

How to Raise a Baby! Using a Flexible and Digital Learning Environment to Support Active Learning in a Developmental Psychology Course

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Digital Learning Environment

The Campus Saint-Jean (CSJ) at the U of A pioneered a digital learning environment that provides students and instructors with a space that:

- is student centered;
- promotes teamwork, discussion, and problem-solving;
- encourages active learning, which has been shown to be an effective teaching technique by promoting a greater sense of agency and motivation on the part of students (Park & Choi, 2014; Sharples et al., 2016; Tynjälä & Gijbels, 2012);
- facilitates the adoption of creative pedagogical practices among instructors;
- and is based on Universal Design for Learning to be more inclusive and adaptable to students' diverse needs (cf., Boothe et al., 2018).

Layout, Technology, & Training



The room provides multiple ways for students and teachers to present and engage with content through:

- a large main screen for presentations;
- six wall-mounted touch screens displays to support group work;
- 45 Chromebooks for student use;
- and 60 moveable desks that allow the room to be configured for small group work or for larger team activities depending on the needs of the course and instructor.

Further, CSJ's Information Services and Technology and the U of A's Centre for Teaching and Learning provide instructors with professional development workshops about how to implement pedagogical practices using technology in the room.

Activity

The "MyVirtualChild" program was used for a group activity in the digital learning space.

- This interactive web-based simulation allows students to raise a child from birth to age 18 and monitor the effects of parenting decisions over time.



Project Description

The course was a 2nd year developmental psychology class with 15 students that was taught in French.

- Over 3 class periods, students worked in groups of 3-4 to make parental decisions in teams.
- They were presented with scenarios that asked them to decide which parenting practice they would adopt.
- There were two course assignments based on this activity:
 1. Students worked in teams to create a Google Site to record their decisions (see Figure 1).
 2. Students then wrote an individual report to explain the link between the themes of the course, scientific research articles, and their parenting decisions.

Project Learning Objectives

- Apply the theories and content discussed in the course to make parenting decisions and explain the development of a virtual child;
- develop communication skills by working in teams to come to a consensus about parenting decisions;
- appreciate diversity in parenting approaches across individuals and cultures;
- and strengthen critical thinking skills by integrating scientific research on human development to explain the effects of parenting decisions on a virtual child.

Student Outcomes

Below are comments from a student who participated in the activity:

"I really enjoyed working on the Virtual Child Assignment in the Digital Learning Environment as it allowed me to engage with my peers and the course content in a way that simply completing the assignment alone at home or in a traditional group collaboration setting (e.g., classroom or library) could not offer.

For example, by being able to communicate effectively in real-time via the use of the wall-mounted touch screens, I was much more actively engaged with the course material and my peers, than I have felt while completing previous assignments for other psychology courses.



Figure 1. Sample group website

Additionally, completing the assignment in this collaborative manner was very beneficial to my overall understanding of the course content. For example, by actively engaging with my group members in this manner, I was able to gain a new perspective on some of the developmental theories we discussed in class, as well as possible ways we could apply these to these theories while "raising our child."

Overall, the benefits provided by the digital learning environment resulted in my increased interest and motivation in the course—I looked forward to each session we had in the room!" - T.P.

References

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