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## *Sharing learning and teaching experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic*

Despite all the challenges that the Covid-19 pandemic brought about, it represented, in my personal context of postgraduate teaching in Higher Education in the UK, an amazing learning opportunity. The switch from face-to-face teaching to online teaching was very swift: from one week to the other I moved my lectures online. This was March 2020, towards the end of the Spring term, and the rest of the academic year - the Summer term, when students are mostly dedicated to their dissertations - quickly passed with me trying to do the best I could with existing tools. It was not a big challenge, with the cohort I had, and the personal experience of speaking with colleagues and friends abroad via free audio and video tools. The bonds between students, and myself and the students, had long been established, and most work to be done was one-to-one tutorials, with occasional group sessions, and thus could be delivered with Skype, with a reinforcement of guidance on what to do via the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). At this stage, it was also of extreme help, the outpour of freely available online resources that mitigated, to an extent, the lack of in person access to library collections. However, as this cohort ended their one-year programme, unexpectedly online, a new cohort was starting in late September, and the teaching scenarios were varied: for sure I had to be designing learning for online and hybrid teaching. Online and in person are different environments that have their own affordances and constraints, and I could use elements of both, to tailor my teaching delivery as pandemic scenarios changed.

This transition period, although difficult to navigate as there was a lot of uncertainty, was also exciting, as I dived into learning how to teach online. A wealth of teaching resources became available free of charge to educators, including a course on *Teaching Online* and another on *Blended Learning* from the Oxford University Press – Epigeum. I invested a lot of time in doing these courses and sieving through a wide range of resources, such as those made available by the Open University, JISC Open Educational Resources, to the Khan Academy and to various TED Talks.  Online platforms were also expanding and Zoom won my heart over Teams - although at times, old Skype was still necessary.

Before I move on, in the next section, into the case study of using e-tivities, based on the work of Professor Gilly Salmon (https://www.gillysalmon.com/), I would like to briefly share with you my pedagogical approach to online. Teaching online is different from teaching in person. This may seem obvious, but I think many educators do not fully appreciate the difference, nor make the most of it. Some seem to just want to transfer what they already do in the traditional classroom straight to the online space. It is undeniable that some activities work better in one environment than in the other. Online allows playfulness with time and space: students can review recorded lectures, and they can engage with you, even if you are not there, through online forums for example. Thus, when designing online learning it is important to consider the functions of different technologies than just the technologies *per se*.

Online teaching has helped me to be even more collaborative in the teaching and learning with my students. Although, I always favoured more listening than instructional models of learning, the online tools have allowed for more space in which the dialogue to happen. I feel that the online space, used correctly, favours students' construction of knowledge and the development of collaborative learning communities. This was my aim using the e-tivities, as I explain in the next section.

## Case study on the use of Gilly Salmon's e-tivities

The need to teach online in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic led me to the use of e-tivities to scaffold students' development, based on the model proposed by Gilly Salmon. I found them a great solution to support learning in online and blended / hybrid environments. This is a lesson from the pandemic, that I will keep for the future, as this type of active online learning keeps learners engaged, motivated and participating from day one.

Salmon in her book *The Key to Active Online Learning* provides a very detailed framework to guide the development of e-tivities:.

| Numbering and pacing and sequencing | Number as follows: week. sequence of task. (e.g. 2.4 would be week 2, task 4) |
|---|---|
| **Title** | • Enticement to open the invitation to take part. <br> • Very brief descriptor. <br> • Be inventive and creative but keep it very short. |
| **Purpose** | • Explain. If you complete this activity you will be able to... <br> • You will understand better how to... <br> • You will find it essential for assignment X... <br> • Use verbs! <br> • Link directly with your outcomes and/or objectives for the unit, module, course, and programme. |
| **Brief summary of overall task** | • If you find you have more than one major activity or question, divide into more e-tivities. <br> • Clear brief instructions on how to take part and what to do. <br> • One question or task per message. <br> • When you have written this part , check that the task is self-contained. |
| **Spark** | • Spark to light the fire for the topic, interesting little intervention. <br> • Directly link with topic for this week. <br> • Opportunity to expose 'content' but with the purpose of a *spark to start a dialogue with others.* |
| **Individual contribution** | • Give clear instructions to the individual participant as to what he or she should do in response to the spark. <br> • Specify exactly what you are expecting the participant to do and in what media (e.g. Wiki, discussion board, audio file etc.) and by when (i.e. the day and date). Tell them the length of contribution expected. <br> • Create a link from this part of the invitation to the location for posting. |
| **Dialogue begins** | • Request response from an individual to others, what kind of response, how long, where and by when. <br> • Key point: students come online to see if others have read and responded. Make this happen <br> • Create a link from this part of the invitation to the location for posting the response to others. |
| **E-moderator interventions** | • Clearly indicate what the e-moderator will do and when. <br> • Explain that the e-moderator will: summarise, give feedback and teaching points and close the e-tivity, and when this will happen. |
| **Schedule and time** | • Total calendar/elapsed time allowed for this e-tivity. <br> • Completion date, <br> • Estimate total study time required (e.g. 2 x 1 hour) |
| **Next** | • Link to next e-tivity <br> • You can suggest additional resources to help with the task- indicate whether they are required or optional, place the links at the end of the invitation. |

**FIGURE 1. FRAMEWORK TO GUIDE THE DEVELOPMENT OF E-TIVITIES.**

**Source: https://www.gillysalmon.com/e-tivities.html**

The proposal is that these e-tivities support the student through a structured developmental process, the five-stage model:
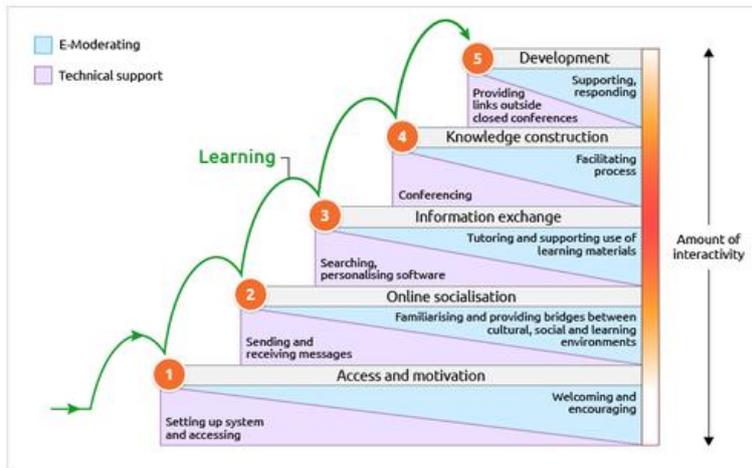


**FIGURE 2. THE FIVE-STAGE MODEL.**
**Source: https://www.gillysalmon.com/five-stage-model.html**

In my teaching practice, I used a simpler version. Here is an example of an initial e-tivity in a joint forum bringing together two different MA programmes, aimed at introducing the students to each other, encourage interactions, and getting them used to the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE):



**FIGURE 3. INITIAL E-TIVITY: JOINT FORUM.**
**Source: Carla Figueira.**

In another VLE area, related to a specific module Autumn module for the MA Cultural Policy, Relations and Diplomacy students, one of the first modules in the academic year, I developed weekly tasks that were both subject specific and encouraged the development of academic skills. The progression went from practicing retrieval of information and referencing of sources to summarising and analytical skills. In many cases, I associated tasks, but, of course, you can break them down, or further complexify them.

Activity 1. Library information retrieval (task to complete by Tuesday 13 October by 4pm)

⚙ ▾

Mark as done

**Task:**

1. Access the e-resources available through the Goldsmiths Library, Senate House Library and through the British Library EThOS e-theses online service.

If necessary, consult the Goldsmiths Library video guides on YouTube or further support here.

2. Produce a bibliographic reference for 3 items related to 'Cultural Diplomacy', one from each Library.

See some guidance on referencing here.

3. Write a short paragraph of no more than 200 words to accompany your bibliography telling your colleagues why these particular articles/books/theses are worth reading.

4. Post the bibliography and its rationale in this Forum.

5. Read what other colleagues have posted and choose an entry to comment on: How useful and interesting did you find the selection posted by your colleague? Could you recommend another item to add to his/her bibliography?

6. Post the reply in the Forum. Feel free to comment on more than one entry.

**Purpose:** By completing this activity you will be able to search databases, identify and access and evaluate appropriate academic material and present the required bibliography information accurately.

**Time:** *We recommend you spend a minimum of 2 hours on this activity, in addition to reading time.*

**FIGURE 4. E-TIVITY 1. LIBRARY INFORMATION RETRIEVAL.**
**Source: Carla Figueira.**

Many of the e-tivities had associated weekly forum discussions, and, in some cases, they also had folders with reading packs available. Animating the forums is a task that takes time – which needs to be considered in your time allocation – but it is important to encourage and maintain the engagement of the students. In other cases, the e-tivities were adaptations of existing activities, such as a diagnostic essay or the development of group work. These online adaptations allowed for information to be permanently available to students and for richer peer-to-peer learning, as in the cases where comparisons and comments were invited.

Students found the e-tivities very useful and asked for more in other modules. E-tivities will be a tool I will continue to use in my teaching. Besides the e-tivities, I used other tools, such as Padlet, with varying degrees of success. The key, I guess, is to try, learn from the experience, adapt, and 'keep calm & carry on'!