#NoStudentLeftBehind: Reflections from the Migration to Digital

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ABSTRACT

Despite the worsening risks of the COVID-19 pandemic, unemployment, rising death tolls, digital divide, threats to freedom of the press, and threats to academic freedom, teachers are called to carry on with their classes because "education can and must." For this reason, they are faced with a unique challenge to shelve go-to, in-person pedagogical strategies and sink their teeth into remote learning to minimize further disruptions in learning and maximize affordances of digital technology.

This paper presents the findings of an action research project chronicling experiences and reflections of a remote learning ad hoc committee in designing an accessible and flexible general education course on Public Speaking. To serve as the backbone of the paper, the three principles of the Universal Design for Learning: representation, action and expression, and engagement were utilized.

Major reflections in the migration to remote learning include: Fostering an educational ethic of care through *student familiarity*; providing access to all students by *planning with a range in mind*; and demanding for and maximizing support in *taking the full turn to digital*.

May these reflections contribute to the ongoing discussion about the importance of an educational system that is more responsive to the times, more mindful of the diversity of students, and more equipped to make sure that in the migration to a better normal, there will be #NoStudentLeftBehind.

KEYWORDS

Universal Design for Learning, Action Research, Remote Learning, Public Speaking Education, COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic forced a myriad of human endeavors into a complete halt in compliance with social distancing protocols implemented by governments around the globe. In the Philippines, the virus has left establishments out of business (Salaverria), churches closed (Esmaquel), and live entertainment venues empty (Diño-Seguerra). But one of the most gravely affected sectors is education, with 87% of the student population (UNESCO) prohibited from returning to their classrooms (Commission on Higher Education).

Educational institutions were faced with the challenge to uphold academic resilience and design learning continuity plans despite the pervasive threat of the virus. A total of 1,935 higher education institutions in the Philippines (Carillo), majority of which follow the traditional face-to-face delivery mode (Philippine University Rankings), remain physically closed but have been asked to explore alternative modes to deliver learning content remotely for the second consecutive academic year. These modes commonly utilize digital technologies and online approaches but the Commission on Higher Education clarified that the delivery of learning must be adjusted "depending on the levels of technology, availability of devices, internet connectivity, level of digital literacy, and approaches" (2). For a country like the Philippines with an urbanization of less than 50% (Kemp), digital divide is a serious consideration for educators (Jaucian). Even from the preliminary planning stage of the remote learning semester, calls for #NoStudentLeftBehind (#NSLB) have surfaced. #NSLB is a hashtag students have used as a form of online protest to call for more inclusive educational plans for pandemic learning (Torres). It is posted along with narratives from students, guardians, and teachers underscoring the

sentiment that education amid the pandemic is "only for those who can afford" it (Magsambol). An investigative study details the difficulties encountered by Filipino university students enrolled during the first semester of pandemic learning: "unstable internet connectivity; inadequate learning resources; electric power interruptions; vague learning contents; overloaded lesson activities; limited teacher scaffolds; poor peer communication; conflict with home responsibilities; poor learning environment; financial related problems; physical health compromises; and mental health struggles" (Rotas and Cahapay 154). The hashtag demands educational institutions to make academic decisions "based on compassion, solidarity, and urgency" as the country is beset not only of the public health crisis but also of "climate disasters and government incompetence" (Veloso).

Amid unemployment, rising death tolls, digital divide, and the worsening risk of the virus, teachers-instructional designers are called to continue teaching because education can and education must (Department of Education). For this reason, traditional educational institutions are faced with a unique challenge to shelve their go-to residential classroom pedagogical strategies and sink their teeth into remote learning spaces to minimize further disruptions in learning and maximize affordances of digital technology.

This paper presents the reflections from an exploratory research project chronicling experiences of a remote learning ad hoc committee in designing an accessible and flexible general education course on Public Speaking offered by the Department of Speech Communication and Theatre Arts at the University of the Philippines Diliman. As teachers grappled with overhauling public speaking lessons for remote learning and students struggled to stay connected from the other side of the screen, it was a vocational imperative to document and unpack lessons from the experience. In doing so, principles of educational action research were used in an attempt to contribute to discussions on practices for pandemic learning. Moreover, the Universal Design for Learning was used as the framework in informing student-centered pedagogical decisions. Specifically, the three steps of action research: planning the action, taking action, and evaluating the action (Coghlan and Brannick 14); and the three principles of the UDL: representation, action and expression, and engagement (Meyer et al. 59) were utilized to serve as the backbone of the paper.

In the preliminary stages of the course pack redesign, the following questions were tackled: How can a general education course on Public Speaking, usually taught in a classroom with a physically live audience giving immediate feedback, be taught online without sacrificing the preset learning outcomes? How can educators practice flexibility in course implementation to suit the different circumstances and needs of the students at a time like this? How can educators ensure, given the demographics of the students, inclusivity and accessibility in remote learning? Can public speaking instruction thrive outside the physical classroom and the face-to-face presentation setup?

Following the tenets of action research, this paper is a "live case study being written as it unfolds" (Coghlan and Brannick 14). Here, the teacher-researcher attempts to capture the panic, inspirations, hurdles, and solutions teachers-instructional designers faced/are facing while making sure that no student is left behind. As an action research project, the primary aim of this paper is not only to "contribute to the fund of knowledge" in the humanities cluster especially in upholding the relevance of general education subjects at a time like this, but also to "construct actionable knowledge" that other practitioners may examine and even replicate (Coghlan and Brannick 14). The first stage of the action research is a process of inquiry that involves an in-depth analysis of the topic's history and status quo. The second stage requires "rigorous exploration of the resolution of the issue through action." Finally, the third stage is a collaborative reflection of the undertaken action and its impact to all stakeholders involved (Coghlan and Brannick 14). This qualitative approach does not involve a distant observer but an active participant working on the ground, fleshing out personal experienced realities merged with that of other collaborators. Insights are also based on artefacts from collaborators in the form of journals, reports, formal and informal surveys, conversations with colleagues, and student and teacher feedback. For this paper, the final step of the action research process will

be given focus by providing reflections for consideration as the country continues - with no clear end in sight - to migrate teaching practices remotely.

In the course pack redesign process and the reflective exercise during the roll out of the semester, the UDL framework was used as a lens. UDL means reaching and "teaching every student" (Meyer et al. 3). The framework operates under the assumption that barriers to effective learning exist. More importantly, it stresses that educational institutions must not look at learning barriers as intrinsic to the students themselves and something that they have to work on, fix, or treat on their own before learning materializes. On the contrary, the UDL framework encourages educators to place prime value on the fact that learning barriers are built externally, embedded within systems, environments, and cultures where the intent and attempt to learn take place. These barriers include "materials, strategies, policies, or infrastructure" that fail to address the students' learning needs (Moore 522). "Teaching every student" must be considered in designing instruction to minimize if not totally eradicate the said barriers and ultimately, create enabling circumstances fostering "communities of expert learning" (Meyer et al. 3) and "improve learning outcomes" (McGhie-Richmond and Sung 45). These mean producing empowered students that are capable of achieving academic success and ultimately, UDL's goal of "transformative learning" (CAST). With UDL, there are no learning disabilities that need to be addressed, only curricular disabilities that hamper student learning (Meyer et al. 3; Ayala et al. 143).

CAST provides the blueprint for UDL that elaborates on its three main principles:

Principle # 1: Provide multiple means of engagement
Principle # 2: Provide multiple means of representation
Principle # 3: Provide multiple means of action and expression

The US Department of Education Higher Education Opportunity Act 2008 states that these principles provide a "scientifically valid framework for guiding educational practice" that zero in on two concepts: flexibility and accessibility. Related literature (Meyer et al.; CAST; Ralabate; Hall et al.) connects these principles to brain-based research on learning networks: Representation taps into the recognition network or the "what" of learning. In this principle, learning content is housed in more than one format and delivered through more than one mode with the goal of producing well-informed students. Action and expression tap into the strategic network or the "how" of learning. Here, students are given a variety of ways to assimilate and demonstrate what they know, helping them become more critical. Engagement taps into the affective network or the "why" of learning. Students are given the freedom to take control of the trajectory of their learning by allowing them to explore themes and experiences that are relevant to them and to the times.

The UDL framework has been employed by a number of instructional designers (King-Sears; Wilson; Alnahdi) to address the needs of learners with cognitive and physical disabilities. But major proponents clarify that UDL is for all students, even those that do not fit the clinical definition of disability, because all students face barriers. Advances in brain-based research reveal that learner variability is the norm and that socially constructed disabilities are the ones that impede student progress (Meyer et al. 3). These disabilities are exposed and even exacerbated during the pandemic demanding educational institutions to pay close attention in order to uphold academic resilience.

Major criticisms regarding UDL were also considered in the conduct of the study. First, there is limited research on UDL as compared to other educational frameworks (Anstead 3) particularly with Filipino respondents, students during the pandemic, and tertiary level students. In addition, existing UDL literature provides "inadequate operationalization" (Boysen 2) of a complex framework and the lack of "clear evidence for UDL's effectiveness" (Boysen 20). Second, following the UDL framework demands more work hours on the part of the teacher (Lachheb et al.). As compared to administering standardized

assessments and activities, providing a variety of options based on the diversity of students is laborious and time consuming. And third, the UDL framework requires additional faculty retooling, financial support from administrators, and policy support (Scott 283) for successful implementation. Despite the mentioned criticisms, the researcher of this study sees the potential UDL holds for students in need especially at a time like the pandemic.

Below are neither rules nor formulas - because UDL suggests that each classroom looks different - but reflections and considerations in attempting to make the Public Speaking general education course accessible, flexible, inclusive and, hopefully, still relevant.

Student familiarity

Student familiarity is the main anchor of the UDL Framework and a prerequisite in applying the engagement, representation, and action and expression principles. This familiarity with students must go a step further; beyond names, student numbers, and the random information teachers ask during the first day of class. Public speaking classes, like other humanities classes, have a relatively smaller student-faculty ratio which improves immediacy and facilitates student-centered pedagogical strategies such as creative presentations, delivering speeches, and collaborative activities, as compared to large classrooms more common in the sciences cluster. But even pre-pandemic, this teacher-student familiarity is not uncommon in the humanities. In fact, making subtle - or sometimes even drastic - changes in instructional plans based on the students' live reactions and feedback has always been part of the class itinerary. This intentional laxity is present in designing activities, project mechanics, deadlines, classroom games, teaching strategies, examples cited, and even jokes during the lecture. What worked for one section may not work for another section because of the differences in demographics and psychographics of the students. In the practice of the faculty, shown clearly in the department feedback sessions, even the content, learning materials, references, readings, sequence of lessons, and the semestral calendar are not set in stone. Resonating with the dynamism of the communication discipline, Public Speaking instructors know to provide room for modifications, sudden inspiration, and improvisation. Getting to know students is an essential component of what Hawk calls the *educational ethic of care* that paves the way for a student-centered classroom (Calp and Kaskaya 1) that positively impacts the quality of the educational experience (Reed et al. 27) for students and teachers.

These strategies and insights are not entirely new. It just so happens that now, amid the pandemic, educational institutions have to look into more categories of differences that directly impact teaching and learning strategies. The more teachers know about students, the better they can prepare for the variety of techniques that can be offered. Here are some of the practices faculty members have adopted in order to improve their familiarity with the students in aid of instructional design:

a) Start with Day 0. In the committee's course pack preparations, faculty members made sure that the course calendar starts with DAY 0. This is the period after student registration and before the first day of classes. During this period, surveys conducted by the university are examined. Additionally, a separate survey designed to draw a more detailed profile of enlisted students is rolled out. The preliminary survey administered by the university provides pertinent information that points to the students' capacity and limitation to attend remote learning classes. The second survey probes deeper into the willingness, hesitation, domestic environment, and other information specific to the needs of the course. This must be conducted on Day 0 before the first day of classes otherwise, teachers run the risk of wasting course pack preparation when during the class proper, teaching strategies are not logistically possible. In gathering data from the students, faculty are advised to handle students' personal information with professionalism and care following the stipulations of the Data Privacy Act of 2012.

Day 0 may also be devoted to non-formal survey administration to inspect additional information that would improve familiarity with the students. This was coursed through online correspondences; students who were unresponsive through email were contacted through the contact numbers listed in their registration

portals. Surveying trending discussions on social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Tiktok may be viable sources of information as well. It may not be as scientific a method as surveys but it is a good way to listen to the sentiments of the students.

b) Construct non-academic assessments. Student evaluations are imperative for learning to transpire. However, teachers must use assessment tools and learning activities to determine not only students' academic progress but also to get to know students better. The table below lists some aspects of classroom management and instructional design that were freely elicited from the students through regular, non-disruptive, non-invasive non-academic assessments.

Classroom elements/requirements	***Prompts for probing***
live public speaking/recitation/class sharing during synchronous meetings	Can you comfortably speak your mind during class via Zoom?
	Is anyone else present in your learning space?
	Is your current environment conducive to learning (presence of noise, other online students within the same space, connecting to public Wi-Fi, etc.)
	Do you feel safe in our learning space (Zoom)?
	Do you feel safe in your space (from where you are studying)?
time for content delivery	Is our class coinciding with disruptive activities at home/learning space?
	Do you share the same gadget with others (other students or family members in work-from-home setup)?
	Is your internet stable during class time?
	Is your home conducive to learning?
time for class announcements	If I make announcements outside class time, will you have the means to receive them?
	Aside from studying, what other responsibilities do you perform (attending to siblings, household chores, work, etc.)?
	Is your gadget/wifi available all day?
channel for announcements	What platforms are available outside class time (free data apps, text messaging, etc.)
	Is your gadget/Wi-Fi available all day?
ample time to work on assignments	Aside from studying, what other responsibilities do you perform (attending to siblings, household chores, work, etc.)?
self-presentation (for final speech delivery)	Do you have a space in your present location where you can comfortably and freely deliver your speech with video/mic on?
	What adjustments can we make/are feasible (digital background, record speech at night when everyone else is asleep, zoom in camera to keep the view of the house out of the frame, etc.)
class attendance	Is attending class/education your top priority at this moment?
	If not, what do you consider as your priority?
	Is someone/something preventing you from attending class?
	What challenges did you encounter before logging in?
	What do you look forward to after logging out?

Table 1: Table of classroom elements and prompts for probing

In a public speaking class, and in humanities classes in general, these assessment tools are embedded within the usual student-centered activities like class sharing, recitations, think pieces, and presentations. Responses to the prompts allowed faculty members from the department to tailor fit public

speaking activities (previously done live in front of an audience in close physical proximity) migrated into a remote learning setup.

These nuggets of information - handled carefully and consensually in compliance with data privacy and ethics protocols - allow teachers to make more informed and more sensitive decisions in redesigning the instructional plans in a way that best caters to the type of students present. Preparing the course pack includes preparing for change. The submitted course packs and the university-approved syllabi must not limit teachers in asserting academic freedom, especially in deciding on what is best for students based on interaction and assessment on the ground. The remote learning committee of the department regularly assembled and decided on adjustments and accommodations while still anchoring on the set learning objectives of the course. This, obviously, is easier said than done. After years - even decades for some - of in-classroom practice, a sudden and drastic change may be challenging. One of the challenges include being too in love with "tried and tested" teaching strategies, like a gamified activity designed for face-to-face learning for example, that it becomes difficult for teachers to acknowledge that it may not always work. Getting to know the students means understanding that differences will exist and this is a reality teachers always have to factor in when designing lessons. Getting to know students deeper fosters stronger connections (Calp and Kaskaya 1) and opens up the door for a culture of compassion and empathy in the classroom. Classrooms should not be a jungle where only the strong survive.

Plan with a range in mind

Literature surrounding the UDL framework points to this particular strategy: planning with a range in mind. This means anticipating student profiles coming from a full spectrum. As McGhie-Richmond and Sung contend, "learner diversity is to be expected" and that teachers must "proactively plan for this diversity" even before meeting the students (45). The more profiles are determined, the better teachers can prepare to accommodate and tailor fit learning strategies. This means opening up instructional plans for multimodal, multiplatform, varied implementations that are easily pliable. Teachers are challenged to have foresight and visualize a whole spectrum of possibilities. This may sound too daunting and laborious at first, but honestly, in preparing for pandemic learning, teachers had no choice. As a department in one of the biggest state universities in the country in terms of student population, servicing students from different regions, across all economic brackets, faculty members had to prepare to cater to a wider range of students. On top of this, as a service unit in the university, the public speaking course that the department offers is a general education subject that is taken by students across different colleges.

Based on the information gathered from preliminary surveys on student readiness, capacity, and willingness, and based on the development of the pandemic, the committee looked into different possible scenarios. Below is a table that the committee created in August 2020 during the preparation for the first remote learning semester:

COVID-19 Scenario	***Learning Modality***	***Classroom Setup***
COVID-19 Complete Eradication; Full roll out of vaccines/drugs; Complete return to normal	Face-to-Face (FtF)	As is with minimal precautionary measures
COVID-19 controlled but not totally eradicated; significant vaccination figures; herd immunity in major regions	Blended Learning	Mixed FtF (minimal, for assessments only) and online learning (information transfer); FtF:Online ratio will depend on COVID-19 situation; Proceed with precautionary measures; strictly follow in-person protocols

Table 2: Matrix of Pandemic Learning Possible Scenarios *(continued on next page)*

COVID-19 Scenario	*Learning Modality*	*Classroom Setup*
Major cities still under ECQ/ MECQ/GCQ	Remote Learning	Consumption of learning delivered to the students/ consumed remotely; Modular Approach; Adjustment for laboratory, field, theatre, studio, practicum courses

Table 2: Matrix of Pandemic Learning Possible Scenarios *(continued from previous page)*

At that point, the best course of action (as decided by the administration), was to go for distance/remote learning similar to other educational institutions. A modular approach, a student-centered independent teaching strategy where knowledge is delivered in bite-sized forms consumed in a ladderized manner (Friestad-Tate et al. 41), is utilized. Under this learning modality, the committee decided to prepare three different delivery modes:

a) Printed/Offline Modular Mode
b) Digital-Offline-Modular Mode
c) Digital-Online-Modular Mode.

The committee also worked on redesigning courses to suit all these three modes of learning. For each mode, the following elements were prepared: *design* (how the learning content is presented), *delivery* (how the learning content reaches the students), *consume* (how the students study the materials), *assess* (how the students are evaluated), *return* (how the students submit requirements/output), and finally, *feedback* (how the students receive the results of the assessment). The matrices below show the learning continuity blueprint produced from initial planning sessions:

Remote Mode	***PRINTED MODULAR LEARNING*** *(This should be the default. Move up the modular distance learning modalities based on the capacity of students)*
Scenario	For students with no/little available internet connection and digital learning equipment
Description	DESIGN: Printable modules are prepared by the department before the start of the semester. DELIVER: Modules are delivered via courier service to their residence/ downloaded and printed during the registration period CONSUME: Students engage in self-administered, self-paced (guided by flexible calendar) learning. ASSESS: ALL assessment tools will be in the form of written worksheets (objective type quizzes, essays, journal, etc.) SUBMIT: Requirements will be sent back to the department periodically (per grading period) or by the end of the semester FEEDBACK: Faculty members are expected to return graded worksheets periodically or by the end of the semester depending on logistical capacity
Pros	All students will receive modules (with adjusted deadlines and assessment activities) Lack of internet connectivity and possession of gadgets are not an issue.
Cons	Minimum competencies expected of students after completion of the course must be re-evaluated (no face-to-face public speaking activity) Assessment is very limited to what can be captured via self-administered, untimed, written examinations Additional expenses for courier service. Lack of synchronous learning/ communication

Table 3: Matrix of learning continuity plan for printed modular mode

Remote Mode	***OFFLINE DIGITAL MODULAR LEARNING***
Scenario	Students with available learning gadgets but with unstable internet connection
Description	DESIGN: Digital and downloadable modules (pdf documents, instructional videos, digital worksheets, podcasts) are prepared by the department before the start of the semester. DELIVER: Digital modules are made available for download via LMS/sent via email. CONSUME: Students engage in self-administered, self-paced (guided by flexible calendar) learning. ASSESS: Via digital assessment tools (online quizzes, word documents, multimedia projects, etc.) SUBMIT: Digital output submitted online periodically (grading period). FEEDBACK: Faculty members are expected to provide feedback from output periodically (grading period) or as deemed necessary.
Pros	Maximizing available digital modes in order to deliver content. Accommodates students with unstable internet but with gadgets Asynchronous Availability of supplementary instructional materials through repositories online.
Cons	Minimum competencies expected of students after completion of the course must be re-evaluated (no face-to-face public speaking activity, possibly recorded) Lack of synchronous learning/communication. Data storage requirements for students. Assessment is very limited to what can be captured via self-administered, untimed examinations/ activities.

Table 4: Matrix of learning continuity plan for offline digital mode

Remote Mode	***ONLINE DIGITAL MODULAR LEARNING***
Scenario	Students with reliable internet connection and available learning gadgets
Description	DESIGN: Digital modules (pdf documents, instructional videos, digital worksheets, podcasts) are prepared by the department before the start of the semester. DELIVER: Digital modules accessed via LMS (UVLê, Google Classroom, etc.) CONSUME: Students engage in self-administered, self-paced (guided by flexible calendar) learning. Asynchronous/synchronous modes are available. ASSESS: Via digital assessment tools (online quizzes, word documents, multimedia projects, etc.) Synchronous/Asynchronous modes are available. SUBMIT: Digital output submitted online periodically (as needed). FEEDBACK: Faculty members are expected to provide feedback from output periodically (as needed).
Pros	Maximizing available digital modes in order to deliver content. Convenience of delivering digital instructional materials. Availability of supplementary instructional materials through repositories online. Synchronous/Asynchronous modes Faster turnaround time for feedback.
Cons	Minimum competencies expected of students after completion of the course must be re-evaluated (no face-to-face public speaking activity, possibly recorded) Assessment is very limited to what can be captured via online platforms.

Table 5: Matrix of learning continuity plan for online digital mode

The above matrices are far from perfect and foolproof, but it served as a guide for the committee in making instructional design decisions and providing faculty members with a mindset of flexibility. Planning with a range in mind operates with the knowledge that there is no such thing as a "one size fits all" (CAST) instructional design and the more profiles of students teachers are ready for, the more inclusive classrooms become (Hall et al. 4). In the committee evaluation, faculty members handling the public speaking classes made the following accommodations based on how they interpreted the matrices.

MODULE ELEMENT	***Accommodations teachers made for students:***
DESIGN	-digital modules in pdf, doc, ppt, or jpeg format -printed modules with learning guides and teaching guides (care of faculty or department) -multimedia presentation (PowerPoint, pdf, mp4 video) -live Zoom lectures with PowerPoint -recorded Zoom lectures for asynchronous use -own website designed for class -lecture videos produced by faculty -animated videos -curated reading, viewing, listening list (based on current events and student profile) -podcast produced by faculty -website designed by faculty with multi app integration for interaction
DELIVERY	-online -UVLê -Google Classroom -social media (Facebook) -Discord -UP Webmail -gaming platforms -educational/messaging apps - supplementary LMS -website -offline -printed modules delivered via courier (LBC or GrabExpress) -digital modules delivered via flash drive
CONSUME	-synchronous -via live Zoom lectures -chat-based correspondences -voice rooms (Discord) -social media/gaming platform -asynchronous -self-paced and self-administered guided digital modules -self-paced and self-administered guided printed modules
ASSESS	-accommodations for students with no camera/mic for final speech presentation -unproctored assessments -self-paced/untimed assessment -less (almost none) objective summative assessments -performance-based/project-based/task-based assessment techniques -targets critical and creative thinking -recalibrated rubrics -purely individual activities for students with unstable internet -group work for students with gadgets/stable internet for online collaboration/ peer-to-peer instruction -multimedia assessments for students with gadgets/stable internet -low-bandwidth activities for students without gadgets/unstable internet
RETURN	-periodic submission of accomplished modules (usually weekly) -end of semester bulk submission -end of semester return of printed modules/flash drive
FEEDBACK	-automated feedback system via LMS -synchronous sessions used for feedback and not lectures -comments embedded in student output (Google Docs comments) -email correspondences -out-of-class time consultation -end of semester evaluation

Table 6: Matrix of teaching techniques/adjustments employed by faculty members

Further perusal of the above-mentioned list of accommodations reveals the blueprint of UDL at play. The table below summarizes the teaching strategies and categorizes each under the UDL principles.

Engagement	***Representation***	***Action and Expression***
Guided modules (printed) designed for autonomous learning (self-paced and self-administered)	Digital modules available in different formats: -pdf -doc -ppt -jpeg -mp4 (video/animation) -Zoom recording -mp3/podcast format	For final speech requirements -accommodations for students with no camera, mic, or internet -accommodations for students with no study/performance area at home
Guided modules (digital) designed for autonomous learning (self-paced and self-administered)	Printed modules (with learning guides and teaching guides)	Activities -options for individual, pair, or small group work -options for submission (digital or printed)
Authentic learning materials -Curated repository of reading, viewing, listening list based on current events and student profile	Live Zoom lectures with multimedia	Assessment tools Option for multimedia and low bandwidth assessments depending on student capacity
Assessments: -performance-based -task-based -project-based -targets critical/creative thinking over objective summative assessments	Dedicated website with multi-app integration for interaction	
Feedback -required periodic consultations (feedback through paper submissions, video conference, text-based correspondences)	Curated reading, viewing, listening list (based on current events and student profile)	

Table 7 Table of activities categorized based on the UDL Principles

The matrices above that served as the blueprint for the pilot pandemic semester show that a big chunk of instructional design is providing an array of options for the students where faculty members are not forced to "grade a fish by its ability to climb a tree." Similarly, a big chunk of course pack roll out is adjusting and adapting because learning is not free size. Based on the practice of the Public Speaking instructors, teaching strategies employed that are in line with UDL's Engagement Principle include activities that promote student autonomy over their learning, a sense of community through authentic learning materials, and motivation through periodic consultation sessions. The UDL Representation Principle is evident in the multimedia and low bandwidth instructional materials specifically created and curated to assist students in perceiving and assimilating learning experiences despite the remote setup. Finally, the UDL Action and Expression Principle is practiced through tapping different channels for communication, avenues for creativity, and multiple means to embody public speaking concepts.

Keeping the UDL Framework at the core of instructional practice may be taxing for educators, but with the present circumstances, it is no longer a mere debate on preference, teaching style, or academic culture. Preparation for pandemic learning had to go back to the basics of "what does the circumstance permit us to do?" Most of the studies in UDL point to accommodating differences in cognitive and physical abilities. However, in this pandemic, teachers are dealt with more cards. These include students from provinces with unstable connectivity, students with limitations in navigating digital technologies, students with no gadgets, working students, students locked in with abusive caretakers, cramped homes, shared spaces not conducive to learning, among a host of other

student setups all under the shadow of a devastating pandemic. Planning with a range in mind is a) understanding that there are barriers to learning that the Filipino student is facing, b) not romanticizing and relying on Filipino resilience, c) accepting that teachers are one of the main players in student learning and success; and finally, d) exhausting means to lessen barriers, creating an environment where these barriers are addressed, or at least temporarily work around the barriers in order to achieve learning goals.

In one of the department's division meetings, committee members arrived at the conclusion that one of the best ways to plan for the students is to plan WITH the students. Teachers come in the semester with a pre-structured/semi-structured course pack making sure that it is anchored in the goals of the department, college, and university. But in doing so, teachers must operate with a mental note that all academic preparations are only finalized upon engagement with the student. It is time to give students authority to really take more responsibility for their learning and allow them to construct the direction of the semester. This gives students a sense of ownership of their education that then paves the way for a sense of investment in the learning process. Of course, there are - must be - non-negotiables like the course goals, course outcomes, and the core values of the institution, but teachers must allow as much student participation in the details of the course. In this process, teachers get a more holistic understanding of the needs and capacity of students which in turn better informs instructional design and preparation. Students' input may also be welcomed in rubric making, enrichment activities, assessments, semestral calendar planning, and the like. This may come with some hesitation from faculty members who treat the syllabus or instructional plan as sacred. However, a more in-depth examination of the profile of our students and the resources available in the digital age demands learning institutions to regard students not as mere empty receptacles waiting to be filled with knowledge (Forcier and Descy 13) but as partners and stakeholders in the pursuit of learning.

Another way to include more student insight in instructional design is by institutionalizing feedback generating mechanisms such as but not limited to student consultations and referenda, mid-year evaluations, student assemblies and conferences, curricular and extracurricular surveys, socials, exit interviews for graduating students, and alumni engagement. Educators may harvest useful information that may aid instructional design and better inform the teaching practice. In the words of the university's Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Louise Jashil Sonido at the EduTech Philippines 2021 Conference, "touching base with students" has a valuable impact in informing the university's way forward. Engaging students in the planning process allows educational institutions to avoid reducing instruction into mere consumption of mass-produced modules and course packs. Further investigation of the matrices above reveal that the UDL-guided flexible, accessible, and student-centered teaching strategies allude to Agile Design Models, an emerging instructional design framework that aims to prepare students for "volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous" (Bates) contexts such as the present learning conditions.

Take the full turn to digital

It is very evident by now that the migration to remote learning demands more than just a change in platform as if simply evacuating from one classroom to another. This migration demands a complete reframing - educational technology experts would even call it a paradigm shift (Bridges et al. 210) - of how teachers look at and practice teaching.

The pandemic teaching force has found themselves adopting teaching strategies that were unheard of in pre-pandemic classrooms: recording video lectures, testing out different software programs and applications, setting up mini home studios, speaking to dead silent Zoom meeting rooms, designing unproctored assessments, figuring out automated quizzing platforms, teaching from home with a formal top and "pambahay" shorts, and a host of other *first times*. Studies on how teachers

acclimatized to the new teaching environment have yet to emerge. In addition, remote learning is not really what most teachers have trained, prepared, and signed up for. One thing was clear during the committee preparations: "teaching as you were taught won't work anymore" (Fawcett and Juliana 71). Furthermore, teaching as you taught pre-pandemic, forcing some old practices no matter how *tried-and-tested* these may be, might only yield unfavorable results. Instructional design experts assert that the digital age, even without the pandemic, demands teachers to rethink teaching approaches and strategies (Donaldson and Knupfer 43) in this changing society. And now that majority of the population is already immersed in the ubiquity, instantaneity, and interconnectivity of this high-tech world, experts warn present-day teachers that there is no turning back (Prensky 1), there is no escaping technology (Selwyn 390; Edwards et al. 3), and there is no other choice (Tucker 171).

Unfortunately, but unsurprisingly, technology integration in Philippine classrooms has not materialized the way educational technology experts around the world have predicted. As key drivers in the learning environment, teachers must be equipped with tools to navigate the digital space. However, a deeper investigation of narratives from public speaking teachers in the department brings to fore challenges to effective technology-assisted pandemic teaching. In a foreign study, Heyoung (59) would go as far as saying that teachers ARE the barriers to technology integration in classrooms. The scholar clarifies that there are hindrances that contribute to teachers' hesitation to make the digital turn: lack of knowledge about information and communication technologies used for teaching; lack of experience in migrating to digital after years of training in the physical classroom; time constraints for preparation and implementation of technology-enhanced instruction; technical difficulties and the lack of troubleshooting knowledge; students' lack of enthusiasm and unwillingness to cooperate; and the teachers' logistic limitations to access technology (Heyoung 47-53). On top of these factors, Gilakjani (264), in another study, adds that the lack of professional development programs also contributes to the hesitation.

Teachers are the main drivers in the pursuit of learning and their technological capabilities are critical (Sharma and Koli 49) now more than ever in a time of mandatory remote learning. These realizations all point to the need for improved state support for faculty retooling, provision of resources, humane working conditions, academic freedom without threats of red-tagging, and fair compensation. The education system will only fail, and fail miserably, if state and university administrators refuse to accept that there will be changes in the "how, what, when, where" (Gagne et al. 208), and quite evidently in the student profiles of the past years, even the *who* (Prensky 1) of learning. Accommodations for students can only be made if accommodations for faculty members are also set in place.

Aside from just relocating the teaching practice to maximize the spatial and temporal flexibility of remote learning, an overhaul of how educational institutions are perceived is important. This reframing entails more than just providing internet access and gadgets to students and teachers. As Sharma and Koli put it, "there are also many things that are valuable in education, as in life, that technology cannot do" (17) like in-person social interactions and instructional and relational immediacy. This underscores that technology is just the vehicle towards change and the teachers remain to be the key component and driving force in the pursuit of learning. High tech does not automatically equate to high efficacy. It is not a question of what technologies are present (although, of course, the basic gadgets for connectivity are necessary), but a question of how these technologies are used to facilitate learning and relate with the world. In educational technology, education is written first before technology as if reminding teachers that pedagogical grounding takes precedence over digital fireworks.

In the process of reflecting on public speaking pedagogy as a service unit in the university, teachers were forced to confront questions that are not entirely new but mere elephants in the room: What type of knowledge, skills, values must be taught to Filipino students especially during a global

health crisis? Are lessons in the humanities still a matter of importance in this political climate? Is public speaking still relevant now? Is formal education still relevant now? What is the role, if there is any, of public speaking in the digital age? What is the role, if there is any, of public speaking during a pandemic? Will public speaking instruction survive remote learning? What types of graduates and citizens are needed as the country moves forward from the pandemic? Does the current educational system support the needs in moving forward? What kind of classroom must be created once all of this is over, if it will ever be over? What kind of world is expected in the event that the human race survives this?

These questions may seem to be off on a tangent with regard to the UDL framework this paper operates under, but a closer scrutiny would reveal that the practice of interrogation is a manifestation of the very foundation of UDL: inclusion. It is understanding that there is a world outside the classroom and that ultimately, the classrooms extend to that world. The persistence of students and teachers in continuing education informs us that learning is still viewed as an essential human undertaking even amid a pandemic. However, it is also worth asking: what are educational institutions teaching students if learning continues business-as-usual while students randomly get dropped from Zoom calls because of poor internet connectivity or worse, students missing class to fight for their lives?

In the course of this pandemic, #NoStudentLeftBehind has regularly appeared on social media with the most recent trend in May 2021 after netizens protested against the "normalization" (Hernando-Malipot) of the current educational setup without providing accommodations for students in need. As of writing, the hashtag has 62, 00 hits on Facebook and 39, 700 hits on Google Search. It frequently appears with other calls such as #LigtasBalikEskwela, #WalangIwanan, and #WalangIwananUP serving as distress signals as students struggle to keep up.

In the department, alignment meetings and informal conversations with colleagues have a tendency to immediately transform into support groups with narratives of students' struggles shared as if to quench the need for psychological debriefing - a student apologized for not being able to submit requirements because the student was the only one in their family spared from the wrath of the virus; another student asked for help as their family evacuated to their roof after their 2-storey house was submerged during the Cagayan flooding in November 2020; every now and then, the Facebook timeline becomes an obituary of sorts with posts of condolences from different social circles. These stories are the backdrop of everyday work in the academe, a stark contrast from the rhetoric of Sundar Pichai, CEO of Google and Alphabet, during his commencement address for the first of its kind virtual graduation exercises produced by YouTube for the graduating Class of 2020, the first batch of students who did not receive the usual send-off rites due to the pandemic. The centerpiece of the speech was a reminder, "you will prevail" (01:11), meant to lift the spirit of the graduates who were stuck in their homes and with no clear path forward. Pichai then proceeds to tell stories of similar moments in history that, according to him, mirrors what the whole world is experiencing at that moment: the Class of 1920 who graduated after a flu pandemic; the class of 1970 who graduated during the Vietnam War; and Class 2001 who graduated the year of the 9-11 terror attacks (01:23-01:42). And then, he reiterates his thesis statement by saying, "in all cases, they prevailed" (01:48). Pichay argues that history is enough proof that students of the present generation "have every reason to be hopeful" (01:54) because earlier generations who underwent a similar fate, made it. Hope and faith are essential tools for human survival but the assumption of survival is fallacious and in the context of the speech, historically inaccurate. Pichai failed to include an important part of the narrative in his rhetoric: a significant number of individuals, in whatever circumstance, do not make it. In fact, a quick Google search would show the death toll for each of Pichai's historical references and the present worsening pandemic.

Focusing only on the narratives of the ones who were privileged enough to survive and thrive is detrimental to the decisions and actions in building a flexible and inclusive learning environment.

Learning vicariously through the people who "prevailed" is a healthy exercise for reflection but must not be the end of the evaluative process. Let it be a jump off point to ask: What happened to the others? Why are they not as fortunate? And what can educational institutions of today do differently to make sure all students get an equal shot?

Fostering an educational ethic of care through *student familiarity*; providing access to all students by *planning with a range in mind*; and demanding for and maximizing support in *taking the full turn to digital* - these reflections are at the heart of the UDL framework that promises to be one of the "core levers" of transformative learning (CAST). With the demands of the digital age and the pervasive damage brought by the pandemic, "turn of the millennium teachers are facing the most dramatic paradigm shift to emerge in the educational community in the last several centuries" (Bridges 210). Without losing any more time, teachers are encouraged to be open to embrace digital technologies as necessary tools in teaching, and learn alongside students. The UDL places the teacher at the forefront to bring the shift to light while also inspiriting other education stakeholders to sustain these conversations until affordances for all students - and teachers - are in place.

Above are preliminary reflections of an ongoing action research of a Public Speaking general education course' migration to remote learning. Moving forward, may the paper contribute to the ongoing discussion about the importance of an educational system that is more responsive to the times, more mindful of the diversity of students, and more equipped to make sure that in the migration to a better normal, there will be #NoStudentLeftBehind.

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