Chapter 30

Applying a Teaching Decision Cycle to the Design of Online Learning Within Faculty Professional Development

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ABSTRACT

Higher education instructors who will be teaching online for the first time need institutional assistance. Migrating a face-to-face course to an online setting requires some understanding of the differences in a physical and virtual setting. This chapter proposes that the design of courses for online delivery can be facilitated by professional development in which instructional design is used to examine important teaching decisions. A framing of instructional design for college instructors, the teaching decision cycle (TDC), prompts a re-examination of assumptions and F2F teaching decisions. A three-day professional development event is laid out in which the TDC is used to structure instructor re-thinking and designing of a F2F course to a new online or hybrid course. Research opportunities along five categories are suggested.

BACKGROUND

College instructors are used to designing courses for face-to-face (F2F) delivery, typically organized around the development of a syllabus with sections addressing learning outcomes, student activities, assessment plan, policies, and schedule. For those new to teaching online, the initial development of online and blended courses can easily become a "save-as" version of their F2F courses, ignoring the attributes and constraints of the online medium.

Institutions have turned to faculty professional development (PD) to assist faculty to move their existing and new courses online. However, PD for online/blended course design tends to focus on how to use the course management system (CMS) with less emphasis on the instructional design decisions that

provide a foundation for online teaching decisions using a CMS. Instructional design provides a structured process which involves an analysis of what has been done and what might be done, determination of course goals, and a design for how those goals are met with instruction. The ID process also examines implementation and evaluation of the design, all of which inform ongoing revision of the online. Within the ID process, instructional issues address learning outcomes, assessment and teaching, and increasingly how media and technology become part of the teaching decisions.

The quality of online courses varies tremendously resulting in institutions turning to a number of quality control programs (e.g., Quality Matters) to ensure robust online courses. While these approaches help faculty to re-think learning outcomes and appropriate assessment, the quality criteria become a checklist for online course design, as opposed to a more informed pedagogical approach, including an awareness of how people learn (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000) and how different instructional approaches and models can be used to assist students in achieving learning outcomes (Joyce, Weil, & Calhoun, 2014). In effect, much of professional development for new online courses involves how to meet the criteria of these quality control programs using a CMS. Thus, a quality online course requires that one adhere to a checklist of features, as opposed to faculty making informed teaching decisions, many of which address the contextual realities of a course for students, the instructor, and within a program. A checklist cannot address the context of any course, realities which impact students and instructor.

This chapter advocates the use of instructional design (ID), which prompts instructors to be clear about learning outcomes and the range of what is to be learned, but also learner differences and the contextual realities of the teaching and learning setting. The online educational setting involves more than the CMS site, but how the course is situated within a degree or credentialing program. Students are increasingly attentive to how programs help them get jobs and change careers, so successful online programs are more than a collection of online courses. They require systematic program review so that goals of the program are continually being re-examined and held accountable to those goals or revisions of those goals (Shambaugh, 2017).

Appropriate PD for online course design and teaching needs to include a means for instructors to be clear about learning outcomes and other details before designing features in a CMS; in effect, to re-examine assumptions from F2F courses, involving learning outcomes, student characteristics, student activity and engagement, teaching and assessment, as well as policies and procedures needed to manage an online course. One way to facilitate this re-examination of assumptions for an online course is to use the Teaching Decision Cycle (TDC) (Shambaugh & Magliaro, 2006). The TDC prompts instructors to ask and answer key teaching questions: what is to be learned, how is that learning assessed, what teaching options can be selected to support the learning, and how does media/technology support the choices of learning outcomes, assessment, and teaching options (i.e., teaching models, content-specific and general teaching strategies). The overall purpose of this chapter is to introduce these questions to help faculty make teaching decisions for online courses and to suggest how this approach can be delivered within a F2F professional development setting.

The chapter first summarizes the challenges facing both instructors and staff support in the design of online and blended courses. In a second section, the TDC is described and its prior use summarized. The TDC applies instructional design phases that organize teaching decisions (learning outcomes, assessment, teaching, technology). The third section discusses the use of the TDC across a three-day F2F PD event for faculty looking to re-design courses for online teaching. In the final section research topics are suggested.

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