Teaching Online Tutors – Getting Them to Empathise with the Online Student’s Experience

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This paper relates the culture shock of our faculty’s first exposure to online teaching, where students do not physically attend; their sole experience of the university is through online learning.

Art & design is one of the most “personal” disciplines in the tertiary sector. Other text-based subjects have engaged with online learning to a large extent, art & design, with its culture of studio-based working, F2F teaching & tutorials and emphasis on visual medium rather than text-based resources, has lagged behind. We prefer a personal “hands-on” dialogue with students about their work and its relationship to the larger “visual” culture of modern life, in a studio setting, rather than the more impersonal environment online.

Programmes across the faculty have engaged with aspects of blended learning in their teaching, particularly our home grown VLE StudyNet. Little enthusiasm for a fully “virtual” programme has been apparent until recently.

Now our first fully online programme has been validated, students learn solely online, not attending physically.

To ensure the students’ best experience online we ran staff development events. Staff attended physically, but communication between the facilitator and the attendees was online via StudyNet. This gave them the experience of communicating with the “virtual” students. Staff learnt how to upload pictures, use discussion forums, moderate language and “intention” as well as trying to bring human qualities to their communication, so easily done in a F2F situation, which cannot be communicated easily online. Such as humour, “tone of voice”, etc. A throwaway comment in the studio, once committed to print, may not translate online in the way intended, resulting in miscommunication.
Find out what happened at the staff development event and how the staffs’ experience helped enhance their students’ online learning. Finally find out what our online students thought of teaching online!