



Increasing Student Engagement through Collaborative Learning Outside the Classroom

Rosario Hernández

University College Dublin (Ireland)

charo.hernandez@ucd.ie

Several factors, including the Bologna process, the embargo on university posts and a larger student population pursuing degrees, have contributed to radical changes in teaching, learning and assessment in Higher Education in the last few years. Challenges to academics have resulted in curriculum reform and, most importantly, in innovative practices in which the curriculum is delivered and assessed. It was in this context that a collaborative component has been introduced into a Level 2 Spanish Language module at University College Dublin.

This paper presents the rationale for introducing a collaborative learning component into this module and describes the self-directed tasks completed by the students. A small action research project has been undertaken to explore the students' views about this innovative way of learning. The paper addresses the extent to which collaborative learning outside the classroom contributes to the enhancement of student learning and examines the obstacles encountered by the students during the semester. The discussion of the findings focuses on feedback from the students and on group reflections submitted via Blackboard, the University's Virtual Learning Environment.