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March 16, 2009

OMDE 610: Analytical Annotated Bibliography

Strategies for Building an Online Community

The distance education instructor faces many challenges when attempting to foster an online community in the asynchronous learning environment. Learners are individuals, each bringing their own learning style and perspective to the online environment. A successful online learning environment is dependant on two factors: It is the role of the instructor to cultivate a collaborative community building atmosphere; it is the role of the instructional designer to design the course in such a way that the instructor and can carry out his mission. The research indicates that this is best done by taking a constructivist, learner-centric approach. An analysis of effective online learning systems reveals specific strategies for the distance education designer and instructor in building a collaborative online community, the results of which yield significant benefits, specifically a positive effect on students' online participation, reflection, collaboration, and learner satisfaction.

Beldarrain, Y. (2006). Distance Education Trends: Integrating new technologies to foster

student interaction and collaboration. *Distance Education, 27*(2), 139-153.

doi:10.1080/01587910600789498.

Yoany Beldarrain, an Institutional Leader at Florida Virtual School with over fifteen years experience in teaching, investigates the benefits of using emerging technology tools, such as wikis, blogs, and podcasts, and social software applications, such as Writeboard™, InstaColl™, and Imeem™, to encourage learner interaction and collaboration in the online learning environment, with the ultimate goal of creating a true learning community. Referencing the work of many leaders in the field of distance education, she substantiates her argument for student interaction to be at the center of learner-centered constructivist environments. The author gives specific examples of how these emerging technologies are currently being used in the academic setting to foster collaboration among learners and instructors. She assumes the possible implications for the distance educator, including changes in pedagogical views, theoretical teaching models, social presence, and the role of the instructor and calls for a need for more research on this ever changing topic. The information presented appears to be valid and well-researched and is a good resource for those wishing to consider the use of emerging technologies in the distance learning setting.

Bernard, R. M., de Rubalcava, B. R., & St. Pierre D. (2000). Collaborative online

distance learning: Issues for future practice and research. *Distance Education,*

21(2), 260-277. doi:10.1080/0158791000210205.

Robert M. Bernard, who has published more than 50 peer reviewed articles in the field of educational technology and distance learning over the past 35 years, and Beatriz Rojo de Rubalcava and Denise St. Pierre, who were both M.A. students in the Educational Technology Program at Concordia University, examine practice and research relating to the use of collaborative online learning. Their definition of the collaborative learning environment is strong, encompassing the topics of appropriate instructional design, the role of the instructor, and technology. Referencing leaders in the field of distance education, they emphasize the use of group work, problem-based learning, and fostering a positive interdependence among participants as specific strategies to promote a sense of community among learners. They purport that using a collaborative online learning approach in combination with new technologies may prove to be highly successful when learner characteristics and the learning framework are taken into account, and they call for a need for more research. Although this article was written almost ten years ago, it remains a highly effective resource for those wanting to explore collaborative learning environments.

Conrad, D. (2002). Inhibition, Integrity and Etiquette Among Online Learners: The Art of

Niceness. *Distance Education, 23*(2), 197-212.

doi:10.1080/0158791022000009204.

Dianne Conrad, Director of the Centre for Learning Accreditation at Athabasca University, asserts that learners seek to foster a sense of community within the online learning environment through the art of being nice. She conducts a study which investigates the experiences of a group of seven online learners, and probes for the participation motivations of those learners in their online learning experience. The author's study found that an essential reason in what motivates people to contribute to their online community is the "learner's personal sense of etiquette". Although the study sample is quite small, it provides an interesting, unique and meaningful perspective as to what motivates learners to participate and the importance of a pleasant sense of community in the online learning environment. It shows that learners understand, value, and will protect their online community, both verbally and silently. It shows that learners feel they benefit from a true community of inquiry, and practice.

Dennen, V. P. & Wieland, K. (2007). From Interaction to Intersubjectivity: Facilitating

online group discourse processes. *Distance Education, 28*(3), 281-297.

doi:10.1080/01587910701611328.

Vanessa Paz Dennen, Associate Professor of Instructional Systems at Florida State University, and Kristina Wieland of the Albert-Ludwig University in Germany, examine the importance of the role of the instructor in cultivating an engaging collaborative online learning experience. They compare the dialogues of two different classes: one that had a facilitative instructor, and one that had a non-facilitative instructor. They base their assessment on Stahl's social theory of computer supported collaborative learning (CSCL), along with discourse analysis methods. The authors ground their research in current and past distance education and learning theory, using these in combination to effectively support their findings. They found that the constructivist approach enables learners to collaboratively interact in social learning processes. Although this particular study only compares the discourse of two classes, it supports the long standing, well researched viewpoint that a constructivist approach, a facilitative instructor, and well focused discussion assignments lead to true student collaboration and reflection.

Gaytan, J., & McEwen, B. C. (2007). Effective Online Instructional and Assessment

Strategies. *American Journal of Distance Education, 21*(3), 117-132.

doi:10.1080/08923640701341653.

Jorge Gaytan of the University of West Georgia, and Beryl C. McEwen of North Carolina A&T State University explore the instructional and assessment strategies that are most effective in supporting the creation of a collaborative online learning community. The role of the instructor is emphasized as a key component to the success of the online learning experience. This study also explores the topic of assessment and the importance of meaningful, immediate feedback. These prove to be motivating, overarching factors in building an interactive, connected sense of community in the online forum. Collecting data from a sample of instructors and learners, the study contributes a well balanced look at the online community experience. The strategies for successful community building include encouraging students to interact with the instructor and with each other to foster group cohesiveness, and using group work to help students build a strong learning community. This timely study asserts that "online instruction and assessment must balance the requirements of technology, delivery, pedagogy, learning styles, and learning outcomes". The researchers attempted to reach out to a vast community of instructors and learners, and although the response rates were low, this study supports most all literature concerning which strategies instructors and learners find to be most effective in fostering the collaborative online learning environment.

Gunawardena, C. N., Ortegano-Layne, L., Carabajal, K., Frechette C., Lindemann, K. &

Jennings, B. (2006). New Model, New Strategies: Instructional design for

building online wisdom communities. *Distance Education, 27*(2), 217-232.

doi:10.1080/01587910600789613.

Gunawardena et al., all of whom have varying degrees of expertise in the distance education field, introduce the development of WisCom, a specific instructional design strategy to foster a "community-centered" online learning environment. They ground this new model in well established socio-constructivist and socio-cultural theories of practice. WisCom provides not only a model for teaching that builds upon the intrinsic capability of networked communication to support the growth and intellectual development of communities of practice, but also a model of learning where learners engage in the process of academic investigation that supports individual and collective learning. The researchers use the evaluation and research data from one graduate level course to substantiate their claim that their new approach "fosters reflection, sharing, knowledge innovation, and transformational learning." Although their sample size is small, their findings support the design and implementation of their new model. They call for a need for further study using their WisCom design.

Kennedy, D. & Duffy, T. (2004). Collaboration - a key principle in distance education.

Open Learning: The Journal of Open and Distance Learning, *19*(2), 203-211.

doi:10.1080/0268051042000224798.

David Kennedy and Tim Duffy, both of The University of Paisley, UK, assert that the key ingredient in a successful online learning experience is the collaborative exchanges between participants involved in the course. The case study presents a unique perspective in that the researchers identify the key participants as being not just learner and instructor, but also librarians, administrative staff and technical support staff. They draw their inferences based upon their experience with the B.Sc. Health Studies degree program at the University of Paisley which has been delivered to approximately 1000 distance learning students. This case study outlines the benefits, as well as the challenges, associated with a collaborative learning system. While their data makes sense, and fits with others findings in the field, this case study lacks because it only derives the core lessons from the facilitator's perspective. They admit that the level of evaluative response from learners was disappointing. This article is a valid resource for those looking for the facilitator's perspective, but would not be appropriate for those seeking to investigate the benefits for the learner.

Menchaca, M. P. & Bekele, T. A. (2008). Learner and instructor identified success

       factors in distance education. *Distance Education, 29*(3), 231-252.

       doi:10.1080/01587910802395771.

    Michael P. Menchaca, Assistant Professor at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, and Teklu Abate Bekele, Research Fellow at the University of Oslo in Norway, analyze perceived learners and instructor success factors in the distance learning environment. A qualitative constant comparative analysis methodology supported by an appropriate conceptual framework guided this well-rounded, rich study. The study specifically calls out student satisfaction as one of the major success measures, supported by literature and the framework of the study. The study identifies several noteworthy conclusions including:

1. Collaboration, reflection, and building a learning community are important strategies supported by multiple tools, and
2. Participant satisfaction, appropriate prerequisite skills, and faculty and administrative involvement ensure programmatic success.

This resource is a good source for those wanting to learn about the perceptions, experience, and success of online instructors and learners.

Murphy, K. L., & Cifuentes, L. (2001). Using Web tools, collaborating, and learning

       online. *Distance Education, 22*(2), 285-305. doi:10.1080/0158791010220207.

The authors, both working for the Department of Educational Psychology, College of Education, at Texas A & M University, conduct a study to explore the ways 13 online graduate students learned to use technology, and learned to collaborate in small groups. The study adds to an understanding of crucial design elements for online courses: establishing a balance between structure and dialogue in transactional distance, and the advancement and encouragement of a sense of community. Both of these factors are important to the perceived success of the learner in the online learning environment. While the sample size was small, the study's findings do support the assumption that a constructivist, collaborative and learner-centric approach to online learning is the appropriate way to establish a successful, thriving learning community. Recommendations for further research are included.

Murphy, K. L., Mahoney, S. E., Chen, C., Mendoza-Diaz, N. V., & Yang, X. (2005). A

Constructivist Model of Mentoring, Coaching, and Facilitating Online

Discussions. *Distance Education, 26*(3), 341-366.

doi:10.1080/01587910500291454.

Murphy et al., all with varying degrees of experience in the field of distance learning and technology, conduct a case study of an online graduate course and through their research propose a mentoring, coaching, and facilitating model for online interaction. Their case study research is well-founded in the theory of social constructivism and they reference many leaders in the distance learning field to support their theoretical framework. They employed a substantial amount of scrutiny to the data analysis phase of their study, using a coding system, pilot study and main study. "The proposed constructivist model fosters active learning, provides scaffolding for students to become facilitators of learning, and suggests creative ways for online instructors to manage different types of teaching responsibilities." This article is an excellent source for those wanting to learn more about how to foster an online community of practice.

Swan, K. (2001). Virtual interaction: Design factors affecting student satisfaction and

perceived learning in asynchronous online courses. *Distance Education, 22*(2),

306-331. doi:10.1080/0158791010220208.

Karen Swan, an Associate Professor of Instructional Technology and Director of the Learning Technologies Laboratory and the Summer Technology Institute, looks at issues affecting the satisfaction of students engaged in asynchronous online learning. Swan conducts an empirical analysis which investigates the relationships between student perceptions and course design factors in 73 SUNY Learning Network courses. The study's sample size is large and the response rate is quite good and well-balanced, lending further credence to the validity of the study. The study found that three factors - clarity of design, interaction with instructors, and active discussion among course participants - significantly influenced students' satisfaction and perceived learning. Students engaged in a 'community of inquiry' model of online learning report high satisfaction and perceived learning rates of response. This article is an excellent resource in that it explores the learners' perspective and asks the all important question: What are the key factors affecting perceived student satisfaction and learning?