Assignment 1: Professor For A Day

Michele Brannon-Hamilton

Planning and Managing Learning Technologies in Higher Education - ETEC 520

Word Count: 2857

January 26, 2009

Introduction

The St. Louis Adult Learning Centre is an educational institution located in Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario Canada which trains adults in various areas of education for the Waterloo District Catholic School Board. One section of St. Louis is the literacy department known as Core Essentials.

The following is a five year strategic plan written to guide the Core Essentials' staff as they incorporate e-learning into their department. The plan includes an analysis of the context, an environmental scan, a clear vision of the future and corresponding implications for the department.

Context

The St. Louis Adult Learning Centre is a Catholic high school which educates "over 13,000" (St. Louis) adult students at its combined campuses. St. Louis is an inclusive school where all students are welcome regardless of cultural or religious beliefs. The main campus has over one thousand students and several hundred faculty and support staff. There are several distinct departments including Secondary Credits, Linc, English as a Second Language (ESL), School to Work Programs, Daycare, and Core Essentials.

Core Essentials is the literacy or upgrading department which holds classes in Kitchener and Cambridge. Core Essentials is funded mostly by the Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities (MTCU) and partially by the Catholic School Board. The Core

department includes upgrading classes for all adults and special computer literacy classes for senior citizens.

The St. Louis' institutional mandate and Core Essentials' mission is to empower learners to help themselves in the pursuit of learning. Core Essentials also promotes life long learning. St. Louis follows an Agrarian model as outlined by Bates (2000) which includes no summer classes, instructors who are also course designers and segregated departments (p.39). However, Core Essentials also has some elements of Bates' "Post-Fordist Organizations" (2000) with its client-centered classes and contract employees (p. 39).

Faculty include a principal, two vice principals, six secretaries, several guidance counsellors and an IT department. The Core Essentials department employs six literacy instructors, two literacy assessors and one program manager. Most employees are part time contract instructors who teach and write their own curriculum.

Each class in the Core Essentials' department has 10-20 students and one instructor. St. Louis has a diverse set of learners who are at various literacy levels with the majority being able to read and write at about a six to eighth grade level. All the students are adult learners over the age of nineteen. Some learners are young people returning to high school; others are older adults who have families and children. Their motivations include becoming more independent, obtaining further education or becoming more employable. Learners want to upgrade their reading, writing, math, and computer skills in order to move on to high school credits, become computer literate, go to college or find a job. Others attend literacy classes as a condition of parole and probation or to obtain Ontario Works' funding.

These learners face many barriers to education like learning disabilities, hunger, language difficulties or lack of transportation. Most had difficulties in school. They come from various cultures and may speak many languages. The majority of literacy learners are kinaesthetic learners who had difficulty in traditional "talk and chalk" classrooms (N. Applebee, personal communication, December 2008).

All of the learners in the Core Essentials program currently use computers for word processing, emailing and researching the Internet. The following analysis will show how these learners could benefit from changes to the program. First, an environmental scan shows the external and internal factors affecting St. Louis over the next five years.

Environmental Scan

An environmental scan clearly shows the social, educational, economic, employment, and institutional factors that will affect the St. Louis Adult Learning Centre, the Core department, and the departmental plan to incorporate e-learning into the Core Essentials program.

Social changes include an aging population and the encouragement of life-long learning which often translates into older workers and into adults returning to school (Sangra, 2007, p. 285). Howell also suggests that "there is also a shift toward increased accessibility for those who are disabled" (2003). New technology is changing the world socially with many people using instant messaging, chat rooms and email to communicate. This era of communication demands that people have literacy and computer skills in order to function in society.

Educational changes include a profound move in the literacy field from literacy to essential skills (Understanding Essential Skills) which now includes computer skills in its definition of literacy. The "new trends" (Bates, 2000, p. 49) in education reflect societal needs. This move to a more functional (Scrimshaw, 2000) definition of literacy shows that learners need computer skills in education and the work place. Some literacy centres like Conestoga College and Action Read, both in Ontario, have already incorporated e-learning into their programs to meet these new societal needs (Action Read). Educational changes also include the concept of life long learning and the establishment of the second career program in Ontario.

Technology is also changing the type of learners found today and the type of learning they do. Young learners have grown up with technology and expect an education that entertains and engages them (Speaker, personal communication, December 2008). There is an increase in e-learning at high schools, colleges and universities as the use of online learning shifts from "Web1.0 to Web 2.0" (Baraniuk, 2008, p. 229). The Internet is now a place to interact instead of a place to simply obtain information. As the Internet changes, so does the amount and type of knowledge. Howell, Williams and Lindsay (2003) suggest there will continue to be a rapid increase of knowledge.

Financial factors include the amount of funding available for Core Essential classes. Last year, classes were reduced from two or three classes per campus to one because of funding cutbacks. When turned away, students go elsewhere which in turn causes the next year's funding to drop. The amount of money available each year will affect the Core Essentials program.

Economic and employment changes are a primary concern for many Canadians today. The floundering economy has led to economic hard times causing many workers to lose jobs and others to delay retirement. Job loss is especially predominant in Ontario with the collapse of the auto industry. As a direct response to these economic factors, the Ontario government has established second career opportunities in this province (Second Career). Learners now need literacy and computer skills to get into second career programs or to find new jobs. Because of an increase in computer based jobs, literacy practitioners are seeing a move toward workforce literacy and essential skills (Understanding Essential Skills).

Internal or institutional factors will also affect the implementation of e-learning in Core Essentials including the growth of larger class sizes as more students come to school. Funding is often unpredictable and there is no library, Special Education department or adaptive technology support. Another internal concern is the computer network that St. Louis shares with the rest of the Catholic schools. Sites like Youtube.com are blocked to protect children but end up restricting adults. Also, there are so many users on the network at the same time; therefore, the system is slow and often two students cannot access the same site at the same time. Computers are also old with out of date software.

The "department's current strength" (Bates, 2000, p.49) lies in its design. The Core Essentials program already uses some elements of an "instructional design" (Sangra, 2007, p. 286) approach because they look at the needs of their students, gather specific resources to suit these individual needs, teach to specific student learning styles, create their own curriculum to accommodate students, and assess and reassess learning

outcomes. Their learner centred approach incorporates the needs of ESL learners, older adults, and learning disabled students.

Once the environmental scan is complete, the Core Essentials department can move toward a vision of the future.

The Vision

The following is a vision of how Core Essentials will look after incorporating e-learning into its department. Core Essentials would benefit from e-learning by reaching more students, using software to teach to specific learning styles, using the Internet to overcome learning barriers, using online literacy programs, and fostering computer literacy as a necessary skill for independence, further education and employability.

E-learning in the Core Essentials program would include a "blended" (Kelly, 2007, p. 37) model of teaching that combines face-to-face teaching with technology in the classroom and online. Face-to-face instruction would continue because literacy learners need a lot of one-to-one assistance in overcoming learning difficulties. By purchasing up-to-date software, using interactive software, establishing an adaptive technology lab, accessing the Internet, making an instructional shift, and training instructors, the Core Essentials department could use e-learning to enhance their program.

The department would purchase new software like the latest Microsoft Office or equivalent programs to help students prepare for further education. By becoming functionally literate (Literacy Changes Lives, 2000), students will have an easier transition into further education or into the workplace. Staff would also purchase literacy

software so students could develop literacy and computer skills simultaneously. Interactive reading, writing and math software allows students to repeat lessons as necessary. This repetition enhances memory retention. Computer programs would be used to engage learners by allowing them to use visual, auditory or kinaesthetic learning styles. Visual and auditory students could read and listen to computer programs; kinaesthetic students could use flash card creation software to create learner centred study material. Overall, students would be able to use software that suits their learning styles and their literacy levels while also being able to work at their own speed.

The establishment of an Adaptive Technology lab would help learning disabled students reach their full potential. Instructors could buy adaptive technology like Dragon Naturally Speaking and Kurzweil to help students learn. Students with writing disabilities could speak into their computers using Dragon. The software then changes the audio into text and displays the words in word processing programs. Students with reading difficulties would benefit from Kurzweil which reads text to students. Text books can be scanned into the computer allowing Kurzweil to read any book to students. E-books are also available. Using adaptive technology would allow learning-disabled students to be part of St. Louis's inclusive mandate. This software would accommodate their disabilities and improve their ability to learn. Visually impaired and hard of hearing students could also benefit from these programs. For an overview of how to incorporate adaptive technology into their program, Core Essentials could look at other literacy agencies in the area like Guelph's Action Read (Action Read).

Computers with high speed full Internet access would help students in many ways. Instructors could use the Internet to reach more learners. Students who are unable

to attend full days because of families or jobs would benefit from online courses and course web sites. Students could visit free learning sites form anywhere which may help overcome learning barriers like travel and affordability. Core Essentials could develop a course web site with bulletin boards and elements of what Kelly calls the "Online Filing Cabinet" (2007, p. 38). The site would include frequently asked questions, contact information, videos of learning strategies, information about Core Essentials, and links to literacy websites and community resources.

Furthermore, instructors could use the Internet to access online course material, games and classes from other literacy agencies opening up a world of material for students. This array of information would allow instructors to use a variety of websites and e-learning material to reach visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learners. Staff could use the Internet to teach communication skills by using email, instant messaging, discussion forums and chat rooms. Students could communicate with the instructor or each other.

Core Essentials could use open sourceware like Moodle (Sinclair, 2007 p.7) or Centra to train instructors and teach students. Moodle currently contains a literacy lesson database which includes activities, level descriptors and assessment tools. Instructors can use the material and allow their students to work on the lessons independently. Trained instructors can then mentor new instructors (Bates, 2000, p. 43). Facilitators would use Centra to demonstrate "course management system[s]" (Kelly, 2007, p. 34) like Blackboard, WebCt or Angel.

As Zemsky points out, by accessing the Internet, students can learn "any time and anywhere a computer and a connection to the Internet could be found" (Zemsky, 2004, p.

2). Core instructors can make a slow move from "Web 1.0" to "Web 2.0" (Sinclair, 2006, p.6) over the five years by using the Internet for interactive learning.

An instructional shift will occur as instructors move from posting content onto websites to using online resources like Centra and interactive literacy sites. This shift resembles the move from level 1 to level 2 of Kelly's "eMatrix" (2007, p. 36-37). The move should be slow because literacy and learning disabled students do not do well in traditional classrooms. Therefore, instructors will continue to teach according to Kelly's level 1 (2007) by teaching face-to-face, posting content and using the Internet for research. Instructors will maintain their learner centred approach but they will now incorporate interactive learning into an e-learning environment.

Overall, Core Essentials can incorporate e-learning into their department in many ways. After a look at the possibilities, the final piece of the strategic plan is a look at the real implications for the department.

Implications for the Department

After looking at the context and conducting an environmental scan, the Core Essentials department will need a clear outline of the implications for the department. Implications include limitations and necessary changes in the learning environment such as lack of support, time constraints, financial costs, and computer problems. The introduction of e-learning will also impact the Core Essentials staff.

Core Essentials instructors lack IT support which means computers are not fixed in a timely manner; hardware breaks down; computers are old, and there is no help for software issues. Furthermore, because of the segregated nature of the school, Core

Essentials instructors often feel isolated from other departments and the institution itself. They feel there is a lack of understanding, support or respect from other departments.

Time constraints pose a threat because the implementation of any new program means time is needed for training and for developing course material. Students will then have to be trained in adaptive technology, new software, and web use. Support staff will also need to be involved as they learn new concepts and support the staff and students.

Cost may be the largest barrier to incorporating e-learning into the Core program. Cost includes the billable hours spent training staff and the purchase of adaptive software, the Internet and new computers. IT and support staff assistance (Kelly, 2007, p. 37) will also cost money. MTCU provides finances for literacy instruction which may or may not include computer hardware and software. Furthermore, MTCU funding changes from year to year. St. Louis has funded some new computers in the past year but the money to purchase more computers may not be available. There's only so much money so the department must decide how to spend it (Bates, 2000, p. 44). Even with the latest funding there are currently 12 students but only three computers in the classroom (N. Applebee, personal communication, January, 2009). With the implementation of an e-learning program, Core Essentials must take into account the initial high cost associated with buying new hardware the reality that technology is always changing.

The students themselves may also be a barrier to learning. Staff must continually assess and accommodate for the "changing needs of students" (Strong, 2007, p.48). Strong suggests that people should expect change (2007) so instructors may want to teach students how to expect and accept change.

Finally, instructors face a lot of initial challenges when beginning e-learning. They need extra time to learn new software, attend meetings and train students. They need to learn and practice programs like Centra and Moodle which takes time and they will also be faced with some changes in instructional methods.

Core staff are already stressed and overworked because of the challenges of working with learning disabled students and dealing with sporadic student attendance. Now instructors will have more to do. Besides regular literacy problems, instructors will be handling computer literacy issues. Furthermore, Core staff will need to restructure the physical classroom to accommodate new computers and situate face-to-face learners in an area away from the noise of online activity.

However, Core instructors have the advantage of being facilitators who teach using a "student-centered learning model" (Sangra, 2007, p. 290) and who write their own curriculum. These skills will help then move into their new e-learning environment. Overall, instructors need to stay current in the field of literacy and keep up-to-date in the computer world in order to succeed.

Conclusion

The Core Essentials department could incorporate e-learning into its program successfully by developing a clear definition of e-learning, understanding its environment, having a clear vision of the future, realizing obstacles, obtaining funding, and acquiring institutional support (ETEC 520). After completing a strategic plan, they can then develop realistic and measurable goals that can be incorporated over the next

five years. As Bates (2000) suggests, once a department knows its goals and purpose, it can begin to achieve them (p.45).

References

Action Read Community Literacy Centre. (n.d.). Retrieved January 2009, from Action Read Community Literacy Centre: http://www.actionread.com/

Adult Learning Activities. (n.d.). Retrieved January 2009, from California Distance Learning Project: http://www.cdlponline.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=stories&topicID=4

Baraniuk, R.G. (2008). Challenges and Opportunities for the Open Education Movement: A Connexions Case Study. In T. Liyoshi & M.S.V. Kumar (EDs.) *Opening Up Education* (pp.229-246). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Bates, A.W. (2000) *Managing Technological Change: Strategies for College and University Leaders.* San Francisco: Jossey Bass, pp. 7-75.

Bereiter, C. & Scardamalia, M. (2006). Catching the Third ICT Wave. Queen's University Education Letter, pp. 1-3.

Bullen, M. & Janes, D.P. (2007). Preface. In M Bullen & D.P. Janes (Eds.) *Making the Transition to E-Learning: Strategies and Issues,* pp. vii-xvi, Hershey, PA: Information Science Publishing.

ETEC 520. (n.d.). Retrieved January 2009, from UBC Vista: https://www.vista.ubc.ca/webct/urw/lc5116011.tp0/cobaltMainFrame.dowebct

Guri-Rosenblit, S. (2005). “Distance education” and “e-learning.”

Howell, S. L. (2003). Thirty-two Trends Affecting Distance Education: An Informed Foundation for Strategic Planning. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, Volume VI, Number III, Fall 2003* .

Karrer, T. (2007, March 28). *eLearning Technology.* Retrieved January 2009, from eLearning Technology: http://elearningtech.blogspot.com/2007/03/elearning-trends.html

Kelly, O. (2007). Moving to Blended Delivery in a Polytechnic: Shifting the Mindset of Faculty and Institutions. In M. Bullen and D.P. Janes (Eds.), *Making the Transition to E-Learning: Strategies and Issues,* pp. 33-46, Hershey, PA: Information Science Publishing.

Kunz, J. L. (n.d.). *Computers and Adult Literacy.* Retrieved January 2009, from Canadian Council on Social Development: http://www.ccsd.ca/pubs/literacy/literacy.htm

Literacy Changes Lives. (2000, December). Retrieved January 2009, from National Literacy Trust: http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/Pubs/scrimshaw.html

Ontario Ministry of Training, C. a. (n.d.). *Literacy and Basic Skills*. Retrieved January 2009, from Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities: http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/training/literacy/flexible.html

Sangra, A., Guardia, L., & Gonzalez-Sanmamed, M. (2007). Educational Design as a Key Issue in Planning for Quality Improvement. In M. Bullen & D.P. Janes (Eds.) *Making the Transition to E-Learning: Strategies and Issues,* pp. 284-299. Hershey, PA: Information Science Publishing.

Second Career. (n.d.). Retrieved January 2009, from Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities: http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/tcu/secondcareer/

Sinclair, G., McClaren, M., & Griffin, M. (2006). E-Learning & Beyond.

St. Louis Adult Learning & Continuing Education Centres. (n.d.). Retrieved January 2009, from St. Louis Adult Learning & Continuing Education Centres: http://stlouis.wcdsb.ca/

Strong, Bart (2007). Strategic Planning for Technological Change. In *Educause Quarterly,* Retrieved from the Educause Quarterly: https://www.vista.ubc.ca/webct/RelativeResourceManager/Template/Readings/plan techchange.pdf

SurveyMonkey.com. (n.d.). Retrieved January 2009, from SurveyMonkey.com: http://www.surveymonkey.com/

The Learning Edge. (n.d.). Retrieved January 2009, from Wellington County Learning Centre: http://thewclc.ca/edge/

The Learning Hub. (n.d.). Retrieved January 2009, from The Learning Hub: http://www.learninghub.ca/

Understanding Essential Skills. (n.d.). Retrieved January 2009, from Human Resources and Skills Development Canada: http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/workplaceskills/essential_skills/general/understanding_ es.shtml

Universal Design. (n.d.). Retrieved January 2009, from Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_design

Zemsky, R. & Massy, W.F. (2004). Thwarted Innovation: What Happened to E-Learning and Why (pp. 1-6).