Chapter XIII

A Social Constructionist Approach to Learning Communities: Moodle

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Abstract

This chapter will discuss the influence of the main learning paradigms: conductism and constructivism. We will also talk about the need to apply the OSS development model and licences to the creation of open contents, to be also collaboratively created in communities. The social reality of OSS communities that become learning communities is described by the principles of social constructionism; this paradigm has been applied in the creation of Moodle.org, a true learning community built around the OSS learning management system: Moodle.
Introduction

Conductism and Constructivism

There are two main pedagogical theories used to approach any education process (including the e-learning focused): conductism and constructivism. We can find antecedents of these theories on Classic Greece, in Plato’s Academia. The rhetorical masters based their teaching in the recitation of a discourse previously written in a special book of contents. On the other hand, Plato, founder and director for more than twenty years of the Academia, did defend and practiced a way of teaching consisting in stimulating the student’s individual investigation, complemented by related debates inside and outside the classroom (Aristotle named his own school after the teacher student debates during peripatetic (wandering) walking). Plato applied active learning methods that enabled the students to work and study by themselves, in order for them to discover the difficulty and find out how to overcome it. Plato’s method also stimulated criticism among his students. And you never know where this process will lead, you cannot control what the student is going to learn.

Conductism proposes a detailed instructional design based on:

- A concrete definition of the learning objectives
- The use of well-designed and normalized contents
- The fragmentation of the information in small units, to be studied separately and following a defined sequence
- Continuous evaluation of the students progress, evaluate (and pass) one unit before coming into the next
- Reinforcement of desired student responses
- Control over the student learning pace

On the other hand, the constructivist approach relies more on:

- Creating proper opportunities to allow the students to face situations that create intellectual conflict with their past experiences, forcing them to think
- Suggesting activities that help students to build and restructure their knowledge
- Suggesting problem-solving activities, with real case studies (whenever possible)
- Proposing activities that require interaction and collaboration (with other students and the teacher himself)
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