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My Online Teaching Philosophy

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Introduction

Simply put, online teaching and learning is distance learning. It is online learning delivered through the internet by an instructor. When I think of online learning, I think of technology. Teaching and learning in an online environment involves some type of technological savviness. But it is important for one to truly understand that "the use of technology is only as good as the people and content behind it." (Palloff & Pratt, 2013) So in other words, technology is supplemental to the instruction and learning.

Examples of online teaching and learning include online K-12 schools, the online components of blended learning, virtual classrooms and online courses such as the ones offered by a growing number of colleges and universities. This is instruction that occurs outside of the traditional classroom setting via the internet. I believe it is the type of learning that will better prepare and help further thrust students into a globally competitive future.

Role of the Online Student

Reflecting on my own time as an online graduate student, I am cognizant of the many layers and depth of online instructional practices. Online students must be willing to commit to a certain amount of hours per week to their course. This is to read aligned course materials, watch multimedia, research and interact with peers. I have also observed that learners need to be intrinsically motivated. They need to possess some endurance to be able to respond to each other's discussion posts and engage in meaningful discussion with other learners. Regardless of the quality of the course, the online student will only benefit and gain as much as they are willing themselves to put into the course. Online students require that drive

to push ahead to be their best potential selves. If online students possess these characteristics, their learning experience will include actively participating in a rich community of learners.

Role of the Online Instructor

Online instructors need to know their learners. In order to accomplish this, learners should be given the opportunity at the beginning of the course to share introductions about themselves pertaining to where they are from, why they are taking the course, their pedagogy, and etc. And for more in depth knowledge, instructors can administer pre course surveys to measure growth and to understand what students know prior to taking the course. There are a "multiplicity of learning styles and generational differences represented" within online students. (Dabbagh, 2007) Additionally, there are diverse learners who came from various walks of life and have a wide range of ability and skill sets. For this reason, there are some non-negotiables that must be implemented in order for an online instructor to be effective.

Instructors must be organized, have empathy and be analytical. Additionally, they need to be able to create online course design, determine the outcomes of that course, develop effective assessments, include a component for learners to interact with one another and create engaging and authentic, real-world activities for their online learners. (Palloff & Pratt, 2013) The role of the instructor is also to provide timely feedback which may include redirecting an online learner or sharing areas of concern and strengths to ensure appropriate development. An instructor must also provide clear expectations and online etiquettes at the start of the course. Instructors must lead by example to encourage a safe, respectful and quality learning environment.

I must also add that an online instructor must be present. It is critical that this element takes place throughout the course. It is part of the instructor's role to make sure that they are visible to facilitate discussion boards, provide feedback on assignments, respond to emails, and more. It is important that

instructors allow online learners additional access to them which can be in the form of an "ask the instructor" discussion tab, email, office hours via phone or even skype. This is a measure to actively support students and help them feel like they are a part of a nurturing online learning environment.

Interactivity

Interactivity is vital. There must be at least 3 layers of interactivity to foster student engagement and design an effective course. These components of interactivity are student-to-student, student-to-instructor and student-to-content. The integration of these three elements work to build relationships between the student and instructor and to build community through meaningful discussions and collaborations with peers. Student's interactivity with content should lead to students actively applying new learning. (Academic Partnerships, 2013) Also, in an online environment, there can be synchronous and/or asynchronous learning taking place depending on the way your course is set-up. It is important that the course is conducive to the needs of your learners. (Palloff & Pratt, 2013)

Assessing Online Learners

Guidelines need to be put in place for creating the course design. These guidelines should comprise of the university's mission, competencies of the program, student outcomes, objectives and activities. This is important because assessments must be aligned to all of these elements. (Palloff & Pratt, 2013) Additionally, there must be a self-reflective piece for the instructor to self-assess the course. Including these guidelines allows for a framework; student feedback and results will allow for continuous development and future improvements to the program.

The key to creating effective assessments is ensuring it promotes higher level thinking, authenticity, an ongoing measure to track progress, and that its accompanied by timely feedback. Additionally there

should be opportunity for online learners to be self-reflective of areas that are in need of improvement but also aware of their strengths. Some examples of effective assessing include interactive postings, case-based assessments to compare and contrast and peer review to build social interaction and a community of learners. (Ed Tech Du Jour, 2014).

To Conclude

Online learning is an important element in today's society and academic landscape. It allows access to a wide range of diverse students who might not have been able to pursue opportunities for higher learning. Distance learning lends itself well to students who can't afford to live or commute to campus. Also, thanks to asynchronous methods of online instruction, it is beneficial to those learners who are working professionals as well.

I believe that ultimately, it is an online instructor's job to ensure that students are prepared to become problem-solvers. This should be accomplished through online students actively engaging in authentic real-world applications, collaborative learning environments and reflective practices.

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