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Chapter XII

The Plain Hard Work of Teaching Online: Strategies for Instructors

Dianne Conrad, Athabasca University, Canada

Abstract

Learning to teach online presents new challenges to even seasoned instructors. In an age of technological wizardry, the author of this chapter proposes that there are no secrets to good online teaching. However, the effective application of sound pedagogy online requires time, effort, and planning. Using Collins and Berge's framework for online teaching, this chapter outlines how novice instructors' adaptation to the new medium must include attention to the pedagogical, managerial, technical, and social aspects of teaching. In so doing, online teachers are encouraged to move from a didactic, teacher-centered paradigm to a constructivist-based model where community and collaboration are valued equally with content.

Introduction

Online learning, or e-learning, is no longer new to us. We are familiar with the hyped rhetoric of time-space compression, of technological wizardry, and of globalization. Even those of us who are too old to become digital natives are comfortable with myriad computer-type gadgets that allow us to instantly access or send information visually or verbally to destinations around the world.

As educators, we are learning to handle technologies so that we can feel somewhat technically competent. However, in such a technology-rich world, it remains a challenge to convince novice online instructors that there is no magic bullet and no magic platform to guarantee online teaching success. If there *is* a secret to good online teaching, it is simply hard work—layered, of course, on sound pedagogy. In this chapter, using recent research and my own teaching experience, I will discuss techniques to facilitate the transition of novice instructors to online teaching situations in formal postsecondary environments. The chapter's central argument focuses on Gunawardena's (1992) "letting go"—the moving from teacher-centered to learner-centered pedagogy as the prime focus in making the transition to online teaching (Hase & Ellis, 2002)—and situates such a shift in a socially oriented context of community, collaboration, communication, collegiality, and commitment. The discussion rests on two related sets of assumptions. The first set of assumptions extols the merits and possibilities of experiential learning, as outlined by Alexander and Boud (2002): experience is the foundation of learning, learners actively construct their own experience, learning is holistic and not merely cognitive, learning does not occur in isolation but is socially and culturally constructed, and learning is contextual. The second set of assumptions are those that recognize online learning's potential for deep learning through activities that encourage collaborative learning and critical thinking (Garrison & Archer, 2000; Kanuka, 2002; Oliver, 2002).

The examples and references that illustrate this chapter's premise will resonate most clearly with those who are teaching in formal postsecondary environments. Using as a starting point Collins and Berge's (1996) designation of four cornerstone functions for teaching online, I will advocate for reframing online instruction to equally value connection, community, collaboration, along with the traditional cognitive stronghold, content.

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