On-Line Discussions In Teacher Education: Dialogues Beyond Classroom Walls

The rapid growth of Web-based instruction has raised many questions about the quality of online courses therefore we feel that educators and students must understand the new online teaching and learning paradigm. Mehlinger and Powers (2002) define distance education as a system and a process that connects learners with distributed learning resources. Ko and Rosseni (2001) describe online education as the act of conducting a course partially or totally through the Internet. There are several common denominators among online courses like separation of place/time between instructor and learner, and communication through technological media. I have been interested in the use of online communities to foster a collaborative spirit and to provide a space for interactions among teacher education students as a complement to an in-class course. Accordingly, the focus of this paper is on how teacher education students perceive online learning experiences in higher education as complement to enrich their traditional face-to-face undergraduate course that uses a discussion board weekly. The data was collected during three quarters of an undergraduate class that satisfy requirements of teacher education programs at a large Midwestern University.

STUDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS ABOUT DISCUSSION BOARD ASSIGNMENTS IN AN UNDERGRADUATE COURSE

In a traditional course about computers in the classroom, I used WebCT (WebCT, 2001) discussion boards for the students’ asynchronous weekly discussion postings in which they expressed their comfort level in relation to their projects and software, and to share experiences with classmates. The focus of this study is how discussion boards can enhance face-to-face classrooms as a tool with which the instructor to establish a variety of discussions. The participants in this study were students from three undergraduate instructional technology classes.

These are some general findings of the discussion board interactions: The students found that for those students who they may be shy to voice their opinions in class for fear they may be laughed at if their opinions are faulty a lack of widespread student-to-student interaction happened online interactions were a great option. Students perceived that online discussions provided a convenient way for them to participate in the discussions, because of the convenient of using them at any places and any time. In a face-to-face environment, a student with greater social presence and skills may dominate the discussion through social cues. Students became aware that asynchronous online discussions can diminish the stereotyping associated with high external social status, physical appearance/disabilities, or cultural differences, thereby removing a significant barrier to participation. The online discussions provide an alternative platform where awkwardness in expressing one’s views in a crowd can be evaded. The asynchronicity of online discussions affords participants more time to think, it can also result in the problem of delays between message contributions.
Students found overloaded online systems are the problem specially when becomes difficult to make connections with the WebCT’s Software.

Social interactions are very important in the learning process. Therefore, in distance leaning, the physical, geographic isolation requires that students learn new communication strategies. Some distance learning students have not had the opportunity to communicate and/or interact socially via a text-based Internet media. In conclusion, if we hear our students, we will be able to establish appropriate new communication strategies that will allow them to feel comfortable in participating in text-based social online interactions giving them an alternative way of communicating and participating in their classes.

References:

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