

Mar 9th, 11:00 AM - 11:45 AM

Blogs or Discussion Boards? Which Better Promotes Student Engagement in Online Courses?


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Recommended Citation

Kinne, Lenore and Clarke, Lane W., "Blogs or Discussion Boards? Which Better Promotes Student Engagement in Online Courses?" (2011). *SoTL Commons Conference*. 2.

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Blogs vs. Discussion Boards?

A Comparative Study of Written Learning Communities and Student Engagement in Online Courses



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For a copy

- Slides available at www.nku.edu~kinnel1
- OR e-mail presenter at kinnel1@nku.edu
- Paper is under review at
The Internet and Higher Education

Research question

- Which is more effective, blogs or DBs?
 - Patterns of discussion
(Peterson & Slotta, 2009, Thomas, 2002)
 - Student engagement in the course
(Carr-Chellman & Duchastel, 2000)
 - Students' impression of learning community
(Rovai, 2007)

Methodology

- 4 courses
 - 2 sections of EDG 615 Curriculum & Instruction
 - 2 sections of EDG 624 Assessment & Evaluation
- Participants N =27
 - 13 female, 1 male from EDG 624
 - (5 elementary, 1 middle, 1 high, 7 nurses)
 - 12 female, 1 male from EDG 615
 - All teachers

Methodology

- Online survey
 - Student engagement in course
 - Students' impressions of learning community
- Blog/DB postings
 - Length of initial posting
 - # and length of peer reactions/comments
 - Content analysis of postings

Organization of Blogs

- <http://www.screencast.com/users/lanewclarke/folders/Jing/media/a94245d8-b959-4cf3-9d6a-a043c732bbco>

Managing Blogs

- <http://www.screencast.com/users/lanewclarke/folders/Jing/media/10b3893d-coaa-4aa7-9c27-e86d40ced1a5>
- Through blackboard
- <http://www.screencast.com/users/lanewclarke/folders/Jing/media/00921991-44c7-4223-9e50-174ac9b75df2>

Making Blogs More Personal

- Embedding Photos
- <http://www.screencast.com/users/lanewclarke/folders/Jing/media/68e41ce2-f3ef-4c3e-a818-3ffob6f59063>
- Adding Links and videos
- <http://www.screencast.com/users/lanewclarke/folders/Jing/media/7710c727-e40b-494e-a685-052dcf5e7aef>

Discussion boards

- Each forum included 3 threads, posted by instructor, posing questions about readings
- Students were expected to respond to each thread, and react to postings of at least 3 peers.

Our Data

- **Online Survey**
 - 12 Likert scale items
 - 3 Open ended questions
- **111 DB postings**
 - Responses to professor's 3 questions
 - Reactions to at least 3 peers
- **132 Blog postings**
 - Responses to professor's prompt
 - Reactions to at least 3 peers

Results - Length of Initial Postings

# words	Blogs	DBs
Mean	405.7	127.4
S.D.	140.57	59.42
N	13	14

Results: Comments/Reactions to Peers

# of Peer Reactions	Blogs	DBs
Mean	2.8	.87
S.D.	1.27	.43
# words in Peer Reactions	Blog s	DBs
Mean	260.1	49.7
S.D.	124.73	21.82

The Survey

- 20 Participants
 - 9 blog
 - 11 DB
- All had taken 4+ online courses
- 13 Likert scale items
- 3 open ended questions
 - What did you like about the online discussions
 - What did you not like...
 - What would you change...

Survey Results: Course Satisfaction

How satisfied were you with:

		VS	S	SS	NVS
Participating in online discussions as part of this course?	Blogs	78%	22%	0%	0%
	DBs	18%	46%	36%	0%
Communicating with classmates through these discussions?	Blogs	56%	44%	0%	0%
	DBs	27%	36%	36%	0%
Communicating with the instructor through these discussions?	Blogs	78%	22%	0%	0%
	DBs	36%	27%	27%	9%
Learning content through these discussions?	Blogs	78%	22%	0%	0%
	DBs	36%	27%	27%	9%
Feeling of being part of a learning community	Blogs	44%	56%	0%	0%
	DBs	18%	46%	36%	0%
Feeling that your opinions were valued	Blogs	56%	44%	0%	0%
	DBs	46%	27%	27%	0%
Feeling that you could accurately communicate your thoughts	Blogs	67%	33%	0%	0%
	DBs	55%	36%	9%	0%

Survey Results: Perceptions of Learning Community

How did you feel about the following?

		VP	P	SP	NP
I was able to accurately communicate with my classmates through the DBs/Blogs	Blogs DBs	67% 40%	33% 30%	0% 30%	0% 0%
I felt part of a learning community as part of the DBs/Blogs	Blogs DBs	67% 30%	33% 30%	0% 40%	0% 0%
My classmates listened to me through the DBs/Blogs	Blogs DBs	33% 10%	67% 40%	0% 50%	0% 0%
My instructor listened to me through the DBs/Blogs	Blogs DBs	78% 40%	22% 40%	0% 20%	0% 0%
The DBs/Blogs helped me to understand the course content	Blogs DBs	56% 30%	44% 20%	0% 50%	0% 0%

Survey Results: How engaged were you in the course as a result of the online discussion?

	Extremely	Very	Not Very
Blogs	38%	63%	0%
DBs	0%	60%	40%

Survey Results: What did you like about the online discussions?

Blogs

- Flexibility (3)
- Personalization (2)
- Academic, focused (1)
- Quick communication & feedback (1)
- Visual, easier to communicate (1)
- Easier to communicate because no one was staring at me (1)

Discussion Boards

- Time to think/reflect before responding (3)
- Getting different points of view (3)
- The topics, response choices (2)
- Flexibility (2)
- Personal experiences related to the topic (1)

Survey Results: What did you NOT like about the online discussions?

Blogs

- Not as much feedback from peers as I'd hoped (2)
- Nothing, they were perfect (2)
- Too many, too time-consuming (2)
- Having to wait for last-minute post-ers (1)
- Blog website was blocked by my school, so I couldn't work during my planning period (1)

Discussion Boards

- Time consuming, overwhelming, too many deadlines (3)
- Repetitive information (2)
- Hard to comment on others' postings (2)
- Discussion went off on tangents (1)
- Computer problems (1)
- Impersonal, slow response (1)
- Nothing (1)

Survey Results: What would you change about the online discussions?

Blogs

- Nothing (3)
- Like DB better (2)
- Option to use blogs or DB (1)
- Rotate who reads & comments on which blog (1)
- Request comments that go beyond “I agree” (1)

Discussion Boards

- Nothing (2)
- Make more personal with photos or F2F meetings (2)
- More guidance/interaction/feedback from professor (2)
- More teacher-based entries (1)
- Questions with no right/wrong answers (1)
- Don't like DBs (1)
- Use blogs instead (1)

Qualitative Analysis

- Discourse Pattern
 - Dinner table vs. Podium
(Blum-Kulka, 1997; Cazden, 1988; Tannen, 2007)

Content Analysis Categories

(King, 2002; Peterson & Slotta, 2009; Vonderwell & Zacaharia, 2005)

Social Comments

- Not related to course content

Personal Connection Comments

- 5 sub-codes explained on next slide

Academic Comments

- 6 sub-codes explained on subsequent slide

Content Analysis

- Personal Connection Comments
 - Personal Critique
 - Using personal information to critique
 - Personal Question
 - Questioning, based on personal experience
 - Personal Extending
 - Using experience to extend a topic
 - Personal Supporting
 - Using experience to support a topic
 - Personal Sharing
 - Sharing a personal experience

Content Analysis

- Academic Comments
 - Stating Beliefs
 - Stating personal beliefs related to academic content
 - Answering Question
 - Directly answering professor's prompt
 - Responding to Reading
 - Directly responding to reading, often citing reading
 - Creating Question
 - Questioning, based on academic content
 - Summary
 - Summarizing the academic content
 - Responding to Classmate
 - Responding to a classmate about the academic content

Academic Comments: Examples

- Assessment, testing and evaluation are all similar in that they all attempt to gather some type of data, information, or evidence for measurement purposes...In an educational context, assessment is the process of gathering data, information, and evidence, which can be done in a paper and pencil test...”

Personal Comments: Example

- Twenty-one years ago, I read a book called “The Seven Laws of Learning and Teaching” during my Sunday school training in my church. ...Why do I share this? Because as I read through this article it was clear to me that the most basic principle of pedagogy are not that complicated, instead they have been made complicated with the desire of higher expectations

Student Engagement

- Students using DBs
 - 63% of responses were Academic
 - 37% of responses were Personal
- Students using Blogs
 - 45% of responses were Academic
 - 55% of responses were Personal
- What does “Engagement” mean?
 - to students?
 - to professors?

Learning Community

- In the DB course, community was built through the back-and-forth dialogue
- Examples:
 - I found both of your examples helpful to our discussion of assessment. I believe you may be the only one to bring up the topic of assessment regarding patient education.
 - Your suggestion is a great visual method to explain norm-referenced interpretation. I will remember it if the situation arises again with younger students or maybe modify it for older students.

Learning Community

- In the Blog course, community was developed through sharing of personal life
 - Photos of self, family, pets, video links
 - Personal comments

Example: Hello fellow one-res. I'm trying to get moving after the snow. Today was sunny, warm and beautiful so I'm getting back into the swing of school. Snow days make me want to hibernate!

Questions for further research

- How does a “learning community” differ from a “social community”?
- How would the difference in discussion format manifest itself in two courses that were identical in content? ...identical in instructor?
- Would differences in discussion format be consistent across different content areas?
- How do the definitions of “learning community” and “student engagement” differ between professors and students?

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