Chapter III

What to Expect When Teaching Online

Introduction

This chapter sets out to discover how teachers view online teaching and what they experience when teaching online. It focuses on the stories that the 44 instructors shared with me during the interviews taken for this book. A brief perusal through the literature shows reports of increased time demands, more preparation and hard work, and a need for improved technical skills are just some of the issues that online education was reported to put upon teachers. Yet, as a result of this research, new issues were found, enhancing the knowledge on this subject of online teaching; for example, the extent of the adjustments made by teachers (discussed in greater detail in Chapter VII), the skill gap in technology among teachers and students (covered in Chapter V), and the tradeoffs faced by the teachers when moving to an online educational environment.

Background

A study by Vrasida and McIsaac (2000) shows that teaching online is not easy, because it requires preparation and hard work. It is concluded that teachers should expect to spend more time on course development, student assessment, and other course-related activities when teaching online, as reported by Pallof and Pratt (1999) and by Hall (2002).
Instructors report that online teaching requires more technical skills and that both the use of technology and the course content pose specific challenges. Hence, teachers need help preparing their online course materials, and this could come from professional developers.

The traditional, on-ground classroom is reported to be a much richer media than the online classroom, and to offer excellent support for human communication. In general, human communication is overwhelmingly dominated by body movements over vocal cues and verbal cues (Merrill & Reid, 1981). In terms of learning, written materials rate rather low. Pike (1989) showed that people, in their efforts to learn, generally retain 10% of what they read, 20% of what they hear, 30% of what they read and hear, 30% of what they see, 50% of what they see and hear, 70% of what they say, and 90% of what they teach or do (Pike, 1989, p. 153). This translates into an entirely different approach to communication and teaching when doing it online.

Where the social contexts are different, learning designs should be different. The online environment is more formal in that it relies mainly on writing and hence requires more time to think. It is reported that when online, there is less teacher control over the social context of learning. Nicol, Minty, and Sinclair (2003) suggest that reusable dialogues can help students learn and reduce teacher workload when the archives of prior discussions are available for review.

Text-based communication, prevalent in the online classroom, supports sustained reflection in classroom exchanges. Students develop a sense of accountability from the high visibility of the Web (Sengupta, 2001). In this regard, technology can promote learning in more complex areas of knowledge, such as analysis, synthesis, and creative judgment. Yet, both media richness and social influence affect the media communication choices in Web-based learning (Huerta, Ryan, & Igbaria, 2003).

Students and teachers value the flexibility offered by the asynchronous dimension of the online class. This may result in more collaboration taking place online (Klipowicz & Laniak, 1999). Advantageously, the online learning environment offers the potential to be more female friendly; its anonymity allows students to interact online without the distracting noise of social conditioning (Sullivan, 2002).

With regard to the issue of class size, it is reported that it matters. On one hand, if the class is large, the number of online postings can be quite overwhelming. On the other hand, if the class is very small, the online discussions may not go well (Brower, 2003). As for the quality of the interaction, a study by Angeli, Valanides, and Bonk (2003) found that, at times, the students’ online dialogue does very little to support learning as it is mostly related to personal experiences and does not reflect well-supported reasoning. In general, the classes that have the best course outcomes tend to be small and combine face-to-face with online instruction—a “Web-enhanced class” (Palloff & Pratt, 2001, p. 168).
Related Content

Central Ideas: Technology
www.igi-global.com/chapter/central-ideas-technology/18669?camid=4v1a

Knowledge Sharing Portal Evaluation: An Extended Analysis of Knowledge Seekers’ and Experts’ Feedback
www.igi-global.com/article/knowledge-sharing-portal-evaluation/75208?camid=4v1a

A Case Study of Ontology-Driven Development of Intelligent Educational Systems
www.igi-global.com/article/case-study-ontology-driven-development/3023?camid=4v1a
Requirements Capture Analysis for MOOCS in Higher Education
www.igi-global.com/chapter/requirements-capture-analysis-for-moocs-in-higher-education/137318?camid=4v1a