Online Education Weekly Newsletter (Higher Education) Issue 1

WE HAVE TO BE APART,
BUT WE ARE STILL TOGETHER!
#StayApart #FightTogether

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Opening Letter

As the latest data from UNESCO shows, there are currently country-wide school closures in 107 countries[1] to contain the spread of COVID-19, impacting over 860 million learners globally (of which 14% or 120 million learners are enrolled in tertiary education programs). However, just one month ago, China was the only (i.e. the first) country-mandatory closures.

And within just days of the announcement, 24,000 online courses were made available free of charge to university students across 22 online platforms in China. In other words, China has had the most experience (both in making mistakes and having successes) with transitioning to online teaching and learning. As the entire world is now moving to online education whilst social distancing measures heighten, we thought we would share with you good practices every week, in both "online education policy" as well as "online teaching & learning". We aim to create useable knowledge, for both administrators and teaching staff, that can be applied immediately.

Inspired by professionals around the world working together to coordinate efforts for tacking the novel coronavirus pandemic, we invite you to build a stronger community together, to learn from each other, and to join us in this digital revolution, as described by the Provost of Tsinghua University added in a recent Times Higher Education article:

> *"The online tools and upgrades to existing technologies that have been pushed to the forefront of university teaching will emerge as epoch-making platforms in China. They may well establish new global standards, too, and new norms for online and blended education.*

[1] https://en.unesco.org/themes/education-emergencies/coronavirus-school-closures accessed March 19, 2020

Yours,

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Content

- Who are we and what have we learnt so far?
- Online education policy section
  1. Past policies on the development of MOOC in China
  2. Recent policies by the Ministry of Education in response to the outbreak of COVID-19
  3. Example of a recent university-wide policy in response to the outbreak of COVID-19
- Online teaching & learning section
  - Three stages of online teaching
- Messages/ news from the community
- Next week spotlight: "Sai-yaki of online learning"

If you haven't already, remember to subscribe to receive weekly updates from us, and to be a part of this awesome higher education community for online learning!

Subscribe to get weekly updates!

Who are we and what have we learnt so far?

Most of you are receiving this because of your interactions with MOE Research Center for Online Education, UNESCO-ICEE, or xuetangX. Since xuetangX founding in 2013, it has been the first choice for many universities and faculty in China, accumulating 49 million registered users for both its MOOC platform and Rain Classroom (a smart teaching and learning tool developed by Tsinghua University for live broadcast lessons, recorded videos, classroom interactions and learning data collection), which recently saw an increase of 5 million and 11 million registered users respectively.

Shuaiqiao Wang, President of xuetangX and founder of the Rain Classroom project, has recently shared his thoughts in this unprecedented time during an interview with the Chinese *Distance Learning magazine e-Learning in Chinese*. Here are a few key learnings we would like to share with you:

"There is no online learning, it's just learning"
XuetangX has not been emphasizing *nor* been differentiating between online education mode and traditional classroom mode anymore, as we have seen online elements regardless. Therefore fortunately, this critical mindset has led us to fully integrate data from both online and classroom learning prior to the epidemic, thus providing more comprehensive analysis to improve learning outcome.

"Different learners have different preferences toward learn online"
We are currently serving over 12 million students in China during the current university closures. Therefore, in order to better empathize with and improve students' user experience, xuetangX has formed strategic partnership with popular short-video app Kuaishou (more than 200 million daily active users) since February 2020. Now, we have expanded our Rain Classroom offerings to support live broadcast in the forms of video, audio, screencast, slides, blackboard, etc. to better meet the needs of online education.

"Moving beyond online video lectures to personalized learning"
In addition to working on how to better evaluate and assess online teaching and learning, we are planning to apply more AI related technologies to our classroom (online or offline), especially through the analysis of real-time and holistic data to push personalized educational resources. Thus, helping us to move one step closer to realize personalized teaching and learning.

Online education policy section

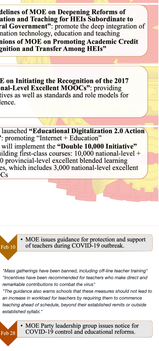
As many of you have requested, we would like to provide an overview of some of the important online education-related policy in China, in order to provide context and better evaluate the applicability of the shared practices from China. Therefore, this section will be divided into three parts:

1. past policies on the development of MOOC in China;
2. recent policies by the Ministry of Education;
3. example of recent university-wide policy in response to the outbreak of COVID-19.

(1) Past policies on the development of MOOC in China

The Ministry of Education (MOE) has released many policies to support and guide the development of MOOC in China since 2015. And by 2019, "China has over 200 million people taking massive open online courses (MOOC), leading the world in both the number and the scale of application of such courses."

The timeline covers the major policies issued by the Chinese Ministry of Education, and should be able to provide some context and an overview. If there is a particular policy that you are interested in, please let us know and we shall expand on it. Otherwise, it is likely that we will cover at least one or two in future newsletters, as they are instrumental for the development of MOOC in China.



(2) Recent policies by the Ministry of Education in response to the outbreak of COVID-19

Throughout the last two months, the MOE has released multiple policy statements, guidelines and notices directly asking educational institutions to take proper preventive and control measures against the COVID-19. Special considerations were given regarding returning back to the university campus, as the outbreak happened in the middle of the Spring Festival where 3 billion passenger-trips were made to travel home for the celebration.

(If you click on each of the dates or policy titles, you will be redirected to the English version of the press release)

- Public holiday for Chinese New Year: Jan 24 to Jan 30
- Most universities were due to start in late February 2020

Feb 07 • MOE postpones start of 2020 spring semester

- *"Schools to provide appropriate advice to students during the winter vacation to facilitate home study and give guidance on hygiene to avoid becoming infected"*
- *"Students to be instructed not to return to their campus before the start of the semester without permission from their schools"*
- *"Routinely track the movements of students and teachers"*

Jan 26 • MOE requests psychological support be provided to relieve novel coronavirus-related stress

- *"The notice calls on local education authorities to report psychological intervention as an important part of its preventive and control measures against the 2019-nCoV-related pneumonia and take actions quickly."*

Feb 4 • MOE issues instructions for deployment of Higher Education Institutions (HEI) online teaching.

- *"Apply online learning and simulated experimental teaching resources to facilitate remote study. In response to the MOE's call, by February 2 there are 22 online platforms in China providing 24,000 online HEI courses free of charge"*
- *"Lectures of the* **"National-Level Excellent MOOCs"** *have been requested to set up model classes to help teachers improve their online teaching skills."*
  - **"This was one of the past policies mentioned previously, in 2017.**

Feb 10 • MOE issues guidance for protection and support of teachers during COVID-19 outbreak.

- *"Mass gatherings have been banned, including off-line teacher training"*
- *"Incentives have been recommended for teachers who make direct and remarkable contributions to combat the virus"*
- *"The guidance also warns schools that these measures should not lead to an increase in workload for teachers by requiring them to commence teaching ahead of schedule, beyond their established remits or outside established hours."*

Feb 24 • MOE Party leadership group issues notice for COVID-19 control and educational reforms.

- *"As schools across the country had been requested to put all the classes online, they were now encouraged explore effective and innovative teaching methods and practices to make the best use of virtual learning."*
- *"schools should not be opened until the epidemic was largely under control and unless the safety of students and teachers could be fully guaranteed"*
- *"HEIs were requested to track students' whereabouts and health status, set aside quarantine facilities for returning students"*
- *"facilitate the smooth graduation of college graduates and their early employment."*

Mar 4 • MOE issues notice on supporting entry into the job market for university graduates

- *"A nationwide "24/7-365" around the clock, all year round online recruitment service platform was launched"*
- *"The notice requested the expansion of enrollment in postgraduate programs"*
- *"The notice requested targeted support to be provided to special groups, such as graduates from poverty-stricken families that were registered in the national poverty relief database, those with disabilities and those living in Hubei province, the epicenter of the COVID-19 outbreak."*

Mar 12 • MOE issues COVID-19 control and prevention guidance for schools

- "a series of guidance documents in Chinese on controlling and preventing Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) have been jointly drafted to provide kindergartners, primary and middle schools and higher education institutions with targeted, scientifically grounded guidelines to help prevent and control the virus, and ensure the health of students and teachers."

(3) Example of a recent university-wide policy in response to the outbreak of COVID-19

Tsinghua University *"has been able to lead the way in China's online transition because we had already made decisive moves into online teaching, in an effort to facilitate the learning of post-millennial students,"* mentioned on a recent Times Higher Education article by the University Provost. In order to overcome some of the challenges, such as: decision making on management, academic and technical related issues; localization and implementation of guidelines and policies; sustainability in the long-run, Tsinghua University has recently created three major policies recently:

(1) Formed three committees to support the transition from traditional classroom learning to online classroom learning:

1. Online Learning Advisory Committee,
2. Online Learning Quality Assurance Committee,
3. Online Learning Technical Assurance Committee.

(2) Online Education Office to support each School or Department:

- To create their own online learning plan
- To organize 100+ technical TAs and 400+ volunteers to deal with issues from both faculty and students
- To conduct weekly reviews

(3) Promote university-level research for online learning beyond COVID-19: from policy-making to learning assessment to stakeholder attitudes and engagement

Online teaching & learning section

This first newsletter is very policy-heavy; however, we do want to include a good practice for teaching staff in this issue too. Hope the following will be useful to you.

(Prof. Xinjie Yu "Sharing His Greatest Joy in Teaching" upon receiving Teaching Achievement Award)

Prof. Xinjie Yu has been a Professor of the Department of Electrical Engineering at Tsinghua University since 2001, and he also teaches two classes on edX called, *"New Course Mode in edX"* and *"Principles of Electric Circuits"*. Prof. Yu was named one of the recipients of the inaugural "Tsinghua New Century Teaching Achievement Award".

In a recent sharing, he argues that **if you are a good teacher in a traditional classroom you will still be a good teacher online, and if you are a bad teacher in a traditional classroom you will still be a bad teacher offline.** Simply put, online teaching puts your teaching skills under the microscope, thus magnifying your flaws and making it much more difficult to hide them, even some of the most charismatic lectures cannot escape.

After having taught both offline for two decades and then online too in recent years, he observed that there are three stages of online teaching and suggested teachers must not be lazy and include all the stages when teaching online.

- Universities use live broadcast lessons, MOOCs, recorded videos, online discussion forums, and video conferences.
- The main differences are the platforms and tools they utilized: from Tencent Meeting app, ZOOM, Rain Classroom and MOOC platforms.

While teachers online frequently use information delivery tools (e.g., live-streaming platforms, network conference applications and specially-designed teaching tools such as Rain Classroom) to deliver their message and sometimes would get responses from students with learning feedback tools (in the forms of audio, text, learners' data), but very rarely would teachers truly engage their students online and shift from teaching to learning. Prof. Yu believes that online technology has gone a long way since he started teaching 20 years ago, and there really shouldn't be any excuses. There is now real-time analytics from in-class quiz results, breakout rooms (similar to large online group discussion) function to let teachers annotate just like using a physical blackboard or whiteboard (and numerous tools).

To sum up, using a Chinese proverb[1] by Xunzi:

Tell me and I forget,
teach me and I remember,
involve me and I learn.[1]

[1] 不闻不若聞之，聞之不如見之，見之不如知之，知之不如行之 = This Chinese proverb appears in Chapter 11 of *The Teaching of the Ru*" (Ruxiao)

re-discover existing knowledge for themselves

classes

Messages/ news from the community

Call for contribution for future newsletter
One of our aims is to create a community where we can learn from each other. If you have any input, feedback, questions, or success stories that you would like to share, we want to hear from you at **office@rcoe.edu.cn.**

I want to contribute for future newsletter

Next week spotlight: “big data of online learning”

As Prof. Yu from Tsinghua University mentioned, real-time feedback is crucial for both teaching and learning. In addition to that, we would also argue that data recorded by online learning platform, like the Rain Classroom, is very important to administrators too. Next week, we will share with you: what kind of data are being recorded? How can data help to improve online teaching for faculty? How can online education data be more useful in decision making? What are some of the challenges and opportunities of a data-driven education system?

Subscribe to the weekly Online Education Newsletter *(Higher Education)*

Each week we will share good practices on "online education policy" and "online teaching & learning" for higher education. We aim to create useable knowledge, for both administrators and teaching staff, that can be applied immediately.
We invite you to build a stronger community together, to learn from each other, and to join us in this digital revolution!

Email Address

First Name

Last Name

Name of Higher Education Institution

Job title

Which of the following best describes you?

- University administrator/ leadership
- University teaching staff
- University researcher
- Student
- Others

You are interested in ...

- Online Education Policy (national-level)
- Online Education Policy (city-level)
- Online Education Policy (university-level)
- Online Teaching (pedagogy)
- Online Teaching (platforms or tools)
- Others

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