Chapter 7
Extra-Curricular Activities:
The Virtual Element

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ABSTRACT

One of the fastest growing phenomena in the use of educational technology is online learning. The shift from traditional schooling to virtual models is a shift in pedagogy from objectivist to a constructivist model where students take more ownership over their learning. Given the current COVID-19 pandemic, academic institutes have an urgency to support students in an online environment while adapting extracurricular activities to the new domain and providing an additional level of engagement, support, and community of learners for their student body. It is important to adapt distant learning to meet all the social, academic, and cognitive needs of all students. This chapter seeks to introduce readers to the opportunities virtual schools can provide to their students interested in engaging with peers outside of the traditional classroom or school setting to pursue common likes and activities.

INTRODUCTION

One of the fastest growing phenomena in the use of educational technology is online learning (Green, 2019; Sligar, 2017). Online learning is developing at an incredibly rapid pace. This shift from traditional schooling to virtual models a shift in pedagogy from objectivist to a constructivist model where students must take more ownership over their learning (Sligar, 2017). Researchers are identifying best practices to keep students engaged and ensure learning is taking place (Farooq & Benade, 2019). Given the current COVID-19 pandemic, academic institutes have an urgency to support students in an online environment while adapting extracurricular activities to the new domain while providing an additional level of engagement, support, and community of learners for their student body. Further, there has been an increase in dropout rates in distant learning, particularly because students are struggling to engage

with material (Bovermann, 2018). These dropout rates vary depending on the type of school ranging from public, charter, and private. Interestingly, Corry et. al (2017) found that 36% of virtual/online schools, prior to the pandemic, are charter schools. With these dropout rates in mind, public schools are having to make a significant change in the infrastructure of their schools very quickly, given the current pandemic. These dropout rates also present a more substantial difficulty as most public schools do not have experience with online learning.

Although there is an increase in dropout rates, when distant learning is structured thoughtfully, there are many benefits including flexibility, accommodation work/social schedules, and twenty-four hour access to content (Lee & Figueroa, 2012). Students are able to learn at their own pace in a setting where they are most comfortable and confident. Some argue that online learning is more inclusive than traditional schooling (Percival, 2017). Moreover, Percival (2017) shared that having learning conducted virtually established a learning that can be adapted to all student needs. Virtual learning allows for accommodations to be made more readily into curriculum. Educators have more resources to better meet the needs of all learners. An example of these accommodations is individualized assignments for students. For, example, students who struggled with substantial texts can be assigned an abridged version of the reading. Unlike the physical classroom, these accommodations can be made without the entire student body seeing or noticing the differentiated instruction. Many students struggled with accepting accommodations in the physical classroom due to fear of backlash from their peers. Learning virtually eliminates that barrier which promotes learning for these students. Virtual learning also promotes collaboration with less barriers (Steinkamp, 2018). Students are able to connect with students outside of their zip code which promotes diversity in the classroom. It is important to adapt distant learning to meet all the social, academic, and cognitive needs of all students. This chapter seeks to introduce readers to the opportunities virtual schools can provide to their students interested in engaging with peers outside of the traditional classroom or school setting to pursue common likes and activities.

Theoretical Framework

There are three main theoretical frameworks that support the idea of extracurricular activities being essential for students to engage in. Primarily, the constructivist learning theory weighs heavily in understanding how to effectively deliver distant learning as the constructivist theories discuss the individual experience of the student (Aldobbie, 2015). The online collaborative learning theory discusses learning through technology and the collaborative process (Harasim, 2012). Further, the multiple intelligence theory suggests that all learners have specific abilities that can be leveraged into different types of learning that will enhance the effectiveness of education which is understood through different areas of intelligence (Bas, 2016).

Constructivist Learning Theory

The constructivist learning theory states that individuals learn through building on prior knowledge and experiencing information at a personal level (Aldoobie, 2015). The constructivist theory views learning as an active process where students are the driver seat of their learning. Learning becomes a dynamic process when understanding it through the constructivist learning theory. The constructivist learning theory supplements the student centered learning (SCL) framework where students can develop ownership of their learning (Lee & Hannafa, 2016). Virtual learning is supported by constructivist learning

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