Learning with New Media in Distance Education

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Abstract

Since the 1990s the "new media" have been understood to be the electronic information and communications media. Their rapidly increasing availability is proving at present to be an unprecedented challenge for all teachers and students. This paper will show how this challenge can be accepted in distance teaching and how participants might be able to face up to it.

In order to define the starting position in distance education, which has now been altered by the new media, pedagogical functions of the "old" media and the new media will first of all be sketched: they differ greatly from one another, because the new media only become effective through the interplay of hardware and software in integrated systems which can be used in an unusual variety of ways. They enable learning actions in at least ten different virtual learning spaces. Above all they foster activating, self-controlled and relatively autonomous learning. As a result, the transition from old to new media causes a break with the pedagogical traditions of distance education.

At distance universities, learning generally has a structural affinity to learning with the new media from the start. This is an advantage for these universities, because it is then easier for them to make use of these media skilfully. Twelve points will be listed in which distance universities are already particularly well-prepared for online learning. They are also the reason why online learning at a distance university will have a different pedagogical structure to a traditional campus university. To provide a practical example of how various and complex the provisions are which have to be taken to enable learning with the new media at a distance university the measures that were introduced at the **Fernuniversität in Hagen** to develop the "learning space virtual university" will be listed and sketched.

Finally, general advantages, advantages specific to distance education pedagogy and to online teaching and learning which a digital learning environment can have in combination with the networks for distance students will be highlighted. Those who want to make use of these advantages must internalise the pedagogical paradigm change which has taken place and *redefine* learning. This is the unavoidable consequence of a wide-ranging use of the new media in distance education. On the other hand, reference will also be made to misgivings and apprehensions regarding expected changes to learning behaviour. A list of pertinent research projects will conclude this paper.

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