

Chapter 1

Utilizing Learning Management System (LMS) Tools to Foster Innovative Teaching

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ABSTRACT

Many post-secondary institutions utilize learning management systems (LMSs) to deliver online, blended, and face-to-face courses. LMSs have a wide variety of built-in functionality that can be used to facilitate innovative teaching. This chapter provides useful information, critical thinking questions, and insights that instructors can use to expand their adoption, knowledge, and usage of LMS tools to build upon innovative teaching practices. Three instructional approaches are discussed: case-based learning (CBL), scenario-based learning (SBL), and gamified learning. Additionally, specific examples are provided to demonstrate how LMS tools can be used to support CBL, SBL, and gamified learning. This chapter invites instructors to critically reflect on how they use LMSs and other educational technologies to carry out ineffective instructional strategies. Furthermore, it provides concrete examples of how LMS tools can help instructors improve their teaching practice and adopt creative instructional approaches with thoughtful use of technology grounded in sound pedagogical practices.

INTRODUCTION

In this digital and information era, technology permeates every domain of our lives in countries across the globe (Hui, 2018, p. 253). Therefore, the global “topography” of teaching and learning must include opportunities for instructors and students to engage with technologies in meaningful ways within educational programs and, in particular, programs that offer academic credentials. “Most educators agree that students need to prepare themselves for the widely changing economy, society, and home life which are highly related to technology” (Hui, p. 253). Online, blended, and face-to-face instructors utilize learn-

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ing management systems (LMSs) to support and facilitate teaching and learning in all delivery modes (Babo, 2018). Therefore, it is important to understand how LMS tools are being used, can be used, and will be used to support innovative teaching practices and enhance student learning.

This chapter describes how instructors can utilize learning management system (LMS) tools to demonstrate innovative teaching and provides some concrete examples of learning activities that instructors can use to demonstrate technological competency. *Technological competency* refers to the instructor's ability to effectively implement educational technologies to enhance student learning via meta-cognitive and cognitive processes (Zhu, Wang, Cai, & Engels, 2013, p. 10). It is important to highlight that this chapter does not provide step by step instructions nor a checklist of essential components needed to carry out innovative teaching. Instead, the chapter includes insights, critical questions, and thoughtful arguments that instructors can consider in order to: critically examine current teaching practice; critically reflect on what it means to be an innovative instructor; critically reflect on how technology is used to foster ineffective teaching practices; and critically reflect on how technology can enhance teaching and facilitate meaningful student learning.

Instructors play an important role in student-preparation for academic success in a digital society and this role demands innovative design of instructional environments, as well as innovative teaching. Educational researchers, Jaskyte, Taylor, and Smariga (2009) state, "it is clear that innovative teaching is not only about introducing a new methodology or technique" (p. 116). They describe it as a process that embodies the interchange of several factors, comprising of the following five components: 1) instructor's personality; 2) classroom culture (virtual or face-to-face); 3) student-faculty communications; 4) teaching techniques; as well as, 5) learning outcomes.

Innovative teaching, as an educational concept, can be perceived and/or misinterpreted as an unrealistic endeavor. This chapter provides information about student and faculty perceptions about innovative teaching and highlights that these perceptions are not always aligned. At this point, it is necessary to state that this chapter does not identify nor examine factors that contribute to the different perceptions about innovative teaching that students and instructors have. We begin with a discussion about perceptions of innovative teaching and then we provide a definition on which we base our arguments.

PERCEPTIONS ABOUT INNOVATIVE TEACHING

Students and faculty have different perceptions about what components are most important for innovative teaching. According to Jaskyte et al. (2009), the three major components of innovative teaching, based on students' perceptions, include the instructor's personality, student-faculty interactions, and classroom culture (p.116). Jaskyte et al. note that students perceive interpersonal skills as the most important components, i.e. instructor's personality, how they interact, and the "culture" (behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs) they foster in the learning environment. When asked to rank descriptors of innovative teaching, students ranked the following as the top five: 1) Engages students and responds to their feedback; 2) Is enthusiastic—conveys a genuine interest and fervor for the subject matter; 3) Encourages students to think outside the box; 4) Makes students excited about learning; and 5) Is open minded (Jaskyte et al., 2009, p. 114). On the other hand, faculty ranked the following as the top five descriptors to enable innovative teaching: 1) Gets students to learn how to construct knowledge themselves; 2) Is open to new ideas; 3) Is original—looks for new ways to present class material; 4) Is knowledge motivated, up to date on scholarship; and 5) Evaluates the effectiveness of her/his innovative teaching method.

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