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## Some Aspects Of Classroom Management In Virtual Learning Environment

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### **Abstract:**

*The article discusses the significance of planning e-courses accepting its character and considering the of interactions that should lead to building community and security. The article tries to break the myth that the teacher is redundant and unimportant in a built e-course. The author stresses the significance of teacher's presence and their role in all phases of e-course "existence" (planning, writing scenario, preparing interaction, piloting, administering, running, managing a course, evaluation of a course).*

**Key words:** online education, planning, classroom management, interaction, feedback

### **1. Introduction**

LMS, CMS, LCMS, VLE, MOOC, CAL, MAL are all abbreviations that have penetrated into contemporary pedagogy. Education cannot resist the current trends in technology and should introduce effective tools applying adequate techniques and methods. What I would like to stress are especially adequate techniques and methods applying all didactic and psychological principle. The content is same, what is different is the form of delivery. We frequently find the courses that are presented as e-learning, however it is just the "printed" version of a textbook transferred to online text divided into the chapters. Limniou and Smith (2010) published the results of their research focusing on VLE that was realised at the University of Manchester stated that most teachers/tutors use VLE as a means for delivering learning material, announcements and assessments to students. They use it also for uploading learning material and they perceive VLE as a tool how to overcome the difficulties of limited time. The same results were gained in a research realised at the University of Presov (see Cimermanová, 2013, p. 451 -452).

Numerous studies have proved that student's involvement in the learning process escalates and enhances learning. Electronic education leads students to building autonomy what is closely connected with the application of metacognitive strategies. Consequently this leads to better results in learning.

### **2. Virtual Learning Environment**

Living in a dot-com era we have to face reality – we read e-book, use pay-pal, book hotels online, instead of postcards we send e-cards. We use powerpoint presentations and LCD projectors instead of blackboard or OHP. Education has its value and should not be a subject of experimentation and modern trends. On the other hand, experiments help us to verify the efficacy e.g of modern technologies. Currently, much space is devoted to so called MOOC – massive open online courses, the courses open to wide public, students, professors who form an interactive community. The environment that is mostly used are wikispaces, Moodle or Second Life that are free of charge. MOOC is a form of distance learning and we can highlight the most significant similar characteristics – broken time and physical boundaries, learning usually happens not only in formal but also informal settings (a lot of discussion runs during "non-official" time among participants). MOOC are usually free of charge and there is no need to have degree even though there are courses where you need a license to enter a course.

In Slovakia, MOOCs are not common, however e-courses are more and more frequently used as a form of in-service (business/company) education. Whatmore, many universities that use computer assisted learning (CAL) or the online courses. (We can also mention secondary schools and even elementary schools use e.g. The portal Bez kriedy (without chalk) to support education) "The environment of a VLE can range from web sites to virtual classrooms to 3D immersive worlds. When considering websites, a set of web pages does not constitute a virtual learning environment unless there is social interaction about or around the information." (Dillenbourg, In: Barkand, Kush, 2009) Currently, when we talk about e-learning system we deal with the learning management system that enables us to manage and administer class virtually on-line.

### **3. Learning Management Systems**

Dillenbourg (2000, p. 9) Stresses that "Many Web-based courses combine distance and presence, which makes learning environments more robust. Whatever technology is used, all tools have intrinsic limitations. These limitations do, over time,

become real obstacles to learning. Even a small amount of co-presence may solve some of the problems that can hardly be solved at distance”. It does not matter whether the course is e-course or blended course (combination of face-to-face, presence learning and e-learning) LMS (learning management system) is a system for student registration and enrolment, helps the teacher to manage his/her work and to monitor students’ work, their activity and progress. LMS is an application for administering and delivering e-courses (uploading / downloading data, synchronous and asynchronous communication, testing, etc.) and participants. The teacher can track students’ activity in a system, evaluate (continuous assessment / final assessment). CMS – content management system is software for publishing and managing the content. Moodle, probably mostly use system (it is free of charge) is a combination of learning management system and content management system (LCMS).

Technically it is a user-friendly system, easily navigated, what's more, a lot of guides are available free and online.

#### 4.(Virtual) Classroom Management

Classroom management can be described as a skill and as such is acquired over time. Bosch (2006) understands classroom management as a process and divides it into 5 stages, namely, Classroom Management Process: Introspection, Observation, Development of the classroom management plan, Implementation of the CMP, Revision of the CMP. He claims that “it is the process that helps teachers improve their classroom management skills, not the answers to the CMP questions. For through the process, teachers internalize the responses. Through the process, teachers face their strengths and weaknesses as educators, learn to evaluate objectively their teaching effectiveness, and, perhaps most importantly, come to understand that as they grow and change, so must the CMP. The very act of completing the process makes a teacher a better teacher”.

Laslett and Smith (2011, p. viii) Describe classroom management as “skill in the organisation and presentation of lessons in such a way that all pupils are actively engaged in learning. This requires an ability to analyse the different elements and phases of a lesson, to select and deliver appropriate material and to reduce sources of friction”.

McLeod, Fisher, Hoover (2003, p. vi) Highlight “these three key elements stand out as critical components of a well-managed classroom in the work of the teacher:

- Efficient use of time and classroom space
- Implementation of strategies that influence students to make good choices, rather than ones that attempt to control student behaviour
- Wise choice and effective implementation of instructional strategies”.

Still frequently, teachers are afraid of “being substituted by computer” in e-learning form or in CAL. This is, however, myth. Similarly to “traditional” learning there are forms of individual learning (where the teacher is not expected and students use self-instructional materials that are written for this purpose). There are courses for self-study e-courses but there are courses with teacher’s virtual presence and the belief that the teacher has nothing to do is another myth. His importance is same although his tasks and roles are different. In books on “traditional” classroom management the key words and phrases are: greeting, seating and starting, transition from one activity to another, concluding a lesson and dismissing, positive feedback, praising, reassuring, content and the manner of its presentation, self-esteem and sense of competence, variety and pace.

Some of those are irrelevant in e-courses (e.g. seating), some of them are naturally solved by the character of environment (pace), and other are done perhaps differently but with the same aim. Icebreaker activities and building a community is extremely important in e-course. The sense of community and belonging helps to develop cooperative and collaborative environment are crucial for effective work and teaching/learning process. Frequently so-called Social fora are used to learners to know each other well. Students are encouraged to share their experience and talk about different aspects even from their personal life (hobbies, books they read, destinations they would like to visit, etc.). Some teachers/tutors send personalised e-mails directly to students at the beginning of (or even before) the course to introduce themselves and to challenge them to enter social forum (what makes students visit VLE or simply e-system and become at least partially familiar with it and to suggest help in case of problem (probably also explaining the possible existence of the Technical forum (see fig. 1) or FAQ section that might be useful for their work in a system).

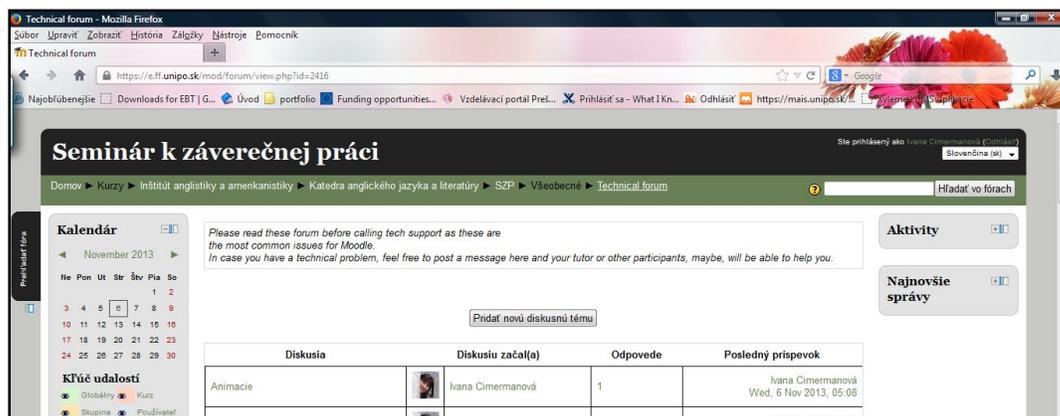


Figure 1: The Print Screen Of The Technical Forum In LMS Moodle

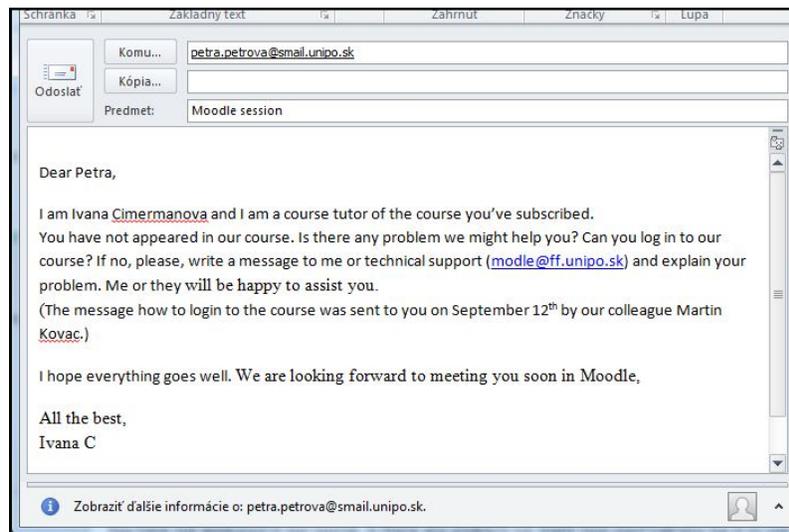


Figure 2: The Print Screen Of The Message To A Student

In case students do not react and are not visible (or active) the tutor should encourage learner to participate (tutor should find out whether a student is lurking – tutor has the tools to track students’ activity – or what is a problem why he/she is passive – insecurity, technical problem, personal problem, etc.). It can be done e.g. by sending a personal email expressing support (see fig. 2).

#### 4.1 Interaction Tools

“Technologies do not originate a socio-territorial single model, but, as it has been happening always, it depends on how it is used and occupied by individuals. So, it would be necessary to design virtual spaces that would offer enough opportunities to every student, which could satisfy their level of adaptation with different degrees of interaction, too.” (Hernandez-Serrano, Gonzales-Sanchez, 2011, p. 477) In the Access, Motivation and Socialisation phases we build the sense of safety, security and group belonging (Maslow’s hierarchy of needs). In the next phase (Exchange) students start to interact with materials, tutor and among themselves.

Watts (2010) postulated the following benefits incorporating interaction into courses:

Interaction builds a sense of community among the students, which leads to student satisfaction, retention, and increased learning (Brown, 2001).

Interaction provides students with the feedback they need to determine if they are mastering the content in your course.

Interaction exposes students to a variety of learning resources, including content materials and experiences and knowledge shared by other students.

In the e-learning (except for publishing materials, and e-mail post already mentioned above) we frequently use different types of synchronous and asynchronous communication to support cooperative and collaborative work. One type of asynchronous communication (not realized outside the real time) is e.g. threaded discussion where students discuss certain topic. It is necessary to moderate a discussion (especially at the beginning of its “life”) to make sure the comments are targeted and deal with a topic set. A useful tool for collaborative learning (e.g. for different brainstorming techniques application) can be wikispace (that is usually a part of LMS; there are different spaces available online for running wiki – e.g. www.wikispaces.com).

E-courses use also various tools for synchronous communication that can be done in a form of videoconference, chats (see sample print screen Fig. 3) what enables interaction students-instructor. Before entering the chat students had to study material published in Moodle (interaction student-material).

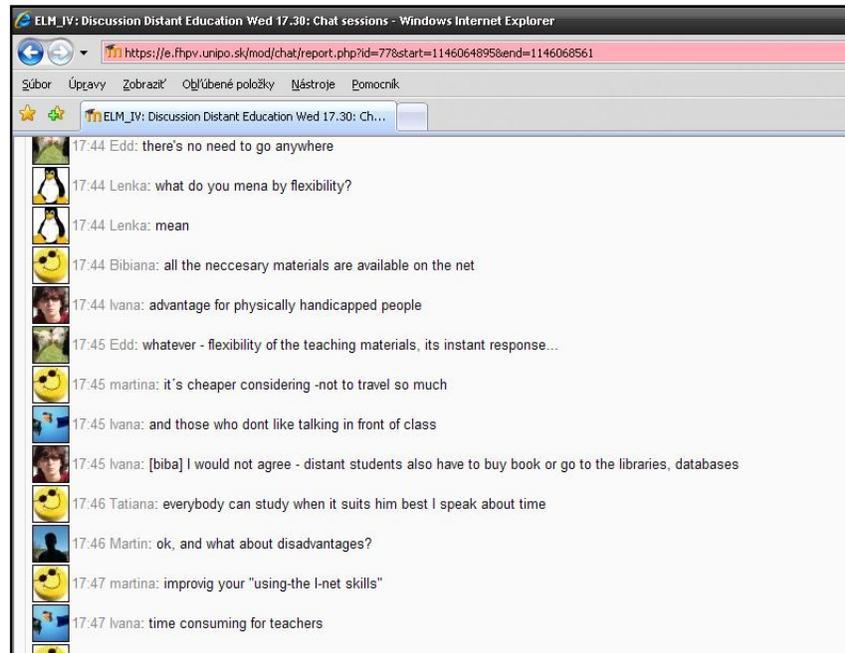


Figure 3: The Print Screen Of The Chat (Synchronous Communication) In LMS Moodle

#### 4.2. Teacher In E-Course

It has been already said that e-learning is about the change of delivery of content and not about teacher substitution. Brown, H. Douglas (2007) mentions that “teachers can play many roles in the course of teaching and this might facilitate the learning. Their ability to carry these out effectively will depend on a large extend on the rapport they establish with their students, and on their own level of knowledge and skills.” According to Harmer, J. (2007), the term ‘facilitator’ is used by many authors to describe a particular kind of teacher, one who is democratic (where the teacher shares some of the leadership with the students) rather than autocratic (where the teacher is in control of everything that goes on in the classroom), and one who fosters learner autonomy (where students not only learn on their own, but also take responsibility for that learning) through the use of group work and pair work and by acting as more of a resource than a transmitter of knowledge. Harmer (1991) defined different roles of teacher in an educational process – controller, organiser, assessor, prompter, participant, resource, tutor, observer. In 2007 reflecting the digital era he describes the teacher as a controller, director, manager, facilitator and resource. He claims that teacher should “assume all five of these roles on this continuum of directive to non-directive teaching depending on the purpose and context of an activity” (p.261-2) and the goal is shift student from dependency to independency.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century is a digital era, the teacher can use the advantage of technology. In case of e-learning the teacher should be present at the “course life” right from the beginning (Identifying and organizing course content, Defining instructional, media, evaluation and delivery strategies, Preparing content, Creating storyboards, Courseware development, Managing and evaluating learning activities, Course delivery and evaluation). There are parts that might be realised by different people, however according to the author’s image.

#### 5. Conclusion

The aim of the article was not to teach or bring research results but rather to share experience on using Moodle and the enthusiasm about the shift that naturally appears in a well-built e-learning course. The form gives us an opportunity to learner-centered teaching, to develop learning strategies (both direct and indirect) and to leas students towards autonomy as well as to develop ICT skills (not just technically but also e.g. in applying modern language learning ways of getting data – e.g. web-search, work with data, way of reading texts online). We do not want to persuade readers about the efficiency of e-education but rather recommend it as supplement or alternative.

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