Chapter XII

Learning Objects: A Case Study in Teacher Education

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Abstract

This chapter presents a case study of a teacher education faculty member as she researches learning objects and integrates the concepts into her curriculum. The case unfolds as the instructor begins to plan the curriculum for the upcoming semester. The planning process leads to questions where the instructor investigates: why learning objects should be used, how learning objects should be used, where learning objects can be found, how learning objects should be integrated, and how learning objects should be evaluated. The investigation concerning learning objects and the course continue simultaneously. Throughout this journey, the author provides examples from the course as she strives to: (1) create an awareness of learning objects among her students and (2) provide an experience where students are afforded opportunities to determine the value of using learning objects as an instructional tool.

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Introduction

While planning the curriculum for next semester’s reading theory course, I chose to integrate Internet-based learning objects into several lessons. I did this for a couple of reasons. First, I wanted to teach my students about learning objects. I wanted my students to know what learning objects are, how they can be used, where to find them, and how to determine if the learning object is a quality learning tool or not. Second, I wanted my students to have an opportunity to experience using learning objects and determine the value of the experience. By creating this personal learning experience, my students would have firsthand knowledge of a learning object experience. They would not read about it or observe me in demonstration; they would experience the learning object themselves. In that way, each would determine the value of using learning objects to teach specific content or skills. My prediction was that students would place high value on the learning objects; they would value learning objects as instructional tools and discover many ways to use the objects to teach and learn.

However, before I created this experience, I needed to carefully research learning objects and determine how my instruction could be enhanced using them. The situation was precarious. Not only do I have the responsibility of producing knowledgeable teachers but I must also ensure that I have provided comprehensive content information for them. Specific to this course, these future teachers must understand educational and reading theory as well as how to use instructional strategies, integrate technology, address multicultural and special needs students, and differentiate between information that is useful and distracting. Therefore, any tool used, any content presented, or techniques demonstrated must contribute to the overall enhancement of my instruction.

As I continued planning the curriculum for the methods course, I identified several learning objects that could be used in my instruction. I also made deliberate changes in the types of assignments that had been previously required in this course. Students from previous semesters were encouraged to create original material for the course assignments and were discouraged from using Internet-based materials. Changes made for this class included required Internet-based materials and no teacher-made materials.

With the preparation phase complete and the course ready to begin, I stood before my students on the first day of class. I discussed goals for the course, specific objectives required for student learning outcomes, and then, fielded questions. Are you saying that you want me to use the Internet to find activities for my assignments? What about the idea of using original or teacher-created materials? What are learning objects? How do I find learning objects? How do I know if it is a good learning object?
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