6-1-2012

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Abstract
The college course used in this project is required for students majoring in the Elementary Education and Early Childhood Unified Programs. Sections of the course are offered virtually as well as on the campus. This paper examines students’ scores on an assignment called the Course Objective Reflection to determine if course format made a difference in the candidates’ perceived learning of the six course objectives. Preliminary results indicate that virtual students achieved higher aggregate scores on the assignment than students completing the class on campus.

This article is available in The Advocate: https://newprairiepress.org/advocate/vol20/iss1/7
Students' Perceptions of Learning Course Objectives: On Campus Versus Virtual Sections of One Course

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Abstract

The college course used in this project is required for students majoring in the Elementary Education and Early Childhood Unified Programs. Sections of the course are offered virtually as well as on the campus. This paper examines students' scores on an assignment called the Course Objective Reflection to determine if course format made a difference in the candidates' perceived learning of the six course objectives. Preliminary results indicate that virtual students achieved higher aggregate scores on the assignment than students completing the class on campus.

Introduction

According to the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics in 2007-08, about 4.3 million undergraduate students, or 20 percent, took at least one distance education course and approximately 0.8 million, or 4 percent of all undergraduates, took their entire program through distance education (Aud et al., 2011). With the increase in students taking virtual course, the investigator wondered if the course format, that is, a face-to-face course and the same course offered virtually would influence students' perceptions when reflecting on their learning of course objectives. Distance education studies such as Bixler (2008); Chang (2007); Chung, Chung and Severance (1999); Cook et al. (2005); Crippen and Earl (2007); Nelson (2007); Saito and Miwa (2007); Shen, Lee and Tsai (2007); and Wang et al. (2006) have found that a tool or feature prompting students to reflect on their learning was effective in improving outcomes (as cited in USDE, 2010). This same report stated research evidence suggests that promoting self-reflection, self-regulation and self-monitoring leads to more positive online learning outcomes. Domine (2011) stated that "technology-based standards and policies do not acknowledge that instructional technologies shape the curricular message enacted within the learning environment" (p. 196). In another study, Larson and Keiper (2002) found that online classes give a voice to all students. An inference from the literature is virtual students may perform well on assignments that incorporate reflection.
Questions to Answer

The project was carried out in one college at a comprehensive university that offers students the option to take courses and entire programs virtually or on campus. Within the college, the majority of the faculty is expected to teach courses, virtually, as well as in the traditional college classroom. The investigator explored if differences existed in the students' perceptions of learning six course objectives when the same course was taught virtually and face-to-face.

Project Background

The two sections of the course were taught in a spring semester. One course was taught on the main campus in a face-to-face setting, while the other course was offered online through the university's platform. For consistency, the investigator used the same content materials and assessments. Enrollment in both sections of the course was close in number with 25 students in the on-campus section and 28 in the virtual section. The assignment used to determine students' perceptions of learning the course objectives was the Course Objective Reflection (COR). On this assignment, students were asked to reflect on their learning of six course objectives. The objectives included the following:

1. Attain an operational definition of multicultural education as an ongoing process by investigating the social and educational implications.
2. Attain an appreciation of cultural diversity, thus gain an understanding of one's self by attaining a greater understanding of others.
3. Develop an understanding of one's life experiences as shaped by membership in groups based on culture, race, socioeconomic status, gender, exceptionalities, language, religion, sexual orientation, and geographical area.
4. Attain a knowledge base of the various aspects of diversity in the areas of culture, race, socioeconomic status, gender, exceptionalities, language, religion, sexual orientation, and geographical area as well as other differences that impact teaching and learning.
5. Develop a knowledge base in the identification of discrimination (i.e., prejudice, gender bias, etc.) and effective means of the elimination of such discrimination in the school setting.
6. Attain an understanding of the implications of diversity in the school, upon the family, and community.

The students, in both sections of the course, were given one week to complete the typed COR. An assignment overview and the rubric used to assess the assignment were provided. The rubric was based on a five-point scale with a score of 1 assigned for "below expectations", a score of 3 for "at expectations", and a score of 5 for "exceeds expectations". The course instructor assessed all students' assignments.

Results

Table 1: Rubric Scores Per Objective - F2F Vs. Virtual Teacher Candidates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rubric Score</th>
<th>Objective 1</th>
<th>Objective 2</th>
<th>Objective 3</th>
<th>Objective 4</th>
<th>Objective 5</th>
<th>Objective 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Total %</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N= 25 F2F (Face-to-Face) N= 28 V (Virtual) *Not every student completed each objective.

Table 1 shows students in the face-to-face section received a higher percentage of the scores 1 and 3, while students in the virtual section received a higher percentage of the score 5.

Table 2. Course Objective Reflection Rubric - Aggregated Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>On-campus</th>
<th>Virtual</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. 3.96</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>-11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. 3.88</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>-12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. 3.6</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>-13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. 3.6</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>-12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. 3.52</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>-15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. 4.0</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>-05%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Course Objective Reflection Rubric - Aggregated Results reveals that students in the virtual section of the course outscored the students in the face-to-face section on all six objectives. The most significant difference in the two sections' scores was the fifth objective at 15% followed closely by the third objective at 13%.

Limitations of the Project

A definite limitation in this project is the low total number. Due to a change in class assignment, the investigator has not taught a face-to-face and virtual section of the course in the same semester. Another limitation of this project is determining if the COR results were directly related to the course format or if other factors impacted the results.

Future Questions and Implications

The results suggest other questions should be examined. When looking at the aggregated results, were the virtual students' scores higher because the COR was writing intensive? Since the average age of virtual students enrolled in the course was higher than the average age of students taking the class face-to-face, was the chronological age of students a factor in virtual students' higher scores? A future implication of this project is to collect data in future courses to increase the data set. A second implication is to examine the disaggregated results for score trends on each objective. For example, scrutinizing an objective with the lowest overall score in both sections may indicate a need for additional instruction on that topic by the investigator. In conclusion, the project results appear to correspond to the review of literature cited in the paper suggesting that self-reflection leads to more positive online learning outcomes.

References


The Importance of Activating and Building Knowledge

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University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Introduction

The following exchange occurred in a third-grade classroom: “I thought grit was a food. It doesn’t make sense,” Saida commented. “Yes, there are grits that people eat. Grits are ground corn, however, in this story the word is grit. Do you remember when it was really windy outside and dust and dirt got on you? That was grit,” Mrs. Henning explained. “That was gross. It got in my hair and teeth,” replied Saida. In this exchange, the grade-level teacher made a meaningful connection between a recent experience and the new vocabulary word. This connection allowed the teacher to clarify the student’s existing understanding of the vocabulary word grit which was affecting her comprehension of the story. For vocabulary instruction to be effective, students must relate new words to their existing background knowledge (Author, 2008). The purpose of this article is to explain the importance of teachers' activating and building students' background knowledge as a way of enhancing their culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students' vocabulary development.

A student’s background knowledge is ever changing by academic experiences, social customs, facts, or emotions that are encountered and learned (Marzano, 2004). Background knowledge plays a significant role in a student’s understanding of the new vocabulary being introduced as well as their retention of the word’s meaning for later use. Background knowledge is what students use to develop, expand, and refine vocabulary word meanings (Rupley, Logan, & Nichols, 1999). By activating students' background knowledge, information is brought to the surface where it is ready to be applied, used to stimulate questions, and build interest in the targeted vocabulary throughout the lesson. Educators are able to use this knowledge to guide learning and to help clarify students' misconceptions about specific vocabulary terms.

Activating Students' Existing Knowledge

Activating students' background knowledge about vocabulary involves teaching students to access the information they have stored in their permanent memory. For educators, the ultimate goal of vocabulary instruction is to have students store their understandings of vocabulary words in their permanent memory so it can be accessed, consciously or unconsciously, whenever needed (Stahl, 1999). Such activation is important for both native and non-native English students, but is particularly critical for CLD students who may struggle with new and unfamiliar vocabulary. CLD students need more than just a brief introduction of the vocabulary to help alleviate their comprehension difficulties because of their English language proficiency limitations. They need numerous opportunities to discuss and reflect on the relationships among concepts as well as connections between the content and their background knowledge. These meaningful interactions enable CLD students to