COMBINING LECTURES WITH WEBPAGE SUPPORT AND INDEPENDENT STUDY

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This presentation will illustrate personal experience in using web-based materials to support and complement teaching in a classroom setting, an approach also adopted by some colleagues. Description: These methods are applied to official degrees with a large group size (50 to 100 students). The base teaching method is composed of lectures and laboratory sessions. Our proposal has been to supplement these with the use of a web page that provides supporting material, including: "Logistics" of the course: academic information, calendar, rules, announcements, calls for practicals and exams, results of assessment; Suggested exercises and activities; Bibliography (including internet links), both general and specific for each lesson or topic; Summaries or content of the subject matter. Copies of graphical material used in class; Interactive material to support learning: 3D molecular models (guided and interactive), animations, self-assessment tests (formative, with feedback provided automatically). The format chosen is open access web pages, which has the benefits of sharing resources with the community, offering easier accessibility, and more flexibility in design and content. A close tracking of the students is not featured, but this is not intended in our set-up (basically due to high numbers of students). The result is mostly one-way delivery, but there are routes for communication and feedback, such as contact forms and e-mail; all this relies, however, on student's initiative and motivation. Despite all the current enthusiasm for e-techniques, our perception of students' reality indicates that the face-to-face lecture format can hardly be abandoned. However, an evolution has been perceived: each year, the students are more prone to accepting and using the technology. Still, frequently they are used to the technologies but only for entertainment, not for work. Key variables: There are many reports of excellent and brilliant initiatives in teaching innovation, but in deciding their adoption and design one must consider some key factors, such as group size and students' attitude and responsibility in their study, even the bare interest in learning. We perceive some facts that may play against this, such as students' diverse interests competing with study, low motivation, and the lack of a culture of effort. Some reflections: In attempting to improve our teaching and the efficiency of students' learning, redesign of teaching methodology is a common goal. When confronting this task, some doubts may arise. Among them: Should we enforce student's responsibility? Are we miseducating the students, being complacent, too permissive or letting them be naive? Are we generating a kindergarten effect? Will the offer of on-line support material reduce the assistance to the classroom?

Keywords: innovation in teaching, active learning, web page