Moving to a New Land: A Case Study of Secondary Teachers’ Experience of Online Teaching

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ABSTRACT
In this paper, the authors seek, through the theoretical framework of situated cognition learning theory, to document and understand the experiences and views of teachers who are in their first year of instructing secondary students online. Using a case study methodology, the authors captured these secondary teachers’ perceptions of their most successful experiences in teaching online students, as well as their view of the challenges and difficulties they experienced in this transition. In turn, the authors wished to determine what supports are needed for secondary teachers to ease their transition to this new land. Three salient themes emerged through the analysis of data: interacting with students, interacting with and adapting curriculum, and pedagogical approaches and engaging in self-reflection on their role as teacher which led to deeper questions of establishing teacher–student relationships and effective e-pedagogy.

Keywords: E-Pedagogy, Online Teaching, Situated Cognition Learning Theory, Teacher-Student Relationships, Theoretical Framework

INTRODUCTION
There is no doubt that our world is changing. With the influx of technology in all aspects of our lives, particularly as our workplaces are demanding new forms of information production and communication, our classrooms and learning programs are changing. The changing of workplace jobs and skill demands for people to live and thrive require our students to master 21st-century skills in order to succeed (Solomon & Schrum, 2007). Indeed education is feeling the pressure to offer learning opportunities using technology as students are increasingly requesting more flexible modes of learning such as online learning. We are witnessing a drastic increase in online learning in a variety of places (Hu & Meyen, 2011).

This emergence of online learning courses in K to 12 schools demands more qualified teachers who are well prepared to take on the challenge. Because online teaching, particularly in K to 12 classrooms, is a relatively new endeavor, many struggle to adapt to with online teaching and learning. Questions concerning the technical elements of delivering successful online courses become tangled with questions of meeting the online learner’s needs even though technology should be used only as a tool and the objectives need to be set to create a learning...
environment “in which both the process and goals are stimulating and engaging, and which take individual student differences into account” (Felix, 2003). Therefore many compelling questions arise such as: how do teachers adapt to online teaching? What are teachers’ experiences when they transfer from face-to-face teaching to online teaching? What do teachers say about their most successful moments in online classrooms? What challenges and difficulties do teachers have in online teaching?

RESEARCH PURPOSE

In this paper, we seek to document and understand the experiences and views of teachers who are in their first year of instructing secondary students online. Specifically, we wanted to capture these secondary teachers’ perceptions of their most successful experiences in teaching online students, as well as their view of the challenges and difficulties they experienced. In turn, we wished to determine what supports are needed for secondary teachers in order to ease their transition to this new land.

Online teaching in this instance refers to instructing within a course that fully depends upon computer-mediated communication as well as additional technology supports such as fax machines and face-to-face office hours. Because there are limited studies exploring secondary teachers’ online teaching experience in the literature, a case study devoted to understanding online teachers’ lived experiences best lent itself to examining this issue.

This study focuses on a group of mathematics and science secondary teachers who a) had moved beyond incorporating technology into their day to day face to face teaching by shifting to a fully online instructional environment and b) were new to instructing exclusively within an online environment.

RELATED LITERATURE

Schools are shifting toward a blended model of learning to integrate and support learning technologies and incorporate new learning strategies that are student-centred, authentic, inquiry-based, and collaborative (Dikkers, Lewis, & Whiteside, 2011; ISTE, 2000). This shift has often resulted in increased pressure on teachers to build online courses, modify existing courses to include online components, and/or teach in a distributed environment that blends online with more traditional, face-to-face methods, requiring a dramatic change in the roles and responsibilities of teachers (Kerr, 2011; Reyes-Mendez, Torres-Velandia, Harrison, & Moonah, 2003). The following review of related literature focuses on the transition teachers undergo as they adapt to this new land.

Transitions to Online Instruction

The shift to online instruction requires teachers to re-examine their pedagogical beliefs and assumptions about learning (Kerr, 2011; Solomon & Schrum, 2007). Researchers (Prallof & Pratt, 2001; Salmon, 2004) argued for the development of an e-pedagogy that involves a change in the traditional practices of teachers. Previous research (Kleiman, 2002; Salmon, 2004; Willment & Cleveland-Innes, 2002) found that this is a transitional journey whereby instructors go through several phases of adaptation before they feel comfortable within this different realm of instruction. According to MacKeracher (1996), instructors often need to rework their model of reality as they engage in this transition toward becoming an online teacher. In making room for the new reality of being an online instructor, a revision of self often occurs which includes examining values and beliefs that inform self and how instructors perceive their role as an educator. Many experienced instructors within a face-to-face environment but new to online teaching struggle with this transition. While they understand the dynamics of successful teaching and learning as well as their role in facilitating within a face-to-face context, they struggle with “how to do that” as an online instructor and feel that their identity as an instructor was challenged (Willment, Baynton, Groen, & Slater, 2005).
The Impact upon Comprehension and Reading Tasks of Preservice Elementary Teachers Using a Web 2.0 Reading Extension


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