

Group Project: Sample Lesson on Blogging

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The objective of our group project was to design and document a sample lesson, keeping in mind relevant theories of cognitive learning and current literature on effective online instruction. We designed a graduate-level course, 755-55 — *Online Tools and Educational Applications*, in order to introduce learners to concepts and theories in the development of instructional technology including: blogging, wikis, YouTube, podcasts, social networking, and Wimba. We created a number of documents to support the semester-long course and posted these to Blackboard as follows:

- Course Information: includes the course syllabus;
- Course Documents: pdf files of assigned reading for students
- Assignments: instructions for in-class activities
- Projects: instructions for out-of-class assignments
- Web Resources: links to articles of interest
- Faculty Documents: our 3-hour lesson plan for week 2

The bulk of our group's effort went into the creation of a 3-hour class, slated for week two of the 755-55 course design. In addition to the lesson-plan itself, we thought through assignments that needed to be completed in advance of week two and homework for the subsequent week. We chose blogging as the topic of the week two lesson plan.

Our rationale for including blogging in our lesson plan was our conviction, based in current research, that blogging can be a critical online tool in developing students'

cognitive skills. Blogging can give learners an opportunity to construct knowledge rather than simply reproduce knowledge thereby making them active participants in learning. “The current thinking is that for learning to be effective learners must have an opportunity to be cognitively active with the learning material” (Lowerison and Schmid, 2007). Blogging affords such an opportunity.

Mayer’s (2002) research in multimedia learning has shown that learners who summarize material process it at a deeper level. Blogging, like journaling, offers

learners a medium in which to set out a logical, linear response to material that is presented in the classroom, whether it be an online class or a face-to-face class. Clark and Mayer (2008) suggest e-learning applications for blogging include “learning journals, post-class application

Summary of the Cognitive Benefits of Blogging:

- building language skills;
- developing critical thinking skills;
- sparking creativity;
- giving adequate time for reflection and deep-processing;
- flexibility of asynchronous communication reduces cognitive load;
- supporting active rather than passive learning.

commentaries, informal updates on course skills and related topics, and evaluation of course effectiveness” (p. 259).

Studies in Gallupe and Cooper (1993) also indicate that electronic forums may enhance problem-solving skills and creativity. The fact that it is somewhat anonymous

to post one's thoughts online rather than speak face-to-face in a classroom full of students, "reduces many student's self-consciousness and defensiveness, thereby fostering their involvement and participation" (Nilson, p. 159).

Today's learners are so accustomed to Web 2.0 technology in their personal lives that they are often more comfortable posting their ideas and questions online than they are in face-to-face conversations. Educational settings need to capitalize on the strengths of the students, and if they are most comfortable working online, then teachers have an educational opportunity to incorporate these tools into their instructional design.

The design principles that are outlined in the text book for Dr. Heo's class (Clark and Mayer, 2008), have only a tangential relationship to blogging. The principles Clark and Mayer propose include the multi-media principle, contiguity principle, modality principle, redundancy principle, coherence principle, personalization, segmenting, and pre-training. The most relevant of these principles in terms of creating blogs would be segmenting and pre-training. A blog adheres to the segmenting principle in that it can help learners break complex material down into manageable chunks. Any given lesson presents a cognitive challenge to learners and sets up a situation in which their cognitive system may overload. Asking students to blog can assist them in breaking the information down into meaningful parts. For example, if a lesson has five main elements, a blogging assignment might ask students to reflect on one or two of those elements, thereby enabling them to construct their own meaning and see how the parts contribute to the whole. Pre-training is also a principle relevant to blogging in that

students unfamiliar with creating blogs will benefit from preliminary instruction. Before asking a student to create his or her own blog the teacher needs to ensure that learners know the key concepts of the technology as well as clear expectations of what to include in the blog.

What is of far greater relevance to blogging, however, is the Clark and Mayer chapter on collaborative learning. Blogs are a way of sharing information from one to many, but the asynchronous context allows time for reflection. Rather than working independently in the class, blogging allows students to hear from their classmates and in turn they “can benefit from the perspectives and expertise of several participants” (Clark and Mayer, 2008, p. 268).

In terms of participation, our group worked exceptionally well together. We began to communicate early on in the course, originally through the use of the discussion tools on the “Group” tab in Blackboard. We also had some early discussions using the Wimba classroom so we could have audio as well as written communication. As the project took shape, we felt the Blackboard space was too restrictive. Doug created a space for our group at Wikispaces.com. Jessica got us started by taking the bare bones ideas we had discussed as a group and putting flesh on them in written form. She created a draft syllabus and teaching outline. The Wikispace allowed Doug and I to easily access Jessica’s work and add our own ideas, edits, and suggestions. Everyone contributed equally to the group’s progress and no one had to be prodded to contribute. There was great camaraderie and team spirit.

Project Checkpoints:

- The topic of the lesson fits with the needs of Instructional Technology majors.
- The lesson material fits for a 3 hour class.
- The descriptions for the lesson are well justified in terms of the principles covered in classes.
- Group members collaborated well.
- All borrowed contents are cited properly.
- There are no grammatical mistakes in the writing.
- The submitted document is in APA style (length, fonts, format, citations, references, etc.)

References

- Clark, C., Mayer, R. E. (2008) *E-Learning and the Science of Instruction: Proven Guidelines for Consumers and Designers of Multimedia Learning*. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley and Sons.
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- Mayer, R. E. (2002) The promise of educational psychology: Vol. 2. *Teaching for Meaningful Learning*. Columbus, OH: Merrill/Prentice Hall.
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