Chapter 6
Identifying the Differences Between Online and F2F Teaching

ABSTRACT

Governing agencies and administrators of education have typically been operating under the impression that online teaching is Face-to-Face (F2F) teaching using computers. This belief is a negative stereotype of education that is continually disproven by instructors of both modes, students of both modes, and research into the similarities and differences. Traditional pedagogies have a longstanding role in the F2F classroom, which do not always transfer into the online classroom. Rather, online pedagogy should be considered as a distinct area of study that addresses the new and evolving pedagogies regarding technology and online learning. Specifically, this chapter identifies what the differences are between online and F2F education in order to demonstrate the unique and necessary distinction of online pedagogy from traditional pedagogies.

INTRODUCTION

Much of the debate about the new technologies is phrased in a familiar idiom of “man-vs-machine,” whether technology-based instruction can effectively replace face-to-face interaction. But the use of technology can only be evaluated against some specific pedagogical expectations. Even a cursory examination of these suggests that technology is likely to have a profound effect on pedagogy, but perhaps not in a straightforward way. If technology threatens the traditional relationship of pro-
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Professor to students, it implies, ironically, other possibilities that may not be as readily met through technology. –D. C. Paris (2000)

In terms of training and preparation, there is an overarching stereotype that governs the way in which online course management and teacher training occur: The face-to-face (F2F) classroom is able to be replicated exactly in the online classroom. Textbooks about teaching online, until recently, have revered in this stereotype perpetuating the idea that if you can teach well F2F, you can teach well online. However, more recent scholarship is breaking away from this view by naming online teaching its own unique discipline (Boettcher & Conrad, 2010; Cronjé, 2001; Cummings, Bonk, & Jacobs, 2002; Granić, Mišud, & Ćukušić, 2009; Kennedy, 2005; Liebein, 2000; Littlejohn, Falconer, & Mcgill, 2008; Maor, 2006; Nachmias, 2002; Palloff & Pratt, 2007; Rovai, 2000; Savenye, Olina, & Niemczyk, 2001). First, recognizing that there are differences between F2F and online education is a significant step forward in administrative progress.

One of the biggest differences between F2F and online instruction (which was addressed in Chapter Two of this text) is the role of the teacher, which has changed significantly and will continue to change (Paris, 2000, p. 95). From King’s (1993) College Teaching article, we gained the phrases “sage on the stage” and “guide on the side” as phrases to represent the transitioning role of the instructor from F2F to online teaching. These phrases have stuck with the field of education, continually being used as a foundation for developing more perspectives, and constantly referenced for new online instructors. King uses these phrases to explain:

In most college classrooms, the professor lectures and the students listen and take notes. The professor is the central figure, the “sage on the stage,” the one who has the knowledge and transmits that knowledge to the students, who simply memorize the information and later reproduce it on an exam—often without even thinking about it. This model of the teaching-learning process, called the transmittal model, assumes that the student’s brain is like an empty container into which the professor pours knowledge. In this view of teaching and learning, students are passive learners rather than active ones. Such a view is outdated and will not be effective for the twenty-first century, when individuals will be expected to think for themselves, pose and solve complex problems, and generally produce knowledge rather than reproduce it (p. 30).

Rather, King argues for a re-evaluation of the constructivist theory which argues that, knowledge does not come packaged in books, or journals, or computer disks (or professors’ and students’ heads) to be transmitted intact to one another. Those vessels contain information, not knowledge. Rather, knowledge is a state of understanding and can only exist in the mind of the individual knower; as such, knowledge must be constructed—or re-constructed—by each individual knower through the process of trying to make sense