

I have always loved to work through challenges, especially when it comes to training faculty on new/current technologies and software systems.

When I started working at a university, I was assigned a training course called HTML for Beginners. The course was a 2 hour workshop spanning 3 weeks in total. It was based on 3 modules that hold approximately 5 lessons in each for a total of 15 units of instruction.

I failed miserably teaching that course -- not because I did not know how to teach or understand HTML (I had coded for years) but because the course was not logically sequenced and students were not grasping the concepts or learning associated with the task at hand. The course was a mess and I wanted to fix it!

My first foray into reworking this course was to convince my manager that this was a necessary task, even though the course had been running for 2 years continuously with no (apparent) issues. However, this changed quite dramatically when (I) the new instructor taught the course. I found that even just after teaching it once, there was a large learning gap between what the students were supposed to learn and what they actually learned.

And so, I was given the opportunity to change the course but to do so in 3 weeks and if the course piloted badly then we would revert to the current version and if not, the new one would prevail.

I jumped right in. The first task was building a widget that allowed the learner to type in code, select a button and have the HTML appear as a web page. I enlisted a student and the widget was created

I then rejigged the order of the learning tasks, presented my ideas, and waited patiently for the results. I was quite heady with excitement.

The revised course was a hit with both instructors and students — in fact when I conducted the course in class (my first assessment) everyone was so excited that they did not want to leave my class but instead play with the widget for the remaining 2 hours until the department closed. Students felt like they had accomplished something (rather than waiting 3 weeks) and instructors were less anxious as the process for saving, uploading and viewing HTML pages can become cumbersome.

Now you're probably wondering what this has to do with the MDE program. Well, in MDE 603 I decided to rework my revised course and move a section of it to Moodle, and make it fully online (theoretically).

I worked through the problems, defining and refining until I got the sequence just right. After teaching the course for a while, I had access to and used the evaluation forms to conduct informal assessments either one on one or as a group. I evaluated, compared alternatives and formally defended my strategies including running a pilot -- just to see if I could solve the issue that was frustrating the students.

When I tested the instructional unit on my learners, they all responded positively, not to mention having fun. After all, if learning isn't fun, then it's not learning.