Presto! Closing statement

One of the main barriers which is consistently applied (and easily studied) to online teaching is that of technology. In our closing statement we will address technology first.

'*Technology does not teach students, effective teachers do*' Palloff & Pratt, 1999

`This quote eloquently sums up our belieft that the teacher is at the heart of teaching, whether online or in the classroom, and that technology should have a supportive role for those teachers and educators 'at the coal face'. For these teachers, reliability and useability are the key to supporting their teaching and they are (in general) not interested in working with an untested and experimental approach. It is important to make this distinction as a premuim is placed on reliability by most educators and they expect this to translate into the online setting. As numerous recent reports have highlighted, including the most recent Horison Report, '*educational paradigms are shifting to include online learning*'. Such a pradigmatic shift requres that the technological systems which support teaching and robust and reliable. We agree with Digital Delirium that there is a learning curve associated with online learning, much as there is with any new technology, but we are strongly of the opinion that this is not as steep a learning curve as we would be led to believe. The very fact that diverse institutes in Ireland (e.g. IT-Sligo, Hibernia College) are successfully using online teaching highlights the flatness of the learning curve - in the same way in which we don't write our own programmes to do e.g. word processing, we shouldn't fall prey to the idea that we have to build everything from scratch. hilst we acknowledge there will be initial set-up costs in moving to an online environment, that should not be confused with difficulty.

Computer programming ability is not required for the *use* of virtual learning environments and there are many off the shelf question banks, activities etc. and even several companies who will develop the online activities as per the teacher's design specifications. In other words that, as the learning environments have improved, overcoming the technological hurdles have become relatively straightforward and it is more of a useability issue rather than a fundamental flaw with the technology.

We do not have to be complete technical experts, we need to recognise that we just need to be technical enough to meet the required teaching needs. It is not the requirement of the online teacher to be at the cutting edge of technology rather to be aware of the advantages that certain applications offer and how they can be applied to the discipline. Think of how e-mail has been adopted as an important means of communication, despite occasional difficulties and other 'technical issues'.

It should also be highlighted that e-Learning initiatives do more than communicate valuable academic, subject specific, knowledge. They also strengthen students' and teachers comfort with technology, and build valuable real-world communication and collaboration skills (Bahr & Bodrero, 2012).

Pegagogy

In terms of the pedagogy that separates f2f teachers and online teachers, it is to facilitate student's understanding of critical concepts, principles and skills, using knowledge-sharing and building through interactive discussion, design of various educational experiences and provision of feedback and through 'weaving' (Salmon) of statements to enable their development through collaborative discourse. Pedagogical roles for higher order teaching and learning would involve facilitating debate.Effective facilitative skills include establishing and recording ground rules jointly (facilitator, participants), clarifying limits and consequences (objectives). General facilitative skills include showing empathy, listening to and acknowledging comments, giving responsibility to participant, developing awareness of individuals within a group and modelling effective group behaviour. These are good facilitative skills which all tutors should have regardless of learning environment. However the outcomes differ – with traditional teaching emphasis is on presenting information, with online learning there is a sharing of your own experiences and hearing others; traditional teaching uses questioning to test students knowledge, online questioning is used to demonstrate understanding or awareness; and most importantly with traditional teaching the responsibility for learning lies heavily with the teacher whereas with online learning dependency on the instructor is reduced and students are empowered to take responsibility for their own learning.

Thus, the methods used for moderation and facilitation in face-to-face situations can be transferred into an online environment and adapted for that environment. The collaboration includes forms of organising a list of speakers, the moderation of discussion, the summary, the provision of tasks as well as pedagogical formats of classes. Moderation and facilitation entails allocating rolls, moderating, coaching, facilitation of reading, writing, understanding, presenting, warming-up, motivation, elaboration, examination etc., self-organization, communication, and collaboration. Teaching online involves the mediation of these functions through ICT rather than in person, although ICT is used in many of these tasks by 'traditional' teachers.

Support and Technical Barriers

Technical problems may be one of the more pertinent problems in online teaching but according to C. Bonk et al (2003) there is actually little agreement on the importance of the technical role in the literature, in part because technical support can be provided through a variety of ways and in part because there are varying degrees of technology sophistication and use in online courses.

According to a professional eteacher at **http://tinyurl.com/6vwh29r** "The job of an eTeacher is to use enabling technology and effective distance learning methods to remove the barriers and build on the strengths of eLearning." Essentially for the students to participate in collaborative and discovery learning, the role is about being a supportive as possible and by kerbing any possible technical problems by making sure help is

never more than “one click” away when students are online, ensure the help they can get is actually helpful.

An adult learner with minimal technology skills may have little success in understanding the recommendations of the computer expert at the campus Help Desk, developing some simple help tools and resources, modeling that it is OK for students and teachers to ask for help. Checking in with the class and with individual students regularly and ask if they need help. Methods of support a teacher can give also include encouraging students to share solutions they’ve gotten from the Help Desk or figured out on their own, linking new online learners with experienced students who are often the most helpful and supportive since they’ve 'been there, done that.'

Take home

We need to stop looking at the failure of software products and eLearning from 10 years ago, as so much has changed in this enviroenment since then and start looking toward the future. The game is not won by staying in one place for too long!

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