

Opening statement response.

Digital Delerium present their comments and queries to Team *Presto!* initially through a “*tongue in cheek*” stream of consciousness monologue and then under a more structured five headings approach.

Monologue:

The pro side amply explains, explores, extrapolates and emphatically wins the argument as to whether or not a good lecturer can become a good on line teacher.

Their argument has ample evidence of how the characteristics of the ‘good’ lecturer like: a willingness to learn new things and etc. will but of course be useful and helpful in their quest to become a ‘good’ online lecturer. They state that they “*have successfully argued that technical barriers do not prohibit a teacher from a teacher from functioning to the best of their professional ability*”.

What are the barriers to which they refer?

We can go on here to show which of their arguments relate to this aspect and agree with it all!

Surely it is time for the con side to raise the white flag and acknowledge the battle is won. Indeed it is. We concede you have proven without doubt that a good F2F teacher can indeed become a good online teacher.

Wait a minute, wasn’t there something more in that statement? What are we arguing about again? Let’s remind ourselves:

“It’s straight forward to become an online teacher – a good traditional teacher can become a good online teacher”

There is a problem with this statement as subject for debate in that it is two statements masquerading as one.

We have already conceded defeat on the latter part of the statement, who in their right mind would argue that a good lecturer cannot become a good online teacher?

However, is it straight forward? Consider what straight forward means. As we are not allowed to use references outside of what we have been given we will ask the other side to give us their definition.

Is there a how to guide? A “Step by step guide to developing pedagogically sound, inclusive, engaging elearning courses for dummies” book that we can buy?

Five headings of debate:

Essential Qualities of a Good Teacher:

1. *Presto!* suggest that the role of the teacher is to develop a “*natural learning environment*”, however, as Prensky (2001) states, there is quite a divide between the teacher and the student with regards to digital fluency. Prensky (2001) classifies society into two groups; digital natives (the younger generation whom do not know life without technology) and digital immigrants (those that know life before and after the advent of omnipresent technology). Students typically fall into the digital native category and teachers the digital immigrant. As such, the natural learning environment for one group (digital natives) will be different from the other (digital immigrants) and the change from one to the other (immigrant to digital in the case of a teacher is difficult to achieve).
2. *Presto!* point to the capacity of the teacher to ‘*connect*’ with their students, as a characteristic of a good teacher. What is their position on the literature that points to the criticality of this connection in the online environment, and the unique aspects to this fostering connection in the online environment; i.e., do they think the classroom teacher has those skills automatically?
3. *Presto!* concur with Palloff and Pratt (2001; pg. 20) stating that there is a need to adopt a facilitative approach in online learning, we agree with this; however, *Presto!* do not provide any evidence to suggest the a good F2F “*facilitative*” teacher can switch effortlessly to online facilitation. The Palloff and Pratt reference is not provided for further investigation.
4. In addition to Bain's (2001) and Dormody and co-workers (2006) comments on the qualities of a good teacher, doesn't the eTutor require many more skills (technical and otherwise) in order to be able to teach online?
5. Smith (2007) argues that “*tedious preparation*” is key. Isn't preparation even more important in an online context, as the literature suggests? (No way you can 'fly by the seat of your pants' there!).
6. *Presto!* suggest that a teacher may be able to hold down two full time positions if they choose to go online with their courses. Not only would this be immoral (a case of a double jobbing lecturer in Galway and AIT comes to mind); but also contradictory to *Presto's!* earlier statement of who a good teacher spends a large amount of preparation time getting classes ready. If a teacher can effectively hold two jobs at once why is there a need for all the educators in Ireland? It could be done with half if educators went online and double jobbed!
7. *Presto!* base their debate on the characteristics of a good F2F teacher being similar to that of an online teacher. These characteristics may be similar but the content delivery and delivery space are totally different; hence the crux of their argument is not in agreement with their stance on the topic.

Timeframe and Skill Set:

8. *Presto's!* long list of suggested solutions (e.g. make technical barriers a positive, availability of technical assistance, need for adaptation to the classroom setting to an online setting, assumed familiarity with the technology) all points to a crying need for a transition period for good teachers to adapt to the online environment! All the advocated solutions/recommendations take time, resources and skills.

Technology:

9. *Presto!* claim, through non-peer reviewed sources, that Broadband in Ireland is improving; however, the standard of broadband varies from location to location in Ireland. We, for example, have experienced the inability of “dongle” based broadband to support a basic webinar due to bandwidth issues.
10. *Presto!* mention the importance of technical support for online learning to be effective and seamless; although not the point of the debate (as it's the teachers' ability to become an effective online teacher not the technical support provided); it is clear that suitable support is required. Not all institutions will have this support, and it often comes down to the teacher to provide on the spot assistance. If the teacher is not familiar with technology, this will hamper the teachers' transition to online teaching. *Presto!* quote US statistics with regard to 24/7 technical support; however, with decreasing staff numbers in the Irish education sector, the IT support will become more and more limited; placing additional strain on the teacher to become a hybrid teacher/tech support. With these new roles comes the requirement for additional training and *Presto's!* point is lost.

Digital Literacy:

11. *Presto!* suggest that the digital literacy of students is improving; again the point of the debate is lost here. The debate centres on the ability of a good F2F teacher to evolve into a good online teacher. The technical ability of the students has little influence on the ability of the teacher to adapt to online learning. Surely the point here should be the current digital literacy of teachers; however, no information is supplied. What about mature students that they may be teaching?

Pedagogical Aspects:

12. *Presto's!* emphasis seems to be on defending the ease of transition to the online environment based on technical factors. What about the pedagogical aspects - for example, the specific models that have been developed for online teaching - would they argue that any teacher can become competent in these models? And the personal skills, which we would argue have substantially different requirements in an online environment.

13. Some of the points made are based on assumptions e.g preparation of pre-class questionnaires assume exposure to online teaching methods, assertion on students' familiarity with technology is not the reality
14. Some points made from the wrong standpoint e.g. accessibility doesn't make a good teacher neither does technical support which is not always available, collaborative learning isn't a proof of good teaching. Of course online teaching maybe the next step in teaching but it takes time and technical skills to reach this step.
15. *Presto!* suggest the studies of Vygostky (1962, 1978; references not provided) underpin the concept of networked collaborative e-learning. Vygostkys work occurred in the pre-online era, so it is hard to imagine that he expected his studies to be extrapolated to it! Furthermore, the point of the debate appears lost in this section; there is no evidence to back up the claim that a good F2F teacher will automatically become a good online teacher, instead the paragraph focuses on the student. Towards the end of this section, *Presto!* suggest that this new model is the pedagogical way forward, however, they do not provide evidence that the current teachers will be able to adapt to this model.
16. *Presto!* use our class as a case study stating that a pre-induction questionnaire can be used to establish the participants' level of expertise with the relevant technology and to identify early if the student or teacher is feeling out of their comfort zone. Surely it is too late for a teacher to feel out of his/her comfort zone in the days before delivering a fully online class! What is the plan B at this stage? Revert to "traditional teaching"? Again, this supports Digital Deleriums point that the change over is not a simple process, requiring additional training, and may not be suitable for all teachers, even good ones.
17. *Presto!* claim that online learning can benefit the student as it enhances their technical skills; but at what cost? What about the F2F social skills?
18. *Presto!* state that "current pedagogical approaches will evolve and be applied to the new format to maximize the affordances of this format". This statement is confusing and needs to be backed up by examples. Are you suggesting this evolution will be straightforward; will it be a step by step / painting by numbers process?
19. *Presto!* state: "online teaching is only the next step in the on-going evolution of teaching. Let's break that down. It is 'only' the next step. As it is 'only' the next step it is therefore a straight forward one? What about evolution and iteration?"

Additional reference:

Prensky, M. (2001). Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants. In: *On the Horizon* Vol. 9 No. 5, MCB University Press, Edinburgh. pp1-6.