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Why collaborative online learning activities are effective

Online collaborative learning activities facilitate knowledge exchange and active learning and require a strong commitment from teachers, including in the implementation of feedback and evaluation processes.

Collaborative learning is a type of learning that enhances and rewards collaboration activities within a group of students.

Thanks to the Internet, today it is possible to activate effective collaborative learning paths both in synchronous and asynchronous mode. In the latter case, the activation of online areas to be used for the exchange of files and multimedia materials allows the students to activate collaboration processes aimed at achieving the objectives of the project. The role of the teacher remains fundamental, however, he is called to interact with the group through the online areas, also for the evaluation of the projects and the correction of the exercises.

On the contrary, the synchronous mode provides for the simultaneity between teachers and students, with the former usually coordinating lessons, through tools such as live streaming or audio chat.

In this process the technology plays a key role. We think, for example, of the great effectiveness that the use of a tool such as web conferencing could have, which allows meetings, presentations or entire training courses to be held live.

Theoretical framework of reference

The most widely used learning theories in the development of online learning environments are cognitivism, behaviorism, constructivism and connectivism.

The connectivist theory deserves a little study. It requires the learning process to take place in a constantly evolving environment. Being linked to the development of new technologies and applications for the web, this theory encourages students to select really important information, establishing connections both with the educational content and with other students.

Online learning activities

Online collaborative activities are able to facilitate active learning and shared knowledge, promoting greater social interaction that can also be useful in the real world, especially in work and professional contexts. Through these activities, in fact, students can learn to share ideas, express opinions and manage time better.

Group collaborative learning

If well designed, online learning environments make it possible to strengthen the sense of belonging to a community, which requires that students take a responsible and active attitude, shared between the different work groups.

To achieve this, the advice is to propose introductory activities that can allow students to get to know each other. Since groups could be made up of many people, the best choice could be to divide the students into smaller groups, using personal messaging services to support them (for example groups on Facebook or WhatsApp).

Group discussions

Online group discussions induce students to listen to the opinions of others, providing opportunities for reflection and sharing of the different points of view expressed. Very important, from this point of view, is the role of teachers who have the non-simple task of moderating discussion activities, making such discussions engaging and potentially capable of leading students to high quality learning outcomes.

In this regard, it could be useful to use online forums which facilitate the exchange of materials and enrich discussions by classifying interventions into strands, generally from the most recent to the least recent.

Feedback and evaluation

If the evaluation process is implemented through a peer-to-peer logic, it is much easier for the collaborative activity to be successful. In particular, the presence of a feedback for learning activities puts the student in the best conditions to face similar situations in the real world, through a transparency-oriented approach.

Teachers are called to seriously consider the design and development of feedback and assessment of student behavior. To fill any gaps in the subject, it is good to follow training and refresher courses to help you acquire the necessary skills on the subject.

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