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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&
Lane W. Clarke, University of New England
For a copy

- Slides available at [www.nku.edu/~kinnel1](http://www.nku.edu/~kinnel1)
- OR e-mail presenter at [kinnel1@nku.edu](mailto: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

- [Link](http://www.screencast.com/users/lanewclarke/folders/Jing/media/10b3893d-c0aa-4aa7-9c27-e86d40ced1a5)
- Through blackboard
- [Link](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-a818-3ff0b6f59063

• 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># words</th>
<th>Blogs</th>
<th>DBs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>405.7</td>
<td>127.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.D.</td>
<td>140.57</td>
<td>59.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Results: Comments/Reactions to Peers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Blogs</th>
<th>DBs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mean # of Peer Reactions</strong></td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S.D. # of Peer Reactions</strong></td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mean # words in Peer Reactions</strong></td>
<td>260.1</td>
<td>49.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S.D. # words in Peer Reactions</strong></td>
<td>124.73</td>
<td>21.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Blogs</th>
<th>DBs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participating in online discussions as part of this course?</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating with classmates through these discussions?</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating with the instructor through these discussions?</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning content through these discussions?</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling of being part of a learning community</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling that your opinions were valued</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling that you could accurately communicate your thoughts</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Survey Results: Perceptions of Learning Community

How did you feel about the following?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception</th>
<th>VP</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>SP</th>
<th>NP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I was able to accurately communicate with my classmates through the DBs/Blogs</td>
<td>Blogs DBs</td>
<td>67% 30%</td>
<td>33% 40%</td>
<td>0% 50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt part of a learning community as part of the DBs/Blogs</td>
<td>Blogs DBs</td>
<td>67% 30%</td>
<td>33% 40%</td>
<td>0% 40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My classmates listened to me through the DBs/Blogs</td>
<td>Blogs DBs</td>
<td>33% 10%</td>
<td>67% 40%</td>
<td>0% 50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My instructor listened to me through the DBs/Blogs</td>
<td>Blogs DBs</td>
<td>78% 40%</td>
<td>22% 40%</td>
<td>0% 20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The DBs/Blogs helped me to understand the course content</td>
<td>Blogs DBs</td>
<td>56% 30%</td>
<td>44% 20%</td>
<td>0% 50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Survey Results:** How engaged were you in the course as a result of the online discussion?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Extremely</th>
<th>Very</th>
<th>Not Very</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blogs</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DBs</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Survey Results: What did you like about the online discussions?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blogs</th>
<th>Discussion Boards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Flexibility (3)</td>
<td>• Time to think/reflect before responding (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Personalization (2)</td>
<td>• Getting different points of view (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Academic, focused (1)</td>
<td>• The topics, response choices (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Quick communication &amp; feedback (1)</td>
<td>• Flexibility (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Visual, easier to communicate (1)</td>
<td>• Personal experiences related to the topic (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Easier to communicate because no one was staring at me (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Survey Results: What did you NOT like about the online discussions?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blogs</th>
<th>Discussion Boards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not as much feedback from peers as I’d hoped (2)</td>
<td>Time consuming, overwhelming, too many deadlines (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing, they were perfect (2)</td>
<td>Repetitive information (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too many, too time-consuming (2)</td>
<td>Hard to comment on others’ postings (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having to wait for last-minute post-ers (1)</td>
<td>Discussion went off on tangents (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog website was blocked by my school, so I couldn’t work during my planning period (1)</td>
<td>Computer problems (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Impersonal, slow response (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nothing (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Survey Results: What would you change about the online discussions?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blogs</th>
<th>Discussion Boards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Nothing (3)</td>
<td>• Nothing (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Like DB better (2)</td>
<td>• Make more personal with photos or F2F meetings (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Option to use blogs or DB (1)</td>
<td>• More guidance/interaction/feedback from professor (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Rotate who reads &amp; comments on which blog (1)</td>
<td>• More teacher-based entries (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Request comments that go beyond “I agree” (1)</td>
<td>• Questions with no right/wrong answers (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Don’t like DBs (1)</td>
<td>• Don’t like DBs (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use blogs instead (1)</td>
<td>• Use blogs instead (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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?


