

Title: The Promise of Online Learning: A Learner and Educator Perspective

Description: In this episode, Dr. Ana-Paula Correia shines a light on the promise of online learning by giving us a deeper understanding of what it means to learn, design, and teach in a virtual environment. Dr. Correia is the Director of the Center on Education and Training for Employment and a Professor of Learning Technologies at The Ohio State University. Listen in as she shares what successful online learning means, from both a learner and educator perspective.

Materials contained within this podcast are the copyrighted property of The Ohio State University.

Fara Allen: Welcome to CETE Works, a podcast produced by the Curriculum and Training Team at the Center on Education and Training for Employment—a translational research center on Ohio State’s campus. We work where research meets reality. I’m your host, Fara Allen, a Program Coordinator at the Center. This podcast series will focus on the various approaches and supports that our center offers to educators of all learners. How do educators engage, nurture, and support their learners? Listen in on these discussions that highlight how educators can connect with and understand their learners! At CETE, we believe that everyone deserves to experience lifelong learning! To learn more about our work, you can visit our website CETE, that’s C-E-T-E, dot O-S-U dot E-D-U. In this episode, I’ll be talking with Dr. Ana-Paula Correia, the Director of the Center on Education and Training for Employment. With more than 25 years of experience in learning design and instructional systems technology, Dr. Correia has a special focus on distance education and online and mobile learning. She has published over 90 journal articles and book chapters in three different languages: English, Portuguese, and Spanish. As a Professor of Learning Technologies in the Department of Educational Studies at The Ohio State University, she leads the Learning and Experience Design Research Group, which is dedicated to investigating learning design processes. This episode spotlights the connection between online learning and teaching, as Dr. Correia shares her commitment to the promise of learning technologies.

Fara Allen: Hello, Dr. Correia, welcome to CETE Works podcast. I’m honored to have you join us today and I’m looking forward to speaking with you and learning more about your work. Can you start us by explaining how you got involved in online learning and teaching?

Ana-Paula Correia: Thank you, Fara, for hosting me today, and I want to start by sharing with you and with the audience how I got involved in online learning and teaching. I’ve been involved with online learning and teaching for more than 20 years now, as a student, as online student or learner, as an online teacher, as an online designer that creates online learning experiences, and also as a researcher on this topic. So, what excited me, in the beginning, was the promise that online learning was about

learning anywhere, meaning anywhere in the world, anytime, it means 3am or 3pm whenever you have time to devote to learning. And I'm adding one more thing, that you can learn anything; there was excitement around online learning and that really drew me to the field, the fact that you can learn anything. Right now, there's so much content developed and available online. If you want to learn how to build a table or how to make a gourmet meal, you can learn; you have the ability to do it yourself. And there was, the promise was so exciting and so enticing, so I got really into this field and dived deeply.

Fara Allen: Thank you for explaining that in such a passionate and compelling way, especially because the internet touches most of our lives in multiple capacities. You mentioned the promise of online learning as exciting and enticing. What makes that promise successful for online educators and learners?

Ana-Paula Correia: You know I could cite authors and research existing studies, but I really want to keep this conversation based on my experience, which is an accumulation of other things I shared with you like being an online teacher, being an online learner, designing online experiences, and researching. It's about a relationship between the instructor, the learning process, the learner, and the content. It should be a win-win for all of these components. Of course, the content, just, you know, is not a person so let's just focus on the teacher and the student. Successful online learning to me is when the teacher is happy being a teacher teaching online and the student is happy being a student learning online.

And being happy, how am I going to define happy? Happy, meaning I'm achieving my goals if I'm a student, an online student, and if I work full time and I'm doing this online degree after hours, I want to be respected as already a professional in a specific area. And I want my instructor to treat me as a professional, meaning listen to my ideas, leverage what I already know, and respect me as a student. At the same time, I want to achieve my goals, that are getting this online degree on whatever topic you pick to pursue. And that is the goal, this is going to drive me when I'm tired after work or when I feel demotivated because I don't get feedback in a timely manner from my instructor. So, on the instructor side, I want to be happy, too. And now I'm going to speak as an online instructor. By seeing my students progressing. I'm also happy because I'm meeting a need, and they came to me to learn more about a specific topic. I also am happy because I can make adjustments to my teaching because of the flexibility that online learning offers to meet my students' needs or my learners' needs. And most of them, based on my experience, are adult learners or are part time students, and they need to be respected for what they bring to the table, that is, the existing knowledge and their role as professionals in different fields. That's kind of a win-win relationship. It brings benefits to both sides. That's how I define success.

Fara Allen: So, you've shared what successful online learning and teaching looks like to you. You've highlighted the happiness, as an educator and a learner, cultivating win-win relationships. Can you give us a deeper look into your own success regarding designing learning, and also how you incorporate this into the environment at our own center?

Ana-Paula Correia: At the core of my identity I am a scholar, I'm a learning designer. It means that I create a plan and create events that help people learn better. You can say, you know, that I use the word event, but it could be an experience you can use the word that you prefer. So, I use my expertise in learning design when I create online learning experiences, but I also use my expertise on learning design when I came in into an organization like the Center on Education and Training for Employment, we do go by CETE, but I like to spell the entire name, and look at these organizations and see how we can make these more as a learning organization. How can we leverage the people, talent, existing talent, and how can we further develop these people into other areas or other interests or even elevate their current talent? So, in a way, in my head, things are similar because I come into an organization, I'm trying to help people learn better. Learn better about the content, the people that we serve, the people that we teach that we interact [with], and help them learn more about themselves, like our Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion movement that is very important to the Center; especially now that we're going through so many crises, health and racial crises, these issues have always been important, but now with a more systematic presence in the center so we can grow in this area.

And we're allowing ourselves to grow in these areas, and allowing our associates, our members of the CETE community, to learn and grow in that area; this is part of being a learning designer and doing my job. I don't know if the connection is made, but this is how I see it in my head.

Fara Allen: You brought a topic up that continues to resurface, which is building and leveraging talent development, we've touched on that in a few of our previous episodes. When you invest in and elevate the individuals within your organization, there must be valuable benefits. So, turning back to you, as an online learner, educator, and designer, how would you describe the benefits involved with these roles specifically?

Ana-Paula Correia: I believe the benefit comes from the knowledge and the skill of creating these online - I'm going to just focus on online learning and teaching because that's the main topic for this conversation today. So, when maybe, two years ago, maybe a little bit less, we all had to come home because of the COVID and the fear of contamination. We had to move many of our practices, especially teaching and learning into the online environment. I think what is going to motivate or what is going to benefit, the benefits that come from my work is to inform best practices in this space and really make the online learning experience exceptional because it can be done it has been done, and it has been done for a long time. It just became more into people's minds now because we had to move into a virtual, online learning environment. But, again, the benefit is to really learn from that experience and really push forward to make that experience, that learning experience, more exceptional. And I have some principles I share with people when they ask me these questions and they are like things like put yourself in your learners' shoes, understand that there are limitations as well, there are constraints in their life and adjust accordingly. They have nothing to do with lowering the quality of your teaching. People get very confused about what quality means. For me, quality means achieving your goals, and the ultimate goal is happiness, and I know we've been talking a lot about happiness in this conversation about online learning and teaching, but I think is important. If your goal is happiness, then you have to understand that, you know, people have different perceptions of happiness, and you have to

understand what your learners or your students' needs are and adjust accordingly. So, what matters to extend a deadline; it really does not impact the quality of your teaching or the class. It's going to impact positively the quality of your students' work, because now, they are going to have more time to devote to the assignment or the project. So, some things are not flexible for no reason, and they really don't impact the quality in a positive way. On the contrary, lack of flexibility will impact the quality of the online learning experience on the negative side. I have more things I could talk about, how to make the online learning experience exceptional, but this is just a start.

Fara Allen: I like how you refer to happiness as the goal in learning and teaching and making the online learning experience exceptional. So, what continues to spark your motivation and keep you invested in virtual environments?

Ana-Paula Correia: I think it's still the promise, the initial promise of learning anywhere, anything, anytime, especially the anytime. Let's just talk about learning anytime and at your own pace. Again, with the COVID crisis that we are currently experiencing, there is that sense that "it's okay," we are all going to move to the virtual. And we all have to meet in front of a laptop at a certain time, you know in our homes, or you know, wherever we are right now. And then, it just really jeopardized, it kind of destroyed the promise of online learning to learn at any time. And I want to go back to that promise. I want to make learning more flexible. Why do we all have to run into Zoom on a very difficult or impossible attempt to mimic the classroom experience? It's not possible because the affordance of the virtual environment, the laptop and the camera, the mics, is very different from the affordance of a physical space. There's no replication possible. You just have to embrace the different affordances of each environment. So, I know the question was a little bit different. I guess what motivates me is still the initial promise and help to reach that promise. And right now, with so many real time events [on Zoom], learning events that we're pushing down to people, including our students, I think it's a disservice to the promise of online learning.

Fara Allen: Dr. Correia, when you talk about the promise of online learning, that itself can be inspirational. So, how do you find that you inspire others in your work, and even in your learning?

Ana-Paula Correia: I don't think it's inspirational. I think it's just doing your job. It's having pride in doing a good job and really aligning with the mission as my mission as teacher is to help people learn better. For me, the motivation is the love I have for my profession. So, if I'm doing a good job that's where I get excited. Of course, that saying like do your job well seems like really a no brainer, but I think it's important. Especially in today's world that we question our passion, our work, and we really have that sense if we're learning something from the pandemic, is that we have a very clear perspective

that life is short, and we don't want to waste our time doing things that we don't love. If you love your job, you have that fulfillment that comes from doing a good job. If you don't, please don't waste your time, just look for a passion, look for another job, because that feeling of doing your job is worthwhile to pursue and again, I'm talking about happiness again that's it.

Fara Allen: So maybe during a time that was really challenging for many of us, and we're talking about the pandemic, we're a learning organization at the center on education and training for employment, and we're a learning culture, so I'm going to turn the table on you just a bit and ask you if you can share with us if there was any professional development that you participated in during the pandemic and what your biggest takeaway was from that, or how did you grow from that experience?

Ana-Paula Correia: So, I think the professional development that I've been a participant most recently is self-reflection - about the nature of work, about the pursuit of happiness, about the mission of my role as Director of CETE and things like that. I cannot say that I went to this workshop that happened on this date during this time, and it was about this topic. No, I'm constantly thinking about responding to the times we're living, the best way I can, and making the most positive impact. I think one aspect of me is my love for cooking, so I was able [to work on this skill]. I know that many people devote some time to improve their cooking skills during the lockdown maybe not so much right now but during the lockdown. I really wanted to learn more about cooking and some techniques, so that's kind of what my improvement or my knowledge gain went, on cooking and combining ingredients to elevate one's palate. And I think cooking is like teaching in a way; it's a performance. It takes too many ingredients and many sophisticated processes to lead to a great result; so that kind of is my linkage to my profession as I pursue a hobby.

Fara Allen: I have several hobbies myself and cooking a gourmet meal is not one of them, but maybe one that I should pursue to become better at. Thank you for your time today, we really appreciate looking into what got you involved in online teaching and designing and taking us deeper into the importance of being happy with what we're doing and meeting learners where they are.

Ana-Paula Correia: You're welcome, invite me anytime.

Fara Allen: On behalf of the Curriculum and Training team at The Center on Education and Training for Employment, we'd like to thank our guest today. If you would like more information on this topic, please contact us at go.osu.edu/OhioState4Work. We would be happy to hear from you and share more information about our services and our work. Follow us on Twitter at OhioState4Work. See our description for details. Thank you for listening to CETE Works, we hope you enjoyed this episode. Be well and bye for now.