TeleLearning and Interconnected Learning Communities

Members of The TeleLearning Network of Centres of Excellence, funded in September 1995 through the Social Science Research Council of Canada, will present the social structures of interconnected learning communities growing out of well-established partnerships, learning activities, and social interactions involving high school learners, student teachers, teachers, and teacher educators. Applied to the education of educators, the notion of learning community stresses the importance that the entire communication process (between students, between schools, between undergraduates already linked to different schools, between undergraduates and teachers or university supervisors and professors, etc.) constitute a system dominated by complementary, knowledge building and common sharing, creating therefore an environment imbued with continuous transformation. The research question of "How can telelearning tools contribute to the creation of functional and collaborative communities of practice?" is being investigated. The websites TACT and Virtual U support these collaborative activities.

Social interactions are clustered along a progressive continuum, which goes from the transmission of information in traditional teaching-learning settings to computer-supported social interaction between learners : i) information, ii) cooperation, iii) coordination, and iv) integration. For instance, the Coordination cluster regroups interactions where 1) teachers and teacher educators co-plan, and co-supervise student teachers' activities; 2) Student teachers coordinate through face-to-face and on-line interactions their searches of relevant web sites, and lesson plans; 3) joint professional development activities for associate teachers and/or teacher educators on the use of new technologies for learning and teaching are occurring.

At each site (Laval & McGill), the value of building a learning community is highly recognized. Working documents specify the value system and key ideas of a fully-functioning learning community. They are meant to create images of the vision, and to facilitate the coordination of the activities occurring at each location as we design each of our unique and interconnected learning communities.

On the content level, integrative curriculum activities are sought. The emphasis is on knowledge building. Knowledge building constitutes the aim of the whole TeleLearning Program. Rooted in a vision that forging and participating in these new community links is in itself an active engagement in the construction and testing of one's own knowledge, the actual learnings, in general, take shape or form through itineraries or projects which have a certain scope and which call upon some expertise in the area of varieties of knowledge, particularly of a fundamental nature and of skills of all kinds.

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