

Co-Creating Meaningful Online Program Under COVID Pandemic

Kyoko IKEDA-CHUN*

MUKOSE Kiichiro**

HOMAE Tomotaka**

MURAKAMI Tomohiro***

IKEDA Shingo***

HASHIZUME Norihiko****

KAMEYA Tomohiro****

This paper reviews and evaluates the process, ideas and considerations, implementation and outcomes of an online program that Kaua‘i Community College and a consortium of national maritime colleges co-created in response to the COVID pandemic.

Keywords: Online program, Synchronous learning, Asynchronous learning, Interaction, Padlet, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Establishing a community in an online course

1. Introduction

Since 2009, Kaua‘i Community College (hereinafter KauaiCC) and a consortium of Japanese national maritime colleges have collaborated to offer a three-week program every March on Kaua‘i for students of Japanese maritime colleges. This program aims to develop intercultural understanding and competencies through learning about Polynesian voyaging and navigation alongside people in Hawaii. This program is called *Ikena Kahua* which means “to seek one’s foundation” in Hawaiian language.

In the three-week program, participants take classes at KauaiCC and work with Kauai’s local non-profit organization that builds and operate a voyaging canoe as well as participate in the state-wide crew training for voyaging canoes. Through these experiences, participants not only gain knowledge about

* University of Hawai‘i - Kaua‘i Community College

** National Institute of Technology - Toyama College

*** National Institute of Technology - Yuge College

**** National Institute of Technology - Toba College

Polynesian voyaging and navigation and practice communicating in English, but also learn and think for themselves important things about life. Given the pandemic, the program which was scheduled in March 2020 was cancelled. KauaiCC and the consortium started a series of online discussions on how to continue the intercultural experience despite the pandemic.

2. Envisioning - Planning Meetings

To envision a new online program, a total of three planning meetings were held. The first meeting was preparatory meeting among representatives from National Institute of Technology - Toyama College, Toba College and Yuge College (hereinafter referred to as NIT Toyama College, NIT Toba College and NIT Yuge College). Then the second meeting was held in August 2020 with representatives from NIT Toyama College, Toba College, Yuge College as well as KauaiCC. The third meeting was held in November 2020 among all the parties. In the first meeting, representatives from NIT Toyama College, Toba College and Yuge College shared updates from respective campuses and their thoughts and ideas for a possible online program with KauaiCC. They also reflected on the last decade of the *Ikena Kahua* program and identified strengths and values that this program had offered to their students and how we can possibly translate these to an online program. Representatives from the three campuses then shared their meeting notes with the KauaiCC coordinator. The KauaiCC coordinator created a meeting agenda based on these meeting notes for the August meeting. In the August meeting, all parties shared COVID-related updates, as well as sharing of their ideas, hopes and expectations for the online program. Representatives also discussed the purpose, goals and learning outcomes of an online program. After open and through discussions, the purpose, target audience, student learning outcomes were identified, and an overall framework of an online program was agreed upon by all representatives. The meeting was adjourned with KauaiCC coordinator agreeing to provide them with a program and budget proposal and that the group would reconvene to discuss the proposal in a couple of months. The November meeting was held to discuss and finalize the details of the program. Each of the three meetings was characterized by open and honest communication, each leading to a clearer vision of an online program we want for students.

3. Program Overview

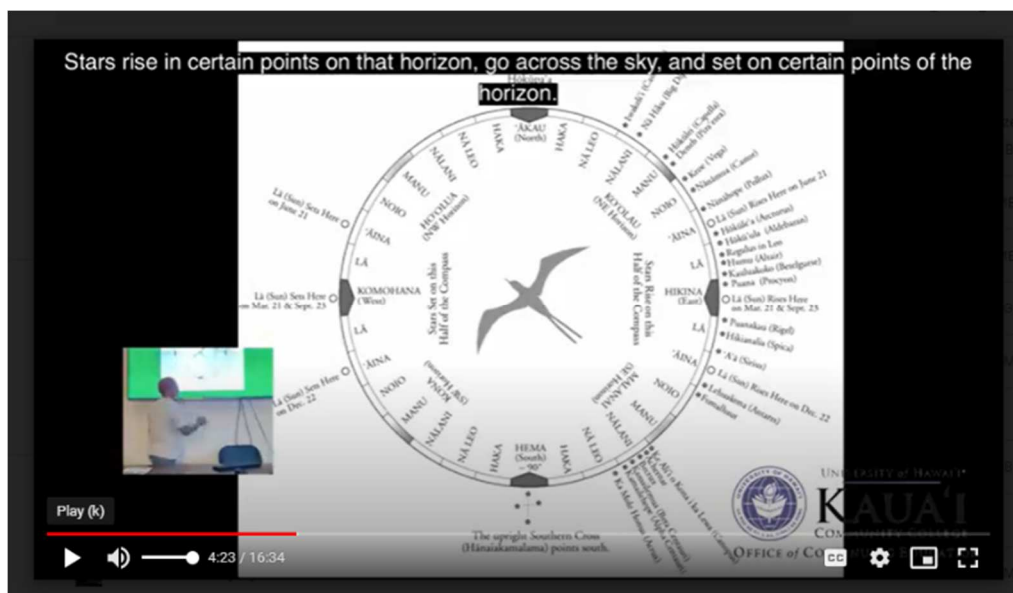
Below is the overview of the new online program.

3.1 Learning Objectives and Outcomes

Learning objectives and outcomes of this program were identified as: 1) to become familiarized with culture and history of Kauai and Hawai'i; 2) to build confidence and interests in communicating in English and intercultural learning; 3) to become interested in the *Ikena Kahua* program.

3.2 Program Content

A combination of asynchronous and synchronous learning activities was planned for this program. As for asynchronous activities, participants were asked to watch one recorded video lesson per week. Topics included: introduction to Kaua‘i; introduction to history of Hawai‘i; and canoe plants.



Picture1: Screenshot of a recorded video entitled “Polynesian Voyaging and Navigation”

Another asynchronous activity was to engage in online communication and discussion about the video lessons via Padlet. All participants were asked to post and comment on the weekly Padlet. Topics included: self-introduction; my favorite place; history of Hawai‘i; and canoe plants.

As for synchronous activity, participants engaged in discussion and conversations with KauaiCC instructors and students via Zoom each week. Each Zoom session was structured in a way that it starts with a check-in, in which participants were asked to quickly introduce themselves, and share their energy level on the scale of zero to ten. Facilitator also asked an additional question each week as part of the check-in exercise so participants get to know each other better. The check-in exercises were followed by Q & A and fun quiz about video lesson or Padlet interactions. After a short break, participants engaged in guided English conversations with KCC students and instructors in Zoom breakout rooms.

3.3 Duration/ Meeting Frequency

This program spans over four weeks with four 1.5 hour weekly synchronous sessions.

3.4 Communication Platforms/ Technologies

We used Microsoft Teams as the main communication platform between participants, their home campuses as well as with the KauaiCC coordinator. Then for each of the four synchronous sessions, Zoom was used as the communication platform. An online bulletin board called Padlet was used as a platform

for asynchronous communication among all participants from Japan and Kaua‘i. Padlet allows participants to post text, photos and videos.

4. Implementation

The new online program was planned and implemented with full support both at the consortium and individual campus level. Prof. Mukose Kiichiro from NIT Toyama College (one of the authors of this paper) served as the lead instructor for the Japan side. His role was to communicate with KauaiCC coordinator as well as communicate important information with the rest of NIT colleges. He also facilitated communication on Microsoft Teams, addressing students' questions and encouraging student participation. The program was also implemented with full support from faculty members from students' home campus. The support included pre-program orientation, technical support prior to the program as well as on the day of the program. Some campuses designated campus classrooms as well as computers for this program, and their faculty members were physically present to support their students. This full support both at the consortium and campus levels helped students' participation and engagement in the program.

As for the number of participants, we had a total of fourteen students (five from NIT Toyama College, three from NIT Toba College, five from NIT Yuge College and one from NIT Oshima College). We also had a total of seven faculty members who participated in the program (two from NIT Toyama College, three from NIT Toba College, two from NIT Yuge College and one from NIT Oshima College).

The program spanned over four weeks, from February 20 to March 12, 2021, with four synchronous sessions on Saturdays (2/20, 2/27, 3/6, 3/13) Japan Time.

5. Considerations and Ideas

In designing and implementing this program, several key considerations were made to make this online program successful.

5.1 Full support and engagement by home institution (consortium and campus)

One of them is to offer support at consortium and campus level to address some of the major obstacles to successful online learning including perceived isolation, technical difficulties, and confusion with content¹⁾. Prof. Mukose, the lead instructor for the Japan side, provided support at the consortium level using Microsoft Teams as the platform, as well as faculty members at students' home institutions provided support to their students as mentioned earlier. With this support, participants were able to make a smooth transition into the online program without being hindered by obstacles including technical challenges, confusion about the content, or perceived isolation often experienced in online learning. At some students' home campuses, instructors gathered the students online after each Zoom session and asked about their experience. If students had experienced any difficulty, instructors would advise the students how they can

address the challenge in the next session. These feedbacks and advices led to better experience and students' sense of achievement at the end.

Another key role played by the instructors in Japan is their role as active participants in the program as a way to model good participation. Often times, instructors at student's home institutions play a role of an observer, instructor or supporter, and their engagement in the actual program is kept minimal. However, in this program, instructors were encouraged to participate in the program as participants. For example, they engaged in asynchronous interaction by posting their ideas on Padlet. They also watched the movies and joined the discussion with students. They even joined the Zoom sessions as participants, not as teachers, and enjoyed the meeting. This attitude demonstrated by instructors in Japan was done intentionally to break the students' barrier for actively participating in the program, and to model active participation.

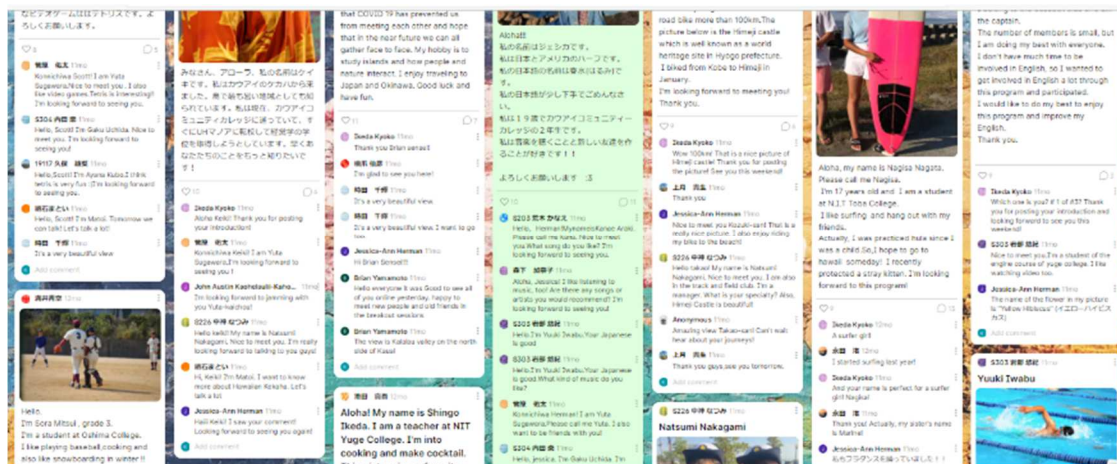
5.2 Building a strong online community

Creating a strong community in an online environment is identified as one of the key factors in successful online learning. Whether it is a face-to-face or online environment, building a community requires an intention to do so²⁾. The KauaiCC coordinator intended to first create an online community that feels safe, collegial and fun, then created and planned interactions that connect students to students, students to teachers, students to instructors and students to contents. To that end, the KauaiCC coordinator utilized features of education technology such as Zoom and Padlet as well as facilitation techniques for both asynchronous and synchronous activities. In all of the designed interactions, the KauaiCC coordinator intentionally created an online environment that is friendly, light-hearted, and casual, while providing necessary structure to integrate all the activities.

More specifically, this program utilized Microsoft Teams as an overall communication platform. The KauaiCC coordinator used the platform to communicate with participants and Prof. Mukose provided necessary support and follow-up with students on the Japan side.

Padlet was used as an asynchronous method of creating connections among all participants by allowing them to post their stories through texts, photos and sometimes videos and comment on others' posts. This served as a closed and safe social media platform for the participants.

Zoom was used as the main communication platform for synchronous sessions. In synchronous sessions, the KauaiCC coordinator created an informal, light-hearted, and most importantly inclusive environment, where all participants' voices were heard. Zoom's breakout room feature was used to get participants to engage in small group discussion and conversations. Zoom's polling feature was used to create a fun quiz to solicit participants' active engagement.



Picture 2: Screenshot of Padlet for Self-Introduction

5.3 Foundation of *ohana* (Family):

The partnership between KauaiCC and Japanese maritime colleges have enjoyed over a decade of active exchanges. This is thanks to Prof. Endo Makoto of NIT Toyama College, who dedicated energy and resources to nurture collaborations among all five maritime colleges and their partnership with KauaiCC. This decade of various cultural exchanges which were funded by the grant led by Prof. Endo allowed many faculty members as well as staff from Japanese maritime colleges and KauaiCC to visit one another. These shared experiences nurtured a sense of friendship or more like an extended family or “*ohana*” in Hawaiian. When we work together, we work with a deep sense of trust and joy. So, when this online program was planned, faculty members from participating campuses joined the program and supported their students without a question. There was a sense of joy in our reunion. In a way this is intangible and cannot be measured. However, this sense of trust and joy of working together served as a strong foundation of the community we intended to build for this online program.

6. Program Outcomes/ Student Evaluation

We asked all student participants to fill out a program evaluation at the end of the program. In the evaluation, we asked the participants if their level of understanding in the following target content areas changed before and after the program: 1) Kaua‘i; 2) history and culture of Hawai‘i; 3) Polynesian voyaging and navigation; and 4) canoe plants. The results show that in all four areas participants’ knowledge has increased after the program. We also asked participants to rate each instructor to help us make improvements in the future. We also asked participants’ input on educational technologies (Padlet, Zoom) as well as study guides used in the program. All participants said that asynchronous communication on Padlet fostered a sense of community and encouraged interaction (rated four or five on a 5-point scale), and all participants said that communication on Padlet was good opportunities to practice their English

language (rated four or five on a 5-point scale). All participants felt that the synchronous communication on Zoom (both in a large group and small groups) was a good learning opportunity to practice listening and speaking in English (rated either four or five on a 5-point scale); and that they felt that it deepened their understanding of asynchronous contents; and that they really enjoyed the activities. Participants' response and comments demonstrated that we were able to meet the first two learning objectives of the program, namely, 1) to become familiarized with the culture and history of Kauai and Hawai'i; and 2) to build confidence and interests in communicating in English and intercultural learning. We didn't ask the participants if this program made them interested in participating in the in-person *Ikena Kahua* program (learning objective # 3), so we cannot correctly assess if we were able to meet the third learning objective. We will assess this once we resume the in-person *Ikena Kahua* program and see if any of the applicants have participated in this online program.

7. Discussion

The Community of Inquiry (CoI)³⁾ is one of the most researched and well-known theoretical frameworks to design learning experiences in an online environment. This framework identifies the following overlapping presences, namely, social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence, as key variables for successful online learning. Social presence is defined as “the ability of participants to identify with the community (e.g., course of study), communicate purposefully in a trusting environment, and develop interpersonal relationships by way of projecting their individual personalities”⁴⁾. Cognitive presence is “the process of constructing meaning through collaborative inquiry”⁵⁾. Magara and Lauren²⁾ explains “teaching presence includes designing and developing the course in addition to guiding and supporting the learners during the course delivery.”

In analyzing the online program that we have created as well as the participant evaluation through the Community of Inquiry framework, we were able to establish all three of presences in the program. In particular, through the intentional design and facilitation to create a safe, collegial and fun online environment and interactions as well as intentional and active support and participation by the Japanese maritime faculty members, we were able to establish social presence among all participants, where participants identified their community, communicated purposefully in a trusting environment (as seen by active participation in Padlet as well as Zoom discussions) and developed interpersonal relationships by way of projecting their individuality. It is important to emphasize that a trusting relationship and environment was not simply established through the use of technologies and facilitation techniques. It is based on a strong foundation of familial relationships that KauaiCC and NIT campuses were able to build over the course of a decade, thanks to the contribution of NIT Toyama College's Prof. Endo Makoto.

Cognitive presence as it refers to meaning-making through collective inquiry took place both on Padlet as well as on Zoom sessions, with a series of guided questions posed to the participants, and the space held for collective sharing. It was apparent in the asynchronous posts as well as synchronous discussions. Teaching presence as explained by Magara and Lauren²⁾ refers to the designing and developing the course and supporting and guiding the participants during the course. In this online program, teaching presence was provided through collaborative efforts of both KauaiCC and Japan maritime college faculty members as mentioned earlier.

8. Conclusion

In reviewing the planning process, the actual program and its student evaluation, we concluded that the following contributed to the success of co-creating a meaningful online program.

- Stage 1: Envisioning - Open and honest communications among key stakeholder and clear learning objectives and outcomes
- Stage 2: Preparing/ Setting the Stage - Active role played by home institution faculty and staff members to provide pre-program orientation and technical support, as well as their participation and engagement in the program, which helped create strong social and teaching presence.
- Stage 3: Implementation - Establishment of a strong community in an online program through an intentionally planned and designed activities and interactions, which fostered all three of the overlapping presences; social presence, cognitive presence and teaching presence. A strong social presence established in this program is attributable to the design, intentionality that went into the program but equally supported by the shared experiences and trust that were nurtured over the years among KauaiCC and Japanese maritime college faculty members as well as active participation by the Japanese faculty members. Also, it is important to note that the strong teaching presence was created as a result of collaborative efforts between KauaiCC coordinator and Japan maritime college faculty members, and not simply by the “provider” of the program.

9. References

- 1) Oomen-Early, J., and Murphy, L. (2009). Self-actualization and e-learning: a qualitative investigation of university faculty’s perceived barriers to effective online instruction. *Int. J. E Learn.* 8, 223–240.
- 2) Magara M. and Lauren R. (2020). How to Establish a Strong Community in an Online Course. *The FLTMAG*, IALLT (International Association for Language Learning Technology)

- 3) Garrison, D. R., Anderson, T., & Archer, W. (2000). Critical inquiry in a text-based environment: Computer conferencing in higher education model. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 2(2-3), 87-105. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/journal/the-internet-and-higher-education/vol/2/issue/2>
- 4) Garrison, D.R. (2009). Communities of Inquiry in Online Learning, in Rogers, P.L. (Ed.) *Encyclopedia of Distance Learning*, 2nd edn, pp. 352–355. Hershey, PA: IGI Global
- 5) Garrison, D. R. (2006). Online collaboration principles. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, 10(1).
Retrieved from onlinelearningconsortium.org/sites/default/files/v10n1_3garrison_0.pdf