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STORYTELLERS BEHIND THE SCREEN — ONLINE TEACHERS' IDENTITY

From a teacher's perspective, transforming from the traditional classroom to the virtual platform could lead to huge changes in teacher's identity. The proposed project aims to analyze and elaborate the challenges that online teachers have to overcome and provide possible suggestions to help online teachers better adapt themselves to the virtual learning environment.

Traditional higher education usually happens in a limited space among a certain amount of people and is exclusive of knowledge, while online learning personalizes this process and give access to the public (Ross et al., 2014). Teachers who have no experience with online teaching usually face a steep learning curve. Also, the lack of interaction between online teachers and students can be compared with the interaction between actors and audiences: the actor cannot change his performance based on audiences' reaction; when the performance fails to appeal to the audience's expectation, they simply change the channel. Swan and Shih (2005) found that the perceived presence (i.e., the psychological state of being connected and close to others in the interactive activity) of the instructors may be a very influential factor in determining student satisfaction more than the perceived presence of their peers. Similarly, the perceived presence of students can, to a large extent, enhance teachers' motivation for teaching. However, this sense of presence has now diminished behind screens. Another debatable question is how much responsibility an online teacher should take when conveying information. Students now have access to countless different websites and to "experienced expertise" on almost every topic they are interested in. "The web is a sophisticated place, and all of us are susceptible to being taken in" (McGrew, Ortega, Breakstone & Wineburg, 2017, p.9). A rational system is needed to assess the quality of online courses as well as the competence of online teachers in terms of subject matters and professional integrity. However, online education is not the enemy of quality education and deserves more consideration and research. The proposed project will shed light on online teachers' identity, motivation, and integrity.