

Chapter 9

The Transformation of an ESL Teacher From the Face-to-Face to the Online Environment

Evelyn Doman
University of Guam, Guam

ABSTRACT

This chapter records the author's transformation as she develops into an online teacher after teaching face-to-face courses for over 20 years. By using autoethnography as the research approach, the phases of the author's transition from face-to-face, to blended, and finally to fully online teaching are documented. Qualitative data is presented in this chapter from field notes, journals, reflections, and discussion board posts in an online certificate course. Transformative learning theory provides the theory behind this study as it creates a context for making judgments about transformed frames of reference. Findings reveal changes in the mindset of the author while redesigning courses to fit the online platform, as well as immediately after teaching blended and then fully online courses. Implications of this research suggest that obstacles to teaching can be opportunities for personal enrichment and growth and that faculty can adjust to new environments if provided with proper training.

INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that today's generation of students is composed of digital natives. Teachers owe it to their students to hone their fondness for technology into productive educational purposes both inside and outside the classroom. New pedagogical approaches like the flipped classroom and blended learning have proven to support learning outcomes that comprise best practices of active learning (Webb & Doman, 2016). However, for teachers, it is not always easy to keep up with advances in technology or to adapt the way that they teach to embrace technology into their tool belts of teaching techniques and strategies. As teachers incorporate technology-assisted teaching, their roles, beliefs, and self-identities are challenged. When embracing either partial online teaching—like the flipped or blended classroom—or fully online teaching, teachers must develop new strategies to ensure that students are staying on task,

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-7438-5.ch009

are fulfilling the objectives of the course, and are interacting with the materials and each other in the changed environment. Over time, teachers can feel themselves becoming reinvented with new skill sets and expanded ways of thinking about teaching and learning. This chapter explores the author's transformation from being a traditional face-to-face teacher, to a flipped classroom teacher, and finally to an online teacher. Before investigating on the changes that the author has undergone while transitioning between teaching and learning environments, it is important to first offer some background information about her as an educator.

BACKGROUND

The author has been involved in the world of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) for the past 25 years. During this time, she has worn all possible hats in the field: teacher, teacher trainer, administrator, curriculum writer, and materials developer. The range of university courses the author has taught has included language skills-based courses for all proficiency levels, English for Specific Purposes courses, academic writing, tourism, business English, and teacher training courses for pre-service and in-service teachers of English Language Learners (ELLs). She currently coordinates a Master of Education in TESOL (M.Ed. TESOL) program.

The author's desire to first experiment with technology-assisted language teaching came in 2009 when she was teaching at a small university outside of Atlanta with a supportive faculty who were all eager to embrace technology to keep up with the demands of the students. It was during this time that she first used Blackboard and Desire2Learn (D2L) as a learning management system.

The interest in technology and its role in education grew in 2012 when the author began working as the Director of the English Language Center at a university in Macau. In this position, she had access to numerous online and on-campus faculty development programs which led a few colleagues and her to begin a journey in using the flipped classroom approach. While preparing and then delivering a flipped language class, the team watched a range of online videos and read numerous books on applying technology in the classroom. Not only did their flipped experience lead to improved teaching and learning of outcomes, but it also changed how they felt about technology and about allowing students freedom in undertaking independent learning activities outside the classroom with the aid of selected platforms that they trained the students on, some of which included VoiceThread, screencasts, and interactive presentation platforms like Nearpod.

In the process of transitioning from a face-to-face teacher, then a blended flipped teacher, and finally an online teacher, the author of this chapter has sought to integrate the pedagogy and best practices that she has come to treasure. King (2001) said that not only must faculty find the best ways to guide their usage of technology, but that they must also understand the changes they go through as they transform their own teaching practices. During the transformative process, the literature has cited many challenges to planning and implementing an online course; some of these include the time it takes to develop and teach an online course (Lewis & Abdul-Hamid, 2006), the ability to use technology to support student learning (De Gagne & Walters, 2009), ways to adapt strategies in online courses (Brinthaupt, Fisher, Gardner, Raffo, & Woodward, 2011), and the need for the role of the professor to change from that as a teacher to that of a mentor or facilitator (Johnson, 2008). The obstacles require teachers to come up with new ways to think about learning. As a course is being transformed, so is the faculty member.

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