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Book Review

Increasing Productivity and Efficiency in Online Teaching

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Increasing Productivity and Efficiency in Online Teaching
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As Allen and Seaman (2016) note, in fall 2014, there were 5.8 million students taking online courses in the United States. The growing trend of distance education should not be taken lightly as related technologies progress. Lawrence (2018) also indicates that educational institutions are facing increasing demands regarding usage of information communication technologies. Like the saying goes, good tools are prerequisite to the success of a job; existing web tools could improve educators' productivity and efficiency, yet the question remains of how to integrate them into course design. In this case, readers may find this book, *Increasing Productivity and Efficiency in Online Teaching*, practical and easy to read.

Divided into four sections, the first section of this book is Design of Content and Courses, which consists of four chapters. First, the authors give us a clear definition that describes the characteristics of millennials and compare them with other generations. The authors propose a term called the Starbuck's Effect, which means personalizing assignments for optimum learning. Just as Starbuck customizes coffee for each customer, educators should design course content and curriculum to meet the specific needs of the millennials. The authors also illustrate the implementations of new tools for online course and offer a series of suggestions to which teachers of millennials may refer.

The author of the next chapter introduces online courses maximizers: visualization, interactive gaming, and analytics software. Similar to directors who visualize the screenplays for studios, visualization is proven to be effective in the academic world. Since games can be informative, interactive and customized to fit the abilities of individuals, gaming is also considered a powerful tool for education. Moreover, new technologies make it possible for educators to gain insight from

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various analytics. Regarding the difficulties in using high tech and approaches that are likely costly, the author suggests that educators adopt a blended approach (classroom and online instruction), as long as the course can be visual and packaged in a game-like program.

The third chapter covers the adaptation of a residential course to web-based environment. The researchers introduce Learning Management Systems (LMSs) and the use of Moodle. Besides being user-friendly, open-source freeware, Moodle is preferred by many for its interactive contents and instant feedback. A test was conducted under the ASSURE model, which includes six stages: analyze learners; state objectives; select instructional methods, media and materials; utilize media and materials; require learner participation; evaluate and revise. The results reveal that both teachers and students could perform tasks on Moodle with no difficulties.

In the latter part of the chapter, the authors of this chapter focus on grade appeals by explaining the process and history, impacts on student, faculty and school, and by suggesting possible contributing factors. Grade appeals imply students' lack of satisfaction and result in instructors' decreased teaching efficacy. Suggestions are offered for both instructors and schools to avoid potential grade appeals. The use of new technologies such as LMS may be of great help in keeping away from the worst-case scenario.

Moving into the second section of the book, Communication, the fifth chapter examines how social media helps instructors increase productivity and efficiency, as well as its inherent potential problems. Among various social media, the authors pick the most popular ones (Edmodo, Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter, LinkedIn) to demonstrate ways to promote the instructor's online presence and connect with students. Two case studies (Facebook and Twitter) are presented to further illustrate the ideas. The authors recommend that instructors should choose one tool at a time and support students with explicit instructions.

In chapter 6, the author puts theory into practice by incorporating Moodle in an online course. She points out that prioritizing asynchronous collaboration and self-directed learning is the key to increasing the productivity and efficiency of students and faculty. Student feedback and pushback were recorded as means of revision; the author also suggests that educators should set boundaries around time spent online in order to avoid empathy fatigue. The next chapter is also about tools and techniques instructors could use in communicating with students. Practical usage of student surveys, course grades and analysis of tool traffic could provide educators a better picture for improving course design.

Chapter 8 focuses on how instructors can utilize the revised Bloom's Taxonomy as a framework to select the appropriate online tool in order to assist student learning, and create a manageable workload for the faculty. Besides promoting the use of rubrics which can save time on grading assessments and provide feedback, they also encourage instructors to explore ways to integrate web tools into course design.

From here, readers walk through chapters 9-11 in the third section on Assignments and Assessment. Chapter 9 contains quantitative and qualitative data collected from students' and instructors' feedback regarding two assessment methods: online quizzes/tests and discussion boards. According to the conclusions, students prefer immediate access to feedback and results in online quizzes/tests. The authors propose that when planning online assessment methods, instructors should make the contents specific, rigorous, and relevant to students. Instructors' self-reflection is critical in online teaching, and instructors should always allow for adjustments.

In the next chapter, the authors deal with the differences in teaching adult learners online. Adult learners have different expectations due to work or life experiences; therefore the instructor should act as a facilitator, helping learners to make clear connections between theory and practice in readings and class assignments, and adapt to the needs of individuals. Opportunities should be given to direct and influence their own learning. Feedback from both the instructor and peers is important, and LMS tools could be helpful as well.

The author in chapter 11 proposes a model of designing online assignments based on the revised Bloom's Taxonomy for instructors. From this guideline, assignments should help students to master the four types of knowledge – factual, conceptual, procedural and metacognitive – and at the same time aid them to develop in the six-stage cognitive process.

The final section revolves around the subject of Advanced Design and Interaction. Chapter 12 focuses on online tools and techniques for instant student feedback and sustainable online teacher monitoring. The authors provide a step-by-step tutorial for applying the Muddiest Point method to the cloud: create assessment forms, provide links to students and analyze results on a regular basis. In this way, teachers can receive results on-demand, instantaneously or according to automated parameters.

An interesting outline on Game Design Methodology (GDM) is presented in Chapter 13. GDM framework allows for student-built games to facilitate the teaching and learning process through digital and physical construction of course concepts. In the meantime, educators create an environment for creativity and building by providing traditional lectures, interactions, and assessments which can be adapted into students' own game constructions. Two case studies are provided to further elaborate the implementation of GDM, and serve as proof of increasing efficiency and productivity in the learning process of complex concepts.

Chapter 14 examines the techniques which provide authentic learning experiences such as case studies, role plays, human-based simulation, and online branching simulations. Through sharing and exchanging of ideas, students find multiple ways to address a problem and think outside the box. Therefore course developers should utilize online branching simulations to support transformative learning, especially in the development of critical thinking skills among participants.

In the final chapter, the author introduces advanced Online Grading System (OGS), which allows instructors to input video, audio, and text along with interactive rubrics. Compared with traditional rubrics, the use of OGS increases the efficiency of teachers providing personalized feedback to their students and also the degree of student satisfaction. According to the case study, teachers perceived benefits in using OGS and students offered positive perceptions regarding its usefulness. The author wraps up by implying that advanced OGS will play a significant role in the future.

As technology advances, so should the mindset of instructors and their instruments for teaching. This well-structured book starts from discussing student characteristics nowadays, key concepts in designing course contents, and proceeds to introducing extensive tools and technologies that could be helpful in interacting with students. It not only focuses on course design and student assessment, but also on how to reduce instructors' workloads. With various concepts and suggestions for instructors to refer to, plus addressing the potential concerns regarding the overuse of high tech approaches, this book gives readers an overall and in-depth review of Online Teaching.

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