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Chapter 8 Summary

Structured Dialogue Embedded Within Emerging Technologies

This chapter goes into detail explaining what Structured Dialogic Design (SDD) is and how it works to provide a structured learning environment for Web 2.0 tools such as wikis. These new tools have caused a shift from teacher-centered education toward learner-centered education. SDD is a model used to provide structure in distance learning scenarios that are generally less rigid and have more leeway for students to stray from the intended path. Web 2.0 tools allow for educators and students to be in communication at any time of day, not just in the scheduled class time. Due to this, it was necessary for a new model to be devised that takes all of this freedom into account and solidifies it into a more solid environment. SDD integrates Web 2.0 tools in a way that is structured, inclusive and collaborative. First conceptualized in 1969, SDD is currently in its fourth generation and is constantly changing and being updated in a democratic fashion that gives it much flexibility. The current version is referred to as a hybrid, because it uses both face-to-face and virtual communication and also synchronous and asynchronous class periods.

The article goes into detail describing how a wiki operates. A wiki is normally in a read-only state, but members of the public, or members of the wiki if it is a private wiki, are able to edit the site and add their own information to what other have already posted. Wikis are a great way to collaborate and are very open, however, they involve giving a great deal of trust to the users, since it is easy to vandalize a wiki and delete another person's work. One group of educators from a small Michigan school were tasked with using a wiki that was built using the SDD process. Prior to this experience, they had only limited experience with Web 2.0 tools. Through this process, they came to enjoy the flexibility of a wiki and admitted to posting some of their material from their living room while their children were playing. Some people even contributed to the wiki while on vacation. It is estimated that virtual SDDs similar to this example, may reduce the cost of face-to-face meetings by a factor of six due to reduced travel expenses.

The application of Structured Dialogic Design will help teachers get a better handle on running collaborative learning projects. SDD encourages participants to ask questions for clarification, but it does not allow for students to make value statements regarding other students' work. These guidelines are developed through the creation of the "skeleton" of the wiki. As students progress, they begin to own the wiki and collaboration begins in earnest, with students comparing ideas. The main drawback to SDD only shows itself in an environment where learners are not expected to cooperate. It does not work well for independent learning. SDD attempts to empower students by making them both the teacher and the student.

SDD has not yet been applied to traditional content areas, but mostly just for the study of societal issues. It is currently simply a theoretical grounding that shows promise, but requires further study in school environments to ensure that it can be used in a regular classroom.

References

Veletsianos, George. Emerging Technologies in Distance Education. Edmonton,AB: AU Press, Athabasca University, 2010. 231-247. eBook