EFFECTIVE TOOLS TO ENGAGE STUDENTS AND INCREASE THEIR INTERACTION WITHIN ONLINE COURSES

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Abstract

Creating a consistent level of interaction is one of the major challenges that online instructors are still faced with. The diversity and demand of online learners makes it even more challenging to create a genuine learning environment, which cultivates a cooperative learning environment and a community atmosphere.

This task will require developing strategies and tools that provide guidance and instruction for students as individuals, and as groups. Instructors should also strive to provide intellectually stimulating student dialogs and quality learning experiences, which should incorporate productive individual and learning team activities. In addition, instructors need to maintain a secure online setting that affirms inclusiveness, diversity of thoughts and critical inquiry into the subject matter. With this, the instructor's presence becomes indispensable to establish the rules and expectations of any collaborative activity, such as group discussion or group projects.

Research studies have identified three major student traits of successful online learner: internal locus of control, self-motivation and independence. Furthermore, a vital factor to successful online learning is the student's perspective on the instructor and the learning environment. This factor seems to impact student self-perception of the learning and attrition level from interactive activities, more than the instructor's teaching style or the instructional design.

The current article will explore instances of instructional strategies, and technology tools that can be implemented in an online course to foster student's engagement, and enhance a three-fold interaction: Student-Content, Student-Student, and Student-Instructor. Some suggestions will be provided on effective use of these instructional strategies and technology tools.

Keywords: Online learning, Interactivity, Engagement, Technology, Online Environment.