

## **The Pedagogue and the Manatee: In Danger of Extinction?**

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### *Abstract*

In order for universities and seasoned faculty to provide and maintain effective pedagogy for the burgeoning virtual reality community of students, specialized professional development is needed for those educators using the new technologies. This is vital if faculty members are to successfully be able to teach online courses and make full use of their academic expertise. There is a need for institutions of higher education to establish mentoring programs that will train and support the novice online instructors. The environment in which this mentoring takes place and the components that insure its success are critical to the successful adoption of the new instructional delivery format taught by seasoned educators. One-on-one mentoring promotes a professional, collegial and empathic faculty who will effectively provide a consistent and rigorous academic program for students online.

### *Introduction*

Today, the majority of institutions of higher education offer online courses. Ideally, these courses are taken by students using high-speed technology and sophisticated Internet support providers, facilitating the speedy exchange of information and the uploading of assignments. The rapid growth of technology globally requires these universities to have the necessary pedagogues to support the growth of this evolving learning society. This represents a major change in pedagogical foundations, and creates a radical disruption (MacCorkindale, 2002). Educators are frequently confronted with integrating new and unfamiliar technology into their pedagogical processes (Czubaj, 2004). Without necessary preparatory training, many faculty are encouraged to teach courses online (Talent-Runnels, Cooper, Lan, Thomas, & Busby, 2005). There is a great deal of pressure from college administrators for faculty members to embrace technology, in order

to increase the number of students served, to improve the quality of instruction, and to reach students in areas not served by traditional classroom instruction (Uttendorfer, 2002).

The pedagogy for online courses is dramatically altered from that of face-to-face teaching and completely unfamiliar to many instructors. Teachers must rethink how they teach, and how they will assist and educate students. Seasoned faculty attitudes toward utilizing this form of technology run from sheer terror to mild indifference and from passive acceptance to overt hostility. Older adults generally exhibit a greater anxiety toward computers than younger adults, and have more negative attitudes (Laguna & Babcock, 1997). Some are technophobes, and deliberately shy away from using technology (Bell, 2006). The university professor who holds reign in the classroom, the master of content and pedagogy, is a dying breed. The instructor of today must be versed in technology, and willing and able to effectively teach classes online. There is a significant difference in the interactions between the physical and virtual worlds. From the time of Aristotle and Sophocles, to the revered Dons of traditional European universities, pedagogues have personally interacted with and influenced their students while face-to-face. Modern technology has impacted that relationship. Will such personal interaction become a thing of the past?

It reminds one of the Manatee, a magnificent creature of the sea, in danger of extinction as the result of another high-speed modernization of technology, in this case, boat propellers. The manatees, which formed the basis of the legends of mermaids and mermen since the seventeenth century, are falling victim to collisions and the boat propellers of high speed watercraft (Bagheera). The primary threat to all endangered species is the encroachment and destruction of their natural habitat (Bayan-Gagelonia, 2008). Traditionally, a species becomes extinct when it can no longer adapt and survive in the constantly changing modern world. Are

both the pedagogue and the manatee in danger of extinction? The only way to save both species is through intervention.

This change toward teaching classes online is occurring too rapidly for many university faculty, and their lack of cyberspace knowledge or expertise leads to their resistance. The fear of appearing incompetent may cause faculty to avoid involvement in an activity for which they have insufficient training (Tshivase, 2005). Attitudinal issues of how people perceive and react to technology are even more significant in influencing the use of technology than the physical technological obstacles (Mishra, Kochler, Hershey, & Peruski, 2002). Some sort of intervention is needed. The key to success in this area is to be mindful of the needs of those involved (Schar, 2002; Sahin & Thompson, 2007).

### *Background*

Staff development is necessary to support this anytime, anyplace flexible learning environment. Many faculty are simply told they will have to teach online, and have to self-educate with a manual or an online training program. The manual could leave out many of the aspects of the online course platform, and the training could be sketchy and ineffective. These practices are more the norm than the unique. There is an urgent need for change. Apathy toward effective training is another danger sign on the road to possible extinction.

Little research exists on the mentoring of older adult learners in the teaching of online courses and the necessary technical training involved to enable them to become effective in utilizing that mode of delivery. With the adult learner, Witte and Wolf (2003) determined it is best to use a facilitative approach in technology courses. The adult learner experiences different developmental stages than a young learner, with different attitudes and perceptions regarding change, curriculum, collaboration, and the learning process in general (Witte & Wolf, 2003).

There is little research on the learning diversity of midlife and older adults in regard to their receptivity and the effectiveness of different teaching techniques (Morris & Ballard, 3003).

Research on university mentoring programs is also scarce (Savage, Karp, & Logue, 2004).

#### *Action Research on Mentoring and Mentoring Programs*

The writers of this paper all experienced great difficulty when they were literally thrown into the abyss of online teaching, with no prior training. They collaborated on their experiences, and invited the anecdotes of colleagues from all over the world who had had similar indoctrinations into online teaching. They designed and conducted a survey of fifty seasoned faculty to determine what mature educators thought would be helpful in preparing them to be able to effectively teach online. One-on-one mentoring by trusted colleagues was the solution suggested by the majority of those involved.

Savage, Karp, and Logue (2004) stressed the need for collegiality in mentoring programs, and referred to the study by Naisbitt and Aburdene (1990) indicating that human response is vital to counterbalance the introduction of technology into society. A human lens is needed to evaluate technology and enable people to embrace technology in a manner that preserves humanity.

Researchers Sahin and Thompson conducted a survey to determine whether collegial interaction, among other factors, was a significant variable as a predictor of faculty technology adoption level (2006). They found one-on-one mentoring by a colleague may successfully meet the needs of faculty regarding their use of technology. Assistance is provided within the parameters of a personal relationship, focused on the individual needs of the learner (Sahin & Thompson, 2006).

Faculty mentoring programs are important for faculty development, for retention of faculty, for achievement of academic goals, and for the achievement of institutional goals. Both protégés and mentors benefit from the mentoring relationship (Zeind, Zdanowicz, MadDonald, & Parkhurst, 2005). Certain mentor attributes are necessary if the programs are going to work. Mentors must be concerned with the learning styles and needs of the mentees (Witte & Wolf, 2003). They must possess wisdom, commitment, caring, humor, integrity, and have high expectations.

The mentor acts as a catalyst. The mentor must be generous in sharing time with the mentee, be willing to learn, open to the limitations of another, have the ability to trust, and have the good judgment to offer appropriate encouragement and praise (Zeind, Zdanowicz, MadDonald, & Parkhurst, 2005). An effective mentor must permit the learner to set the pace, and provide support, a technology lifeline, and a challenge (Witte & Wolf, 2003). It is important for a mentor to have the ability to detect qualitative changes in the mentee rather than immediate competency. The mentor should be able to recognize the potential of another, and encourage and nurture that potential strength.

Adult learners exhibit specific andragogical characteristics (O'Quinn, 2002; Knowles, 1984). Peer mentoring can address these needs. Education for older adults is empowering. It is a means to gain control in the adjustment to technological change, and provide greater self-fulfillment for the faculty (Glendenning & Battersby, 1990).

It is important for professional development training to be offered at appropriate skill levels for individual faculty members, so that they are not overwhelmed or bored. Support while learning new technological skills is mandatory. Mentoring involves meeting with peers to share experiences, seek solutions, re-teach specific skills and improve usage (Hinson, Laprairie, &

Cundiff, 2005). In order to facilitate twenty-first century learners, it is necessary to have effective technological integration, which includes mentoring faculty.

Individual training involves individual mentors and technology helpers. Personalized, individual technology assistance is necessary. Faculty members have a wide range of technological skills and needs, and this cannot be covered by group technology workshops. The focus must be on what learners actually need to do. Tailor-made training enables the mentor and mentee to determine the correct next step, and individually direct the learning process (Leh, 2005).

### *Planning for the Future*

The key word is continuation: to provide faculty with the opportunity for lifelong learning through developing new skills and interests (Saunders & Hamilton, 1999). The dynamic nature of communication is that as conversation continues, understanding develops and widens. This is the helix of communication, with no start or end point. The helical approach to staff development emphasizes long-termism, creativity, and strategic dissemination (Saunders & Hamilton, 1999). Professional development for educators is only successful if educators themselves drive the content (Goodale, Carbonaro, & Snart, 2002). Faculty want people who have had experience teaching online courses to share their best practices. Those competent in the technology processes can mentor others in their department. It is not productive to learn technological skills without help, and it can be a waste of time.

Educators would like to be able to ask a colleague to drop by for quick verbal assistance with teaching an online course. Faculty need help when they need help. Informal chats are social opportunities where people pick up tips and tricks. Instructors do not want to read to learn

how to teach online, they want a personal visit and a demonstration. They want a private tutor, face-to-face, one-on-one.

Creating one-on-one mentoring programs for seasoned faculty provides an innovative model for the successful transition from teaching courses in a classroom to teaching online. The mentor can address technical skills as well as university policy concerns and create a “how to” dialogue with a trusted colleague. Effective one-on-one mentoring promotes a professional, compassionate and collegial faculty who will provide a consistent and rigorous academic program for students online. It will re-inspire an educator’s spirit for teaching and working with students. With the conscientious implementation of this concept the traditional pedagogue can be saved from extinction and continue to function effectively as a foundation of the university experience.

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