

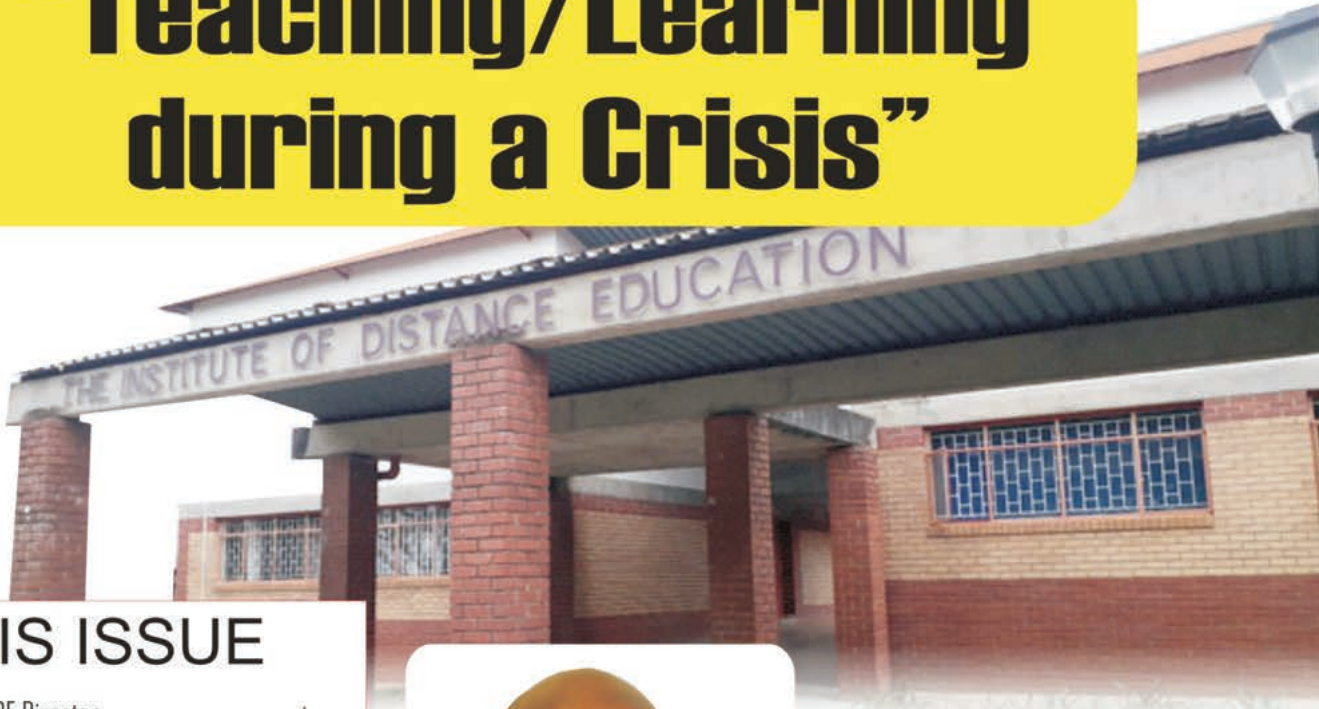
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**University of Eswatini**  
**Institute of Distance Education**

## **NEWSLETTER**

# **“Teaching/Learning during a Crisis”**



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**IDE Director: Professor C. Maphosa**

### **Foreword from IDE Director**

I welcome you to the 20th issue of the Institute of Distance Education Newsletter. We continue to find ourselves amid the Covid-19

pandemic and adjusting to the 'new normal'. I particularly welcome our first-year students to the Institute of Distance Education. Your choice to study using the Open and Distance e-Learning (ODEL) mode is a wise one. You are assured of the convenience and flexibility of studying from anywhere and at any time. As an Institute we are making extensive use of the Moodle Learning Management System to continue to strengthen our online learning delivery system. I also extend my welcome to our international students who are studying with us from Botswana. True to the spirit of ODEL, education delivery transcends the country boundaries.

This issue titled “Teaching/Learning during a crisis” reflects on the need to continuously seek ways to strengthen our online teaching initiatives. We have fully embraced the integration of technology in



## Foreword from IDE Director

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teaching and learning and we do not see online learning as a mere response to challenges caused by the Covid-19 pandemic but as learning for the future. The generations of ODeL keep evolving and we have to keep abreast of the changes in pedagogy and technology. We have trained and we continue to train and support our course instructors in online facilitation and assessment skills. We also support our students to navigate through the Moodle LMS. To this end, some training videos have been developed and posted on Moodle as reference training material for all students.

We also continuously seek to develop new academic programmes to offer market and demand-driven programmes. The Diploma in Psycho-Social Support and Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education programmes are in the process of finalisation to be offered soon. We will continue to work with our collaborating departments and external stakeholders to develop relevant programmes for our potential students.

We have rich and varied articles in this issue. We have an article by Professional Esampally which examines how relevant we are to the digital transformation. Professional Ferreira-Meyers reflects on online facilitators and also the aspect of managing stress in the Covid-19 environment. Dr Mthethwa-Kunene reviews how we managed to hold our first virtual orientation with the new IDE lecturers. During the Covid-19 pandemic, we continue to hold online training in material development for our course lecturers as reported by Dr P S Dlamini. In this issue, we also applaud the generous donation by the Eswatini Communication Commission (ESCCOM) of a mobile laboratory of forty-five tablets. The cited contributions are just some of the many in this report and I urge you to read, enjoy, and provide us with feedback.

I wish you all the best.

**MAPHOSA. C.**  
Professor and Director



## Editor's Note

**W**elcome to the 20th edition of the IDE Newsletter. Our focus is "Teaching/Learning during a Crisis." As we approach the end of 2020, we are reminded of the one of the year's game-changers – the COVID-19 pandemic. This issue therefore, shares experiences and research that relates to innovations and adaptations that had to be embraced during the COVID-19 crisis. Professor Esampally takes us through the paces on remaining relevant in a "changing context." There was an increase in Teaching and learning online, Professor Ferreira-Meyers shares sentiments and experiences of online-facilitators. In adapting to a "new normal" IDE has had to host workshops, training and orientation online. Dr Mthethwa-Kunene narrate how new lecturers were oriented online and Dr Dlamini on conducting a materials design workshop online. As we begin a new academic year, we are reminded how to take care of our wellbeing. Ms Mashinini shares an experience as a distant education student, Professor Ferreira-Meyers helps us cope with stress during a crisis and Ms Mabuza reminds students about the importance of participating in online discussions. Enjoy this issue.

Your feedback is most welcome and please direct your comments to: [stshongwe@uniswa.sz](mailto:stshongwe@uniswa.sz)

Thank you.

## Multi-Model Digital Teaching and Learning at the Institute of Distance Education:

**BY: Professor Chandraiah Esampally**



### How are we relevant to the Digital Transformation

**Professor Chandraiah Esampally**  
Coordinator-Academic, IDE,  
University of Eswatini.

## Introduction

**T**he COVID-19 pandemic has not only disrupted the current education system, it has also redefined the landscape of higher education and reshaped teaching/learning system in general and open distance learning system in particular. This crisis has stimulated innovation within the education sector globally. We have seen innovative approaches in support of education and training continuity; these have included lessons on radio and television as well



as online learning packages. This has compelled all educational institutions to think about possible future requirements to be relevant to the digital transformation context for teaching and learning in terms of accessibility, availability and affordability to ensure widening access and equity with quality of education.

## Efforts by IDE to Remain Relevant in the Midst of the Digital Transformation Context

In an effort to maintain the same quality of delivery of education during the COVID-19 crisis, IDE embarked on initiatives to ensure that the change is being absorbed to remain relevant to the digital transformation context.

## Intensive Digital Training for IDE Teaching Staff

In collaboration with the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CELT), IDE facilitated training to its part-time Teaching Staff on the Moodle Learning Management System (LMS). The aim was to strengthen digital teaching/learning which is made up of many learning tools and applications that support and empower teachers and students in online learning.

The training resulted in enhanced teaching/learning modes using the Moodle LMS, the Zoom application for conducting online classes, WhatsApp and email for communication. The learning tools and technology enabled students to develop effective learning skills.

These changes have also highlighted that the promising future of learning and the accelerated changes in modes of delivering quality education, cannot be separated from the imperative of Blended Learning.

Recognising the fact that not all students could access online learning, due to lockdown restrictions or internet connectivity challenges, IDE organised a few face-to-face sessions but ensured that the

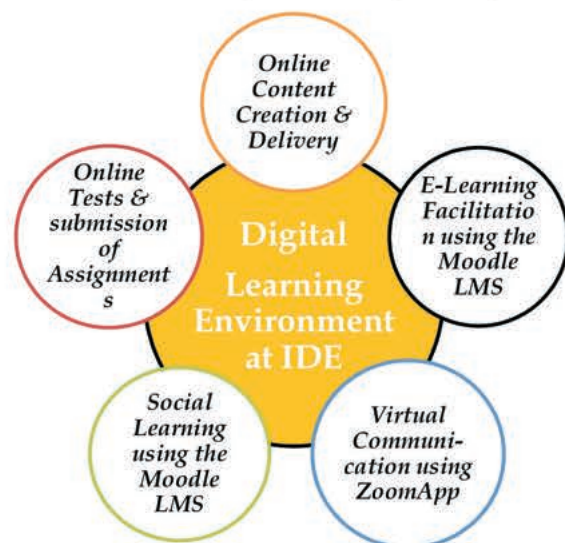
COVID-19 guidelines of the Ministry of Health and the World Health Organisation were adhered to. This was in a bid to guarantee that no student is left behind or disadvantaged due to COVID-19 pandemic crisis.

## Strengthening of Digital Learning Environment Post-Covid-19

Post-COVID-19 Digital Teaching/Learning is envisioned to be a strengthened Blended Learning System (BLS) and, at the centre, IDE is actively engaging with the respective context whilst observing established quality standards. In view of the digital transformation context, IDE is planning to:

- (i) move from a print-based mode to a fully online mode of content delivery, where the student depends on technology for online/virtual classes and online materials including OER (Open Educational Resources);
- (ii) fully move from manually written and/or printed assignments to online submission of electronic assignments;
- (iii) strengthen online assessment;
- (iv) strengthen e-learning infrastructure and facilities which promote quality through social learning.

Thus, IDE is working on strengthening multi-



Source: Adopted and adapted from: Beukes-Amiss, CM & Haiping E, Webinar presentation on UNAM's Response to COVID-19: eLearning Strategies, Experiences and Lessons Learned, CODEL, University of Namibia, 23 June, 2020.



model digital learning resources as indicated below. In future, higher education will be based more on a multi-model teaching and learning approach. To strengthen this multi-model teaching-learning system, we need to prepare for possibilities of a “new normality” to focus on access, equity and inclusion in all our efforts.

However, these groundbreaking changes depend on the availability and accessibility of: adequate digital infrastructure and facilities, adequate increased access of internet connectivity and policy support for extensive use of technology integration in education.

Multiple Entry and Exit Options for IDE Programmes as per the Changing Context  
IDE will continue to be relevant to the changing

context and introduce new programmes or convert existing programmes with multiple entry and exit options. For example, for a four-year (4) degree programme, the entry and exit options could be as mentioned hereunder.

- A Certificate after completing 1 Year of Study of a 4 Year Degree programme.
- A Diploma after completing 2 Years of Study of a 4 Year Degree programme.
- A Bachelor's degree after completion of 4 Years of Study of a Degree programme.

For the above programme, the entry points are two (2) but the exit options are three (3). The entry points are based on entrance requirements and the exit points are based on the candidate's convenience/workload options.

# REFLECTIONS OF ONLINE FACILITATORS

By: Professor Karen Ferreira-Meyers



**Professor Karen Ferreira-Meyers,**  
Coordinator Linguistics and Modern Languages

## ***PART 1:*** **FACILITATING COLLEAGUES' INTERACTIONS ONLINE**

**W**ith this first article, I intend to start a short series of

thoughts and online facilitators. This one will focus on online facilitation in staff experiences of development courses. The series will be complemented by reports from online facilitators working with students and student experience of online facilitation. It would be ideal if we could have some reflections on student facilitation (students facilitating learning and/or discussion with other students).

The reflections I am presenting today are personal. They arose from different situations. I have found myself in since the start of the pandemic: staff training at UNESWA (on blended/online teaching),

staff training on the use of Moodle (at a University in Zimbabwe, under the auspices of the Association of African Universities) and online teacher-training on virtual pedagogy (with teachers in Kenya and Nigeria mainly).

Online facilitation refers to the techniques of enabling and promoting learning in an online environment. It includes communicating, encouraging interaction, motivating participation, supporting and monitoring activities, designing and implementing audio and video resources, informing through comments, etc. As such, the following principles are of the utmost importance: ensuring a safe place, fostering trust and bonding among the participants, managing energy levels, varying activities and tasks.

Facilitators can work alone, as individuals, or in teams. For me, team work offers the best outcomes as each individual brings his or her own talents, expertise and experience to the facilitation. Some facilitators are great at providing useful links, others provide discussion prompts and probe for further details and interaction and others are



Sourced from:  
<https://virtualfacilitationcollaborative.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/GFO-Image.jpg>

excellent at managing time during synchronous activities while others still support continuous learning during asynchronous sessions. Facilitators observe and assess group dynamics, mediate in conflicts, connect participants' contributions (through threading and weaving), and point out areas of agreement and disagreement.

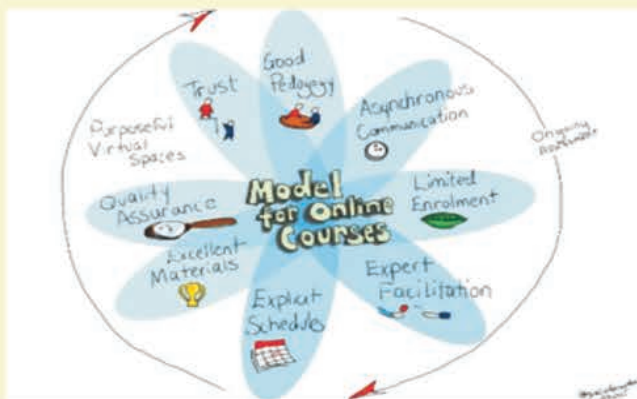


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Having interacted with three different teams (UNESWA, AAU, Coderina), which varied in composition and size (from ten to more than eighty facilitators), I learned that group dynamics are important when it comes to online environments. Of the different types of facilitators that exist (passive, moderate and involved facilitators; Dillard, 2013; Quick and Sandfort, 2014; Sandfort and Quick, 2017), involved facilitators are the most active ones. They negotiate netiquette, ask questions, interpret participants' opinions and encourage these to look at information from different angles. Personally, this is the type of facilitator I aspire to be. It doesn't mean that the

other types do not achieve their objectives. It is just that the hands-on approach of the involved facilitator suits me more than the others.



Image 2 :  
<https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.flickr.com%2Fphotos%2F143825674%40N02%2F47446428482&p sig=AOvVaw2pbPFWSqwQPkgBWUlpd0RW&ust=1601377374458000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=0CA0QjhxqFwoTCNiCjfhZi-wCFQAAAAAdAAAAABAD>

Involved and reflective; such a facilitation practitioner models a positive and professional presence throughout the course and seeks regular feedback from his or her learners in order to ensure that adjustments are made when necessary. Such a facilitator looks for new pedagogical approaches and technical tools and tries to counteract the challenges to inclusive facilitation (i. e. power, inequality, disagreement, presence of plural knowledge).

I have learned that online facilitation is based on universal principles and is simultaneously contextual and local. As Coles (2013), Van Es et al. (2014) and Zhang et al. (2015) highlighted, effective facilitation involves skills in discourse management, attention to productive learning environment cultivation and content expertise in order to be catalysts of successful online teaching and learning processes (Garrison and Cleveland-Innes, 2005). I have seen that working with committed and dynamic facilitators leads to success.

I have noted that knowing members of the team well enough to identify their strengths, weaknesses and design the action/work plan around those points is a sure way to obtain good results. As a person with a strong language teaching and learning background, I understand that communication is key to all of this.



# STRESS and COVID19

By: Professor Karen Ferreira-Meyers



**Professor Karen Ferreira-Meyers,**  
Coordinator Linguistics and Modern Languages

**Stress and stressors  
Tension, Relief and  
resilience, Energy and  
enthusiasm, Socialising, self-  
care and self-coping**

It has been a tough year, and we might have to gear ourselves up for more of such challenging times. COVID-19 has hit us hard but we still need to survive and be productive. There is no choice, really!

At IDE we are well aware that the impact of the pandemic has been different on each one of us. Some have had physical and psychological hardships, others have “thrived under chaos”. What can each of us do to get through the pandemic and to come out as better, more resilient persons and communities?



In this short article, I will discuss some points that were raised at the Adult Education Webinar on 25 August 2020 and at the Association of African Universities (AAU) Webinar on Stress and Stress Management held on 25 September 2020. I will do so by answering a few questions.

## What is stress? How are stress and tension related?

Stress is a feeling of emotional or physical tension. It can come from any event or thought that makes you feel frustrated and angry. Stress is your body's reaction to a challenge or demand. In short bursts, stress can be positive, such as when it helps you avoid risks or it assists you in managing dangerous situations. But if stress persist over a long period of time, then the impact can also be very negative.

## Are there additional stressors due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

For sure, the pandemic has brought with it a whole list of added stressors. While we know that working and studying come with their own stressors, the pandemic has:

- 1. Made these more forceful and**
- 2. Augmented the amount and strength of other stressors.**

Here are some new stressors: fear and worry about your own health and the health of your loved ones, your financial situation or job, or loss of support services you that you rely on. As university staff and students, the sudden change from what we were used to (face-to-face and distance teaching and learning) to blended and online teaching and learning has been stressful for many of us.

## What is relief?

Stress relief, or at least stress reduction, is what we all seek. A stress reliever is any act that aids in the relief of stress. For example, yoga, meditation, exercise are all stress relievers.

## What is resilience?

Resilience is a crucial element of happiness and living a healthy life. It determines how well we cope with what life throws at us, how high we rise above these events and situations that try to wear us down (including battling an illness, coping



with our personal lives, carrying on during a crisis/traumatic event like the COVID-19 pandemic).

**How do energy and enthusiasm help us? How can socialising, self-care and positive coping work hand-in-hand to assist us in becoming more creative people in our homes and in the workplace?**

When we are confronted with trauma we go through various stages. Stage 1 is about self-care and coping. In the case of the pandemic this includes: resting, drinking fluids, eating nutritious food, cleaning/disinfecting, washing hands, staying active, socialising, displaying love to our family members and friends, keeping to routines, talking to people we trust.

A useful technique – often used in therapy – is called re-framing (looking at a situation, person or relationship in a different way by changing its meaning). In particular, positive re-framing refers to reconsidering things, persons, objects, events in a positive light. Being optimistic, energetic, enthusiastic, goal-oriented, open-minded, helpful, confident, alert, dynamic, engaged, resilient and creative is part of so-called positive affectivity: if we experience positive feelings, emotions, sensations, sentiments, then this impacts on how we interact with others and our surroundings.

This positive affectivity helps us process emotional information to solve problems and to make plans. It provides us with stress relief and gives us support while we continue to try to replenish our resources

which have been depleted through stress.

Let us now briefly look at how creativity can help us manage stress, reduce stress, relieve stress. Creativity is the ability to overcome self-imposed constraints or obstacles imposed by a particular situation, in casu the pandemic. A creative person will be able to identify high-quality ideas from all the ideas floating around and use these to imagine or invent something valuable and new. We are all born creative, but there are means and ways to enhance our innate creativity.

Depending on our personality, our intelligence, our interests and our individual learning styles, we can engage in creative activities that, in turn, will positively influence our reactions towards COVID-19. G. A. Davis, in his *Creativity is Forever* (2004) identified some characteristics or personality traits usually associated with creative people. Look at the list and see which ones apply to you:

- Thorough
- Needs alone time
- Ethical
- Emotional
- High energy
- Curious
- Open-minded
- Sense of humor
- Risk-taking
- Capacity for fantasy
- Artistic
- Perspective
- Original
- Independent
- Attracted to complexity/ambiguity
- Aware of own creativity.

<b>Have a routine</b>	<b>Take deep breaths</b>	<b>Call a loved one</b>	<b>Have fun</b>	<b>Open windows</b>	<b>Help others</b>
					
Structure your day and keep good habits	Breathing exercises can ease stress	Lean on each other for support	Play online with friends or start a hobby	Sunlight can improve your mood	Get essential supplies for a neighbour



In the workplace, in your study environment, creativity is based on a combination of three components: expertise (i.e. technical, procedural and intellectual knowledge), motivation (especially intrinsic motivation) and creative-thinking skills (to approach problems in a flexible and imaginative way).

If you wish to find out more about this, then check some of the Coursera online courses. Many of these are free. They are definitely worth your while.



# IDE HOLDS ITS FIRST VIRTUAL ORIENTATION WITH NEW LECTURERS



By: Dr KE Mthethwa-Kunene  
Coordinator Research and Evaluation

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted year plans for higher education learning institutions, globally. UNESWA was no exception. However, IDE quickly adapted to the 'New Normal' and embraced the use of virtual platforms to continue with its activities. IDE conducted its first virtual orientation workshop for new course lecturers on the 16th of July 2020 over Zoom.

The objectives of the workshop were to:

- Capacitate course lecturers and tutors on Principles of Open and Distance Learning (ODL);
- Make course lecturers and tutors aware of their roles in ODL;
- Orient course lecturers on pedagogy and

development of blended learning materials;

- Explain language usage in materials design and development;
- Demonstrate the use of Moodle in a blended learning environment;
- Highlight the importance of feedback for an ODL learner, and
- Outline Quality Assurance processes at IDE.

The workshop presenters (IDE staff) recorded videos on their topics and the videos were sent to the lecturers prior to the workshop. A total of forty-five (45) lecturers from various programmes of study (BSc IT, BSc Commerce, BSc Nursing Science and Law) were invited to the workshop. Seventeen (17) lecturers participated in the Zoom webinar. In total, there were twenty-eight (28) participants (lecturers + IDE Staff). Based on the statistics on video viewing, it could be concluded that almost all lecturers watched the videos even though some did not participate in the Zoom meeting for various reasons, such as work commitments. By the time the workshop was held, all videos had been viewed.

At the end of the workshop, an evaluation was conducted to assess if the workshop objectives were achieved and to ascertain ways of improving future orientation workshops.

The evaluation was conducted online through Google Forms. A majority of the respondents reported that the workshop objectives were achieved as presented in Figure 1 on the next page





Figure 1 (below) shows results on achievement of Workshop Objectives.

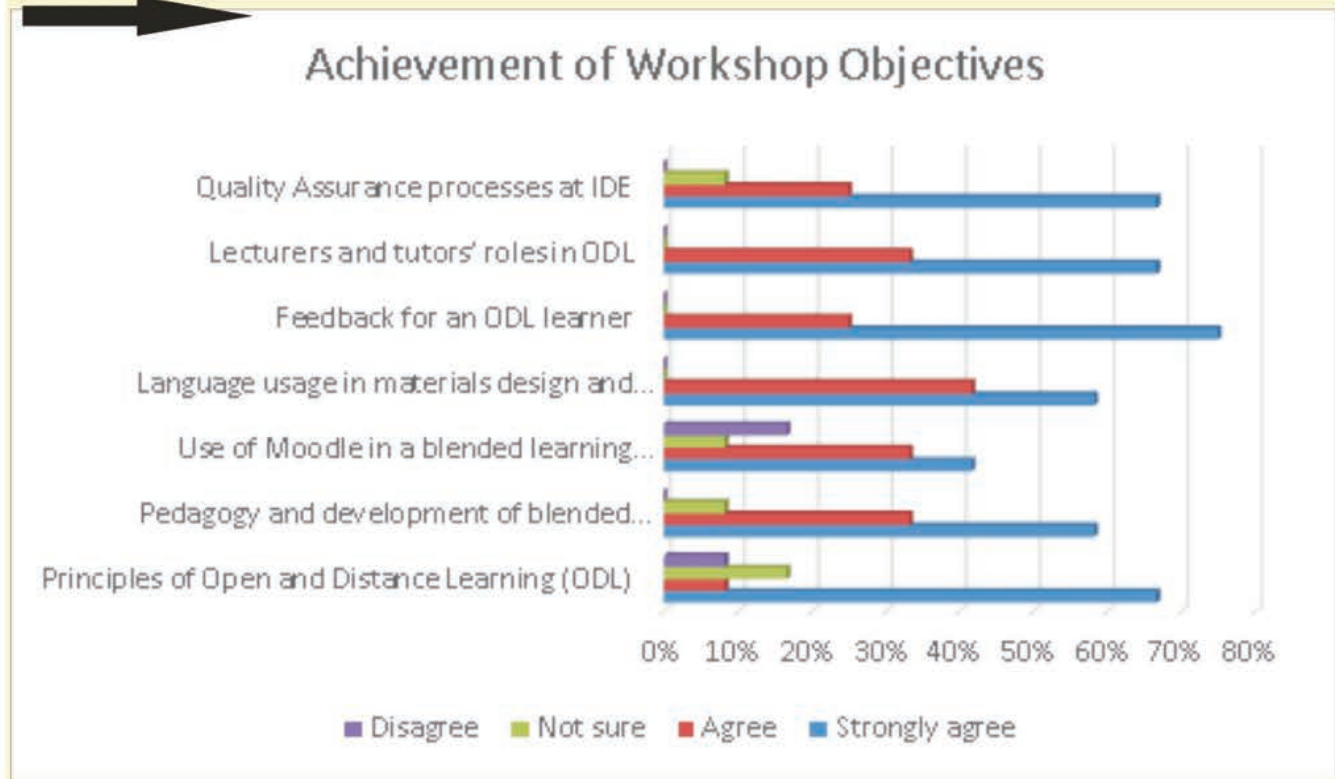
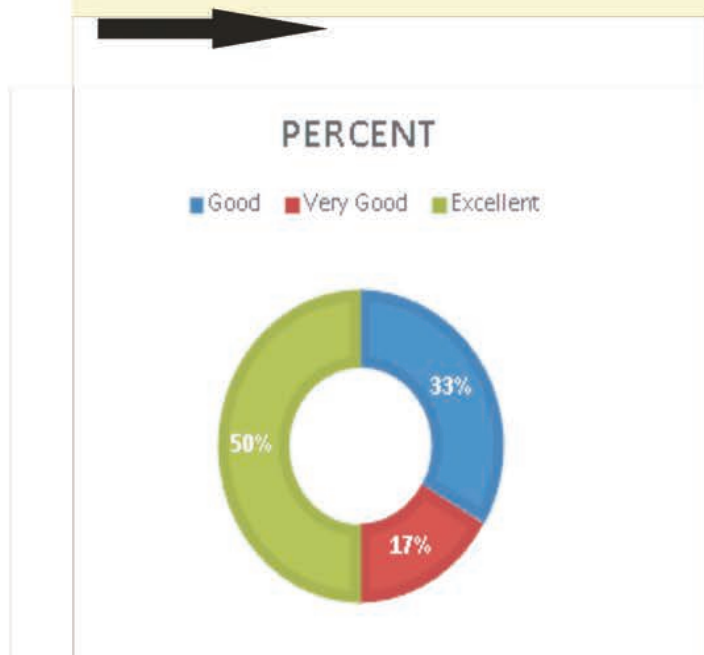


Figure 2: Views about mode of delivery for the workshop

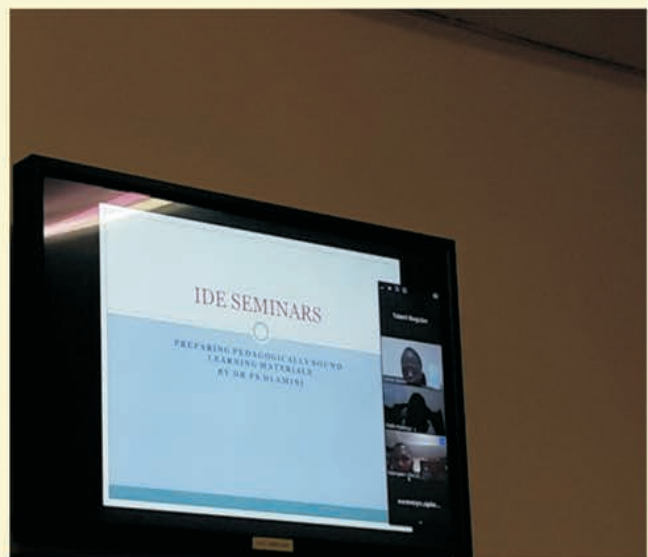


with the workshop being delivered online.

About sixty-seven percent (67%) of the respondents rated the overall facilitation of the workshop as 'excellent' or 'very good' while the rest viewed it as 'good'.

The findings of the evaluation suggest that both IDE staff and lecturers were on track in embracing online learning.

The results shown in Figure 2 indicate that an overwhelming majority (83%) of lecturers found the delivery mode of the workshop excellent or very good. In other words, they were comfortable





# ONLINE WORKSHOP ON MATERIALS DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT IS POSSIBLE – A COVID -19 BENEFIT



**By: Dr PS Dlamini,  
Assistant Coordinator  
Instructional Design and  
Development**

The unexpected changes experienced globally as a result of the outbreak of the coronavirus may not have an entirely negative impact on all sectors as some positive changes have emerged.

It is true that institutions had to quickly shift to online teaching and learning much to the frustration of most key stakeholders, i.e. teachers, students, parents and employers. Conversely, the old adage “every cloud has a silver lining” turned out to be true for the Materials Design and Development Unit at IDE as alternative ways of training staff were explored to substitute the face-to-face sessions.

The Unit has been able to hold a series of online training sessions for part-time lecturers who teach Law courses at IDE. The main platform used was Zoom, where three workshops were held at times convenient to both the lecturers and the facilitators. The first workshop was on the 3rd of June 2020. Interestingly, one session was facilitated by an IDE

staff member who is currently on study leave and based in Cape Town. The collaboration between the Instructional Design and Development Unit, the Multi-media Unit and the Coordinator Law made the series of online sessions a success. The session included topics such as 'The role of the Instructional design Unit at IDE' and 'Designing pedagogically sound learning materials', and was facilitated by Dr PS Dlamini.

The second workshop was held on the 11th of June 2020; it addressed the use of Open Educational Resources (OERs) in the field of Law and was facilitated by Ms NT Vilakati and Mr TC Mavuso. The third workshop, facilitated by Dr TT Rugube, was held on the 25th of June 2020 and it focused on orienting lecturers on the use of Moodle: “Getting Started with Moodle”.

All these sessions were facilitated in the evenings when lecturers and staff had returned from work. The Unit applauds the sacrifice made by both the IDE staff and the Law lecturers. We further invite departments to utilise the different online platforms for training as they also sharpen their skills on the use of ICT and online presentations. We are moving forward. This initiative needs to be embraced as it is apparent that COVID-19 has changed education forever!!!

## Single or Multimodal? Moving Into a New Educational Landscape.

By: Professor Karen Ferreira-Meyers



**Professor Karen  
Ferreira-Meyers,  
Coordinator Linguistics  
and Modern Languages**

Yes, these days we hear and read a lot about modalities. What is meant by that? In the article below, I will briefly look at how and where “modalities” came about and what they mean

in today's teaching and learning world. I have based my discussion here mainly on a very informative article, found online at <https://er.educause.edu/articles/2020/10/the-landscape-of-merging-modalities?s=09>, written by Valerie Irvine and entitled: The Landscape of Merging Modalities.



According to Irvine, modality refers to the location and timing of interactions. Not so long ago, we talk about either face-to-face or online (or distance), but now there are many more terms to represent many more ways of interacting for teaching and learning. So, we need to be clear about what we talk about, and this article has the objective to make some of the terms less complex. Irvine first discusses the history of modality, then she shows us some models of modalities, before going into pedagogy and open access. I will follow her structure in broad lines.

When we started going online for teaching and learning (in some parts of the world this was in the 1990s), our interactions were mostly text-based because of the low speed of the internet. At that time, “online” meant asynchronous learning which means that it is time-delayed and occurs through tools such as email, static websites, and forums. Soon after that, North Americans started talking about Blended Learning and Australians about Hybrid Learning: a mix of on-campus/face-to-face learning and online activities. You are well aware how this works as this is what we have been doing at IDE all along: instructional hours are reduced to allow for independent learning and online interactions.

At the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, internet speed started increasing, especially in the Global North, but more and more also on our continent, and we saw new gadgets, new personal hardware appearing on the market. With the advent of web-based software (one of these days we need to talk about Open Software), synchronous communication became possible: we could now, as teachers and students, interact “live”. And the meaning of Blended Learning changed: blended combined synchronous and asynchronous interactions.

And then came online videoconferencing, which, in the beginning, was called "videoconferencing in education" or "synchronous distance education", but soon the software enabled people from all over the world to connect and we saw the implementation of video-enabled classrooms using Zoom, Google Meet, Google Hangouts, Microsoft Teams, Google Classrooms, Jitsi, BigBlueButton, etc. Modes can thus be merged for teaching and learning and can include groups on campus, remote groups, and dispersed remote individuals. But what should be call this? This is where Irvine gives us a useful table, which I have copied as is below.

Brian Beatty (2007) developed the HyFlex (hybrid-flexible) model: a combination of hybrid, which we know as combining both online and face-to-face modalities, and flexible, where "students may

The Table presents a matrix to provide an overview of four main terms. Note that this is a "best effort" and exceptions may exist: Merging Modality Models (Irvine, 2020)

	f2f	synchronous concurrent	synchronous consecutive	asynchronous consecutive	open access
Blended (Hybrid)	X		X <sup>^</sup>	X <sup>^</sup>	
HyFlex	X <sup>*</sup>	X <sup>*</sup>		X <sup>*</sup>	
Multi-Access	X <sup>^</sup>	X <sup>^</sup>	X <sup>^</sup>	X <sup>^</sup>	X <sup>^</sup>
Blended Synchronous (Synchronous Hybrid)	X <sup>*</sup>	X <sup>*</sup>			



choose whether or not to attend face-to-face sessions." Learners have full control of their modality (face-to-face, online synchronous, or online asynchronous). HyFlex has become increasingly discussed beyond the research literature in response to the COVID-19 impact on campuses, but, in reality, only few of these implementations are true HyFlex designs. Irvine (2006; 2013) developed Multi-Access learning, with four levels of access: (1) face-to-face, (2) synchronous online, (3) asynchronous online, and (4) open access. While the first three are modalities, the fourth is concerned with open access to course materials and/or discourse:

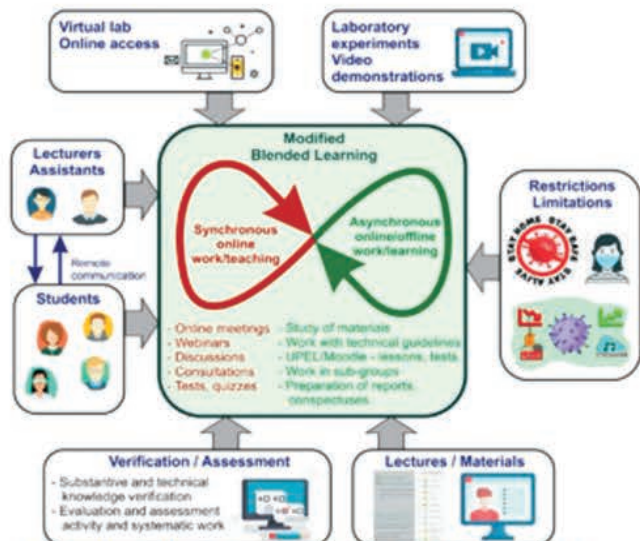
Multi-access learning can also embed blended designs, whereby the synchronous instructional hours merging F2F and synchronous online are reduced in favour of asynchronous activities or decentralised synchronous learning "pods," which are small groups of learners who are expected to meet synchronously for discourse, peer assessment, and social support at a mutually agreed upon time each week. The Multi-Access learning framework puts value on increasing modality access but recognises that contextual circumstances often require customisations and limits. The open-access level is added as a different type of access to encourage the involvement of open learners and a reconsideration of locking resources behind a password-protected learning management system or copyrighting materials—not unlike the rationale supporting open-access research.

In 2013, yet another concept appeared, Bower and colleagues proposed the term Blended Synchronous for teaching and learning situations which include web conferencing, desktop video-conferencing, virtual worlds, and more. Similarly Bell and his colleagues talked about Synchronodal or Synchronous Hybrid from 2014 onwards for that environment where "online and face-to-face students interact during shared synchronous sessions".

**PREVENT THE SPREAD OF COVID-19**

## What will or could the future bring us?

Well, Irvine indicated that we might be integrating telepresence robots in teaching and learning. Interesting, no? And of course not without risks or disadvantages as “learners participate within a face-to-face class by connecting via audio and video with a telepresence robot, which can be tabletop (stationary with pivot) or mobile. In the latter case, the remote learner can drive the robot around the room or beyond, so long as there is wireless internet (or, in some cases, data networks) for connection” (Irvine, 2020).



Sourced from: [https://www.mdpi.com/education/education-10-00292/article\\_deploy/html/images/education-10-00292-g001.png](https://www.mdpi.com/education/education-10-00292/article_deploy/html/images/education-10-00292-g001.png)

There are other terms that have emerged since the beginning of the Covid19 pandemic: Remote Teaching or Emergency Remote Teaching is one of those. It came about due to the concern that hastily prepared practices developed by instructors lacking knowledge and experience in trying to meet learners' needs online would generate negative perceptions of online learning, which has had decades to evolve.

Interestingly too, are the linkages people make between pedagogy and modality, even though these are distinctly separate constructs. It is one of those stereotypes or biases that we, at IDE, need to constantly debunk. As Irvine (2020) noted, “online learning is often accused of being passive, and face-



to-face learning is described as being dynamic. However, large, lecture-based, on-campus courses can also be passive, and small, online seminar courses can be dynamic and engaging. Whether a learning experience is passive or dynamic depends on the pedagogy applied in the modality.

To end this article, let us look at two more concepts: Collis and Moonen's Flexible Learning has "many dimensions, only one of which is related to location of participants" and four main components: namely technology, pedagogy, implementation strategies and institutional framework; and Baker (2000), Bergman and Sams's Flipped Learning is also an example of a pedagogical approach: here, content is learned by the students, independently, before class through recordings or other resources, and during synchronous sessions discussion is the main way of interacting between instructor and learner. Finally, there is the issue of Open Education, Open Pedagogy, Open Education

Practices, Open Teaching, Open Learning and Open Access. Hopefully, we will have time to learn about that in the next IDE Newsletter.

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## IDE Hosts a Workshop on Designing Learning Materials for the Department of Adult Education



By: Ms S Shongwe  
Copy Editor

**O**n the 2nd of October 2020, IDE, through its Instructional Design

and Development Unit, hosted a workshop on designing learning materials for lecturers from the Department of Adult Education. A few lecturers from other departments also attended. This was the first of a two-phased workshop on designing learning materials. This workshop was part of the first phase where the focus was on training participants on utilising the IDE module template and language usage in material development.

The objectives of the workshops were to:

- Orient course lecturers on designing learning materials using an existing template;
- Show how to use language in materials design

and development.

Dr PS Dlamini, IDE Assistant Coordinator – Instructional Design and Development, welcomed participants and took them through the objectives of the workshop. She also encouraged active participation as the workshop approach was that of interaction.

The workshop was officially opened with remarks from Ms Maduna, the Head of Department, for the Faculty of Education. In her deliberations, she appreciated IDE for taking the lead in ensuring that lecturers were equipped with facilitating lectures using the distance education delivery mode. She emphasised the importance of such skills in particular during this period when academic institutions were adapting to distance learning modes due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Ms Maduna expressed hope that, with the skill of designing learning materials, the teaching and learning experience would be enhanced, thus improving the quality of teaching.



Dr PS Dlamini's presentation on components of a module discussed the application of the six levels of Bloom's Taxonomy in formulating learning objectives. These levels are **knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation**. They are developed with the intention of developing the cognitive, affective and the psycho-motor skills. The emphasis was also on contextualisation, which considers the students' level in the use of content, language and assessment. Participants engaged in a lively discussion with regards to how the end user, the student, interacts effectively with a module. One suggestion was for content designers to consider a psychological approach when designing learning material.

Ms S Shongwe, the IDE Copy Editor, presented on the use of language in developing learning material. She emphasised the importance of utilising the active voice when designing learning material; she did so through a well-chosen video. One frequently asked question was: why the active voice in particular? How about the passive voice? Ms Shongwe explained that the active voice:

- Directly addresses learners;
- Allows shorter sentences which are direct and less wordy: the arrangement of words is simple – Subject/Verb/Object; and

- Makes for clearer writing and reading;
- Is closer to the way we (naturally) coin our sentences in everyday conversations, according to some linguists.

Participants were briefly taken through the importance of observing use of language when recording a video-lesson. In particular the importance of varied intonation, a not too high or too low pitch of voice was highlighted, as well as the use of appropriate images and netiquette when students and lecturers interact online.



Source :<https://www.pexels.com/search/word>

Workshop participants deliberated on the use of a word that has varying meanings, such as the word "run". They further agreed that, instead of individual words, the focus should be more on clarifying phrases which pose a greater danger of confusion in a piece of writing. One was reminded of a famous joke by Groucho Marx in the following sentence:



Participants during the workshop on Designing Learning Materials



Dr TT Rugube,  
Coordinator,  
Multimedia

## COMMUNITY SUPPORT - WILLIAM PITCHER COLLEGE LECTURERS ARE TRAINED ON MOODLE

As part of community work, IDE through the Multimedia Unit trained lecturers from William Pitcher College on MOODLE - Learning Management System. Dr Rugube shares with us the importance of on-line learning during a crisis.

**Q. We have just emerged from a period of challenges in trying to cope with mastering teaching/learning during a crisis. What have you (still do) taken away from the experience of being a front-liner in ensuring that teaching happens in the middle of a pandemic?**

With every crisis comes challenges and opportunities. The Covid-19 pandemic has led to at least one positive thing: a much greater appreciation for the importance of technology. We used technology to communicate as well as gather relevant

information for supporting staff. We looked to other educators in the region to help with learning materials.

**Q. In your opinion, how can Instructors/Lecturers prepare themselves with regards to teaching during a crisis such as a pandemic?**

Blended learning approaches which have been tried and tested can be used. Technologies such as video conferencing software can be used to hold lectures virtually with students. Learning management systems too, such as Moodle, can be used to distribute, collect and grade students' assignments.

**Q. In your opinion, how can Students/Learners prepare themselves with regards to learning during a crisis?**

Students are faced with a myriad of challenges inherent in online learning. Since institutions have shifted to remote teaching, students are left with no choice but to acquire technical skills. The assumption is that some students have the skills attained from previous studies, and need to be encouraged to transfer the skills to their learning tasks. Students also need support from different stakeholders so they can acquire data and mobile devices to use for learning purposes,



## The Community of Inquiry and Interactivity in on-line learning

By: Professor C. Maphosa  
IDE Director

Online learning is often associated with a lack of interaction that the learners would experience when learning together in the face-to-face contact teaching and learning. However, the value of online learning is in its flexibility, which allows learning to take place anytime from anywhere.

There is a need to promote high levels of interactivity in online learning by utilising the available digital learning tools. The digital learning tools should be utilised to form Communities of Inquiry among students. The CoI framework, according to Miesky and Foels (2019:293), is premised on a collaborative constructivist approach to learning. Students form a community of inquiry so that they can work together to construct knowledge together and share the knowledge. Therefore, embedded in collaborative work is student interaction.

In Open and Distance e-Learning (ODEL) students, who are generally separated from one another, ought to work together collaboratively and this enhances interactivity. The CoI framework is also viewed as a social constructivist model of learning. The social element implies interaction between and among students. Garrison (2011), cited in Pecka, Kotcherlakota, and

Berger (2014: 213), states that:

*"A Community of Inquiry is defined as a group of learners who collaboratively construct the meaning of concepts and ideas using meaningful discussion".*

It is clear from the above definition that, there is a link between the CoI framework and student interaction. In distance online learning, for example, students may utilise discussion forums to engage with fellow students. This allows students to interact with others on the digital learning platforms. There is, therefore, student interaction in communities of inquiry.

One of the elements of the CoI framework, the social presence also alludes to student interactivity. Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (1999), define social presence "as the ability of the student to relay characteristics of themselves in the online community". Students have to present their 'real' selves as they interact with others online. As ODeL institutions use digital learning platforms for teaching and learning, opportunities should be provided for students to interact with others online and in the process develop a group identity and sense of belonging to the group. Richardson and Swan (2003), note that social presence is developed through collaborative learning activities. It, therefore, shows that there is a clear link between the CoI framework and student interaction.

As ODeL students work collaboratively online, social presence is developed and nurtured. Course instructors should provide for opportunities to work collaboratively online and threaded discussion on a discussion forum, is one way of promoting the required interactivity,



# EDUCATORS – FRONT-LINERS IN TEACHING DURING A CRISIS



By: Ms S Shongwe  
Copy Editor

The world as we knew it! Watching a movie that was shot a year ago, I was struck with the extent to which our world has changed. Then (just a year ago) people shook hands, hugged and shared small spaces. March 2020, our daily schedules and habits were disrupted in a way that has redefined the way we relate to each other. This is the reality of a pre-COVID and a post-COVID world – which is where we are at right now. The education sector, higher education in particular, was not spared.



When we entered March 2020, as IDE we had the determination and oomph to tackle the semester that had just begun. Suddenly, we were in the midst of a pandemic, the world (literally) came to a standstill. So, eight months later, what have we learned about pursuing teaching and learning goals in a crisis?

Ms Audrey Azoulay, the Director General for UNESCO, in her remarks during the International Literary Day 2020, hailed educators whom she said were on the “frontline” as they dedicated their



Ms Azoulay emphasized that “educators in the frontline” require support in the form of:

- Enabling them to develop and adapt in all circumstances,
- Training: widespread training in Distance

Education is essential;

- Developing technologies that educators should make accessible to learners;

Achieving all three, I believe, will go a long way in enabling us to attain the global goal on education which is part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDGs, also referred to as “Global Goals”, have Goal four which is “Equality in Education”.

With a pandemic breathing down our necks, how do we attain equality? This goal is driven by a “leave no one behind” and, with COVID-19, IDE is doing all that is possible to ensure that “no one is left behind.” What else can be done? I believe that research will provide answers to my questions. Research into our experiences as lecturers and students will not only contribute to improve teaching and learning, it will also provide a roadmap on how to teach/learn during a crisis to many lecturers and students to come. The common sentiment by Ms Azoulay and WEF is adaptability. The 'new normal' has compelled us to adapt in order to remain relevant and effective.







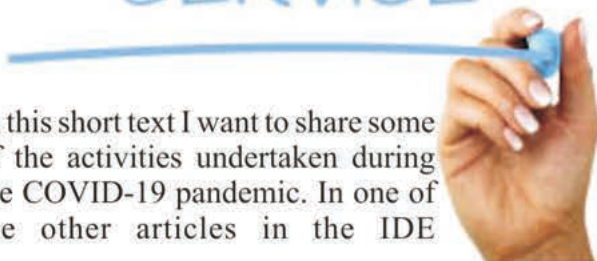
# The Importance of Virtual Community Services in Times of Crisis



**Professor Karen Ferreira-Meyers,**  
Coordinator Linguistics and Modern Languages

The pandemic hit us hard. Suddenly we were in lockdown and could no longer physically go out to our communities to offer community service. What could we do?

COMMUNITY  
SERVICE



In this short text I want to share some of the activities undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic. In one of the other articles in the IDE

Newsletter you will read or you have already read about how IDE assisted William Pitcher Teacher Training College to embrace and implement Moodle.

As a general rule, community service has the best results when it is done in the area of expertise of the individual wishing to give back to his or her community. At the Institute of Distance Education, we are well-versed with online teaching and learning, with the development of distance learning materials, with the implementation of distance and online programmes and courses, with facilitation,

etc. The list is long and varied, and these competencies allow us to intervene at various levels.

Before COVID-19 as a team, we used to go out to our fellow educational stakeholders and assist where possible. This has been happening over the years, but now the sudden onset of the pandemic, the subsequent lockdown and all the sanitary measures still in place, such as social distancing, handwashing and sanitising, meant that it was (and still is) not a good idea to go to the different venues where our colleagues, educators, work.

Obviously, when we do community service, we do so because we want to “give back”, we want to assist others who might not be as fortunate as we are. But community services or volunteering also has personal advantages:

*In the current crisis, volunteering may be comforting, helping people to overcome feelings of inertia and helplessness (as they are separated from loved ones and witness reports on the damage to familiar infrastructures – healthcare, government, food supplies). A review of 33 articles on volunteering during emergencies, exploring motives, suggested that being connected with a cause can be a key driver, alongside regarding it as emotionally cathartic when affected personally, and finding solace from collaborating with others towards the same goal.*

[\(https://www.cebm.net/covid-19/volunteering-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-what-are-the-potential-benefits-to-peoples-well-being/\)](https://www.cebm.net/covid-19/volunteering-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-what-are-the-potential-benefits-to-peoples-well-being/)

One of the areas I know well is that of teaching and learning, and so I embarked on a series of micro learning sessions (for a Canadian community college which works with marginalised indigenous groups and which does not have the financial means to pay anyone for such “teaching” – this goes just to show that not all initiatives in the Global North are wealthy or have sufficient finances to do all what they would like to do). In the past few months, I have held several sessions; here are their titles:

Effective online facilitation; Active listening; Active listening in asynchronous sessions; Grice's conversational maxims applied to online teaching and learning; Techniques to foster engagement in online discussion forums; Netiquette and Peer-to-peer support.



I also joined a WhatsApp group, called TICE Afrique. It brings together colleagues from different countries, mostly Francophone African countries, wishing to share expertise and knowledge. We prepare short learning “capsules”: 10-minute videos on different subjects linked to ICT, teaching and learning.

Of course, all of this is a bit time-consuming, but while preparing my sessions and interacting with participants online, I also learn a lot. I call this a win-win situation.

This write-up discusses just one way of giving back to your community and to the world at large. Each of us can find a suitable way to do so.

# THE ESWATINI COMMUNICATION COMMISSION (ESCCOM) SUPPORTS UNESWA IDE BY STRENGTHENING BLENDED LEARNING



**By: Dr PS Dlamini,  
Assistant Coordinator  
Instructional Design and  
Development**

**C**ollaboration between the Institute of Distance Education (IDE) and

the Department of Computer Science has yielded lucrative benefits for the institution. The two worked together to develop a proposal for funding through the Eswatini Communication Commission (ESCCOM) universal services and access funds. Among other things, the proposal requested

funding for a mobile laboratory for UNESWA that could be utilised by students who require internet access to ease the pressure on the limited available ICT laboratories within UNESWA.



*Professor Zwane (PVC-Administration), Professor Maphosa (Director IDE), Professor Thwala (Vice-Chancellor), Dr Horton (HOD Mathematics), Professor Gadaga (PVC-Academic) and Dr Simelane (Registrar) displaying the tablets which are part of the mobile laboratory*

Collaboration between the Institute of Distance Education (IDE) and the Department of Computer Science has yielded lucrative benefits for the institution. The two worked together to develop a proposal for funding through the Eswatini Communication Commission (ESCCOM) universal services and access funds. Among other things, the proposal requested funding for a mobile laboratory for UNESWA that could be utilised by students who require internet access to ease the pressure on the limited available ICT laboratories within UNESWA.



**The Mobile Laboratory**

The team viewed an availability of a mobile laboratory at UNESWA to be of great use during the university outreaches in remote communities in the kingdom of Eswatini. The mobile laboratory could further enable UNESWA to carry out

more community services that will benefit the citizens of Eswatini, the youth in particular as they could access internet services for educational purposes. The mobile laboratory has



a number of advantages such as keep the computers safe, charging them, connecting to the internet and allowing users to observe social distance in a room. It is also likely that more staff and students can eventually create more contextualised digital learning artefacts, such as video lessons, digital stories and electronic portfolios. On the 23rd of September 2020, the generous gift from ESCCOM; a mobile laboratory that comprised forty-five (45) tablets was received by the University management, IDE and the department of Computer Science.



Professor J Thwala making his remarks



Professor C Maphosa delivering his speech



Professor Gadaga and Dr Horton



Dr Simelane, Dr Methula, Dr Dlamini, Professor Ferreira - Meyers, and Dr Dlodlu



# The Relevance of Culture in Open Educational Resources (OER)

Ms Shongwe (Copy Editor) interviewed Ms Vilakati (Coordinator Instructional Design and Development) on the role of culture in Open Educational Resources.



Miss N Vilakati

**S. Shongwe:** *What (in your opinion) have been significant changes in teaching/learning approaches due to COVID-19?*

**N. Vilakati:** In my opinion, albeit with a bias towards learning design, one of the major changes in teaching and learning has entailed more openness to change achieved through the agency of some lecturers and learning designers to intentionally benefit from a wide array of professional learning opportunities on remote and/or blended approaches to curriculum design and pedagogy.

What stands out for me personally is 'a change of heart' necessitated by the health challenge posed by COVID-19, that is, most of us now tend to embrace more social and emotional approaches to distance/blended teaching and learning. For example, in many higher education professional learning contexts, while re-designing our courses for remote/blended learning, as Communities of Practice we have been reminded to 'Be kind to ourselves and to our students.' Such too is evidenced by being more considerate from an equity standpoint to be inclusive of the most vulnerable students and staff. (see, for example, the University of Cape Town Low Tech Remote Teaching Principles or Guidelines)

**S. Shongwe:** *What then is our (instructors in higher education) call with regards to OER?*

**N. Vilakati:** In a Covid-19 semester, amid all the extra cognitive load involved for both lecturers and students, the resources for distance/blended teaching and learning are simply not readily available. We

now reconsider leveraging the benefits of OER for pivoting to distance/blended approaches to curriculum design and pedagogy. OER, as one facet of open education, can support our effort to make education more affordable, accessible and effective by providing access to quality learning resources.

**S. Shongwe:** *What does "cultural relevance" entail?*

**N. Vilakati:** Culturally relevant education (CRE) recognises the importance of including students' cultural backgrounds, interests and lived experiences in all aspects of teaching and learning for improved engagement and success. The following are the main pillars of CRE: to improve student learning and achievement, to affirm students' cultural competence and to facilitate a critical consciousness and critique of inequities within educational and social institutions.

**S. Shongwe:** *To what extent will cultural relevance advance Open Educational Resources?*

**N. Vilakati:** Perhaps some of the reasons for the slow uptake of OER in university education has been the difficulty to find good quality resources that are also culturally relevant. Due to permissions granted by most OER licenses, it is possible to repurpose content and learning activities to reflect cultural relevance through various perspectives, contributions and experiences. Open Educational Resources hold a promise for creating more relevancy and inclusion by incorporating narratives and perspectives that are often left out of traditional textbooks and other curricular resources.

**S. Shongwe:** *What are the "shifts" that facilitators need to make in order to embrace cultural relevance, especially in the face of a health pandemic?*

**N. Vilakati:** Communities of Practice would need to undertake action research projects to inform deliberations, meaningful dialogic and authentic



exchanges on cultural relevance to explore ways of addressing some of the prevailing challenges in university teaching. The intention is to guard against transference of some of the inequities faced by students in traditional classrooms into the digital space during a time of a health pandemic and beyond.

**S. Shongwe:** *Please share what an 'ideal' teaching and learning (T/L) scenario would be in distance education.*

**N Vilakati:** In an attempt to respond to this complex task, I borrow from Picciano's (2017) integrated model of online/distance learning as well as the Community of Inquiry model. Together, the components of these models can be combined in teaching and learning scenarios to foster a learning community that is driven by pedagogy to incorporate a range of activities, enabled by flexible distance learning delivery.

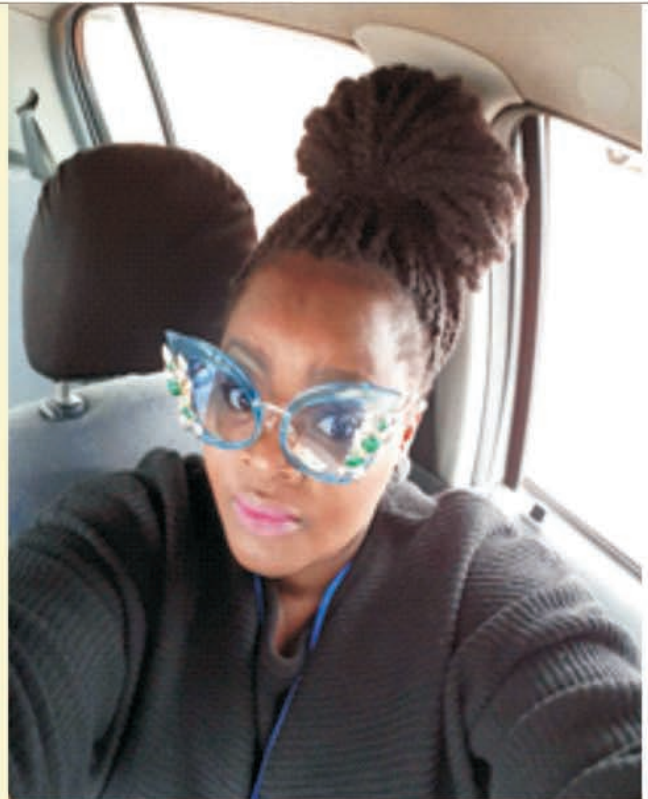
## The Academic August Rush-Rush - Here is to Another Academic Year

By Ms Nqobile Mashinini - LLB I student

The rush began the moment I received my acceptance letter. I had very limited time to settle my acceptance fee and the late arrival of my acceptance letter did not help. The issue of reorganising my time was major. It seemed I was done with party weekends and I gladly welcomed new pressure that promised a better me. I was also happy to take on a new challenge. I was excited and worried at the same time.

I made arrangements to pay the acceptance fee and had the shock of my life upon learning I had to pay for registration to fully become a UNESWA IDE student. I was not prepared! It was as if someone else applied for me. I missed my first lecture as I failed to pay in due time. I later realised it was possible to attend the first lecture even before one pays the fees.

Orientation was of the utmost importance as it gave me an idea of how things are done. It was a great experience with a lot of socialisation. I was so keen to meet my new classmates and to know the corridors of UNESWA. I robbed Peter to pay Paul and was happy to learn that the University accepts



installments. That came as a huge relief. One, two, three, I had to get my modules from the print shop, I had no idea where it was. I had my class the following Saturday.

On the third class there were already two assignments and a test the following Saturday and then there were computer practicals on Sunday. I could not believe such a rush, I realised that procrastination was not an option when I almost missed a deadline on an assignment. We created a WhatsApp group in which we discussed academic issues, through it we were able to update each other on school work.

When the test came the first assignment was



already due. I almost went crazy from juggling between finishing the due assignment and preparing for an upcoming test. By the weekend, I was quite exhausted and I got a low mark in the test I wrote. I was not pleased with my performance. I was not so good at balancing my time. I decided that from that day on I was going to do the assignments immediately I received them. With all the pain came a life-changing decision, I was going to be on my toes always.

When my second test came I was prepared, I was convinced I was ready as I had spent quality time with my module and lecture notes. Boom, I had all the necessary data but lacked the expertise required in answering the questions. However I did my best under the circumstances. My results came back the following weekend and I was shocked to find marks that were not competitive at all. This was definitely not high school. I already knew what was missing, I needed to familiarise myself with the questions that are asked in this course. The answer lies in past

question papers which are available at the library.

In a twinkle of an eye, the exams were here and my wake-up call was seeing the draft time table on the notice board. I was still trying to finish an outstanding assignment. Then CA signing day was around the corner, we were literally running. Some did not have scripts, others had missing tests and assignments with others negotiating marks, it was done, the semester was over.

During exams the atmosphere changes, everyone becomes ultimate scholars, studying seriously and suddenly being quiet. The time to produce what one has been doing since the beginning of a semester had arrived. Sleepless nights and rushing all over campus was the order of the day.

Nothing beats the feeling of seeing results of hard work, it pays and, after everything, all the sacrifices were worth it. I was reminded of why I began this journey. I looked forward to the second semester but that's a topic for another day.

# Embracing Online Learning

## To IDE Students- From Student Support Services Desk



By: Ms N Mabuza,  
Coordinator Student  
Support Services

The year 2020 has made all of us in the world change the way we do things; teaching and learning was not spared. Due to the emphasis on social distance and isolation as some of the effective preventive measures for the COVID-19 pandemic (WHO standards), there was need to change focus in teaching and learning strategies. The next question is, how shall we teach and how shall you learn? Online education has been adopted by many institutions because the infrastructure was readily available, it just needed to be enhanced. Learners had to swiftly make the decision to adapt to online learning to be able to complete their studies. Learner Readiness for Online Learning.

The attitude towards online learning is key to becoming a successful online learner. Generally, attitude, according to Beckman (2016), has a great influence on a person. The way an individual will think, feel and respond to a situation is largely influenced by attitude. This means that developing a positive attitude is a step towards victory. As a learner, once

one develops a positive attitude towards online learning then one will conquer prevailing hindrances.

As distance learners, one of the attributes that make you successful is being motivated. In particular intrinsic motivation, that is, motivation stirred up from within. A self-motivated individual is able to be rational in decision-making which enables him or her not to lose sight of the goals. This is crucial in creating a positive attitude so that negative factors that are associated with online learning are easily overcome. Participation in Online Discussions.

Lack of or limited personal contact with fellow classmates and course instructors is identified as one key factor that results in learners struggling to embrace online learning (Ullah, 2019). Though, as a student who has consciously enrolled for a distance learning programme, reality sinks in only when the actual learning takes place.

The fact that one has to spend more time on the computer screen or in modules or books than with peers and lecturers peaks the loneliness and isolation of students who are engaged in distance learning. Participation in online discussions may be the remedy because it creates an opportunity for more interaction with others. It is this interaction than might make one generate a learning community and make online learning more enjoyable.



# MEET THE IDE PERSONNEL



**Professor C Maphosa**  
IDE Director



**Professor C Esampally**  
Coordinator-Academic



**Professor K Ferreira-Meyers**, Coordinator - Linguistics & Modern Languages



**Dr M Dlodlu**  
Coordinator - Education



**Dr KE Kunene**  
Coordinator-Research & Evaluation



**Dr HP Dlamini**  
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**Dr PS Dlamini**,  
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**Ms N Mabuza**, Coordinator-Student, Support Services



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**Mr SP Maphanga**  
Senior Technologist



**Ms L Simelane**  
Secretary



**Mr W Dlamini**  
Printshop



**Mr SV Dlamini**  
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**Mr B Nhlabatsi**  
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**Ms L Gama**  
Secretary



**Ms K Magagula**  
Secretary



**Ms NT Vilakati**,  
Coordinator-Instructional Design & Development



**Ms ST Shongwe**  
Copy Editor



**PREVENT THE  
SPREAD OF  
COVID-19**



# Tips to help learners benefit from participating in online discussions



By: Ms N Mabuza,  
Coordinator Student  
Support Services

Source: <https://www.123rf.com>

## 1. Sharpen your communication skills

As a learner there is need to master effective communication skills as there is a difference between communication and effective communication. This is achieved by ensuring that your messages are:

- Clear, easy to understand and systematically framed to retain their meaningfulness*
- Correct, free from errors*
- Complete, not vague so that the information provided will lead to appropriate decisions. Others say type a message to your classmates as if you are typing a message to your lecturer.*
- Precise, short and straight to the point to facilitate correct interpretation*
- In consideration of the receiver. Always keep your receiver in mind*
- Reliable, send a message you trust is accurate and receiver may rely on*
- Communicate respect, courtesy and humbleness to the other person as you draft your message so that it is well received.*

## 2. Pay attention to how others communicate.

This may give direction on the accepted etiquette in a discussion forum. The leader may give direction on what is accepted and not accepted

## 3. Respond to contributions by others

This is definitely a two-way street. Read what others have written and comment just as you expect them to read and comment on what you have written. Learning from others is one of the fringe benefits of online learning as everyone is sometimes compelled to say something as opposed to face to face sessions. Be generous and take initiative to assist others if they have a problem you will need their assistance too another time.

*Enjoy your online learning.*