

Blogging for Better Learning

Summary of Project:

Learning Objects Journal LX™ building block blogging tool was used to facilitate interaction and reflection in an online literature course using the Blackboard Course Management System.

Why Blogging is a Good Choice:

It supports constructivist learning theory because the content that students and teachers create becomes part of the wider body of knowledge. It also supports connectivism learning theory, which states that knowledge is formed from a diversity of opinions and ideas and continued facilitation of communication creates continual learning. For more on constructivist and connectivism learning theories see these sites:

- Constructivist - <http://www.exploratorium.edu/ifi/resources/constructivistlearning.html>
- Connectivism - <http://www.elearnspace.org/Articles/connectivism.htm>

How Blogging Was Used in the Course:

I used blogging as a social and reflective tool in a college sophomore level fiction course. An explanation for the desired outcome of the use of blogging in the course was provided to the students. I also modeled the kind of blog posts I wanted from the students at the beginning of the semester. The students then performed reflection on weekly readings by posting one original post per week. The students also discussed different topics covered in the readings by responding to at least one other classmate's original post per week.

How it Worked in the Beginning:

Student postings had thin content and they did not include quotes from the text or connect ideas from the text with real-life situations. Most students posted too late for others in the class to respond to their postings.

Inserting a Rubric as a Correction:

Criteria for content was added by inserting a rubric for grading posts. Requirements in the rubric were:

- Students had to support their opinions with quotes from the text and a page number.
- Student responses to other postings had to discuss one item mentioned in the post with which they agreed, and one item with which they disagreed.
- Criteria for dates and times of postings was added

There were some complaints from students about adding the rubric after the course started! However, after I explained why I was adding it and what the desired outcome for them and the course overall was, they got over their reluctance.

How it Worked by the End of the Course:

Student posting content had improved significantly. In addition, discussion between individuals had improved. And, the timeliness in posting improved somewhat with more students posting throughout the week instead of waiting until the last minute.

Why the Changes Helped the Project Work:

Having a specific criteria helps students to understand what is expected of them, and using the rubric for this greatly improved their assessment of what they needed to do to fully complete the assignment. In most areas of the assignment, the students were able to perform at the level expected, but they needed to have those expectations clarified in a concise and easily accessible manner. Requiring students to learn how to disagree in an academic environment promotes healthy discussion and greatly improved the discourse between individuals. Once students understood the difference between "arguing" and "disagreeing" many more new ideas were presented and discussed.

Perceived Benefits of Blogging by Students:

Students less familiar with traditional literature discussion topics found the blogging experience helpful in aiding them to more fully understand and explore the readings. Students who were already familiar with traditional literature discussion topics were able to:

- Expand their own knowledge.
- Practice academic responses in an online environment.
- Help their classmates who were not as strong in literature discussion.

Results Linked to Learning Theories:

Constructivism - Students were able to collaborate on ideas and opinions and construct new knowledge for themselves and others on the topics covered in the course.

Connectivism - Students created knowledge through a diversity of opinions and connected on various levels outside of the classroom material. And, continued communication throughout the course created a bond that allowed for more sharing and learning. In addition, students realized that their interpretations of literature could change over time and with new life experiences.

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Student Opinions on the Use of the Blog:

"I believe the blogging was a positive aspect of the course. In many ways it gave you insight to what we were reading from other people's perspective. I might read a story and it brings a certain theme or mindset to fruition, then I read someone else's take on the same story and I think 'Oh yeah. I never thought about it that way.'" – C. Johnson

"The blog is a nice tool to use. Students can see several posts at once rather than having to maneuver back and forth between multiple pages. One draw back come with it being non-verbal or in person. It is very difficult to bring across humor or to make obvious the meant tone." – J. Spikes

"I am very computer challenged and the word "blog" scared me to death at the beginning of the semester. I felt like that was a word I have only heard come out of my 14 year old step-son's mouth before. I was thinking about all the high tech things I am scared of, IPOD's; MP3 players; TIVO. But I found it was easy to use and I was able to catch on immediately. I felt it was a good tool since you could see a page worth of responses to the readings at a time, rather than having to click on a persons name to read their answer as you have to do in the discussion boards. I still do not understand completely what a blog is. I hear about it on channel 4 news, you can go to their website and "blog" about stuff. I do not think I will become a full time blogger, but it was a fun easy tool and an easy way to share the different opinions on the readings with each other." – L. Deberry

"I really enjoyed the use of the blog in this course. I got much more out of it than I would have gotten out of doing assignments alone. It was very helpful to see other peoples viewpoints on each reading. The use of the blog also provided good peer interaction. In many of the online courses I have taken there is no interaction with others. This class provided interaction, but I still was able to work a my own pace." – H. Opuzenski