Getting Started Teaching Online: Some Considerations

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オンライン教育を始めるにあたっての一考察

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Abstract

Over the last several years Osaka Jogakuin College (OJC) has been exploring various ways to increase its e-learning capabilities particularly through the use of online class management systems. One important issue that must be considered is how to use class management systems to teach online effectively. This paper briefly describes what class management systems are before focusing on some issues teachers should consider when beginning to use such systems to teach online. The issues have been compiled by reviewing several books on online teaching.

Key words : teaching online, class management systems, WebCT, CALL

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　過去数年間に亘り、大阪女学院大学・短期大学では、Ｅラーニングの可能性が増え、特にオンラインを使用してのクラス管理の様々な方法の模索がなされてきた。その際考えるべきひとつの重要な点は、オンライン教育を効果的になすために、どのようにクラス管理システムを用いるかという点である。本稿は、オンライン教育のためのシステムの使用開始にあたって、教員が考えるべき幾つかの問題に焦点を当てる前に、クラス管理とは何かについて簡潔に述べるものである。論点は、オンライン教育に関する幾つかの書物の検討に因った。

キーワード : オンライン教育、クラス管理システム、WebCT、コール

Since 2000 Osaka Jogakuin College (OJC) has been exploring various ways to increase its e-learning capabilities. In 2000 OJC's e-learning project team explored having teachers create web pages for their classes and by 2002 web pages were required for Topic Studies I and II classes[1]. In 2002 Makino and Cornwell, while reporting on the work of an early e-learning project committee, asked the following questions:

> ...How broad should OJJC's[2] on-line presence be? Should the presence consist only of web-based study links for existing classes or should OJJC attempt to teach entire classes entirely online? Should OJJC attempt to teach its entire curriculum online? ...Is state-of-the-art information technology something that OJJC needs in order to remain competitive even if classes are never offered online or does having the latest technology only make sense if OJJC is committed to having a full online presence complete with online degrees and a fully developed online continuing education program? (Makino & Cornwell, 2002, pp. 311−312).

While these questions are still being answered, progress has been made on several fronts. OJC currently subscribes to WebCT's online class management system by the same name. WebCT is known for its innovations in the area of e-learning or what it refers to as "learning without limits" (WebCT, 2005c). WebCT provides its class management system to thousands of educational institutions in more than 70 countries worldwide. However, just installing a class management system does not guarantee its success. One important issue, and the focus of this paper, is how to use the system to teach online. This paper is the result of reviewing several books on online teaching. It will briefly describe what class management systems are in general and what WebCT offers specifically, before focusing on some areas teachers should consider when beginning to use course management systems to teach online.

Course Management Systems

In a report for the EduCause Center for Applied Research, Morgan defines class management or course management systems as, "software system[s] that are specifically designed and marketed for faculty and students to use in teaching and learning. Common systems used in higher education include WebCT, Blackboard, Learning Space, and eCollege" (Morgan, 2003, p. 3). Some schools such as the New School for Social Research in New York City develop their own proprietary course management systems. Most course management systems include ways to manage course content, communication, assessment, grading, and allow ways for students and teachers to share materials, files and do joint activities.

As a provider of course management systems, WebCT offers educational institutions an online learning environment where teachers can deliver course materials, encourage collaborative learning, communicate with students, and assess learning outcomes. As WebCT writes in its publicity material, WebCT is a virtual course environment where teachers can present material, communicate with students, and assess individual and group work:

Presentation

WebCT Campus Edition makes it easy for instructors to create and deliver dynamic course materials. Instructors can:

● Organize content by topic, making it easy for students to navigate

● Create Learning Modules that include sequenced content and activities

● Personalize content presentation for students based on their performance

● Automatically generate a resource page containing all course Web Links

Communication

WebCT Campus Edition provides extensive support for group work, giving users the tools they need to communicate and collaborate effectively. Instructors can:

● See "who's online" and instantly begin a conversation with any user

● Use private chat and whiteboard rooms to collaborate on group projects

● Send customized announcements to students or teaching assistants

● Engage students in discussions and easily grade their participation

Assessment

Using WebCT Campus Edition, instructors can easily deliver and manage a wide range of online assessments and assignments. Instructors can:

● Give group assignments with customized instructions for each group

● Let students publish their projects to share them with the entire class

● Take a quiz from the student view to "road test" assessments

● Give instant feedback to students on their assessments (WebCT, 2005a).

Since its implementation at OJC, WebCT's use has been voluntary. Some teachers use many of its functions with their classes, some teachers use certain functions, and some teachers have not used it at all. One of the challenges in deciding if and how much WebCT should be integrated in classes at OJC and then in getting teachers to adopt it in their classes has been a lack of understanding of how one actually goes about teaching online. This confusion is not unique to OJC; it has been well-documented in the many

books that have been written to help teachers and schools learn about teaching online.

Teaching Online—Considerations

I have been teaching online as an adjunct faculty member of the New School for Social Research through their online university since 1996. (The following website will show you the portal for the New School's system: www.dialnsa.edu). I have taught numerous classes but the classes I have taught several times are Teaching the Sound System of English and Teaching ESL Grammar. I have been interested in learning ways to improve my teaching and to incorporate more of the technology that is available. To achieve these two goals during the summer of 2005, I undertook a study of several online teaching texts. The texts reviewed were:

a) Discussion-based Online Teaching to Enhance Student Learning: Theory, Practice, and Assessment (Bender, 2003);

b) Engaging the Online Learner: Activities and Resources for Creative Instruction (Conrad & Donaldson, 2004);

c) Learning Online: A guide to success in the Virtual Classroom. McVay Lynch, 2004);

d) Lessons from the Cyberspace Classroom: Realities of Online Teaching (Palloff & Pratt, 2001);

e) Teaching Online: A Practical Guide (Ko & Rossen, 2004); and

f) The Virtual Student: A Profile and Guide to Working with Online Learners (Palloff & Pratt, 2003)

The following areas or issues were covered in the above books; after briefly covering the issues, I will provide a brief annotation on some special features the books incorporate.

When beginning to design a course, it is helpful to think about whether the course will be a *hybrid* course (a course partially taught in a face-to-face situation) or a course that is taught entirely online (for example, a course where students are scattered all around the world) (Ko & Rossen, 2004). At OJC use of the course management software thus far has been to support existing courses; none of the OJC courses have been taught entirely online. On the other hand my New School courses have been taught entirely online and have also been *asynchronous* which means that students and teacher have not had to be logged on at the same time. If a class is taught with all students logging on at the same time it is technically referred to as being a *synchronous* class. One year I did host a synchronous activity—we had a "Halloween party" in the chat room.

Teachers should also consider the amount of resources available (Pallof & Pratt, 2001). Some schools provide initial training, ongoing staff development, and dedicated staff

support for online courses while others are only able to provide the software and leave it to the teachers to learn how to use it. At OJC we were fortunate to have a series of training sessions showing us how to use the software and there are staff and teachers who are experienced in using WebCT available should anyone have a question. In addition to training, the amount of time necessary to teach online needs to be considered—many books suggest that initially there is a learning curve with the design and implementation of online classes taking quite a bit of time.

Creating a positive online environment is another area that teachers must be concerned about. Learning to learn online takes some time and, if possible, can be more effectively accomplished if students are offered some type of orientation workshop on online learning course during their first year. Online classes often privilege those who are good typists and sometimes students who are very comfortable in face-to-face encounters find it hard to work in an environment that primarily uses written communication. The written nature of online learning can also make it challenging for second language learners.

Many books suggest having some type of icebreaking activity, for example, having students give a self-introduction and/or tell why they are interested in the course. Other activities include having students complete a sentence such as "If I had to choose a song or CD to represent my character, it would be..." or having them interview (by email) and introduce each other online. Students need to be told the instructor's expectations regarding participation (many books suggest logging on two or three times a week, and many software programs have ways of tracking students' participation). For large classes, (or even smaller ones), most classroom management systems allow the designer to put students into smaller groups and many books suggest that groups of four or five members are ideal. (Bender, 2003). It is sometimes hard for students to understand how they will be evaluated so this needs to be clearly addressed; some books suggest the use of rubrics to help students clearly see how their grades will be determined and others urge the use of multiple sources for evaluation (Conrad & Donaldson, 2004; Palloff & Pratt, 2003). In other words, don't depend on just one type of evaluation such as written reports, or group assignments.

When developing a course, teachers must consider the types of activities they want to include. Possibilities include instructor lectures, student discussions, group work including presentations, research projects, and assessment projects such as quizzes, exams, portfolios, etc. When converting lectures to a written online format, it is important to remember that the lecture will not be listened to[3], but rather will be read. Thus some adjustments must be made to the register and layout of the lecture. Shorter paragraphs with headings and graphics are helpful as is a style that is somewhere between causal speech and formal

writing (Ko & Rossen, 2004). WebCT offers teachers the opportunity to view what they refer to as exemplary courses. The following courses were available for viewing when this paper was published:

> International Business
> General Linguistics
> Expository Writing
> The American Film
> Copyright and Intellectual Property Issues in Education
> Anatomy and Physiology (WebCT, 2005b)

By observing some classes, teachers can begin to develop criteria on what works and what should be avoided in an online class. As far as the actual course goes, teachers need to learn how to navigate around the course management system design interface. For example, there are presentation areas where teachers can post announcements, list the syllabus, and arrange the schedule. There are also discussion areas with a range of options where students can post responses and/or interact with other students. There are areas to post lectures and there are ways to incorporate email and chat rooms in the course.

Special Features

In the next section, I provide a brief annotation on special features found in each book:

Discussion-based Online Teaching to Enhance Student Learning: Theory, Practice, and Assessment (Bender, 2003)

Bender was one of the few authors who explored philosophical issues in online learning in a section she called theoretical implications: building a body of online pedagogy. She urged readers top rethink learning theory and referred to Bloom's taxonomy of knowledge acquisition. Part two and three of the book included several detailed chapters on practical applications and assessment. Judicious use of headings make the book very readable and easy for a teacher new to online teaching to follow.

Engaging the Online Learner: Activities and Resources for Creative Instruction (Conrad & Donaldson, 2004)

This book was more of a compilation of activities than anything else. The first part of the book referred briefly to constructivism and described how activities might best be designed. It ended with examples of a project rubric and a team rubric. The second part of the book was a compilation of activities. It had descriptions of activities to help students

learn how to use online tools, get to know one another, learn to work in teams and pairs online, reflect on various assignments, and so on. I felt that some of the activities were underwhelming and just left hanging without much contextualization.

Learning Online: A Guide to Success in the Virtual Classroom. (McVay Lynch, 2004)

This book was the only book aimed at the online learner but it should prove very helpful to teachers designing online courses. The book is full of helpful extras such as practical tips and reminders of things to remember along with screen shots (pictures of computer screens showing some of the functions being described). An example of a tip in the section on communication was to "keep in mind that the name of your file should include your last name and a descriptor (e.g. lynch-paper1.doc) This will help your instructor differentiate your paper from all of the other files named "paper1.doc" (McVay Lynch, 2004, p. 52). The book is full of links to useful sites and is meticulously edited as are most books published by RoutledgeFalmer. I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in online learning and teaching.

Lessons from the Cyberspace Classroom: Realities of Online Teaching (Palloff & Pratt, 2001)

This book is one of several by the authors (another one of their books was reviewed for this paper). Like the Bender book, it makes good use of headings and formatting to lead the reader through the book in an easy-to-follow manner. A special feature is that each chapter ends with a list of tips related to the topic covered. For example, the chapter on the tools of online teaching ends with tips for adopting and working with courseware. These tips appear to be well-thought out and are practical; they should help teachers design and implement online courses.

Teaching Online: A Practical Guide (Ko & Rossen, 2004)

This book along with the McVay Lynch book is one of my favorites. It is full of useful information including an annotated list of resources at the end of each chapter that directs readers to numerous links to websites. Like McVay Lynch, Ko and Rossen provide screen shots and they have also created a special website where the resources are updated and additional ideas are listed. The website is <http://college.hmco.com/education/instructors>. Ko and Rossen also thoroughly cover the issues surrounding hybrid courses.

The Virtual Student: A Profile and Guide to Working with Online Learners (Palloff & Pratt, 2003)

This is a solid book that examines who the online learner is. While it does not have the

tips at the end of each chapter like Palloff and Pratt's earlier book, it does provide two sets of resources at the end of the book (each a little over 15 pages long), one for teachers and one for students. Again the layout makes the book very easy to read and an added benefit is the use of many examples, tables, and quotes from students and teachers.

Closing Remarks

This article is aimed at teachers who are interested in incorporating aspects of online teaching into their face-to-face course. It provides a brief overview of what is involved in designing an online course for those teachers who find themselves in the position of having to teach their first online course. Its usefulness is mainly in helping teachers select a reference book for further study. If a teacher is mainly interested in a variety of activities, he or she may be pleased with the book by Conrad and Donaldson. However, if they would like to get into a little more of the philosophy and learning theory surrounding e-learning, they may be happier with Bender's book. For teachers wanting a lot of examples and links, then they should choose either McVay Lynch with her focus on the learner or Ko and Rossen with their practical guide on putting courses together.

In addition to providing an overview of online teaching course design, this article should also be of use to administrators. By understanding what online teaching involves, they will be better equipped to interpret information they are receiving from various committees charged with the task of implementing e-learning.

Notes

1 These courses are one-semester, content-based courses offered in OJC's junior college that involve independent research and a research paper with citations. The courses are referred to as Supervised Reading and Research I and II in the four-year university.

2 OJJC refers to Osaka Jogakuin Junior College which was the name of the college before it opened a four-year university in 2004. The college now consists of a four-year university and a two-year junior college both of which focus on humanistic, content-based education in English.

3 Although it is possible to allow students to listen to lectures through the use of pod casts and online video, many teachers do not have the technical expertise or the technical support in their schools to take advantage of this technology.

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