Challenges of the Physical

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Imagine that the pandemic had always been with us.

Imagine that formal education had never evolved in-person.

Imagine that we had always been online.
Think of all the things that might never have been invented...
Imagine what *might* have been possible
Imagine what is possible
Let’s go on a journey into a wondrous land whose boundaries are that of imagination...
Your next stop:

The Twilight Zone
I have an idea...
I call it ‘in-person learning’
Here is how it works
First, you get a bunch of people together in one place at the same time.
Then you tell them stuff. Sometimes you tell them to do stuff. Sometimes you let them talk.
That’s pretty much it
It would need some scheduling
There would have to be a few rules.
So of course the teacher would have to be in control of every second of it.
Every single second
I know what you are thinking...
That’s a ridiculous idea!
Jon, you are absolutely crazy!
It would never work!
I mean...
What kind of idiot would try to teach everyone the same thing at the same time?
What student in their right mind would give away all their autonomy to sit in a room being told what to think and what to do by a stranger?
What kind of impoverished learning would take place when you make people learn stuff when they don’t need to learn it and they can’t use it for anything they care about?
And

Why waste of so much of a learner’s day to make them travel to and from this teaching-place?

What about the environmental impact? The traffic? The inevitable accidents?
And

How much does it cost to run a place like this? You would need a huge building! Think of the staffing just to keep it clean!

Where does the money come from?

Where are you going to get the land?
What else could you do with that land?

What are you going to do with it when you are not using it for teaching?
How are you going to get teachers to come to one place?

Why would they bother?
And

You could only teach a few hundred people at a time, at most.
And

There’d be no record. You’d have to keep repeating it over and over!
And

What about the diseases?
And

Why would you bother when people can learn everything they need to learn online and in the places that they live, play, and work?
You have a point.

But hear me out...
A lot of learning already happens in-person.

Why not all of it?
People like to do things with other people
We could make campuses fun!
We could share expensive things
We could provide libraries*

* places to keep paper books.
Paper books? Huh?
Paper books

They smell great!
Some things would be easier to teach
Everyone would be learning the same things, so we could test whether they have learned what we taught.
It could be done quite efficiently
Pretty soon it would all seem normal
People might even start thinking that it’s the only way to learn
People can get used to anything.
You’re probably wondering about motivation, though.
I have an idea...
Rewards and punishments
They won’t want to learn, but we can make them learn!
And here’s the really cool thing...
Credentials work for that too!
I know what you’re thinking...
Jon, this is immoral, impractical, and inhuman!
Hmmm...
You have a point
But, maybe....
We just need a lot of really caring teachers with a lot of time to give to learners, to distract them from the fundamental ugliness of the system.
People who would devote their lives to making the system work
I know what you’re thinking...
Where are we going to find such remarkable people?

How could we afford to pay them what they are worth?
I have an idea...
We won’t pay them very much!
Maybe it’s a bad idea
But we know that online learning could be improved. We know it can be confusing, misleading, inefficient, disempowering and lonely at times (despite the many people physically around us and the thousands we connect with online, including the top experts in the field).
Maybe competition like this could be just what’s needed to think more deeply about how we learn online and why it is a good idea.
Maybe.
But back to the real world...
Pedagogical methods are situated solutions to problems of learning.
Without smart pedagogies and passionate teachers, everyone learns everything at once. Usually that leaves many people bored and many people confused.

The teacher is in control of every moment. Students have no choice when and where to attend. They do not control what or how they learn. They cannot control how long it will take.

With classmates, a teacher, and the surrounding physical spaces, relatedness is well supported. However, it may be divorced from the rest of their social and community lives.

Our most cherished pedagogical methods are, primarily, solutions to these central problems.
The default online situation

Learners can easily try, and try again, can choose the right time to learn, the right place. They can fail in private. They can seek different resources, other people. However, it can be harder to seek help when needed.

The teacher cannot be in control and must let go. Outside the classroom, only grades and threats of credentials can coerce learners to conform to teacher demands.

There are many more people with whom to engage, at any time, but engagement tends to be more instrumental, and it is sometimes harder to communicate tacit knowledge.

http://selfdeterminationtheory.org

And yet…

"I suppose it is tempting, if the only tool you have is a hammer, to treat everything as if it were a nail." (Maslow, 1966)
Effective online teaching

**Effective pedagogies** glorify different capabilities, interests, approaches, goals. They support differences in pacing, technical needs, and prior knowledge. They celebrate failure and acknowledge small and large successes.

**Effective pedagogies** give learners control, not just choice. They let learners choose whether and when to make choices. They support personal goals, are personally relevant, acknowledge existing skills.

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http://selfdeterminationtheory.org

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In brief:

🤝 *Let go,* but stay close

👁 Make learning *visible*

👩‍🏫 Make learning *shared*

⭐ Don’t ever coerce

❤️  *Care*
How I do it

Open, relevant, student-chosen activities:
- scenarios,
- problems,
- projects,
- research,
- design,
- etc

Shared artefacts
- Discussion,
- shared discoveries, help given, etc

Portfolios of evidence
- optional

Formative feedback (peer/tutor, no grades)

Shared reflective learning diaries

Evidence of outcomes
- Student-graded Outcome mappings/
  Outcome harvesting

Each outcome gets a grade or pass/not-yet-pass (including self-identified outcomes)

Final credentialing
How would you design online education if in-person education had never been invented?
Thank you, obrigado

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A few selected readings


