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Author: Karen PRICE   ‹ Previous Post | Next Post ›
Posted date: Thursday, June 3, 2010 3:38:13 PM
EDT
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3:39:25 PM EDT
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Author: Dr. T. SMYTH
Date: Thursday, June 3, 2010 5:18:23 PM EDT
Subject: What About this Model?

Toward a Theory of Online Learning

1. As you read Chapter Two of *Theory and Practice of Online Learning,*
note the author's emphasis on collaborative and independent learning modes and the challenges in designing
instruction that addresses the components of those modes.

What strikes you most about this chapter?

2. Here is an interesting point:

*Sufficient levels of deep and meaningful learning can be developed, as long as one of the three forms of interaction
(student-teacher; student-student; student-content) is at very high levels. The other two may be offered at minimal
levels or even eliminated without degrading the educational experience.* (Anderson, 2002)

How would you define "very high levels" of interaction?

Click Reply, enter your response (minimum 400 words);
also reply meaningfully to at least two (2) other entries (minimum 200 words each).

(5 points)

Due Date: midnight, 6 June - but begin now!

Here are some guidelines for your entries:
(This is slightly different from discussion of Chapter 1.)

Original Posting - 7 points
Your original posting should...
–mention at least 2 points from the week's readings (1 point)
–relate new content to what you have already learned in the course to date (1 point)
–relate content to your own personal experiences (1 point)
–critically analyze the content - your posting should not be just a summary of the reading (3 points)
–be grammatically correct and proofread for spelling errors. (1 point)

Responses to Two Other Student Postings - 3 points
Your responses to two other students should...
–incorporate quotes from the other postings (1 point)
–be logically reasoned and supported (1 point)
–be grammatically correct and proofread for spelling errors. (1 point)

1. As you read Chapter Two of *Theory and Practice of Online Learning,*
note the author's emphasis on collaborative and independent learning modes and the challenges in designing instruction that addresses the components of those modes.

What strikes you most about this chapter?

In this chapter, Anderson places a focus on learner interaction, engagement and the role and type of interaction occurring in online learning. In reflecting on this chapter and the challenges of creating a learning environment that is simultaneously learner-centered (or learning-centered as Anderson posed), content-centered, community-centered, and assessment-centered., I offer the following musings.

In order for a learning environment to center on the learner and learning, Anderson suggested that a necessary precondition is that the instructor gain information on students' culture, backgrounds, preconditions, etc. Anderson commented that some researchers argue that the restrictions of online learning environments negatively affect communication efficacy (Short, Williams, & Christie,1976) while others argue that the unique characteristics that define online learning (appropriate combinations of asynchronous and synchronous voice, text, and video) can actually lead to enhanced or hyper communications (Richardson, 2000). After considering this presumption and reflecting on my own experiences with online learning, I believe that asynchronous learning environments may actually allow for both more breadth and depth of thought in discussions from class members and present a greater opportunity for the instructor to gather information about his/her students. In these environments where discussion boards are used to share thoughts, as in this class, people can respond in their own time after careful thought and consideration to the material and to those comments that others have shared. Additionally, in a synchronous or live chat/talk/lecture setting, the discussion is often dominated by the more social and outgoing members of the class whereas, in an online context the user may feel some protection from the environment being a bit more anonymous. I do think that the facilitator of an online discussion needs to be cognizant of the fact that words written in an email type posting often fail to convey the emotion and interpersonal subcontext that live discussion permits and, in such, we need to be careful that we do not offend or misinterpret intentions of the writer.

Traditional on-campus classroom learning is structured in such a way that the physical time and space of a lecture defines and dictates the opportunity for learning. With online learning, the Wed and all of the vast technology tools that are available is not limited by time and space…or the knowledge of the instructor! The online learning context provides more opportunity for the learners to engage with the material and for the learners to engage with one another. I may never have met my online colleagues face to face, but I honestly feel as if I get to know my classmates better in an online environment than I do in a traditional classroom where the instructor tends to dominate.

Another type of interaction that I would like to comment upon is the interaction between the instructor, the learner and the evaluation and assessment process. In Chapter two, the discussion on

assessment-centered learning piqued my interest because I teach a class on classroom assessment, a topic that is often misunderstood as seen in a negative light due to the focus on large scale summative assessment in an age of accountability. All too often, in any learning environment, the teacher or trainer sees assessment only from the perspective of a test that measures recall of information. I agreed with the author in that "I am continually disappointed to note the very high percentage of recall questions and the lack of strategies that effectively measure the four sets of competencies identified by Baxter and others" (Anderson, p.50). I think that educators need to do better with assessment in ALL learning environments, not just online formats. I disagreed with the author that assessment places a burden on the instructor. Assessment is a tool that is not only providing feedback to the learner, but also to the instructor. Assessment is feedback and that feedback should be used to help guide instruction not just grades.   I agree that there are a multitude of technology based tools that can simplify the assessment process, but I would also caution that the more removed the instructor is from creating assessments and engaging in the assessment process, the less benefit to the learner and the instructor. The use of too many automated tools such as were mentioned in the chapter can diminish the feedback loop.

In reading the statement that "Critics of theory (McCormick & McCormick, 1992) have argued that too strict adherence to any particular theoretical viewpoint often filters our perceptions and thus blinds us to important lessons of reality", I realized that I must have a bit of a critical viewpoint towards theory myself! I agree that it is important to have a theoretical underpinning for the reasons you engage in a particular practice, but all too often reality of our practice does not align with any one theoretical viewpoint or perspective. I prefer to focus on the feedback I receive from evaluating and assessing my practices to gauge what is working and determine how I might proceed moving forward.   What better way to determine if our courses are meeting the goals of being learner-centered, community-centered, content-centered and assessment-centered., than to evaluate how well we are meeting those objectives!

2. Here is an interesting point:

Sufficient levels of deep and meaningful learning can be developed, as long as one of the three forms of interaction (student-teacher; student-student; student-content) is at very high levels. The other two may be offered at minimal levels or even eliminated without degrading the educational experience. **(Anderson, 2002)**

How would you define "very high levels" of interaction?

I agree that sufficient levels of deep and meaningful interaction can be developed in and online course and that it is a necessary condition for an effective learning just as it is equally important to do so in a traditional face-to-face learning situation. However, I disagree with Anderson that you can eliminate any one type of interaction (student-teacher, student-student, or student-content) and not have the educational experience degraded. I think that equal and balanced levels of all three types of interaction are important for a quality learning community and for effective learning. . I think that "very high levels" of interaction is a personal definition and would vary greatly accordingly for different students. Someone who appreciates and desires communication and discussion would define a high level of student-student interaction differently than someone who would rather absorb and process information. Additionally, students who are more intrinsically motivated to learn would require very different levels of student-faculty interaction and feedback than those who rely on external validation as a source of motivation.   So, rather than the focus being on increasing any ONE type of interaction to this nebulous "very high level", I would argue that it is important to ensure that there are multiple modes of delivery of instruction and engagement of students and that students are required to engage at all levels: with content, other learners and the instructor.

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OK