Emergency Remote Teaching with Reacting To The Past: A Case Study

Grant Kolean, Nickolas Dupras, and Kathryn R. Johnson

Department of History, Northern Michigan University, Marquette, MI, USA

Abstract

Reacting to the Past (RTTP) is an immersive historical role-playing and active learning pedagogy typically employed on-campus. This case study analyzed Northern Michigan University’s History Department courses that utilized RTTP during the COVID-19 emergency remote teaching (ERT) shutdown. Maintaining RTTP and online learning pedagogical best practices was especially difficult. With little time to restructure their courses, the games were innovatively adapted to a variety of web-based platforms resulting in positive learning outcomes that varied by degree depending on technology and synchronous requirements. Inspiring unintended outcomes also occurred and were analyzed. This case study provides a unique and theoretically-grounded contribution to the fields of online and history pedagogies while also supporting additional research calls for the role of emotional presence in the Community of Inquiry. The poster will visually engage the audience with the case's key findings and suggest open software other educators might employ. The presenters will stimulate discussion to assist educators interested in conducting RTTP and similar active learning strategies online.

Research Questions:
1. Did the RTTP games achieve anticipated learning outcomes when implemented in the context of ERT?
2. Did faculty perceptions of the RTTP game as an immersive and emotionally-charged learning experience suffer when implemented in the context of ERT?
3. Were faculty able to achieve online teaching best practices according to Chickering and Gamson (1987), Quality Matters Standard 5.2, and the Community of Inquiry framework even when faculty did not intentionally design for these expectations?
4. How did the experience of conducting RTTP during ERT impact faculty decisions about teaching during the Fall 2020 semester?

Data Sources:
Oral history interviews with faculty from the four courses, learning objects, anonymized student-created digital artifacts, and written documentation

Results

The in-class experiences were overall positive despite the stress and uncertainty of the shutdown. Differences in presentation, format, technology, class size, and level were present. The learning outcomes were on par with the same games in previous semesters or showed slight improvement. Students achieved higher learning outcomes utilizing synchronous compared to asynchronous software.

The professors were able to meet their original objectives. The students did not indicate any negative impact on their own learning experience. As a result of the experience gained from the shutdown, the four professors had different approaches to RTTP the following Fall semester, including in-person RTTP online with RTTP, and online without RTTP.

Conclusion & Recommendations

RTTP promotes quality undergraduate education, requiring interaction between students and faculty, cooperation among students, and active learning. RTTP aligns with Quality Matters Standard 5.2, which requires opportunities for learners to interact with each other, the material, and the instructor. Similarly, each game includes role sheets, a student gamebook with historic primary sources, an instructor manual, and mechanisms to move the game toward deep and rich learning. Thus, RTTP promotes the social, cognitive, and teaching presences of the Community of Inquiry framework while also adding to the growing body of evidence suggesting that the emotional presence should also be considered to maximize meaningful learning.

Learning outcomes were achieved; professors adhered to online teaching best practices perhaps without realizing it, but the RTTP learning experience was notably diminished due to the lack of physical interaction (heckling, etc.). Heightened emotions emerged as an important theme. In the context of uncertainty, students and teachers relied on their connections with each other to create a sense of normalcy. Connections between RTTP and the Community of Inquiry should be further explored.

Recommended and tested software with required affordances and free login: Slack and Discord

Other open software suggestions: Apache OpenMeetings, Big Blue Button, Jitsi, MConf, VMukti, WebHuddle