

e-Learning: The Virtual AG ED Model Classroom

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Introduction

Constructivist teaching has resurged as a dominant learning paradigm as a response to the positivist model of education that is prevalent in schools. In order for education to become more constructivist, there must be a change in teaching practice from didactic to self-directed student learning (Heflich, 1996).

During the Spring of 2000, students enrolled in Agricultural Education 3203, Planning the Community Agricultural Education Program, were required to utilize and participate in a multi-channel e-Learning destination site as a supplement to the lectures and laboratories. This e-Learning software platform encompassed a course management system, institution-wide customizable portals, and advanced web-based architecture for easy integration of multiple administrative systems.

The purpose of using an e-Learning platform was to provide students with the opportunity to use electronic communication so that they may become more self-directed as learners, to increase communication with the instructor, and to expand the boundaries of the classroom. According to Juliano (1997), the use of the Web to supplement traditional instruction employs “power pedagogy” that establishes an extension of the regular classroom to increase teacher productivity and to accommodate more students with existing facilities.

How it Works

The instructors created their e-Learning course without the knowledge of any coding (HTML). Customized portals are already established for any class announcement, course document, course information, assignments, web-link, staff information, or communication like email, a discussion board, virtual chat, and student or group web page. The instructors also had the ability to integrate multiple administrative systems. The administrative systems include an online grade book, student and course tracking, and course utilities.

The students were required to log into the e-Learning site, which required a user name and password. This access allowed the students to navigate throughout the virtual course into any customized portal. Students were able to download all documents or post all requirements, and utilized various communication tools.

Advice for Others

“Even when well designed, online discussions will not naturally thrive; they must be facilitated and evaluated” (Knowlton, Knowlton, & Davis, 2000). The following were negatives perceived by instructors and students using the e-Learning site:

- ?? Self-discipline and self-motivation are required by the students.
- ?? Anxiety was caused by an initial steep learning curve.
- ?? Difficulty in discussion closure.
- ?? Faculty adjustment to more student comments and a heavier workload.
- ?? Stressed importance on literacy and writing skills.
- ?? No face-to-face contact.
- ?? Frustrations with technical difficulties and level of computer sophistication.
- ?? Time management.

The following were benefits perceived by instructors and students using the e-Learning site:

- ?? Convenience and flexibility.
- ?? A high need for cognition.
- ?? Allows the classroom to move outside its physical boundaries.
- ?? Collaborative learning.
- ?? Communication is instantaneous.
- ?? Email provides as visible record of an exchange of ideas, anonymity and privacy.
- ?? Increases instructor availability and extended class discussions.

Implications

The ability of the instructor to successfully integrate e-Learning as part of the curriculum can be a powerful pedagogical tool for students of diverse learning styles.

References

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