

Chapter 18

Building Relationship Through Learning Communities and Participation in Online Learning Environments: Building Interactions in Online Learning

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ABSTRACT

With the increase demand for distance education, institutions of higher education are actively exploring opportunities to weave self, subject and students for web based distance education. The pedagogical skills necessary to create effective active learning opportunities are explored throughout this chapter as well as lessons learned from research. The authors used vignettes to position effective course design and implementation aligned with both Bloom’s Taxonomy and the SAMR (Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, Redefinition) model to enhance online learning environments. Learning objectives and course goals provided direction for developing task for social presence, cognitive presence and a collaborative stance in authentic online learning.

INTRODUCTION

Good teachers join self, subject, and students in the fabric of life... Palmer, 1999, p. 11

This quote is as true in an online learning environment as it is in the traditional brick and

mortar classroom. In essence, “All education- face- to-face, distance mode, online- requires understanding the nature of the medium in order to conceptualize and design it as an educational environment” (Harasim, 1995, p 138). Due to the increase demand for distance education, institutions of higher education are actively exploring

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opportunities to weave self, subject and students for web-based distance education. These institutions are often faced with challenges such as technological knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, student knowledge, and content knowledge (Wilson, Zygouris-Coe, Cardullo, & Fong, 2013). These challenges are often compounded by faculty members' busy schedules, lack of technology and preconceived notions and attitudes. Beyond simply offering online course work, instructors need to know how to set up the online format effectively to present opportunities for student involvement through collaborative discussion, video chats, Wiki pages, Twitter, and blogs to name a few. The pedagogical skills necessary to create effective active learning opportunities will be explored through this chapter. This chapter includes lessons learned from research, vignettes of effective course designs and implementations, and ideas about emerging technologies, and how they can enhance online learning environments.

SELECTING EMERGING TECHNOLOGY

When preparing to teach a course online, critical emphasis should be placed on the skills required for creating and facilitating effective online course work as well as the issues and ways the course may change for students. For example, it is important for instructors to implement activities that allow students to analyze and utilize critical thinking through emerging technologies such as blogs or Twitter. Often these emerging technologies require the user to assemble and analyze information differently, defying the typical notion of a static text. In a recent listserv discussion (EDUCAUSE, January, 2015) a faculty member was soliciting thoughts on a "good" cloud-based social network platforms that could facilitate substantive organic communication and collaboration amongst past,

present, and future students. Many faculty members offered descriptions of the platforms. Table 1 presents a snapshot of the suggestions.

While this list of resources is diverse, intuitive, and on target for what is needed to support substantive organic communication and collaboration amongst past, present, and future students, the key element that is being overlooked in the recommendations given is connection between the students and the technology and the students and the content (Cardullo, Zygouris-Coe & Wilson, 2014). When introducing a new platform in an online course the connection between all of these elements need to be in the forefront (Cardullo et al., 2014). Technology that doesn't connect to students and improve the way they experience the content misses the ultimate purpose of meeting learning goals (Arbaugh et al, 2010; Cohen & Hollebrands, 2011; Fey et al., 2010). Instead of implementing something new, instructors should consider surveying the students to find out what they are already using, and incorporating something, they are already familiar with using. This would alleviate the introduction of a new platform. It takes time to learn how to efficiently operate emerging technologies, and instructors must account for these elements in their coursework. If learning the new technology creates a benefit worthy of the time it will take away from other elements of the course, then it is worthwhile, but implementing something new simply for the sake of being "innovative" can cause students to miss important content related to the goals of the course.

Electronic technology in the age of new media creates a different type of literacy, developing a literacy stance that is no longer static. With each new tool or device comes a learning curve. Interactions between mode and media affect the discourse, design, production, and consumption of online courses. Technology rich activities can enhance high levels of student engagement and peer collaboration allowing students to connect,

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