10 Rules of Teaching in this Century

By Trent Batson (downloaded from Campus Technology)

We've been predicting a technology revolution for decades, and actually, it happened 5 years ago. We are now past the tipping point. Suddenly, we find that higher education no longer has a corner on knowledge making and distribution. But on the bright side, the entire culture is learning-resource rich, technology has a more human face, and education has become more critical than ever.

As the revolution gathers momentum, many higher education institutions are clean-sheet redesigning teaching, learning, assessment, and career development. The 10 rules in this article suggest the depth of change that's occurring on campuses right now.

These rules describe how to transform current teaching-centered practice to learning-centered practice, using the technologies of today.

Two basic 21st century laws frame these rules: First, the knowledge developed during the course does not pre-exist the course. Second, since the knowledge of the course does not exist before the course (because you and the students develop the knowledge during the course), your chief challenge is to manage the process of knowledge discovery. Here are the rules for how to do this:

1. *Re-examine and adopt the move from teaching to learning*. This principle gained prominence in the 1990s as a catch phrase, but with limited implementation, well before the tipping point in 2005. Now, there are many reasons to make this move and no longer reasons not to make the move. Before, it was hard to make the move because of the comparatively tiny resource set and the restricted learning opportunities compared to what is available today. Now, because learning resources and opportunities are infinite, make the move: Don't just tell students the key knowledge in your field, but help them discover it through problem-based active learning. Change your curriculum from a list of what you will say to a list of essential problems (or questions) that students will address, with your guidance, throughout the semester.

2. *Re-visit the accountability measures on your campus* (usually called learning goals or learning outcomes) and re-structure them to fit the move you and others are making. As course design at your campus or in your courses starts to incorporate active learning approaches, rubrics based on the legacy curriculum need to change as well. It may well be better to re-state learning outcomes in terms of essential problems and the research associated with those essential problems, and build rubrics based on the problems within a problem-based learning structure.

3. *Make a corollary change in assessment*, once this move from teaching to learning is underway in your course or course of study: Move most assessment activity away from testing and toward evaluation of student evidence of learning. Student evidence of learning is now easy to capture and store. In the new paradigm of active and varied learning, testing is less appropriate but assessing student evidence is more appropriate.

4. *Insist on teaching only in technology-enabled classrooms*. Information technology *is* the default learning technology of today. Campuses have spent millions of dollars on management systems such as the SIS, ERPs, and CRMs because they knew they had to. Now, to stay in business, they must spend millions more to finish the job of building learning spaces for the current learning paradigm: 100 percent "smart classrooms." These learning spaces must allow all students to have access to the Net while they are in the learning space.

5. *Make sure your students have technology management tools of their own* as they take on active learning challenges. Campuses spend hundreds of thousands of dollars each year on management systems for faculty, for them to teach. But, as you and your campus make the move from teaching to learning, students must also have tools to manage their own resources and evidence, not just during a course, but 24/7 while they are enrolled, including between semesters.

6. *Insist on faculty having management tools for their own professional development* to support annual review or a request for promotion or tenure. You, as a faculty member, must be as adept as your students in using Web-based applications, and there is no better way to learn the new breed of applications than to use them yourself for important professional purposes.

7. *Do not discard the lecture or class discussion approach when appropriate*, but use it primarily for the purpose of helping students address the essential problems of the course: Use lectures and discussions to help students to make progress in their projects and therefore to build their course portfolios.

8. *Make sure your students have a digital repository of some sort*--a portfolio system, a wiki, a blog, a Web page builder, a place to store and manage the evidence of their active learning.

9. *Require your students to interpret their collected online evidence at regular intervals* and, finally, in capstone Web presentations.

10. *Make the collection of evidence the primary work of the course*. In other words, students should be graded largely or entirely on their final portfolio for the course. In a learning-centered course, the portfolio is the *sine qua non*.

These rules apply to any course, any field, or any kind of formal learning sequence. The rules describe what is necessary to adapt to and *celebrate* the millennial change we've just gone through.
The 20th century economy, led by the industrial sector, has morphed radically into the knowledge economy, an economy of ideas and innovation. This new economy is not yet generating the wealth of the old economy. Therefore, in order to regain our economic vitality, education needs to be the primary engine.

The four years of traditional undergraduate education has taken on a new urgency: Because the vitality of our economy now arises from innovation, college graduates must be allowed to be innovators. The ten rules provide the path.

About the Author
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