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Best Practice Guide: Converting to a Hybrid Course

Introduction

Transferring face to face courses to a hybrid course has the potential to increase student learning outcomes compared to that of the traditional classroom (Dziuban, Hartman, Moskal, 2004).

Although many definitions of hybrid and blended learning exist, there are three key points “(1) web-based learning activities are introduced to complement face-to-face work; (2) "seat time" is reduced, though not eliminated altogether; (3) the Web-based and face-to-face components of the course are designed to interact pedagogically to take advantage of the best features of each (University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee, 2011).” This best practices guide will include ideas and tips that could assist you in facilitating communication and learning among your students. The guide should be useful to anyone who is converting a program from entirely face-to-face to a blended learning format.

Pre-Planning Strategies

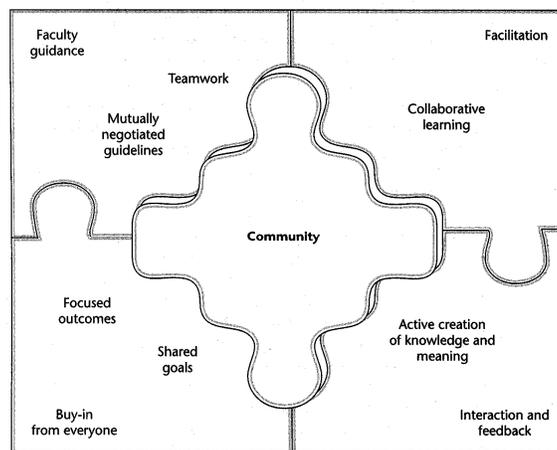
The following is a list of questions that trainers need to ponder when transferring a face-to-face course to hybrid course.

1. “What are the course objectives (Delaney, n.d.) ?” Posing the question will ensure the new blended course will be based on the actual learning goals, not technology.
2. “What are you doing in the classroom to meet each of your objectives (n.d.) ?” List all of the activities that you currently use in the classroom setting. Be specific about the objectives that are being met with these activities. This list will help with the redesign of your course.

3. “Which of those activities can best take place online (n.d.)?” Think about what is working well in the classroom and what can be done differently or even better online (n.d.). There are several activities that can be enhanced using an online format.
4. “How will the online activities integrate with the face-to-face activities (n.d.)?” A hybrid course is the integration between two courses. If not converted well, students will find the online course will to be busy work unless it compliments what is being taught in the classroom.

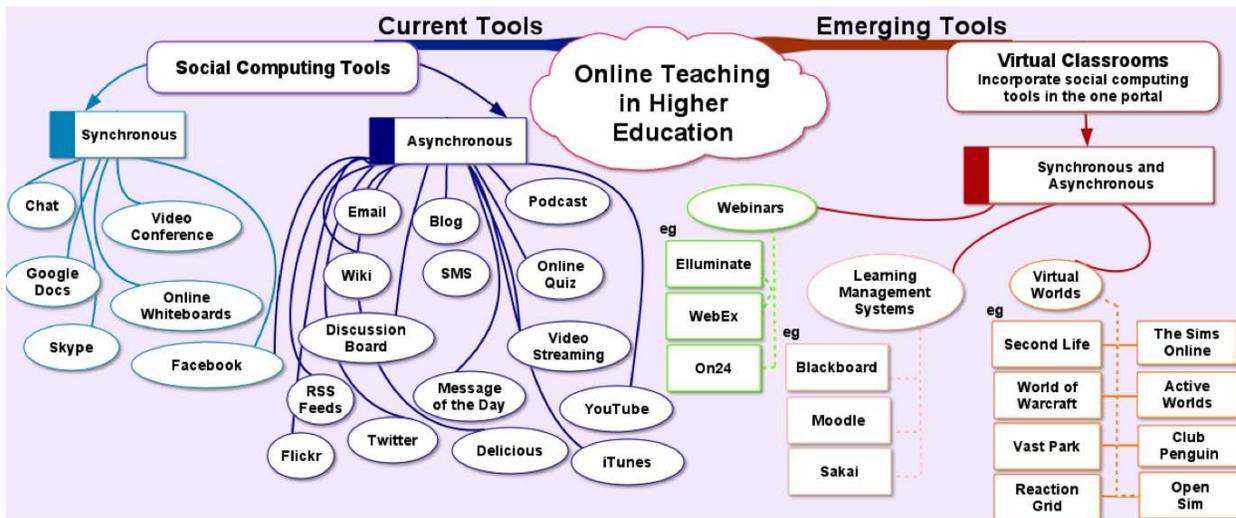
Objectives That May Be Enhanced with Distance Learning

After reflecting on objectives and activities that are currently in your face-to-face classroom, it is time to examine what can be enhanced online. The challenge is to have the content of the course adjust to the needs of the learners (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2009). Discussion boards are one of the most important aspects of online learning. Threaded, relevant conversations need to be had to inspire students to retain their new knowledge. Below is a picture illustrating the importance of the discussion board (Buis, 2011).



Facilitating Communication and Learning Among Students

“The syllabus can become an important communication vehicle for the instructor in clarifying expectations related to appropriate use of language in all communications”(Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2009, p. 166). The syllabus provides the frame work for contacting the instructor, technological difficulties, and most importantly, having the students understanding their role in the hybrid course. Some of aspects of online learning that may enhance communication are email, wikis, blogging, social networking and virtual worlds (2009). The following chart is a list of tools that shows the current and emerging tools currently being used by higher education institutions (Gregory 2008).



Role of Distance Learning Instructor

The role of face-to-face teacher to hybrid teacher will go from teacher-centered to student-centered. Student-centered learning will engage students in the learning process (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2009). They will need to interact with both the teacher and other

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students in order to be successful in the course. The chart below outlines some of the traditional roles of the teachers with that of a hybrid teacher (Rivas, 2010).

Changing Instructor roles			
From		To	
Role	Example	Role	Example
Provider of content	The teacher who gives copies from a book for the students to read and gives them a questionnaire for them to answer picking up the information without reflection or analysis.	Designer of learning experiences	The teacher who asks learners to read and gives them the opportunities to compare what they read with the update context.
Source of information	The professor that recite or tell the grammar structure of a language and provide only two or three examples of how to use that rule. And after ask students to present a dialogue with that language structure.	Presenter of critical questions	the teacher that use determined situation to present a new language structure and help learners to discover the rule by giving them opportunities to reflect and analyse the situation.
Objective-based	The teachers who focus his/her class to get his/her own goals for the class according to what he/she planned without consider learners comprehension and internalization. The important thing is to cover the topic of the unit.	Project/inquiry-based instructional designer and assessor	The teacher who creates and design strategies to help learner to understand and internalize the new language issues, no matter the time they take because he/she is able to involve new structures while the previous ones are being reinforced. Besides he/she helps the learners to overcome difficulties they are facing with any topic.
User	When a teacher uses a forum to propose a discussion, he/she suggests the topic and the number of posts and he/she is the one that can say what t do, learners only have to post and no more.	Moderator for a variety of learning styles	When the teacher implements different strategies to follow a discussion, she/he negotiates with the students the topics of interests for them.
Controller of a teaching environment	The teacher that propose the topics, propose the activities, propose the way to work in a class and the students must follow step by step the requirements.	Co-creator of learning experiences	The teacher who is open to suggestions and negotiate with the learners how to develop the different topics.
Instruction–presenter	A professor who says what to do, how to do, when to do, why to do... and learners are required to do exactly what the teacher says.	Learning–facilitator	The teacher who gives clear instructions but allows learners to discover different ways to work. No authoritarian style.

Conclusion

For a hybrid course to be successful, pre-planning, objective building, communication and understanding of instructor roles are all a vital part of the transformation from face-to-face to blended course. Trainers need to imagine, create and support this type of course to invoke higher level thinking and retention rates.

References

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