage of the invited guest speakers and alignment with real topics of concern at the timing of our course: *every assignment was educational and connected to the real world, and the diversity of the class made it more valuable. The in person (on ZOOM) classes were long, but worth it, especially with the breakout room work.*

6. Conclusion

To be certain, we were able to engage with extremely difficult topics during this summer and the feeling was that, although we needed to adapt quickly and intentionally, overall, the

course was deemed a success. The future will involve even more experimentation and implementation with the ZOOM videoconferencing in order to bring in scholars and practitioners from abroad as well as to save on time, resources, and energy expended in making these classes available for our hard working and stressed students. We faculty in our doctoral program find the technology available to be instrumental and critical, and hope that it remains educational for all of our students in the years ahead.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest in this study.

RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION ETHICS STATEMENT

The author declares that research and publication ethics are followed in this study.

AUTHOR LIABILITY STATEMENT

The author declares that he has done every step of this work himself.

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