


<h2 style="text-align: center;">Is Virtual Learning the New Trend in the Teaching-Learning Process?</h2>  <p><small>Boston Cronicles / Reporter News Joe Head High School senior Lazaro Buford listens as his English teacher in absentia, Markey Kline, lectures from Stamford High School. Buford and other Joe Head seniors are learning college and high school English credit through a video conferencing class.</small></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Wilner Cuenca</b> August 1, 2001</p>	<h3 style="text-align: center;">Is Virtual Learning the New Trend in the Teaching-Learning Process?</h3> <h2 style="text-align: center;">Introduction</h2> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The word <b>virtual</b> means produced by a computer and intended to seem real. Then, does <b>virtual learning</b> mean unreal learning?</li> <li>• For centuries students have attended classrooms to learn and achieve knowledge.</li> <li>• Students and teachers share the same space when interacting.</li> <li>• New teaching-learning methods.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cable TV – Public TV stations. (Off-line)</li> <li>• Web sites. (On-line, Off-line)</li> <li>• Video conferencing - virtual classrooms. (On-line)</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>VIRTUAL OR DISTANCE LEARNING</b></p>
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<h3 style="text-align: center;">Is Virtual Learning the New Trend in the Teaching-Learning Process?</h3> <h2 style="text-align: center;">Disadvantages of Virtual Learning</h2> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No interaction student-student, teacher-student.</li> <li>• Necessity of technical assistance.</li> <li>• Teachers require additional concentration in on-line classes.</li> <li>• It is not for young students.</li> </ul>	<h3 style="text-align: center;">Is Virtual Learning the New Trend in the Teaching-Learning Process?</h3> <h2 style="text-align: center;">Advantages of Virtual Learning</h2> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Virtual education can make specialists more accessible.</li> <li>• A VLE allows students to control their learning process.</li> <li>• Students can pace their time according to their own abilities or constraints.</li> <li>• Compared with the conventional way of teaching, VLE can accommodate more varieties of student learning styles.</li> <li>• In asynchronous classes, no external influences like race, age, sex, appearance, etc.</li> </ul>
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<h3 style="text-align: center;">Is Virtual Learning the New Trend in the Teaching-Learning Process?</h3> <h2 style="text-align: center;">Conclusion</h2> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Every change conveys opposition.</li> <li>• Computers are essential in our lives.</li> <li>• The cons are becoming fewer than the pros.</li> <li>• Attending school or college will be weird.</li> <li>• <b>Virtual learning is the new trend in the teaching-learning process.</b></li> </ul>	<h3 style="text-align: center;">Is Virtual Learning the New Trend in the Teaching-Learning Process?</h3> <h2 style="text-align: center;">Glossary</h2> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Off-line; means no interaction in real time between people, for instance teacher-student, connected through the Internet.</li> <li>• On-line; implies the possibility of interaction in real time between people, for instance teacher-student, connected through the Internet.</li> <li>• Video-conferencing; means that two or more people at different locations can see and hear each other at the same time.</li> <li>• VLE; stands for virtual learning environments.</li> </ul>
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## **Virtual Learning: The New Tendency**

### **Advantages and Disadvantages**

The word virtual means produced by a computer and intended to seem real. Then, does virtual learning mean unreal learning?

For many centuries students have attended classrooms to learn and achieve knowledge and experiences from their teachers and classmates. Even though these classrooms have experienced some transformations throughout their history, these changes have retained the same central concept; students and teachers share the same space to interact. Nowadays a dramatic revolution is taking place and is gradually changing the criterion of the teaching-learning process.

Since computers have become a part of our daily life, some teaching centers around the world, especially from developed countries, have been offering a wide variety of programs to get a bachelor, master or even Ph.D. degrees with classes off-line and on-line using the Internet as the main medium. This kind of teaching-learning method has been named *virtual learning* or distance learning. Subsequently, the answer to the question stated in the first paragraph is a definitely NO, it is simply a new way of teaching-learning.

As usual, every change entails analyzing pros and cons in order to undertake actions to speed up or stop that change.

### **Disadvantages of virtual learning**

Since direct interaction student-student, student-teacher is necessary to motivate the learning process, additional training for teaching staff and students could be necessary with an orientation stage and training to make them familiar with the new environment (Lee 8-9).

Interaction is essential to learn how to socialize with others, to make friends, to share, to learn discipline, etc., skills that could be hard, not to say, impossible to learn through a computer.

Given that more sophisticated equipment is required in these environments, technical assistance could be necessary to deal with technology problems associated with management and transmission of information. On-line programs could be annoying for the people involved if a failure occurs and no one can fix the problem.

In on-line classes using video-conferencing, normally, the image projected could become bent or blurred as a result of excessive movement from the lecturer (Lee 12). The lecturer besides giving attention to the common aspects of traditional classes needs additional concentration on video cameras, his movement, microphone, etc. As a result, it demands more energy from the professor resulting in more stress and/or feeling of exhaustion after classes.

Virtual environment is not for everybody. In remote areas or in towns where there is no access to the Internet, people are relegated from this learning method. Basic computer knowledge associated to internet (browsing, e-mail, downloading of files, etc.) is also needed to undertake a program using this environment, since all information must be transmitted using this medium.

Distance education for kindergarten, elementary and generally young students who need constant supervision is not the most appropriate system.

### **Advantages of virtual learning**

Most experts, specialists or scientists who are dealing with researching have no time to travel extensively to give lectures; virtual education can make them more accessible by using video-conferencing.

A virtual learning environment allows students to control their learning process. Even though a VLE can be goal-oriented as Scott Follows points out in the program *In Thirst for Knowledge* created at Acadia University, “students must complete a set of tasks and submit a

progress report before progressing to new information and tasks. The student has complete control over when a task is completed and the extent to which the task is completed.” (100)

Asynchronous classes permit people to study in their free time due to no schedule restrictions, allowing students to pace their time according their own chances or constraints.

Compared with the conventional way of teaching, VLE can accommodate more ways of student learning styles. “Traditional lectures are geared for students whose learning styles are sequential, non-active and verbal. As an educational tool, a VLE provides information in a number of different formats (e.g. observation, listening, reading), and it engages the learner in a range of information searching processes.” (Follows 100). Therefore, every student can formulate his/her personal strategy of learning; this will motivate him/her to achieve his/her goals.

Since business is possible through the Internet, distance will no longer prevent students from enrolling in a program or class anywhere in the world. Registering is a simple process through the Internet due to a guided, step-by-step program.

Virtual learning tends to be cheaper than traditional education. The information will be shared among various institutions. As Peter Watson remarks, "Perhaps the most significant is that the basic library or information service is unlikely to be dedicated to a single university institution. [...] Thus, the cost structure of such a service will allow reducing average costs per unit as the number of subscribers to the service increases. A virtual university is therefore likely to subcontract its library services rather than regarding them as a part of its core business" (71).

Anonymity in a virtual environment forces teachers to focus attention on the ability of students and their individual responses, eliminating the possibility of external influences like race, age, sex, appearance, etc.

## **Conclusion**

Every change that involves many people and that radically alters their customs conveys opposition. But computers have demonstrated such an enormous contribution to society

development that almost nobody nowadays can envision life without them. Even though presently still there are some constraints as pointed out; computer engineers are working in these areas to soften them. With the development of more sophisticated hardware and software that is easier to use, the cons are becoming fewer than the advantages. Therefore, in the near future attending school or college to study will be the exception; *virtual learning will be the norm in the learning process*. Consequently, in this area, **virtual learning is the new tendency**.

### Glossary

Off-line; means no interaction in real time between people, for instance teacher-student, connected through the Internet.

On-line; implies the possibility of interaction in real time between people, for instance teacher-student, connected through the Internet.

Video-conferencing; means that two or more people at different locations can see and hear each other at the same time.

VLE; stands for virtual learning environments.

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