



OLTD 503 - Reflection on Recipe for Online Learning Soup

For my second evidence of learning, I chose to continue using the soup metaphor and design a recipe for what a healthy online community should look like. It turned out simple, but visually appealing and clean enough that anyone can follow, even without an education background.

Working on this recipe really helped me think of what an ideal online course would look like, why would people want to join, and more importantly, why they would stay. From an educator's perspective, an ideal course would have students who are engaged in a thriving community, sharing insight, asking questions and interested in the subject. Yet, the number of students who drop out of online courses after starting them is simply staggering. While I was thinking about this, an ugly thought flew out of my head and hit me in the face: maybe some educators are good at face-to-face because they have a captive audience. Maybe they don't work hard at building communities, holding their content and their PLOs close to their chest, building their teaching around those inanimate rules instead of building their teaching around the students. Maybe, when they transition to an online course and see the numbers drop out as the course progresses, they think that it's because the students are not interested, too busy or just lazy. And if that's the case, I really need to work on being better than that!

The reality is, students are not predictable; we can't even begin to put them in our recipe, because we can't know what the class will look like when we start. All we can do is work **our side** -- work on our interactions, work on how we build the community, how we ensure proper netiquette is followed, how we encourage the relationships, how we create a safe haven where real learning can happen. Overall, it's about how we ensure that we have a strong presence in the course, to support and hold space for learning.

An online course does not have a captive audience. For people to carve the time out of their busy lives to interact and build the relationships within the group, the moderator - the teacher - must be above all a magician,

with all the excitement of taking rabbits out of a hat, or sawing a lady in half. Particularly in the early stages, when the community is being built, the class has to be unique and engaging enough that the student feels bad when a class is missed. "You won't believe what she did this time -- she turned a pigeon into a flower! No, really!"

Traditionally, there is certainly an image of distance when we think of online relationships; yet, we hear about people falling in love and getting married online more and more often. So, while it may seem cold and distant, online communications have the potential for being warm and for creating true friendships. If we as educators are able to create a safe, friendly environment, our students can then relax and let their guard down, and start building ideas, collaborating and learning together. The quicker we can get to this point, the more smoothly our course will flow; I like to think of Brewer's person perception model, in which we as humans quickly assess people, and categorize them according to where they fit into our context. A traditional online course makes it more difficult to assess people; nowadays, however, we can use tools such as Zoom to have seamless face-to-face dialogues, visual tools such as Padlet, and connect through Google Plus and Twitter.

As I was working on this recipe, a few random thoughts came to my mind. A couple of them are cool enough to make it into my reflection. For instance, Zoom should be used whenever the class is together; I would institute the "Zoom High Five" where everyone yells HIGH FIVE together and pretends to high five the screen. I also would use Padlet in order to collaborate visually through quick sketches and photos. I could ask students to do a quick "I am ___ and I am real because..." and share with the team. Finally, I would ask students to have a real notebooks -- and I would have one, too -- for a couple of reasons: one, it would bring the course which is virtual into their real world; two, and most importantly, because I am a firm believer in motor memory and the fact that it helps students recall and retain information. It also forces you to write slower, and while you are writing, your brain is making connections, which simply doesn't happen as efficiently when we are typing. We could share a page of our notebooks once in a while, with a reflection to accompany the page -- why is this particular page important, and what was the a-ha moment that you had when writing it?

This recipe for Online Learning Soup shows good evidence for the following program outcomes: **Critically assess and evaluate resources for best practice in online learning**, as well as **understanding how to build rapport and manage groups**.

I have learned much through the readings and the activities in this course. The best thing I have learned, I believe, is that online teaching would be a good fit for my personality. It feels good to play with technology and create fun things for students to see and fun activities to do, but most of all, I hope I am able to build good communities when I am running my own courses.