Going digital: Challenges and opportunities in transforming face to face ALL workshops into online versions

Key Words

digital technologies, partnership, staff skills, educational software

Abstract

While the decision to adapt AL materials to online formats may be mainly motivated by practical reasons such as increased outreach and limited resources, an emerging body of literature suggests that this format may be 'as or more effective than face to face instruction' (Gonzales 2014, p.45). This paper discusses the challenges and opportunities posed by the move to digitalise face to face ALL workshops. Based on the experience of adapting the 'Writing a Literature Review' face-to-face workshop for the Open Learning Environment (OLE henceforth), it explores the practical, technical and pedagogical advantages and limitations of the online format. Informed by best practices in the development of online materials (Blummer & Kristaya 2009), we sought to create an engaging, interactive set of resources that would also allow students the flexibility to select the activities that met their specific needs. In this process, collaboration with partners from different areas of the University, the Library in this case, proved crucial to the effectiveness of the tool, as it integrated the resources formerly available separately, thus allowing students to access more targeted face to face support. Furthermore, the process of digitalisation has the potential to benefit both online and face to face students, as it necessarily leads to curriculum revision ranging from updating of materials to more research-based practices and focus on formerly neglected areas.   Regarding the challenges, the paper addresses the issue of the potential lack of AL staff technological skills. Should staff be trained in the use of software for educational design or should an educational designer be hired for this purpose? If staff is to be trained, then by whom, for how long and at what cost? In our experience, a combination of basic training by experts, self-learning and peer mentoring, in which our established partnerships with other areas of the university played a crucial role, proved successful.

References

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