

Brandi L. Antonsen

Dr. Lynette Molstad Gorder

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Traditional Classroom Instructional Strategies Benefit Distance Education

Distance education has significantly changed the way education is accessed. As the availability and use of distance education has increased, people are able to learn through secondary education, university degrees, and continuing education courses. With a variety of definitions and perspectives, distance education largely classifies as “an institutional based, formal education where the learning group is separated, and where interactive telecommunications systems are used to connect learners, resources, and instructors” (Simonson, 2015, pg. 31). With a change of format, it is crucial that the learning remains equivalent through an online medium. Therefore, analyzing traditional classroom procedures, routines, strategies, methods, and interactions allow for well informed teaching in distance education. A significant aspect of student learning lies within purposeful instructional strategies. With scholarly research and proven student learning, this positional paper will examine how instructional strategies of the traditional classroom work equally as well in distance education. These beneficial instructional strategies include goals and objectives, interaction among students and instructor, student centered learning, assessment techniques and deliverables.

As instructional strategies are plentiful, it is important that these strategies are chosen based on the characteristic of the instructor, students, and content (pg. 175). Distance education courses place independence on the student as they are largely responsible for the learning while

the instructor facilitates the course. Therefore, “methods that focus on the learners and incorporate interactivity have been shown to be the most successful” (pg. 175). These methods or strategies from traditional classrooms fit appropriately when delivering content in distance education.

From the initial designing of a course, traditional or distance education, the instructor establishes the goals. The instructional strategy of forming goals and objectives is a well known traditional approach, but it remains a necessity for effective distance learning. Objectives “should state the condition under which the learning should occur, the performance expected of the learner, and the standard to which the performance will be matched” (pg. 134). Therefore, well established goals and objectives from a traditional class or particular lesson do not necessarily change because of the change of medium to a distance course (pg. 134). Additionally, the course goals and objectives provide consistency with time management when covering the course content. This time management encourages students to master the course goals through submission dates and continuous outlines which are provided and necessary for both traditional and distance education (Zsohar & Smith, 2008, pg. 25).

With well established goals, the instructor also aims to provide interaction among students. A true learning community develops as the students and instructor get to know one another in class (Morgan, 2018, pg. 84). A community aspect creates a sense of shared purpose, membership, establishment of boundaries and rules for behavior, continuous interaction, trust among all participants (pg. 84). Traditional classrooms often achieve interaction and community through consistent face to face discussion and group work. This formation of community is able to thrive within the means of online instruction through many similar traditional techniques. These techniques include discussion boards and video chats which are “designed to initiate

interactive dialogue” between the students and instructor (Keebler, 2009, pg. 2). Such online communication tools “give learners and instructors the ability to communicate with each other” asynchronously with discussion boards and synchronously with video chat (Sugar, 2007, pg. 381). Student participation within these interactive formats increases the frequency of engagements along with their understanding of the course content as the questions or prompts require research and problem-based scenarios (Keebler, 2009, pg. 2). Due to the ability to research discussion prompts in further depth, the content mastery can often be greater than a traditional classroom environment (pg. 3).

Student-centered learning has long been a teaching strategy within the traditional classroom setting, but this student-centered approach fits well into distance education environments (Simonson, 2015, pg. 167). “By its very nature, online education demands that students become engaged in the learning process” (pg. 167). Therefore, this established instructional strategy promotes active learning and collaboration within the online resources and course activities. Moreover, online students cannot sit back and absorb the information in a lecture style setting, but rather participate in the learning process. This interaction between the instructors and students further fosters wholesome, independent learning. Additionally, Woodley acknowledges how “students move from being passive participants in their education to becoming co-constructors and responsible for developing self-directed learning paths as they navigate the educational system” (Woodley, 2017, pg. 470). Through informative use of a student-centered learning method, instructors become guides for students as they “create their own ways of learning within the online environment” (pg. 470). Students are then placed at the forefront of the course as the instructor facilitates the learning.

As instructional strategies often cover teaching the course content, assessment techniques provide immediacy and facilitation of learning groups (Simonson, 2015, pg. 237). Traditional classrooms provide a place for instantaneous feedback through face-to-face discussion. Distance education environments can continue this sense of immediacy for feedback through the use of equivalent assessment methods. These instructional assessment approaches include online quizzes and tests, asynchronous communication of discussion boards, synchronous communication with videoconferencing and audio chat, portfolios with multimedia products and problem-based activities, and rubrics. As each of these methods are beneficial to student interaction and learning, videoconferencing and discussion boards provide “opportunities for instructors to empower students by checking in with them to make sure expectations are clear, and to help with any problems they may be having with assignments” (Woodley, 2017, pg. 475). These advanced technologies offer equivalent assessment and feedback opportunities to interact with one another and be assisted in real time (pg. 475). On the other hand, written rubrics for all assignments lead students to clearer understandings and more thorough work. Zsohar and Smith examine how “having an instructional rubric for grading helps clarify the purpose and critical elements of the assignments for both the instructor and the learner” (2008, pg. 25). The clarification from the rubrics often provide students with more organized and detailed instructions which minimize student confusion.

Another common instructional strategies for the traditional classroom is the use of deliverables. Deliverables model the course content through various media selections and handouts. Although these deliverables contain “off the shelf” media in a traditional classroom and then pass the material directly to the student, instructors in an online environment can easily replicate the benefit of this valuable strategy (Simonson, 2015, pg. 135). “Ready-made”

materials can be “adapted or modified to accommodate the technologies involved in instructional delivery” (pg. 135). Moreover, some materials may simply need to be enlarged or formatted for a digital audience, but the content remains consistent. In both traditional and distance education settings, the instructor considers the timely delivery and communication of the material. The only difference remains in the transfer of the content material.

In conclusion, distance education benefits from the use of well established instructional strategies used within the traditional classroom setting. These strategies include, but are not limited to, goals and objectives, interaction among students and instructor, student-centered learning, assessment techniques and deliverables. When selecting instructional choices for distance environments it is of high importance to “match the outcomes defined by the objectives and the assessments implemented” (Simonson, 2015, pg. 175). Therefore, these chosen and researched instructional strategies function from the foundation of the course purpose and effective assessment in order to demonstrate student achievement. With continuous change in the education field it is important to recognize the need for periodic evaluation of all instructional strategies. As Keebler emphasizes, both distance learning and traditional classrooms consider “a variety of pedagogical factors” that focus on strategies that foster “collaboration and interactivity” (Keebler, 2009, pg. 1). These instructional strategies remain “learner-centered, feedback-oriented, problem-based, process-oriented, and flexible” within both environments (pg. 1). These qualities place all importance on student learning and achievement.

References

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