

**#NoStudentLeftBehind:
Designing and Flexible and Inclusive Remote Learning Continuity Plan**

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The Covid-19 pandemic forced a myriad of human endeavors into a complete halt in compliance with social distancing protocols implemented by governments around the globe. In the Philippines, the virus has left establishments out of business (Bello as cited by Salaverria, 2020), churches closed (Esmaque II, 2020), and live entertainment venues empty (Seguerra, 2020). But one of the most gravely affected sectors is education with around 90% of the student population (UNESCO, 2020) prohibited to return to their classrooms (Duterte as cited by Magsambol, 2020).

Educational institutions were faced with the challenge to uphold academic resilience and design learning continuity plans despite the pervasive threat of the virus. A total of 1,935 higher education institutions in the Philippines (QS Asia News Network, 2017), majority of which follow the traditional face-to-face delivery mode (UniRank, 2020), remain physically closed but have been asked to explore alternative modes to deliver learning content remotely for this academic year. A number of private universities have already migrated their teaching practices online (Villarin, 2020; Contreras, 2020; Ang as cited by Cua, 2020). However, for a country like the Philippines with an urbanization of less than 50% (Kemp, 2020), digital divide is a serious consideration for educators (Salceda as cited by Jaucian, 2020). Even from the preliminary planning stage of this attempt to go online, calls for #NoStudentLeftBehind - a hashtag students have used as a form of protest to call for more inclusive educational plans for the coming semester - have surfaced (Torres, 2020).

In the midst of unemployment, rising death tolls, digital divide, and the present risk of the virus, teachers-instructional designers are called to continue teaching because education can and education must (Department of Education, 2020). For this reason, traditional educational institutions are faced with a unique challenge to shelve their go-to residential classroom pedagogical strategies and sink their teeth into remote learning spaces to minimize further disruptions in learning and maximize affordances of digital technology.

This is: #NoStudentLeftBehind: Designing a Flexible and Inclusive Remote Learning Continuity Plan. This paper presents the findings of an action research project chronicling experiences and reflections in designing a flexible and inclusive university-level course on Public Speaking for a state-run university in the Philippines. To serve as the backbone of the paper, the four steps of action research in education (planning, acting, developing, and reflecting (Mertler, nd) and the three principles of the Universal Design for Learning (representation, action and expression, and engagement (Morin, nd) were utilized. How can we teach Public Speaking, usually taught in a classroom with a physically live audience giving immediate feedback, online without sacrificing the preset learning outcomes? How can educators practice flexibility

in course implementation to suit the different needs of the students at a time like this? How can we ensure, given the demographics of the students, inclusivity in remote learning? Being written as it unfolds, this action research captures the panic, inspirations, hurdles, and solutions professors-instructional designers faced/are facing while making sure that no student is left behind.

For this presentation, I will be focusing on the final step of the action research process, reflecting on the action, by providing a list of best practices while following the guidelines of the UDL framework. UDL means reaching and teaching ALL students. The framework operates under the assumption that there are barriers to learning BUT it is important to note that we should not look at learning barriers as intrinsic to the students themselves and something that they have to work on their own but something that are built externally within systems, environments, cultures, where the attempt to learn takes place. Simply put, the goal is to minimize or lessen these barriers if not totally eradicate them. This will only happen through making sure that instructional design is flexible and inclusive. There are three basic principles of UDL, representation, engagement, and action and expression.

Three Principles of the Universal Design for Learning (Morin, nd)

- 1) Representation - teachers provide information in more than 1 format, and in a variety of ways-how to represent information, ways to customize the display of info (auditory, visual).
- 2) Engagement - teachers help students engage with learning by giving them choices and autonomy, and by incorporating their interests.
- 3) Action and Expression - teachers allow multiple ways to interact with the content and to show what they have learned.

The literature would show that UDL is usually used in addressing needs of learners with differences in cognitive development or learning styles, but this pandemic has further exposed the different needs and widened the gap among our students. UDL is understanding that our students come from a whole spectrum and we have to be prepared to accommodate as much as we can.

I present to you, not rules because UDL understands that each classroom looks different, but reflections and best practices in our attempt to make it flexible and inclusive.

Best practices:

- 1) GET TO KNOW YOUR STUDENTS. This is the main anchor of the UDL Framework. And this familiarity with students have to go beyond their names and their student numbers. I'm sure teachers know this already. We make subtle changes in our instructional plans based on their reactions and feedback during class. Be it activities, examples, or even jokes. What worked for one section may not work for another section simply because of the differences in demographics and psychographics of the students. It's just that now, during the pandemic, we have to look into more categories of differences that have a direct impact on our teaching and learning strategies. The more we know our students, the better we can prepare for the variety of techniques that we can offer. a) The best way of course is through a survey conducted WAY BEFORE THE SEMESTER STARTS or else, you risk wasting your preparation when during the roll out, you

realize it's not clicking. One of the good things about our students is that they are very vocal and proactive. They conduct their own surveys and research and they post it online. Twitter, it may not be as scientific a method as conducting surveys, but is also a good way to listen to the sentiments of your students. b) EVALUATE DURING THE SEMESTER, teachers must use assessment tools and learning activities to determine not only students' academic progress but also to get to know your students better (their current disposition, house setup, values, etc.). These nuggets of information allow you to redesign the instructional plans in a way that best caters to the type of students that you have. You can do this through creative check in questions for Zoom attendance, last week I asked my students to make a "day in the life vlogs" which they thoroughly enjoyed. And I got to know them beyond their usual class introduction and their grades. We all know that this plays a big part of being a teacher and this allows us to make more informed decisions in rolling out our lessons. This means that teachers must PREPARE FOR CHANGE! Yes, we have the university approved syllabi and course outline but we always have to assert our academic freedom in deciding on what we think is best for our students based on our interaction with them. I know a lot of teachers who are master organizers, they have every minute perfectly planned down to every lecture, every presentation slide, every activity, every item on the quiz. That's good. But we also have to be ready to make adjustments anytime during the semester. I remember my first day of online class, based on my first interaction with the students through zoom, I had to on the spot, lessen the number of synchronous meetings because of the tech problems we encountered that session. We are creatures of habit. And sometimes, we end up too in love with "tried and tested" teaching strategy, an activity for example, that it becomes difficult for us to acknowledge that it may not always work. Getting to know the students means understanding that differences will exist and this is a reality we always have to factor in when we design our lessons. Getting to know students deeper opens up the door for a culture of compassion and empathy in the classroom. Classrooms should not be a jungle where only the strong survives.

- 2) PLAN WITH A RANGE IN MIND. This is something that the UDL framework reiterates: anticipation of a full range of student profiles. The more profiles you determine the better you can be prepared to accommodate and tailor fit learning strategies for them. This means opening up your instructional plans for multimodal, multiplatform, varied implementation that are easily pliable. Teachers are challenged to have foresight and visualize a whole spectrum of possibilities. It sounds too daunting and laborious at first, but honestly, in preparing for this semester, we had no choice. As one of the biggest state universities in the country, servicing students from different regions, across all economic brackets, we had to prepare to cater to a wider range of students. Actually even for private schools, for international schools for example who have a more homogenous mix of students, preparing to distinguish differences in readiness and accomplishment is still vital. For the remote learning semester, based on the information we gathered from our preliminary surveys on student readiness, capacity, and willingness, and based on our current context, ang looked into different possible scenarios:

Learning Modality	COVID 19 Scenario	Classroom Setup
Face-to-Face	COVID 19 Complete Eradication; Roll out of vaccines/drugs (Duterte, May 2020); Complete return to normal	As is with precautionary measures
Blended Learning	COVID 19 controlled but not totally eradicated	Mixed FtF (minimal, for assessments only) and online learning (information transfer) FtF:Online ratio will depend on COVID situation Proceed with precautionary measures
Distance/Remote Learning	Major cities still under ECQ/MECQ/GCQ	Consumption of learning delivered to the students/consumed remotely Modular Approach

Of course, the best course of action (as decided by our administration), was to go for distance/remote learning similar to other educational institutions. Under that learning modality, we also decided to prepare three different delivery modes: a) Printed/Offline Modular Mode; b) Digital-Offline-Modular Mode; and c) Digital-Online-Modular Mode. The table below shows the initial study plan:

Remote Mode	Scenario	Description	Remarks
Printed Modules <i>(this should be our default. We move up the modular distance learning modalities based on the capacity of our students)</i>	-For students with no to little available internet connection and digital learning equipment	DESIGN- Printable modules are prepared by the department before the start of the semester. DELIVER- Modules are delivered via courier service to their residence/ downloaded and printed during registration period CONSUME- Students engage in self-administered, self-paced (guided by flexible calendar), learning. ASSESS- ALL assessment tools will	PROS: No student left behind. Internet connectivity/possession of gadgets is not an issue. CONS: -Minimum competencies expected of students after completion of the course must be re-evaluated (no live public speaking activity) -Assessment is very limited to what can be captured via self-administered, untimed, written examinations -Additional expenses for

		<p>be in the form of written worksheets (objective type quizzes, essays, journal, etc.)</p> <p>SUBMIT- Requirements will be sent back to the department periodically (grading period) or by the end of the semester</p> <p>FEEDBACK- Faculty members are expected to return graded worksheets periodically or by the end of the semester.</p>	<p>courier service.</p> <p>-Lack of synchronous learning/ communication</p>
Offline Digital Modules	-Students with available learning gadgets but with unstable internet connection	<p>DESIGN- Digital and downloadable modules (pdf documents, instructional videos, digital worksheets, podcasts) are prepared by the department before the start of the semester.</p> <p>DELIVER- Digital modules are made available for download via LMS/sent via email.</p> <p>CONSUME: Students engage in self-administered, self-paced (guided by flexible calendar), learning.</p> <p>ASSESS- Via digital assessment tools (online quizzes, word documents, multimedia projects, etc.)</p> <p>SUBMIT- Digital output submitted online periodically (grading period).</p> <p>FEEDBACK- Faculty members are expected to provide feedback from output periodically (grading period) or as deemed necessary.</p>	<p>PROS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Maximizing available digital modes in order to deliver content. -Accommodates students with unstable internet but with gadgets -Asynchronous -Availability of supplementary instructional materials through repository online. <p>CONS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Minimum competencies expected of students after completion of the course must be re-evaluated (no live public speaking activity, possibly recorded) -Lack of synchronous learning/ communication. -Data storage requirements for students. -Assessment is very limited to what can be captured via self-administered, untimed examinations/ activities.
Online Digital Modules	-Students with reliable internet connection and	DESIGN- Digital modules (pdf	PROS: -Maximizing available

	learning gadgets	<p>documents, instructional videos, digital worksheets, podcasts) are prepared by the department before the start of the semester.</p> <p>DELIVER- Digital modules accessed via LMS (UvLE, Google Classroom, etc.)</p> <p>CONSUME: Students engage in self-administered, self-paced (guided by flexible calendar), learning. Asynchronous/ synchronous modes available.</p> <p>ASSESS- Via digital assessment tools (online quizzes, word documents, multimedia projects, etc.)</p> <p>Synchronous/ Asynchronous modes available</p> <p>SUBMIT- Digital output submitted online periodically (as needed)</p> <p>FEEDBACK- Faculty members are expected to provide feedback from output periodically (as needed).</p>	<p>digital modes in order to deliver content.</p> <p>-Convenience of delivering digital instructional materials.</p> <p>-Availability of supplementary instructional materials through repository online.</p> <p>-Synchronous/ Asynchronous modes</p> <p>-Faster turnaround time for feedback.</p> <p>CONS:</p> <p>-Minimum competencies expected of students after completion of the course must be re-evaluated (no live public speaking activity, possibly recorded)</p> <p>-Assessment is very limited to what can be captured via online platforms.</p>
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We worked on redesigning our courses to suit all these three modes of learning. For each mode, we had to prepare the following elements: the design (the form of the learning materials), the delivery (how the learning materials will reach the students), how the students will consume the materials, how they'll be assessed, how they'll submit their output, and how they'll receive the feedback. The table below shows the elements of the module.

DESIGN	How teacher will creating the form of the learning materials
DELIVER	How the learning materials will reach the students
CONSUME	How the students will consume the materials

ASSESS	How students will be evaluated
SUBMIT	How students will turn in requirements
FEEDBACK	How teacher will return checked submissions

The challenge was to do it in such a short period of time. What I learned is to design pre-structured/semi-structured instructional plans that provide the teacher with a flexible guide on how to go about the semester depending on the type of student that they'll have. Planning with a range in mind operates with the knowledge that there is no such thing as a "one size fits all" instructional design and the more profiles of students we are ready for, the more inclusive our classrooms become. Last week, we delivered printed modules for a student with no internet and no gadget in Mindoro. I also sent a flash drive with OTP connector to a student with no internet access, no laptop, but with a working smartphone. Their activities are flexible enough to be done individually, in pairs or if their internet permits, collaborate as a group. This means that a big chunk of instructional design is providing an array of options for the students where we are not forced to "grade a fish by its ability to climb a tree." We have to reiterate this need because it's not just a matter of preference, we go down to the basics of "what does the circumstance permit us to do?" Most of the studies in UDL point to differences in cognitive development or learning styles. But this pandemic, we are dealt with more cards (students from off the grid provinces, non techy students, students with no gadgets, working students, etc.). Planning with a range in mind is a) understanding that THERE ARE barriers to learning that the Filipino student is facing, b) not romanticizing and relying on Filipino resilience, and c) exhausting means to lessen these barriers or creating an environment where we address these barriers or at least temporarily work around them in order to achieve our learning goals.

The best way to go about this is to plan WITH the students. Teachers must come in the semester with a pre-structured/semi-structured course plan and then, finalize it during first contact with students. It's time to give students authority to really take more responsibility for their learning and allow them to have a say on how to go about the semester. I found that this gives them a sense of ownership of their learning that then paves the way for a sense of investment in the learning process. Of course there are non negotiables like the course goals and course outcomes, but let us allow as much student participation in the little details of the course. In this process, we get a bigger understanding of the needs and capacity of our students which in turn will help us to assist them better. This semester on remote mode, instead of following the 3-hour weekly schedule, I allowed my students as much flexibility in terms of consuming content. I give them the materials every Monday, and I ask them to attend to it anytime within the week and submit output by Sunday. I learned that some students share gadgets at home with siblings and parents who are on work-from-home setups, students who work better at night when it's more quiet, students with intermittent internet signal. Students' input may also be welcomed in rubric making, enrichment activities, assessments, and the like. Engaging students in the planning process let's us avoid reducing education into mere consumption of mass produced modules and course packs.

Let's just remember that the soul of the instructional plan is your content, the main lesson or desired learning outcome. That will always be there. Do not be afraid to explore different means in which you can

breathe life to the lessons. Our content must be like liquid that can take the form of its receptacle. Multi-platform, multi modal, flexible and inclusive!

3) A complete REFRAMING OUR VIEW some even call it a paradigm shift in how we look at teaching. This semester, like all of us, I found myself doing things that I have never done in my traditional classrooms. Recording video lectures, dead silent zoom meeting rooms with all students on mute, unproctored assessments, teaching from home with a formal top and pambahay shorts. And honestly, it almost drove me crazy because it was all new. It took a while for me to accept and digest all of it little by little and I realized that we have no way but to reframe how we look at education and we have to do it almost overnight. We cannot teach the way we were taught. Furthermore, we cannot teach the same way we did last semester. And forcing our “old” practices and teaching as if we were in the classroom may not do us any good. We will only fail, and fail miserably, if we refuse to accept that there will be changes in how we teach, where we teach, when when, what we teach, even who we teach. An overhaul of how we look at education is important especially now at this moment that almost everything is at a standstill and there is still no end in sight. This reframing goes more than just providing internet access and gadgets to our students and teachers, it is an overall continuous reassessment of our educational system. What type of knowledge, skills, values must be taught to Filipino students at a time like this? Do our lessons still matter now? What types of graduates and citizens do we need to move forward from this? Does our current educational system support these needs moving forward? What kind of world are we expecting if ever we all survive from this?

Last week I saw viral Twitter and Facebook posts of students who are struggling with the new learning setup. Students who need to literally climb a mountain for mobile signal to access learning materials. Students who are already burnt out after a few weeks in online learning. Students who chose to drop out in the meantime. And then I remembered the speech of Sundar Pichai, CEO of Google and Alphabet delivering a commencement speech for the first of its kind virtual graduation exercises produced by Youtube for the Class of 2020. It was very informative, very inspiring but somewhere in the speech, probably to lift the spirits of the graduates who did not receive the usual send-off after attaining a degree, he said this: **YOU WILL PREVAIL**. He then told the stories of similar moments in history that, according to him, sort of mirrors what the whole world is experiencing right now. Like the Class of 1920 who graduated after a flu pandemic, Class of 1970 graduated during the Vietnam War, and Class 2001 who graduated the year of the 9-11 terror attacks. And then, he proceeds by saying, **IN ALL CASES, THEY PREVAILED**. Of course he said a number of other good points, but to end this presentation, allow me to focus on this one. The speaker argues that the long arc of history is enough proof that we, too, will make it, because earlier generations who experienced a similar fate, made it. And that “we have every reason to be hopeful. I get the value of hope as a very important human tool for survival and I do hope and pray that we all make it. But he failed to include an important part of the narrative: some people did not make it. In fact, a significant number of people did not.

And focusing our gaze only on the narratives of the ones who were privileged enough to make it, will be detrimental to the decisions and actions that we will make today. It’s good to take inspiration from people who did but it is also important to ask, what happened to the others? Why are they as fortunate? And what can we do differently to make sure we all get an equal shot to survive?

These are just some of the findings of an ongoing action research this semester. I hope this presentation reminded us of the importance of an educational system that is more pliant to the times and more mindful of the diversity of our students. A salute to all teachers who took the challenge head on and who make sure that we all prevail and that there will be #NoStudentLeftBehind.

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