

MELANIE

Hi, good morning, and welcome to my classroom. My name is Melanie Adrian, and I'm an Associate Professor in the Department of Law and Legal Studies. And I also hold one of the Chairs of Teaching Innovation. Welcome to my classroom, except this is the typical COVID classroom. My neighbors have just decided that they're going to start a construction project in the background. So if it feels more like a construction site, that is the reality of what we're living through right now.

ADRIAN:

I am so pleased that the EDC has given us the space to talk about what it means to teach at this time. And so thank you so much for organizing the series of talks and holding these conversations. I think it's also great that we're providing these short introductions so that we can really get to the conversation quickly when we meet.

This session will meet on March 25, and I invite everyone who's interested to attend. I really look forward to hearing from you, and sharing, and learning from each other. Thank you so much to Dr. Rooney for inviting me to this and to participate in this. I really, really appreciate it. So from what I understand, I'm here just to give you a very brief overview of what I did in the fall and what worked and what didn't work. And what I'll be doing today is talking a little bit about a study that I conducted on engagement during the fall term, so let's get started.

Hello, and welcome to my classroom. I used this fall, actually, to conduct a little bit of a study. Over the summer, as many of you, I was grasping at straws to figure out how I was going to teach online, how best to do that. And I was really motivated to engage students and to help them relationship-build in this context. I was very worried about student isolation. I was very worried about this distance and what this distance would do to teaching, to learning, but also to their mental health. And so that really motivated me to try to engage my pedagogy in a slightly different way.

So what I did is I asked my department-- and thank you to the Department of Law and Legal Studies for allowing me to do this. So I taught two fourth-year advanced legal seminars that were exactly the same course. I had redeveloped the course for online delivery-- thank you so much for the SOPI grant, EDC and TLC-- that I redeveloped in the summer with a colleague of mine at Ottawa U.

And the idea was that we would create these modules learning modules that were then going to be supported by some live sessions. And really, at the end of the day, I was trying to recreate what I call the aha moment, right? That moment where the student realizes something, the instructor realizes something, learns something, grows, the horizons change a little bit.

And so the course was called Is Religious Freedom a Human Right? And it was really designed as a conversation. So in every module in every week, the students would watch a video, they would listen to a podcast or various podcasts, and then they would do some readings as well. And so that was meant to be on-the-move pieces, right? So they could listen to the podcasts if they were going to work, or if they were doing other things in the house, or caretaking and so on, and then the videos to give them a slightly different perspective, and then as well as the readings. And so all of those were meant to provide kind of a multi-modal approach to the learning moment.

Then within the week, they would write 500-word blog statement about what they've learned and link it to one big idea. So they could choose whatever they wanted to write on. And then I also had, online, a few kind of questions that they could think about to help them formulate something. And then a few days later, they would write about 250-word responses to something one of their colleagues had written. So that now engage them in a conversation with other students.

From there, they attended what I called book club. And that was just a half hour, 45 minute chit-chat about what they'd learned. So that gave them an opportunity to voice and to talk about some of these big ideas that we were taking up in the class. Then they attended an hour live tutorial. After that, they wrote a final paper, either on their own or a podcast-- creating a podcast as a group. So that was generally what I organized and thought about.

Now, the courses all have the same content, same instructor, expectations, course delivery. All of that was all the same. The only difference between the two courses was that one class was divided into learning pods. So that's what I called them. And they were groups of four students, rather than groups of 11. So each one of my courses had either 21 or 22 students. And so the one course was divided in half, and the other course was divided into groups of four, who then met in smaller groups for

the live tutorials.

So instead of hosting one live tutorial with each of my students and courses, I actually divided them into two. And that was just my preference. I just really wanted to see them all on the screen, and I could only fit 12 comfortably. So that was my preference. So I did four hours of tutorial a week. But all of the students were randomly assigned, so I had no choice over who was where. And there were a total of 43 students, as I said.

So we got ethics approval in the summer, and then we designed three surveys that we collected from each student, one just as they were starting the course 1 about midway through, and then one after they had finished the course. And these surveys asked students to reflect on their engagement, their learning, and their other experiences in the class. We also collected demographic data, GPA, if they'd ever taken an online course before, et cetera so that we could have some interesting cross references to the data that they were giving us. So that's what we did.

And I guess my question or series of questions were three. So my question really was, will small group work increase student engagement in that kind of online course and online format? So did the learning pods increase that engagement or not, or even decrease the engagement? My sense was that they would be effective because smaller groups-- I thought that they would feel more responsible towards each other, be able to also create other systems of meaning amongst themselves that would help them through this stressful time. And I wondered if it would change their relationship to the course material as well.

The second question I had was, did it change or affect, in any way, their perception of learning? And so did they feel like they learned more, the same, less, a bit of all of that? Yeah, so that was the second question. And then I wondered if it actually affected their grades. And so that's what we set about doing and testing.

So before I start talking a little bit about the six things I've learned-- and they're very tentative-- listen, this is a small study-- 43 people. If one student changes their mind from very great to great or in whatever type of question we're dealing with, it changes the numbers significantly. So listen, I understand that, so take this with a grain of salt. I consider this kind of a first reflection on this kind of teaching and the

effectiveness of this kind of teaching. And so it's just these are all kind of tentative ideas that can be pursued or could be pursued in a larger project to see if they bear out, actually.

But all of that said, it's quite encouraging, what I found. And what I'll do is I'm going to highlight the six things that have come out of this study so far, so let's do that. So the first one was that the pod class was more engaged with peers. So the pod class, they reported-- and this was a significant difference, I think-- they were 82% more engaged or felt more engaged with peers than the non-pod class. And we rated this on-- their engagement was much better or better than expected. So that was an interesting-- I thought that was an interesting piece, in terms of engagement.

Now, I have to say that this also aligned in an interesting way with their ability to meet deadlines. And so their ability to meet deadlines in the pod class was worse than expected. It was at about 64% versus the non-pod class, which was about at 50%. And again, that means that there's one student that was different-- one or two maybe. And so I don't want to overdramatize that too much. But certainly, in terms of the engagement piece, it's really interesting.

All right, the second piece that I learned was that the pod class was more engaged in the course. And here, there was also a significant difference. So the pod class said that they were 77% more engaged, very great or great. And the non-pod class was at about 62%. So both were engaged, but the pod class was more engaged.

All right, 3. So we also asked students to rate their ease of learning in the course, in relationship to their other courses for the term. And here, I really thought this was a significant difference. The pod class scored the ease of learning with a 91%, and the non-pod class at a 76%. So I find that very interesting as well.

Also interesting here, we cross-referenced this-- or cross-fertilized-- with their GPA, and this was also an important piece. We found that 92% of the B students in the pod class ranked their engagement as a very great or great compared with 44% of B students in the non-pod class. One class had some C students. The other class actually didn't have any C student, so I couldn't look to see how this was affecting the C or D students because I didn't have that comparator. So I left it at B, but that's also a very, very important piece here.

So 4, compared to other classes, both classes reported higher engagement, but the pod class rated this even higher-- so in relationship to the last point that was just made. Interestingly, the pod class met outside of class time much more than the non-pod class. So 82% of students in the pod class said that they met outside of class and had other discussions outside of class versus the non-pod at 62%.

Finally, the pod class had higher grades. So here's the shocking thing. 100% of the pod class had the same or higher than their GPA, the non-pod class, 81%. Still a significant number, of course. But still, it's a 20%, 19% difference. 81% had the same or higher than their GPA. So I thought that was also very interesting. And I'll leave it there.

The only other thing I would want to mention is that it's interesting to me that 95% of the pod students established and used alternative messaging boards, and Facebook was the most popular for this-- so 95% of pods and 62% of non-pod students. So I thought those were some of the kind of key pieces that I want to pull out of the discussion. I think there are lots of other things I could say at this point, but I guess this is just to invigorate you and motivate you to come and join the discussion on March 25. So I hope to then. Take good care. [GIGGLES] Bye-bye.