

Big Picture Podcast – Episode 13

Online Learning (Chapter 7A)

Interview with Amy Schneider and Jacque Harris

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Co-hosts Stephanie Blake and John Suchocki interview online learning experts Amy Schneider and Jacque Harris of Ozarks Technical College. Many tips for succeeding in an online course are presented. But we first delve into the many challenges specific to this format. These are challenges that instructors and students should understand before launching into this still developing method of teaching and learning. Duration: 34:16.

John: Welcome to the Big Picture podcast. Today's episode, we're going to focus on the online course. We understand that the online course has much to offer, many advantages to it. But of course, this format has also many challenges associated with it.

Stephanie: My name is Stephanie Blake. I am an instructor at Ozarks Technical Community College in Springfield, Missouri. I'll be serving as a co-host today next to John. With us today are two amazing ladies who specialize in online curriculum. Ladies, would you please introduce yourselves?

Amy: Hi, my name's Amy Schneider and I'm an instructional designer at 80C.

Jacque: I'm Jackie Harris. I'm also an instructional designer at OPEC.

John: Jackie and Amy, thank you so much for being with us here. Would you say an online courses better than a face to face course or face to face? Course is always better than an online course.

Amy: I think what we see across the board is that there are definite inequities between seated courses and online courses. Traditionally, when you think of a seated course, you have students come in and they they sit. The faculty member lectures, they take notes, may or may not have a homework assignment study for the exam that we're gonna have in three weeks done. We think of an online course. There are week after week expectations from the student that faculty members feel obligated to impose. Whether that be because of attendance policies or things of that nature. So it tends to be that online students have more requirements placed upon them.

John: Because the instructors feels like they're trying to make up for what's missing and then they go overboard.

Amy: I believe so, yes.

Jacque: So a lot of times the dynamic becomes your trading, a specific schedule, time to show up to class for additional work because in a seated course you can come in and display limited participation. And in some cases, none. But in an online class, you're expected to perform at every learning opportunity that there is.

Stephanie: There are two ways to earn points in a class. One is through what I call thinking that's going to be your test taking. And one is through doing that will be some of your in a learning pedagogical pieces and projects. Do you find that the percentage of learning points versus doing points is different with a seated class versus an online class?

Jacque: I feel like a lot of times faculty feel the need to add additional points, additional activities. Oftentimes it results in a lot of busy work in online courses.

Stephanie: So those doing points right.

Amy: I think that also stems from a lack of curriculum mapping. I think we see a lot of intentional aligning to outcomes when it comes to K-12 because K-12 has standards. You know, those middle school teachers, high school students have standards that they need their students to meet. And so when you cross that line over into higher education, if you're not in a technical program more often than not, you there are no outcomes. There are no standards that you have to meet. Therefore, objectives either come from the textbook and are overlooked. So it's oh, this is a great activity I want my students to do. Let me put that in the course. Oh, I'd really love it if my students did this thing. Let me put it in my course. And as Jackie said, sometimes that lends itself to busy work, things that aren't necessarily aligned to objectives and outcomes. Learning outcomes that we want to see our students master. And so then our our online courses become this this glob of stuff

John: Stuff

Amy: To

John: To

Amy: Do.

John: Do.

Amy: Yeah.

Stephanie: The students that are graduating today have skills that our instructors don't have, but our instructors have skills that the students don't either. So talk a little bit about the disconnect that you're seeing between the modern learner and the modern educator.

John: Wait a second, Stephanie, where you about to say that the students don't need.

Amy: Maybe

Stephanie: Maybe.

John: It seemed

Amy: Knew

John: That

Amy: That

John: It seemed

Amy: Standard

John: The implied

Amy: Applied

John: Rate

Amy: Or if

John: There.

Amy: There ever

John: I mean,

Amy: Been seriously,

John: Seriously, we're

Amy: We're

John: Talking

Amy: Talking.

John: Fast changes here.

Stephanie: It's true. I'm not going to lie when I sit in, you know, my lunches sometimes with my colleagues and they have expectations out of the students that are sometimes antiquated. For example, in lunch just the other day, they were lamenting that the students couldn't use word anymore. And I said, well, that's because all of the students in K-12 now use the Google suite. They have absolutely no need to learn word. And the professors were saying, oh, but in the real world, they have to be able to use word. And I'm like, no, they don't, actually. So talk a little bit about the disconnect between the K-12 education outcome and going into the secondary education and, you know, the differences between what professors want them to have and what they do have.

Amy: I think our higher ed faculty aren't prepared to meet those learners at times where they're at. They just have ideas of they should know these things and being able to assess a student and where where they're at, where their skill sets are at. And we run across the gamut. Right. We have students who have no technical skills at all, something that Jackie and I like to say. You know, they're at scroll down. You know, they're their technical deficiencies are such that just scroll down and you'll find your answer. But then we also have students who yes, they are coming in well equipped. But our faculty at times are not equipped to meet those needs and meet them where they're at because they've been using products in a way that they've been using them for years. And so it's being able to assess students and their needs where they're at in the classroom.

Jacque: The only thing I would add to your point, Stephanie, is that a lot of faculty, especially in higher ed, where they don't have education backgrounds, necessarily their subject matter experts. So they're teaching in the way that they were taught. So why can't students pay attention to my lecture, take notes

John: And

Jacque: And

John: Just

Jacque: A C

John: Like

Jacque: Exam?

John: I did, but it's.

Jacque: Right. Because I walked uphill both ways in the snow. Well, it wasn't great when you experienced that. And it's not effective for your learners. So regardless of what was inflicted upon you, you should practice with your students something that's effective for the way that they learn.

John: Ok. You've got a student who's trying to decide whether or not they should take this particular online course. What advice might you have for that student? What should they be looking for sensitive to?

Amy: So I think number one, and I would say this is for both Jackie and I. Number one is they have to know the time that is going to be needed in order to be successful in that course.

John: And you're saying earlier that that time is actually going to be way more than what they would find in a face to face

Amy: Exactly.

John: A seated course. Wow.

Amy: Exactly. Which

John: Is

Amy: Is

John: This that

Amy: Just.

John: Just typical or is that just because the nature of the course and nature of a professor to bulk it up all the time? Overcompensating isn't.

Amy: I think because we've perpetuated this cycle of where we're not clear on expectations and therefore, yes, things are piled on because I feel that I'd like my students to encounter this thing. I'd like my students to encounter

John: That

Amy: This thing.

John: You talked about that earlier in terms of a map mapping. You lost me there back ago, too. You were saying that the courses should be mapped,

Amy: Right.

John: So.

Amy: So the approach that Jackie and I take is that we are here to support faculty. Faculty are overburdened with many credit hours to teach a semester, usually outside of their given course load. So they're teaching not only their regular bass course load, but overloads. And that tends to lend itself to an over crowding of time. You know that that's taken away from really reflecting on what I need to have in my course. So therefore, students who take online courses, they're probably more often than not going to spend more time in that three credit hour course

John: File.

Amy: Online than they would seated.

John: So the first bit of advice to the student is, one, recognize there's a great probability you're gonna have to put a lot of time for the same number of credit hours, recognize that, anticipate that potentially even.

Stephanie: So if a student is trying to decide, should I take this class seated or should I take it online? What criteria should they use to assess that for themselves?

Jacque: I would say first and foremost, play to your strengths. If it's your first online class, choose a subject that you already have a strength in.

Stephanie: That's great advice.

Jacque: Secondly, take an honest look at your schedule. Do you have time to take this class and do you have enough self-discipline to make that time and devote it? And what's your plan B? Have a backup plan if you plan to study. I took all of my classes online. I found that I was tired in the evenings after putting my kids to bed. And that wasn't a great time to study. So I would go to bed when my kids went to bed and I would get up at 2 o'clock in the morning and study from 2 to 5 a.m. and it worked really well for me. I was young. I

John: I

Jacque: Was

John: Was

Jacque: Energetic.

John: Energetic.

Jacque: I

John: I

Jacque: Could

John: Could

Jacque: Do

John: Do

Jacque: That.

John: That.

Jacque: I don't think I could do that now, but I knew I could

John: But then

Jacque: Then and I

John: I

Jacque: Devoted

John: Devoted.

Jacque: That time. But what if I needed a backup plan? What if my kid was sick the night before and I was up all night? I would be in no condition to study. So when else have a backup plan?

Stephanie: So I'm inherently hearing you say they also need to set a regimented time each day or each week that they spend on that course. Is that correct?

Jacque: I would say yes, if you can. If you can't absolutely schedule the same time because maybe your work schedule isn't the same every day of the week. Map out your schedule every week and find a way to stick to it and have a backup plan for each week.

John: Well, it's this is interesting in a way the students are gonna be learning the content of the course, but in a very real way, they're also learning some organization skills.

Jacque: Absolutely.

Stephanie: That being said, let's talk for a second about what are some of the skills that students are going to pick up from an online class that are applicable to the real world or a job interview or their future.

Jacque: Have a good one for this. So there are a lot of asynchronous communications that happen in the working world. Emails are exchanged every day. Instant messages which are quas asynchronous good jobs come with a lot of autonomy. And with that comes the responsibility for managing your time and meeting goals without being micromanaged. So those types of skills you really have to develop to be highly successful in an online class.

John: And in the professional world, with the

Jacque: John,

John: Job you

Jacque: Both

John: Might have.

Jacque: Yes.

John: Yeah.

Stephanie: So John and I specialize, of course, in science classes. What advice specifically do you have for students taking math and science in an online setting to be successful?

Amy: I would say to seek help. Ask questions. Oftentimes, online students can feel isolated and removed from any type of tutoring services or help often. You know, they might feel like they're bothering the instructor if they're emailing them every day with questions. You know, I would suggest to anyone who's taking a math or science online course to not be afraid to ask questions. Reading comprehension is a skill that we know in order to be successful in an online course, you have to read instructions. You've to comprehend those instructions. So not being afraid to ask questions and seek clarification is a really good real world application as well. Because when we're in our professional settings, if we need clarification, you know, we might go a total wrong direction because we were afraid to ask a question.

John: This reminds me of that exercise. I think a lot of people getting high school age. No, I certainly did. Where you're given the sheet of instructions and it says read all the read all these instructions. And then the bottom, it says Skip, skip all the previous questions or something like that. That kind of thing. You're not talking about the actual chemistry or physics. You're talking about the direction on how to study the chemistry and physics.

Amy: Yes, absolutely. I think oftentimes what trip students up is that there is a multitude of text in online courses and they need to read and then breathe because

John: Read

Amy: It

John: And breathe.

Amy: If they're skimming through and they're just trying to, you know, look for the highlighted, you know, like when you're reading a textbook and you're just looking for them for the main points, are looking for that highlighted, you know, vocabulary word. They need to read and breathe and let it sit for a second. When we answer phone calls from students, what we'll do is we'll walk them through the course, will go to either the instructor's announcements or we'll go to that module where the instructions live and we'll just walk them through it. OK. And sometimes that's all they needed. All they needed was to read and to breathe.

Stephanie: I think you pulled up a very valid statement by saying that an online course doesn't happen on an island. It doesn't happen in isolation. And I think a lot of students believe they're going to be able to do this course just from the privacy of their kitchen table. And the reality is, at some point they're going to have to go outside of that island for some reason. Perhaps it's seeking out tutoring. Perhaps it's coming on campus to meet with the professor. Perhaps it's going to your local library. Just so you can be proctored for an exam. So I think, you know, an online course is not going to happen on all on an island. And that is a great, great example.

John: But recognize, the most important thing you're going to get out of this course potentially does not the subject matter. It's going to be this the process of taking the course.

Amy: Well, and I think it's like Jackie said, when you pick an online course to take. Pick something that you're already familiar with. You know, you're just dipping your toes into the water. And

John: And

Amy: If

John: If.

Amy: You're already familiar and you bring some prior knowledge with you about that subject matter, then you can have greater takeaways like self-regulation than just the content in the course.

John: The idea the old idea is you come to college to learn some content, your head is empty and the instructor's going to fill it with information. Right. You're pointing out here that there are life skills involved in taking an online course. And it matters. But let's pretend it doesn't. It almost doesn't matter what that content is taking. This online course is going to give you these serious life skills that you're going to interview for a job, for example. Guess what? It's probably going to be through a resume conference. How do you present yourself when you're on camera? You slouch back on a couch. You

know, that's. Or do you sit up straight and smile? And those are you're saying serious life skills that will have serious impact on your ability to sell yourself in the job market.

Jacque: Absolutely, in this digital age. That's exactly what students could learn.

Amy: And I would say also that they're going to learn that self-regulation in a seated course just by showing up to class on time. You know, those kinds of things that we need to be cognizant about as we teach, helping our students to build in those metacognition skills, you know, thinking about, okay. What am I doing this week? How am I planning to be successful this week? We can build that into any modality that we in which we teach.

Stephanie: So it's interesting when students come to a seated class, they automatically know the decorum required to do so. They know they need shoes on a shirt, not a belly shirt. You know, there are some requirements, too, being pseudo professional in a seated setting. How do you think we should train our students to understand the decorum necessary in an audio visual component of an online class?

Jacque: We actually have a seated faculty member who's been talking about the behavior he's noticing in his classroom lately. And we talked about early on in the semester having a conversation with students where together they decide the kind of learning

John: Bernanke

Jacque: Community

John: Think.

Jacque: They all want to participate in. And I think that is essential for an online course or a seated course. A lot of times we see requirements posted, but rarely do we see faculty engaging with their students and deciding together, how do we want to form a community here? What do we want to be a part of? How do we want to show respect for each other, ourselves and our learning?

John: There e-textbooks and there are printed textbooks.

Jacque: There are a lot of benefits to e-text, and I'll let Amy talk a little more about those 'cause she's like an E tax advocate.

John: Ok.

Jacque: But really the biggest advice I would give to students for using e-text, even if they're more of a paper kind of person, they almost all include a reader which will read the text aloud to

John: Oh,

Jacque: You.

John: It

Jacque: That's

John: Makes

Jacque: Excellent

John: So make

Jacque: Use

John: Use of

Jacque: Of

John: That

Jacque: That.

John: Feature.

Jacque: Yes, that's a great feature. I wouldn't say just listen to it, read it, but also listen to it in your busy times, especially if you need to go back and study.

Stephanie: I was just telling John earlier that when I have an E text, I have to use the reader as I'm reading along. Otherwise, suddenly I'm making a grocery list while simultaneously reading I can't stay focused in an E text format. So what advice do you have in terms of reading strategies for screen reading?

Amy: So there are screen readers that are free and you can download something like 3D right gold app that many learners with disabilities use to read the screen, and that will highlight text as you go. So something that, you know, your English professors will say, you know, take it, take a certain section, look at it, dissect it. And that's something that we don't typically do, that that isn't natural, you know, for us to do when we're reading. Usually if we're reading, we're skimming, you know, and students will do that because it's faster. I'm just skimming through. And they're taught in, you know, in K-12 settings to to kind of skim look for that bold word. You know, look for the first sentence in the paragraph, that kind of thing. But using these apps, you know, that highlight text helps you to stay focused where you're at. And then you can pause and kind of digest for a little bit. What is what does that mean? You know, e texts, you can hold down a word and the definition will pop right up in most browsers. So things like that. We've we've come across students who will say, well, I just have to hold the book in my hand. And I think that's fantastic. But when we live these busy lives and we're on the go, that E text is something that, you know, I could just carry in my pocket.

Stephanie: But what I'm hearing you say is your interaction with the text must still be extremely active, not passive. I've heard you say highlight and click. And, you know, maybe highlight and download those words to a separate notes page and re look back at them. You know, the educational researcher Marzano says we have to see something twenty seven times before we transfer it from short term memory to long term memory for that test. So I'm hearing you say active, active, active interaction with that etext.

Amy: Yes, you have to engage with the content, you have to read a sentence, determine, do I understand what it's telling me? And if I don't, do I need to read above below? Do I need to keep going? You know, maybe it'll come as I continue to read, but intentional reading will have to be intentional readers, not just I read this chapter because my instructor said I had to do it in order to prepare for the test. But I've to be an intentional reader.

John: One of my big struggles with my students is getting them to slow down when they're reading, they're going to want to read the textbook. The thick science textbook with like reading a novel. And I'm like, slow down, slow down. And I struggled with how to help them to slow down. Tucci's gave the answer to turn on that screen reader. If it's a textbook and listen while you read because that screen reader second, be reading like with little, little, little or no way. It's going to read slowly, step by step, especially for a science textbook. You've got to read slowly.

Amy: I think this also begs the question of how are students consuming information? Are they consuming information? Chapter by chapter through a book? I think that textbooks have they've long been our source of information. Just as you said, we we went to college because that's the only place that we could learn. Now we have so many different forms

John: Forms of

Amy: Of

John: Supercomputers

Amy: Learning.

John: In our pockets.

Amy: Exactly.

Stephanie: If I have a section of the text book that I want my students to read, I find they often will skip the reading, but then go to YouTube and look up a three to 10

minute video on that topic and then go straight to doing the homework. So give me the words I need to use to my students to say no. This etext is important because go.

Jacque: Ok, I have two points. One, I think learners seated or online should be active in their learning process, regardless if they're looking at the textbook or listening to the instructor or doing research. Whatever you're engaged with, you should be active in that engagement as a learner. My second point is there is no right answer. There's no magic words. However, when we work with instructors to chunk information, we should guide students in that same way.

John: Chungs,

Jacque: Chunk

John: That

Jacque: That information.

John: Information.

Jacque: Take good notes. Like Amy said. Read that sentence. Do you understand it? Show me where you understand it. Have your students read it and connect it to an idea that you identify with something in the world. Something in your life. Something in your experience. Come up with an analogy. Reframe it if you can. Reframe what you're learning. You understand it.

John: Well, no. My favorite questions to present to students for them to ask themselves is what did I just learn? And then to answer that question. And they're going, no, and I don't need to lie because I just learned it. No, no, no, no. Stop, express, articulate what you think you just learned. Pause and do that. But that's a discipline. It's a skill that needs. I'm fine. Needs to be taught.

Jacque: Yeah. So a lot of times when we talk to faculty who are transitioning to online, it's really a challenge for them to create content because they don't want to do. Well, they'll they'll read that in the book. They'll understand that concept from the book. And I

always say, well, you don't go into your seated class having assigned the reading of a chapter or walk in and say, okay, everybody read chapter six. I'm just going to stand over here in the corner and do my own thing while you accomplish that. No, you speak about the material. You bring your own expertise into the classroom and you would do the same in an online class. So if students are assigned a chapter a lot of times, the easiest way to help faculty start writing content is to say use this space as if you were a little angel on their shoulder. And what you would like whispered in their ear as they're reading. So point those things out specifically in the text in the course site. So in your online course, type out like the key things that they should be looking for when they're reading.

Stephanie: What are some other trip ups that you see students having because they weren't quite prepared for that first day?

Jacque: I would say most institutions allow students a few days before the semester starts to access the course. Most faculty will send out an e-mail a day or so before the course begins. It was a read over those materials. Look at as much of the course is as open to you. You might not be able to complete assignments yet, but look at it, get a feel for it, see what you're in for, and then take an honest look at your schedule and see if it's doable. Also, get snacks. Get snacks legitimately. If you've done a lot of good time management and you've planned out this is what I'm going to study. Okay, the time comes. You sit down. You know I need a snack. You go and get a snack, you come back, I need a drink. You go and get a drink. I need a sweater. You go and get a sweater before you know it. Half of the time that you've planned to set aside for studying is gone. So prepare your study zone, clean off that desk, get your pencils sharpened, get your books stacked there, get your chargers out, get your sweater and get your snacks.

Stephanie: I would add to that as well. Send out a text message to the folks who are important to your life and say, hey, I'm going to spend the next two hours working on homework. Please don't text me because it's so easy to get sidetracked or derailed by those incoming Facebook messages and and people trying to pull at you. Distractions.

Amy: Absolutely. I would take if due dates are already set in the course. Add those to your calendar, set up alerts a week before, two days before so that you're not doing

work 10, 30 the night. Something is do you know those kind of things that we as professionals do and then we pass that on to our students in the real world. You are going to have deadlines. You're going to have things that you need to accomplish at a certain time. So how can you plan ahead? How can I work backwards if I know this is my due date and I've got 7 days to accomplish something? How can I break that up? We have to model that for our students so that they can be successful.

John: But I've got to ask, can this be taught? I think of the student who's thinking, well, I'm just not like that. I know that person over there. They're always being like that. But I can't just. I can't be like that. Not me.

Amy: I would challenge every student to grow in some area of these sort of self development skills that we've been talking about. Pick one thing that you know

John: No, you

Amy: You

John: Need

Amy: Need to

John: To

Amy: Grow

John: Grow

Amy: In

John: In.

Amy: And challenge yourself to do something that's a little outside your norm.

Stephanie: You know, this year, the DSM 5 added addiction to devices, to a psychological dysfunction, and one of the things John and I have talked about a lot is academic endurance, being able to put that phone away for 15 minutes, set yourself a timer, put it far, far away and then accomplish whatever task you need to do. And then the next week, you're going up to 30 minutes without looking at it. And the next week we up it to forty five minutes without looking at it. I think that's a skill that's going to become more and more imperative to any learner, but particularly the online learner who doesn't have a teacher looking over them.

Jacque: And I would add to that. Well, you should challenge yourself to grow, set reasonable goals, start with something that you can do this just a little bit of a challenge and work your way forward. Meet yourself where you're at. Be realistic.

John: So step by step from the start of this podcast we talked about, it's going to have such a time commitment. And Stephanie, you point out right here in a bid to find yourself an accountability partner, I would have never thought of that. So I'm just gonna go right in and take this course. But no, no, no. Here's the real important bit of advice. Find an accountability partner, someone who will oversee someone. You can report to a friend, perhaps someone you're an accountability partner for them to.

Stephanie: Yeah, just someone each day to even say, do you have any homework today? Do you need to spend some time doing homework? If I make dinner for you, will that allow you to free up some time to work on your online class? You know, just something like that. So what are some of the most frequent hang ups that you see with our students each semester? There's the repetitive issues that students have.

Amy: They have goals and they want to meet these goals, and so they register for classes with this expectation of, okay, I'm going to take, you know, these five different courses because similar to what I took in a high school semester and so I'm going to take these courses and then too soon they realize that, oh, no, I am working 40 hours a week. You know, I do other things outside in the community. But I've also got these five courses now that I've got to take and just life. Life is one of the number one things that we've seen that trips up students.

Jacque: Yeah, I would say just be thoughtful and reflective and realistic in setting your goals. I think that's that's the number one thing. And then what Amy had said earlier about students needing to breathe. We have a handful of phrases that apply generally to teaching and learning that we toss around. And every semester we have hundreds of students who don't have any technical challenges. They just need to read, breathe, think what is actually happening because it can look different. If a teacher is talking to you and you can raise your hand and ask a question right then that's a different experience than reading what's happening and breaking it down for yourself and then asking questions. ASYNCHRONOUSLY. It's a different experience and we we can't ignore that. But the process is still there just in a different form.

Amy: Online education is touted as being flexible. It's really sugar-coated. I think in ways that we don't intend. But but it is.

Stephanie: It's clear that we teach at a community college where we get a lot higher ratio of, you know, working parents as opposed to maybe a four year university where the students are little bit more traditional.

Amy: True, but I think also even with those traditional students, you know, it's that self-regulation that's key to success. If I can manage my time properly, if I can ask my self-reflective questions about things like how am I going to be successful this week to make sure I get all of these projects done, how am I going to read intentionally the materials that are set forth in my courses so that I can learn and understand to be successful in those courses? That self-regulation component is super important no matter if you're a non-traditional student or traditional student.

John: The facts and figures may be forgotten, but once education is the flavour and let's add the skills that remain after all those facts and figures have been forgotten. Amy Snider and Jackie Harris, thank you so much for joining us here at the Big Picture podcast.

Amy: Thanks for having us.

Stephanie: Pay a job, guys.

Amy: That

Stephanie: That

Amy: Was

Stephanie: Was

Amy: Fun,

Stephanie: Fun,

Amy: Man.

Stephanie: Isn't it?

Amy: That

Stephanie: That

Amy: Was

Stephanie: Was

Amy: A very

John: Our

Amy: Fine

John: Theme music

Amy: Our

Stephanie: Our

Amy: Second.

Stephanie: Second

John: By Zach

Stephanie: Podcast.

John: Jefferey

Stephanie: The first

John: Musical

Stephanie: One.

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