

Podcast – July 28, 2006

Is Online Teaching and Learning Different?

Source: Gulati, S. (2004). “Constructivism and emerging online learning pedagogy: a discussion for formal to acknowledge and promote the informal”

<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/00003562.htm>

Traditional adult education exemplifies the Objectivist view of knowledge. This view is based on the premise that learning is achieved by a teacher imparting knowledge to students through instruction, lecture, and practice. Assessment of the students’ knowledge rests on measurable, visible learning behaviors. While some teaching strategies may include affective and diverse learning approaches, learning achieved within the objectivist paradigm emphasizes teacher-control and learner compliance.

By contrast, the Constructivist view of knowledge emphasizes the active role of the learner in interpretation of reality. This position rejects the objectivist view that “the facts speak for themselves,” or that “knowledge is the reflection of ontological reality.”

Is the online learning environment well suited to embracing a constructivist perspective? One could argue that key elements of the constructivist paradigm such as those below could be especially well realized in an online class.

- the importance of learner control,
- learning in real-life contexts, flexibility in learning,
- freedom to choose learning resources, and
- openness in discussing issues

Gulati seems to believe that a constructivist approach could be emphasized online but argues in this paper that they are not. Gulati states that “a closer examination of the emerging pedagogy reveals that the emerging collaborative online learning practices may be building on the traditional, normative, campus-based, linear teaching experiences.”

A missed opportunity? It would be a shame if Gulati is correct and, as online instructors, we are missing an opportunity to provide a richer learner experience with the technology available to online teachers and students. Next time: some ideas about how technology available to online instructors can embrace a constructivist perspective.

Good Practices in Student Assessment: <http://www.ucd.ie/teaching/assess/as14.htm>

As a practical application of the constructivist perspective, consider, from University College Dublin, some suggestions about “good practices in student assessment.”

I’ll comment briefly on just one of the ideas: Learning Contracts.

Learning contracts by some accounts have grown in popularity and are consistent with the self-directed learning concept that is at the heart of a constructionist viewpoint.

Typically, a learning contract is a written record of goals and objectives agreed upon by instructor and student, an explicit statement of how those goals will be met, what evidence will be produced that both instructor and student agree will demonstrate learning, the metrics of assessment, and a time line for completion.