**Reflections on Building an Online Course Module**

**By Scot Acre**

Creating an online course module provided me with some of the most interesting, thought provoking tasks that I have had to opportunity to partake in thus far in my career.  This process really forced me to think deeply about two ideas: pedagogy and assessment.  They are both words that educators use daily, but became hindrances that initially crippled my ability to begin the module, but ultimately lead to a high quality module.

Pedagogy was my first sticking point. I began by looking at other exemplars in terms of course management sites, unfortunately I wasn’t able to connect with them and thus brushed them aside as they didn’t “look” how I wanted mine to. It wasn’t until I was asked to go beneath the surface, that I truly understood the marvel that is pedagogy. In particular, the idea that though a face to face environment would afford differences, best practices are universal regardless the space that they take place in. What I really learned as a result of this is to create what you want your students to understand. In essence, pedagogy helped to make difficult decisions easier, as a progressed through the creation of my module.

My second sticking point was in assessment. I have always been trained to “begin with the end in mind” when it comes to developing units. I have learned that this can be a mistake when it comes to online learning. Certainly, one must have an idea of the skill set that must be demonstrated by students, but how does that get measured? As a teacher of mathematics it would be easy to get confined by the procedural aspect of things. It would also be easy to rely upon vocabulary knowledge as the primary source of knowledge. In fact, the module that I developed was done for that very reason. Having said that, there are so many more meaningful ways that students can demonstrate their understanding… the question is, how does one provide a clear, concise arena for students to create their own knowledge, while still demonstrating that they “got it”? This is a question that I am still wrestling with.

As you go about the process of starting your own course management site, there are many things to consider. Initially, the most important thing is the choice of technology as it pertains to the limitations set forth by the school district. I wanted to use Moodle but found that our district doesn’t support it. The moral here is that it will be important to have discussions with your IT department on how your course will function within the confines of their rules.

From there, it is important to make the module as user friendly as possible. Students have difficulty following instructions when you are standing right in front of them… imagine what might happen when left to their own devices. My recommendation is to be sure to spend extra time on this feature, as it will save you time in the long run. In addition, DO expect to spend time with the upkeep and monitoring of things. What you have created will need to be quite dynamic and flexible, and thus will need your daily attention.

The final piece of advice that I have is to NOT limit yourself to the confines of the hosting site. For example, if you don’t like the way the assessment feature asks questions, then find a different way to give the assessment. Having said that, you DO want an environment that will allow you to create things in a way that makes your life easier; that is why it is SO important to “shop around” at the beginning of the process. Pick the piece of technology the works best for you, and then make it your own.

In closing, creating an online course module can truly elevate the currency of teaching and learning for both you and your students. It will take the expert knowledge that you as a classroom teacher have, combined with purposeful pedagogy and assessment, through the usage of the technological tools for this elevation to occur. Wish me luck as I begin my journey.