E-pedagogy
Associate professor Grete Oline Hole, Høgskolen i Bergen

Introduction

Hi! My name is Grete Oline Hole, and in this lecture I will give you a brief overview of what characterizes e-pedagogy -- or teaching and learning in a virtual classroom.

Probably you will recognize many of the things I am speaking of here from your ordinary work as a teacher. Many of the principles of good teaching are of course also essential in good e-teaching and in the following you will learn more about how you can take your teacher competence and apply it to a Virtual Campus.

The main difference between e-pedagogy and teaching at the home university is that you deliver your teaching material through a computer! And in this course you will learn how to use the opportunities the computer gives you as an e-teacher. But you still have to use your knowledge of the topic you are teaching and your didactical skills when you plan your course.

Teaching philosophy

While you plan your course, you will be more or less aware of your underlying teaching philosophy. This is not the place to have in-depth discussion of these big issues. But I will briefly remind you of the three main perspectives of learning. From the behavioristic view we see learning as connecting smaller units of knowledge by stimulus and response. When using the cognitive/constructivist view learning is interaction between already existing knowledge and new experience. Within the situated perspective learning take place in real-world practices or from learning material and tasks connected to the real world.

As you learn in the screen-lecture on collaborative learning, in this course we are influenced by the situated approach. We have a focus on student-centred, task-oriented teaching and learning methods. We have tasks which require co-operation between students--the students must share their experiences and help each other to increase knowledge. A lot of interaction, discussion and collaboration takes place during this course.
The “Didactical Diamond”

Now I will give you an introduction to some central didactical principles to remember when you are planning an e-teaching session. Whether you plan a course or a single lecture these are issues to consider.

And I will start by showing you what we call the “didactical model of relations” as it was developed by Norwegian educational researchers. Bjørndal and Lieberg presented the model in 1978 and it was later developed by other Norwegians researchers. All elements in the model are inter-related and influence each other.

As the figure shows, there are 6 main elements: Aims, Content, Methods, External conditions, Participants’ Knowledge, and Assessment.

The first thing to do when you plan a course is to decide what the Aim(s) of the course should be. What are the intended learning outcomes for the teaching?
Depending on what the students should learn, your teaching strategies will differ. In professional education we now see a trend towards a competence-based curriculum where knowledge, skills and attitudes are integrated in core competencies. This will have different consequences for how you structure your course, and how you plan the assessment when compared to more traditional academic courses.

Do you want the students to learn in solitude, to study by themselves, or do you want to stimulate a more collaborative learning situation where dialogue, discussions and reflection are important? These are questions you have to address.

However, what you as a teacher plan is one thing. But the aims that the students set for themselves might be quite different. Do they really want to put a lot of work into your course --or do they just want to pass and get the credits? A good way to explore this is to ask the students to present their learning expectations at the beginning of the course.

When you participate in our course you will see that these are some of the things that we also expect you to do. Our aims are that you will learn how to construct your own e-learning course, develop your own didactical skills in e-pedagogy and also experience collaborative learning in an international setting. We also ask you to present a plan for how to reach your expected learning outcomes. in the beginning of the course. After finishing this course, you should be aware of the commonalities and differences between e-teaching and campus-teaching.

When planning the content of a course, the first thing is to make the curriculum plan. After that you have to decide the weekly structure - what progress there should be in the course and how to stimulate your students learning. In parallel you must look for learning materials available for the course. And the content of the course, for example, literature, lectures, web-links, and audio-visual material which can trigger learning, should be located or developed and decided upon.

When planning the progress through the course, and the expected level of learning outcomes, taxonomies can be helpful. The most frequently used is Bloom’s taxonomy of the cognitive outcome.
He classifies knowledge in 6 steps, 1. knowing of, 2. understanding, 3. application of knowledge (to be able to use it), 4. analyzing, 5. synthesizing and 6. evaluation.

Other taxonomies are Krathwal’s taxonomy of attitudes and Simpsons’ taxonomy of skills.

Tasks and assignments are important tools for the students’ learning and the way in which they are constructed can trigger learning in different ways. Students can be invited to collaborative or individual learning. Your learning philosophy should be reflected in the way you construct the course and plan the task for the students.

And, as you will see, the content in our course intends to stimulate participatory learning within a task-centred approach.
Speaking of methods in e-learning, one of the first things to do is to plan how the student can feel familiar with their learning arena. One way to do this is to make good tutorials and small introduction tasks so the student can quickly start to find their way in the virtual classroom. We have good experience with giving students a pre-start week before the actual course-work starts -- just to get to know the learning environment.

What are the methods you use for letting your students acquire the required competences? Are they going to read and study on their own or will they discuss, reflect and share information? Are you planning a lot of group-work? If so, it is important to present a schedule of this for the students.

Since you don’t have a face-to-face contact with students, synchronic (at the same time) communication gives the students an experience of being in a common classroom. You can use chatrooms or a virtual conference-room. You can either use the key-board for written communication or a head-set and/or web-camera. Different tools can be used for different purposes.

Do you want the students to engage in a-synchronic (not at the same time) discussions? You can set up discussion-forums where students can enter at a time that suits them. This gives the students time to think, to discuss facts, and to check their spelling before they write an answer.

Consider carefully your intended outcome from the communication-session and the access that students have to different tools, when you decide what to use, and when to use it! Our experience is that these methods have worked well so far, and therefore we have also used them in this course.

To sort out access, tools and equipment are important parts of considering the external conditions for e-learning. Other elements in the study-situation must be considered as well. The students’ learning situation, your own working situation, and the time allocated for this work will influence the course.

Is this a mandatory part of the students’ study-program and therefore will they have time to do what is expected? Or is this a voluntary course -- on “top of all other duties”? Do you have part-time students, who study in the evenings and week-ends? If so, then you might need to adjust the delivery dates for their coursework. In international courses different dates for
holidays, the beginnings and ends of the terms and so on will influence the students’ participation.

We have tried to sort out these external conditions in different ways in our courses.

As you can see in the figure; Participants’ knowledge is another point to consider. Very often teachers take this for granted. The curriculum plan presents the expected learning outcomes, but very rarely can students read what expectations the teacher has in relation to their pre-knowledge. This should be sorted out in the beginning of the course. Good learning starts with building on already existing knowledge. But this is easy to forget.

The last element in the figure is assessment. Depending on your aims for the course, assignments are constructed in different ways. But how the learning outcomes for students are assessed is also important. If you want to stimulate student-centred reflective learning process, you must make sure that this is assessed!

In our experience, portfolio assessment is a good way to ensure this. Your e-portfolio will consist of reflection notes and different tasks you have completed during the course, along with feedback from teachers and peers. In your final assignment you will be assessed on some of the products in your portfolio, which provides you with the opportunity to work further and improve your material before handing in. And there are tasks which reflect your teamwork.

As you see, these are general principles for teaching and learning … coming from campus teaching. However, they are also useful for practice in e-teaching and from our examples I have tried to illustrate how important it is to carefully plan this in a Virtual Classroom.

Readings