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The Transition from Real to Virtual – How Educators Can Successfully Move from Face-to-face to Online Instruction

Many teaching professionals are finding themselves in a position where they need to include themselves in an online teaching environment. The brick and mortar institutions that they have been so long a part of are trying to adapt to a variety of demands and as a result there are large scale efforts to introduce classes delivered through online learning.

Teachers confronted with this pedagogical change are discovering too that to move from the long practiced and familiar face-to-face environment to the new world of online learning brings additional difficulties and responsibilities. Despite these issues and others though, teachers are experiencing a great deal of success and satisfaction in making this ambitious change.

Challenge of Change

The path to online learning is a difficult one, not entirely because of its inherent technological challenges. Just as earlier forms of distance education were viewed with criticism, suspicion, and disregard, so too are online courses given the same scrutiny. Besides the technological the procedural challenges that teachers face in adapting to the online format, this

added concern makes the transition for teachers potentially more problematic and less desirable.

The challenge for teachers to move themselves online, let along their material, is multi-fold. Regardless of any system-related or process-defined changes, there also exists the ability that an online teacher is more easily scrutinized for their work since it is suspended in a retrievable environment. Unlike the spoken word but very similar to the written word, the common tool of choice for classes, the online forum, is as accessible and retrievable as well-used tome in a public library. Even other aspects that are not as readily used across online classes are stored for future access (video, audio, etc.).

To be a teacher of online learners means being willing to learn as a teacher as well. For seasoned teachers who have grown comfortable in their methods and seen success as instructors, this is new territory. The implied threat that online learning poses to their profession, both as a body and as individuals, requires that they adjust their way of thinking and adapt to this “brave new world” or risk losing their significance.

As some have experienced before, it may require reapplying for your own job.

Experience as a Teacher

For those teachers that are able to take an online course themselves from a “online-knowledgeable” instructor, there are some lessons learned they can bring forward into their own online classes. Experiencing the needs of students in this setting, it is possible for

educators to identify practical situations where they themselves can see the benefits an active teaching presence can make in this wired environment.

To perform the duties of this new position requires a number of skills that teachers may not have employed before.

Open Communication – there is a depth of exchanges that is expected within an online environment, perhaps to replace or compensate for that interaction that normally occurs when meeting in the flesh.

Community Building – in a traditional classroom setting, there are very limited reasons for students to be anything else self-absorbed, scrambling to get a teacher’s attention in order to demonstrate their knowledge and looking for ways to improve their grade. Online classrooms however require a more engaging approach wherein students are actively brought closer together through the use of communication tools, exercises, and other constructs.

Less Lectern – While being an expert still accounts for a great deal as an online teacher, how you apply that knowledge is doubly important. Just spouting off quotes and delivering rehearsed speeches is no way to integrate a student into the material. The need now is for special individuals who can be more than just a soapbox of ideas in the front of a class