After Thirty Years of Teaching You Want Me to Change? Transforming the Traditional Classroom to an Online Setting

After thirty years of teaching at the secondary and higher education levels, this professor was asked to develop and teach online courses during the past academic year. This presentation focuses on the transformation of methodology and pedagogy from a traditional educational format to a virtual one while maintaining the philosophy of learning developed over a lifetime of teaching.

The challenges inherent in any educational change include Fullan's stages of initiation, implementation, and institutionalization. These are evident in institutional change. In this case the changes are dealt at a personal level highlighting the nature of the courses and the educational background of the students. The online classes included statistics and methods of teaching mathematics. In a traditional setting these courses are challenging to students and usually require extensive face-to-face interactions in and out of the classroom. Most of the students are non-traditional in terms of their age and experience, but traditional in terms of their learning habits and experiences. In order for the two courses to be relevant in a virtual format the implementation of their basic tenets have to be maintained and adhered to while offering students different options and opportunities to practice their skills and knowledge. In the hopes of establishing the online courses as permanent options in the university, statistical analyses and personal reflections were gathered during the semester. The results and findings of these will be part of the presentation.

The presentation will show that there are correlations between the students' participation via online activities and their success in the courses. Though this is not necessarily surprising, what the statistics do show is that the amount of time and when the students participate make a difference in their achievement. What is also evident is that the types of activities, discussions, and other forms of involvement do make a difference. This informs the professor of his or her responsibility in creating interesting and meaningful forms of engagement for the students. It is also important that these reflect the personal philosophy of the instructor and the requirements of the traditional classes.

Online teaching also demands that the instructor modify the traditional style of teaching in a face-to-face course. The challenge comes when attempting to maintain one's personality and technique in the online setting without compromising his or her effectiveness. Subtle nuances, eye contact, and physical habits are all part of one's teaching developed over a lifetime of experience in the classroom. In the virtual setting, these cannot be used thus requiring the instructor to find different ways to provide these small but necessary teaching dispositions.

Finally, the presentation will give personal reflections on the future of online courses, their effectiveness and possible institutionalization in academia. The current status of higher education including economic challenges, the available technology, and the proficiency of students in technology will help to determine the future nature of university and college education.