Using Face-to-Face Tools for Success in Distance Education:

Article Critique

Gillian McKnight-Tutein

Cluster 32

ITDE 7007 Dr. Schlosser

November 22, 2003

Nova Southeastern University
USING FACE-TO-FACE TOOLS FOR SUCCESS IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

The article primarily addressed successfully preparing preservice and inservice teachers for the shift from face-to-face classes to distance education courses.

The teachers may have had little or no computer training. They may have casually used the computer to type a document or surf the web. The study likened these individuals' capabilities to that of “regular” students and mentioned a study by Hara and Kling (2000). It discussed the frustration, anxiety, and confusion students face when taking a distance course. Daniel (2002) states that it is important to imbue in all students the shift in required skills and behaviors that education is undergoing and that distance education will take.

He goes on to say that the learner must become familiar with the proficiencies and competencies required of them, and to understand the adoption of the necessary skills to become successful in distance education, they need to participate in a course that familiarizes them with the basic tools necessary for success in a distance education course as well as courses that integrate instructional technology.

Daniel’s study discusses four projects that were put in place as a course of study to assist teachers in gaining the necessary skills to provide and facilitate distance learning to their students. Each student brings a different level of computer literacy and competency to the class. There was no set syllabus for the class and the content of the course was left to the discretion of each instructor.
Daniels (2002) stated, “Preservice and inservice teachers should take responsibility for their own learning. The motivation of the teacher has a direct effect on the student and the learner controls the success of his or her acquisition of knowledge.”

While the writer enjoyed the article and agreed with much of what was discussed, the final quote by Daniels was telling. The motivation of the teacher does have a direct impact on the acquisition of knowledge. But how do you motivate the teacher?

Instructional technologists, researchers, professionals in the field of education and other stakeholders in the success of distance education would do best to discard this “if-you-build-it-they-will-come” attitude. Distance education while popular, is popular within those circles that have the skills, find value, and are able to use it on a regular basis, which allows them to hone their skills, and find even more value and are then able to use it more often. (You get the idea). It is a cycle.

The writer believes that the foundation of this cycle does not come from the preservice or inservice teacher, but from the administration. There must be two plans set in motion, both carefully thought out. One has to be an administrative plan that allows the teachers time (i.e. a flexible schedule) to study and practice without feeling overwhelmed about their current workload and responsibilities. Otherwise, how can they meet any of their commitments, even if they desire to be a part of the evolution?
This is akin to the government deciding that they were going to provide a partnership with businesses in order to get mothers back into the work environment, but not providing childcare. There was good intention, but a lack of planning. Simply put, it fell short of the expected goals.

The other plan the writer feels must be employed is a marketing plan: (1) Here’s what’s coming (2) Here’s why it’s great (3) Here’s why it’s great for you, the individual (4) Here’s why it’s great for the organization (5) Here’s how we’re going to pull it off, (with your help).

This is all necessary for buy-in.

The author has had the recent experience of walking into a situation where the IT department spent a large amount of money on an off-the-shelf software training program. No one was using this fabulous tool. The reasons:

(1) Not many people knew that it had been bought or how they could find out more about it (one email was sent announcing that they had bought something that could help folks with Microsoft software, with a link to the site)

(2) No one saw the value (except for the Helpdesk, because they kept track of the questions they were receiving from the associates)

(3) Who had the time? (Does my boss support this? Am I allowed to use during work hours? How would I go about requesting that time? Would I be paid for it? Is there a secluded place set aside to utilize the coursework?)
(4) What was the structure and expectation? (Like this study there was no syllabus or directed learning…fine for some, not fine for most)

Most importantly the writer feels that any plan should include the opinions and feelings of the users as well as well as timely feedback. Asking, and listening to the responses, goes a long way with the people who are truly the customers of distance learning. The assumption that people will flock to distance learning because it is there, and that people will inherently want to use it, is as false an assumption as thinking the horse will drink because you have led him to the water.
References
