A Digital Development Program (DDP) Encouraging Teachers to Teach Digitally

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Abstract

This talk presents an ongoing seven-year Digital Development Program (DDP) to train and encourage tertiary English for Academic Purposes (EAP) instructors to teach digitally. As leaders of an EAP team at a state college and as proponents of the idea that mindful use of technology enhances both teaching and learning, we decided to embrace the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge model known as TPACK (Koehler & Mishra, 2008)[1], as our guiding model for this initiative.

As there was no interactive platform available at our institution at the start of this project, we initiated a pilot to integrate the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) Moodle into the EAP program. Research has shown that inadequate, inappropriate professional development is a significant barrier to successful technology integration in schools (Kopcha, 2010)[2]. In addition, Koehler and Mishra (2008)[1] identify content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and technological knowledge, as well as combinations of these as necessary for effective teaching with technology. Hence, we piloted the first blended learning courses in our EAP program based on the research.

The DDP included the following:
ongoing theoretical and hands-on professional development workshops
individualized support;
identification of progressive benchmarks for effective implementation of Moodle
ongoing collaboration, sharing ideas, materials, and techniques for blended learning
development and maintenance of an 'English Teacher's Virtual Staff Room' (ETVSR) on Moodle
an ongoing evaluation which included questionnaires, course audits, departmental conferences
annual staff performance reviews based on TPACK model

Based on the success of our pilot, the college administration adopted the Moodle platform and required instructors in all disciplines to integrate technology into their teaching, using the DDP as their guiding model. The fact that the EAP teachers were now seen as technology pioneers and experts brought new-found respect and prestige to the department.

As new opportunities arise, such as the development and delivery of online EAP courses, our DDP model has enabled us to successfully meet these challenges. The commitment and hard work of all parties concerned has resulted in a digitally literate staff with the skills required to develop and deliver a wide range of pedagogically sound, blended and distance learning modules of instruction. The DDP model has since been applied to other institutions with similar success. This talk outlines the DDP model, and how to motivate, empower, guide and support instructors with the essential skills to be active players in the ever changing educational landscape.