

Proceeding Submission of Abstract for Hawaii International Conference on Education

Title: “Constructivist Teaching Online – Is it Possible?”

Author: Dr. Kani A. Blackwell, Associate Professor

Affiliation: College of Professional Studies, California State University, Monterey Bay

Address: 100 Campus Center, Seaside, CA 93955

Email address: kani_blackwell@csumb.edu

Abstract:

Constructivist Teaching Online – Is it Possible?

Educators in higher education, who have worked years at perfecting a constructivist model of teaching, are now being asked to deliver instruction in a technological manner that seemingly violates every principle of effective teaching. This research report covers a three-year study on the benefits, drawbacks, and revelations of online teaching from a die-hard constructivist teacher educator, who has taught for thirty plus years, excels in teaching effectively through face-to-face classes, and developed an online course for educators.

The objective of this study was to explore the success, if any, of the university students who would undertake a course with the author teaching a hybrid format of online learning, putting into practice a constructivist approach to teaching and learning. The success of the teacher teaching the course was measured by the students taking the course: would students learn the content as well as the students in the face-to-face classes, would there be meaningful dialogue and discussions, and would there be a depth of understanding of the content demonstrated and adequately expressed by the students?

Constructivist pedagogy depends upon the learner being active, interactive with others, personally responsible for their own learning, and building upon their own knowledge, attitude, and skills. The teacher of constructivist classrooms assumes a less traditional role, guiding, modeling, and scaffolding the teaching and learning experience for the students. The study attempted to document the challenges and success of such an undertaking of constructivist teaching online.

The first year of the study was exploratory in nature, whereas the author attended conferences and took a summer-long workshop that offered sessions in how to design, develop, and teach courses online using the Blackboard or Course Info platform. During the second and third years of the study, an online education course was designed and taught by the author, to twenty-nine students (15 students the first year and 14 students the second year). All of the students were practicing teachers working on their Master of Arts in Education degree or taking the course for additional certification for teaching. None of the students had ever taken an online course before and the majority of them were not ‘computer-savvy’ as they stated. At the conclusion of each year’s course, focus groups were videotaped and pre and post surveys were administered to assess the students’ experiences and their own perceived success of the course. The first summer that the course was taught, 12 of the 15 students completed the course and the second year, 14 out of 14 completed the course. All students who completed the course answered through a self-assessment survey ‘successful’ and that they had ‘learned’ the content of the course. The acquired learning of the content of the course was measured by the professor/author through in-depth essay questions submitted by the students. The success rate in numbers cannot

Abstract-Constructivist Teaching Online

be measured quantitatively but qualitatively, by the anecdotal testimonies of the students and the journal kept by the author.

The initial findings of the past two years of anecdotal conversations and the assessment surveys indicated a very positive response for constructivist teaching online, with identifying 'problem areas' as well as several specific suggestions for maintaining effective teaching components that encourage success of constructivist teaching through the distributed learning model. The 'acquired learning' of content was found to be as robust and rigorous in the writings of the online students as compared to students in prior fact-to-face classes.