

Chapter 8

Remember the Importance of the Human Touch

Kelly Bergman

Technology can be simply amazing. There are so many things we can do today that were unimaginable even 10 years ago. During this age of innovation, more and more people are arguing about the importance of integrating new technologies into our courses. Just one example is the “[ASCD Smartbrief](#)” (ASCD, n.d.), a weekly online publication from the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD). This publication dedicates a section in every issue to celebrating recent applications of technology in educational settings. Headlines include: “Online Games Teach Business Strategies to High-school Students”, “iPod Touch Helps Florida Students Spend More Time on Math” and “Many iPad Applications May Be Tools for Educators.” However, as we push forward and find new ways to integrate the latest and greatest technology into our courses, we cannot forget the importance of the human touch.

Background

When I first heard about online education, it sounded very impersonal. And to be honest, I wasn’t sure if I wanted to have anything to do with it. But before jumping to any firm conclusions, I decided to learn more about it in an effort to make an educated decision about whether or not online education made personal and pedagogical sense to me. I signed up to participate in Summer Web Camp—a weeklong event hosted by CU Online at the University of Colorado Denver to help support faculty while developing an online course (see Lowenthal & Thomas, 2010 for more information on Web Camp). Participating in Summer Web Camp was an amazing introduction for me to online education. I left Web Camp believing in the power and possibility of online education and specifically believing that I could teach online. But at the same time, I also recognized and still believed in the power of teaching certain things in a face-to-face setting. I teach teachers how to teach and, while this can be done online, I strongly believe it is more effective and efficient to have some face-to-face class sessions to model certain behaviors for my students. Because of this, when the time came for me to begin teaching online, I began teaching hybrid courses—rather than fully online—because I wanted to leverage the strengths of both online and face-to-face learning environments.

During my first semester teaching a hybrid course, three of my 15 sessions were face-to-face. I carefully chose what activities would be done in our face-to-face sessions versus those that would be done online. For example, if there were certain strategies or behaviors that I wanted to physically model for students, I planned those for the face-to-face sessions. I challenged myself to develop online activities that would accomplish the same goals that I had set when I was teaching the class in a traditional face-to-face format. For instance, there were many times when I would have small groups meet to do an activity in my face-to-face class and I found that I could have the students do something similar by having them participate in a threaded discussion that was specific to their group. This was a really interesting process because it forced me to look carefully at my content and decide which method (face-to-face or online) was the best

fit for each of my teaching activities. But it also forced me to wrestle with how to maintain a human touch in the online portions of my courses. In the following pages, I briefly explain some of the strategies that I use to add a personal touch to an online or hybrid course.

Adding a Human Touch When Teaching Online

Online learning has been characterized as impersonal and isolating. In ways people tend to think of hybrid courses as addressing part of this problem through the combination of time spent face-to-face and online. But it is way too easy when teaching a hybrid course to assume that all affective types of communication will take place during the face-to-face sessions. The following are some strategies I use to add the human touch to my hybrid courses (but they all are equally applicable to fully online courses).

Pick Up the Phone

I strive to call each student before class begins or shortly thereafter. As useful as email can be, I believe that individually calling students on the phone adds a human touch to my courses. I make sure students know when class begins and how to access the class. I also remind my students about tutorials that are available to help them with the online tools we use (i.e., eCollege and LiveText) in class. Many times, I have to leave messages, but I believe this is still helpful because my students know that I have reached out to them and they can hear my voice (see Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2010 for more on this type of strategy).

Post Pictures Online

I ask each student to post a picture of him or herself in an online threaded discussion or through a social networking site. Even in hybrid courses where you eventually meet face-to-face, I think it's important to put a face with a name. During my first few interactions with each student, I look at his/her picture so I know exactly who I am responding to and remember to add that human touch whenever I can. I also think it's important for students to be able to put names and stories with the faces of their classmates. I have my picture posted in the online syllabus so students can see my face and I also post a picture in the discussion to model for them how to post their picture online.

When I teach a hybrid course, I use the students' pictures to memorize each of their names so that I can greet them by name when I see them for the first time in the face-to-face session. This, too, is one of the behaviors—because I teach teachers how to teach—that I like to model for my students. In an elementary or secondary classroom, knowing students' names is extremely helpful for classroom management. In a post-secondary setting, it is important for developing rapport with your students.

Learn About Your Students

I believe it's really important to learn as much as you can about your students—especially when teaching online when so much of the valuable chit-chat that happens before and after a class and on breaks is missing. I strive to know about my students' interests, what they like to do outside of class, and so forth. This is one of the behaviors that I believe is so important to model for my students because the more we know about our students, the better we can design our instruction to meet their needs.

At the beginning of each semester, I facilitate a discussion where I ask students to tell the class a bit about themselves. As I read the discussion, I make notes for myself about each student so I can refer to them later. As I find out what students' interests are, I can make personal connections with them. If we have a common interest, we can bond around that. If a student has an interest in something that is new to me, I can develop rapport by having that student teach me a bit about the subject. Also, if a student shares that he or she is a single parent, I know that there may be times when family issues must come before school issues. The information I learn about students helps me better understand and interact with them.

Prior Experience Learning Online

Learning online is strange and foreign to many students. I always ask students about their prior experience learning online because I find that typically those who are brand new to online learning struggle the most. Finding out how many courses they have taken online helps me to identify which students may need additional support.

At the beginning of the semester, I also send out an e-mail to all students and ask them to reply with the answers to questions like "How many online courses have you taken?" and "Why did you choose to take this course online?" I ask students to respond in a private e-mail for two reasons: (a) it helps us check the e-mail system to make sure everything is working properly and (b) answers to these questions might be more personal for students and might better be done one-on-one than in a threaded discussion.

Comfort with Technology

The more advanced we are with our technological skills, the easier it is for us to forget what it's like to be less comfortable with technology. Each time I teach, I try to find out how comfortable each student is with using technology. Technological proficiency is often a hidden curriculum with online learning. We often assume that our students are proficient in the use of technology but this isn't always the case. We need to remember that some students may need more detailed instructions for some activities.

Survey Students

Another strategy I use is that I survey my students during the first few weeks of the course (using a tool like SurveyMonkey.com) to collect feedback on how things are going. Done anonymously; students give me feedback to help improve our course. I make a point of summarizing the feedback and sharing it with students so they know that their voices have been heard. I then use the feedback from the students to make mid-course adjustments. For example, during one survey, I learned that many students preferred to do their online work over the weekend. As a result of this information, I changed the sessions to stay open until Sunday rather than closing them on Saturday. Students appreciate being able to give feedback about the course.

Comment to Every Student

I don't think it's necessary to reply to each student every time he or she posts in the discussion threads. However, I do think it is important to comment to every student in a course. Therefore, I strive to occasionally comment to every student to ensure that I don't leave anyone out. I believe that this shows my active participation and provides a connection to each student. In my experience, students appreciate knowing that faculty

members have taken an active role in the discussion and students appreciate the individual attention. I keep a checklist so I can make sure that I respond to each student. (This is a time when I refer back to students' photos. I like to see whom I'm responding to.)

Personalize Grading

Another way that I try to add a human touch is by personalizing my grading. I specifically try to do this when I am grading students' discussions. I have found that this shows students that I have read what they wrote and that I'm making connections with them. Private responses allow me to provide more personalized feedback than if I were responding in a threaded discussion.

When I grade the discussion in eCollege, I give each student a numeric score and add comments in the comment box. My comments may include something that specifically relates to the student's post, they might pose an extending question, or they might connect to something I learned about them in the discussion at the beginning of the semester. This is one more opportunity to connect with my students.

Keep Track of Assignments

The accountability of turning in an assignment in a face-to-face class is different than in an online class. Unlike in a face-to-face course where students typically turn in their work to a person, at a certain time—students online typically turn in their work individually at different times of the day and often privately. In my experience, it is easy for students to forget to turn in an assignment, to turn it in the wrong place, or to submit it in the wrong format. I use a checklist when I teach online to make sure that students have completed the tasks that I've asked them to and I follow up with them when something is missing. This type of accountability keeps an online class in the forefront for those students who might occasionally forget about it. Further, it provides a bit of human touch in an environment where students might sometimes feel isolated and alone.

Timely Response to emails

Because students do not see their instructor on a regular basis, they need to know that, if they email their instructor that they can count on a timely response. Sometimes they need information before they can proceed with an assignment, other times they just need support and encouragement. I know that some instructors use Twitter as another way to respond to questions in a timely manner (see Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2009); regardless of the tool for communicating, students need to know that they will hear back from their instructor.

Concluding Thoughts

Technology offers many amazing resources and we, as online instructors, should continue to learn about the latest tools and integrate new strategies into our instruction. But in addition to using current technology, we should also challenge ourselves to make sure that our courses have a human touch. If you are hoping to enhance the human touch in your course, I suggest beginning with learning as much as you can about your students and connecting your instruction to their needs. Brain research tells us that students learn best when they are able to make personal connections with the content; getting to know our students is the first step in the process.

My experience has shown that students greatly appreciate the fact that I take time to get to know them and connect my instruction to each of them. My course surveys and FCQs have shown that the additional time it takes to add a human touch is well worth the effort. Regardless of your content area, I encourage you to continue to use the latest and greatest in technology, and also to remember the importance of the human touch.

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Bio

Kelly Bergman has been an educator for 19 years. She earned her bachelor's degree in Elementary and Middle School Education from the University of Northern Colorado, a Master's degree in Whole Learning from Regis University and an Administrative

Certificate from the University of Denver. As a teacher, mentor, and principal in elementary schools, Kelly has always been known for helping others make sense of complex materials and tasks. Most recently, she has had the privilege of teaching teacher candidates at UC Denver.

Chapter 9

Jazzed about Jing

Margarita Bianco

&

Dave McCollom

Technological advances have influenced the way we teach and how we communicate with our students. This is true for both traditional face-to-face courses as well as for online courses. Screen capture tools, such as Jing, can be used in a number of ways to facilitate learning and personalize communication (Griffis, 2009). In the following chapter we briefly explain what Jing is, how you might use it in the courses you teach, and conclude with some specific feedback of students perceptions of using Jing in both face-to-face and online learning environments.



Background

As an Assistant Professor in the School of Education and Human Development, I teach in both face-to-face and online formats. I am always looking for ways to improve my teaching—especially with online instruction. I first learned about Jing in 2008 from a colleague who was enthusiastic about a free, new technology she learned about at a conference. The word “free” caught my attention. I immediately downloaded Jing. Within five minutes, I was creating my first screen capture and brainstorming all the ways I could use this technology. I began using Jing in the courses I teach. I also found ways to use it as a collaboration tool for my research. I have since shared how I use Jing at a number of faculty development presentations.

When I was invited to write this chapter for *The CU Online Handbook*, I thought it would be interesting to collaborate with Dave McCollom, the author of TechSmith’s Education Community Blog and a member of TechSmith’s Education Advisory Board. Dave’s technological expertise coupled with his experience training faculty and K-12 students around the world on how to use Jing, provides great insight into how we can use Jing for teaching and learning.

What is Jing?

Jing is a free application that can be downloaded to your computer (Windows or Mac) from www.jingproject.com. Jing enables you to take screen captures (sometimes called screenshots) and annotate these static images of your computer screen. Jing also enables you to record short videos (5 minutes or less) of onscreen action (sometimes called screencasts). You can then share screen captures and screencasts instantly with others—whether over the web, in instant messages, email, or even embedded in your online course shell. Jing’s companion site, screencast.com, makes sharing a breeze. Once your screen capture or screencast is complete, with a click of a button you can easily upload it to screencast.com. Once the upload is complete, screencast.com copies the URL (to your screen capture or screencast which is now uploaded to

www.screencast.com) to the clipboard of your computer, which you can then paste into an email or your learning management system (LMS) to share with students. Further, screencast.com even provides HTML embed code to directly embed your screencasts into your online course. But if you don't want to use screencast.com, you can simply save your screen captures as .png files and your sceencasts as .swf Flash video files and distribute as you see fit. Sound complicated? It really is not. The Jing Help Center (<http://help.jingproject.com>) has quick and easy video tutorials that will help with all Jing functions.



Once you get hooked on the free version of Jing, it will be just a matter of time before you start thinking about upgrading to the pro version called Jing Pro. Jing Pro costs \$14.95 per year and provides some additional features that the free version does not. For instance, with Jing Pro, you get the option to include your webcam in screencasts so that part or all of the screencast can include a video of you. Jing Pro also uses a premium video format (MPEG-4 AVC) that is better for recording rich content from your screen. This video format also produces friendlier file sizes and can be edited in many standard video-editing applications.

Teaching with Jing: The Perfect Companion

There are many ways to integrate Jing into your face-to-face or online instruction. Below are just a few of the ways that instructors have used Jing for teaching and communicating with students.

Introductions

Jing is great for introductions. In the first weeks of the semester, you can create a PowerPoint slideshow of family photos. You can narrate and record the slides introducing yourself and your family to your students. The Jing video can then be uploaded to your LMS for students to access. You can even ask students to create a video about themselves to share with the rest of the class.

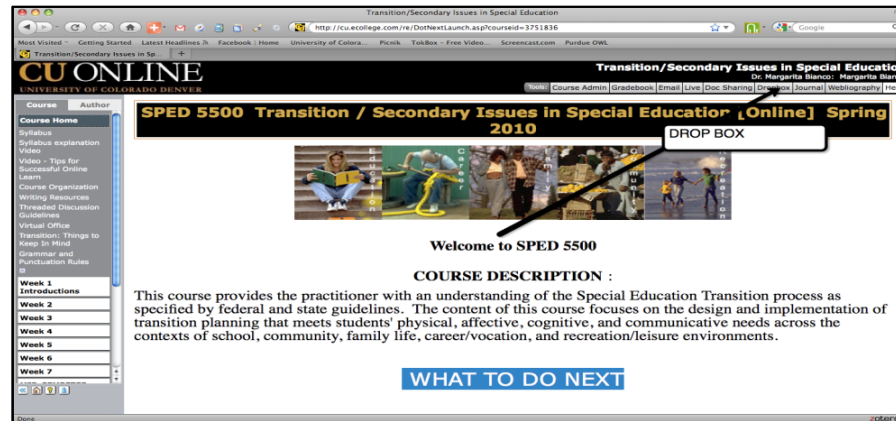
Answering Email

You can also use Jing with email. Sometimes typing out a detailed response to a student's inquiry takes a long time. Instead, you can simply answer the student's questions in a narrated video (in other words, a screencast). We have found screencast responses can be much more personal. By communicating in this way, you can provide a personal and detailed response—and if needed, you can demonstrate where to get more information (e.g. share a website) or how to perform a task (e.g. use the drop box in eCollege—a LMS used at our university).

Explaining Assignments and How To....

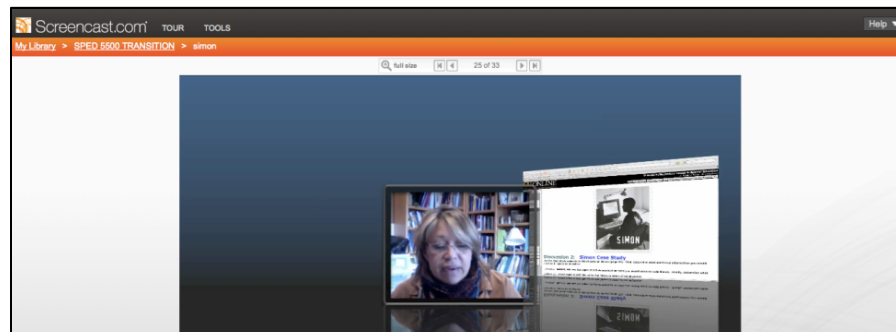
The all text environment of some online courses makes it difficult to give directions or navigate a course (MacDonald & Caverly, 2007). Jing is a perfect tool for explaining assignments and demonstrating “how to...” do almost anything. Explaining assignments can be enhanced when students can see and hear the purpose of assignments and how they will be evaluated. For instance, you can create a screencast where students can see the grading rubric while you explain each component of the assignment. This allows students to listen to the explanation as many times as needed. This alone can reduce the number of questions you get about a specific assignment.

Explaining “how to” do something also becomes easier with Jing. For example, by creating short narrated videos, you can demonstrate how to do things like use tools in a LMS, how to conduct a literature search, or how to use APA style when writing a paper. The value of using screencasting in this way is that it is easier to demonstrate how to do detailed processes than it is to write out detailed instructions (Griffis, 2009).



Introduce and Summarize the Week

Jing can also be used to introduce a week or summarize what was learned in a given week. For both face-to-face and online courses, the first author provides a weekly introduction of the learning for the week by outlining key points to consider and keep in mind. Afterward, she provides a summary of what was learned by connecting discussions to readings and practice. We have found that creating a screencast for these purposes saves a lot of time. There is no longer a need to spend time typing lengthily emails several times a week. In just a few minutes, you can create a visually engaging summary of the week, send the link in an email or post the video to your LMS. For example, the image below is a screenshot of a video summarizing students’ work on a case study discussed in class.



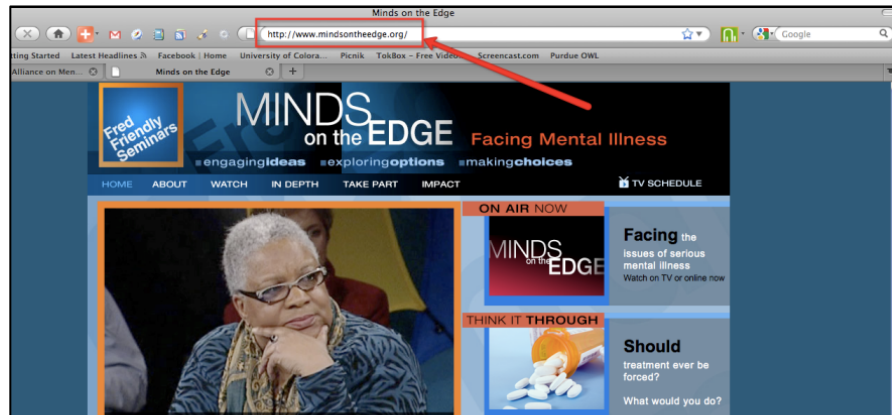
Feedback for Students

Perhaps our favorite way to use Jing is to provide detailed feedback on students’ written work. Typically students are asked to submit their work electronically and instructors provide feedback using the track changes function on Microsoft Word documents. Although this system works, instructors can also add a Jing clip. After

reading students' work and commenting on content and professional presentation, you can then create a screencast and essentially summarize your comments. Students will then be able to see the written feedback and hear what you have to say about their work. Personalizing communication with students in online learning environments is frequently discussed as a critical feature of effective instruction (Steinweg et al, 2006).

Explore Content Related Websites

How often do we crowd our syllabi with a list of related websites for students to explore—or simply send students a link to a website? Next time, use Jing to create a virtual tour of content related websites pointing out where to find the information students need to know.



Advising

Finally, we recommend using Jing for advising students. The first author has recently started to explore the utility of using Jing for student advising and has had much success. By creating Jing clips with the student handbook on the screen and narrating students' schedules, you can demonstrate where to find internship forms or outline the requirements of their final portfolio.

Students Use Jing Too

Although the first author has been using Jing as a teaching tool for more than one year, she has only recently started requiring students to download the free version of Jing and include Jing projects as part of their course assignments. For example, students recently had to select one of five articles to read for one of her online courses. Instead of having them summarize the article and share a Word document or type their reactions to the article and post to a threaded discussion, students were required to create a Jing presentation to highlight what they learned. Students were encouraged to be creative in their presentation by using images and talking us through their learning.

Reflecting on the Student Experience

In order to improve teaching, instructors often ask students for feedback on how things are going in class. Thus, it only made sense to ask my students what they thought

about Jing. The following comments,¹⁰ from some of my students at the University of Colorado Denver, illustrate what they think about using Jing in the classroom.

When asked about getting feedback on assignments by using Jing, one of my students shared the following:

Feedback on my assignments using Jing and hearing you talk is much more valuable than just getting back papers with track changes and written comments. The use of Jing has provided much more personal and detailed feedback and has allowed me to get information on the direction I should take with future assignments. It also eliminates -or at least decreases any confusion or questions I might have regarding what written comments refer to. [Kim Decker]

Another student in a face-to-face class humorously commented on how much easier it was to have his paper critiqued using Jing.

When you TORE into my paper it was nice to actually hear your voice and know what you wanted from me instead of marks on my paper. Instead of a marked up paper, or a typical "good job" and blowing off the hard work I put into it you actually gave me helpful insight on how to write a graduate level paper. You explained to me, in your own words, what you expected of me without telling me exactly what to write. You showed me my paper and scrolled through it and told me what I was lacking and asked me to become a critical thinker and writer. At first I was nervous about not doing so well on my paper, and then when you explained it to me, it gave me a whole new perspective and thought process of writing. This whole process was great because I did not have to worry about setting up an appointment to discuss my paper; instead it was thoroughly explained using Jing. [Christian Eaves]

Another student commented on the personal nature of using Jing for feedback

It's way more personal to get feedback via Jing than just the written feedback on the documents. It made me feel good that you took the time to go the extra step in order to make sure that I understood your feedback. I thought using Jing for our discussion group was really fun! I found that it was a more personal way to express my thoughts on the topic. And I really liked hearing others' Jing clips, I was able to put a voice and a personality to all of my classmates that I have been interacting with all semester.

[Tracy Piniarczyk]

Students also commented on how the short video clips facilitate their learning.

The short videos further my learning by providing many of the benefits of a face-to-face course experience. Although it is an online class, the clips provide an opportunity for us to hear a real-life explanation of assignment expectations and discussion of course topics. Again, the use of Jing minimizes confusion and questions I would have otherwise. Along with Jing, the other uses of technology in this course, such as the video of panel members, have helped me to see how the course material should and can be applied to real-life situations and individuals.

...the Jing clips do give me a sense of closure from one week to the next, which is really nice. The Jing clips do a nice job of reflecting on the previous week and giving me a little direction for the next week.

[Tracy Piniarczyk]

¹⁰ Students' permission was obtained and granted to include in this chapter.

One student commented on liking the visual aspects of Jing.

I like the "visual" aspect of Jing the most. When you have comments regarding assignments, I can see directly what you are referring to. I also like the little intro to each week's assignments via Jing. I've also used the little intro to the assignments when I try to recall what you had said about a specific assignment and how you wanted it completed. Don't get me wrong I like the "paper" syllabus and written instructions too. [Karen Minnotte]

Most importantly, however, students are beginning to think about how they can use Jing and other screencasting software in their own practice as educators

I teach student with significant support needs and I am always trying to find new ways to keep them engaged and involved in their learning. Some ideas I have had for incorporating Jing into my classroom: have students put together a power point of their community words with pictures and text and have them narrate the slides by saying the word, if we have a camera, using Jing to practice their interview skills so they can review and reflect on their interviewing skills. I also think this would be a really great way to get information to parents. For example, I just sent home a permission slip for some field trips coming up. How great would it be for the parents if they also received a Jing clip that has me describe the field trip permission slip, where they have to sign and more about what the field trips were about. [Tracy Piniarczyk]

Conclusion

Using Jing, and other screencapture software products, allows instructors to personalize instruction and communication with students. Technological advances continue to influence the way we teach and while some instructional technology may be expensive and complicated to use, Jing is easy and free.

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Bios

Margarita Bianco is an Assistant Professor of Special Education at the University of Colorado Denver. She has nearly 20 years of classroom teaching experience, most of which was in urban settings working with students with disabilities and culturally and linguistically diverse student populations. Her research interests include gifted students from underrepresented populations including twice-exceptional and culturally and linguistically diverse learners. Dr. Bianco received the 2004 Council for Learning Disabilities (CLD) Outstanding Researcher Award for her research on the effects of disability labels on teachers' recommendations for gifted programs.

Dave McCollom began at TechSmith as an IT specialist in 2006 before moving into his role as education evangelist. Currently, he works closely with users around the globe, specifically focusing on the educational markets. In his position, he conducts ongoing and direct conversations with customers in order to influence continuous product improvement. Dave's outreach to the educational community includes attending conferences both in the U.S. and abroad as well as visiting schools and classrooms for one-on-one and group training sessions with educators.

Chapter 10

Getting to Know You: The First Week of Class and Beyond

Joanna C. Dunlap



Patrick R. Lowenthal

The first week of class... whether on-campus or online, we always plan a few orientation and get-to-know-you activities in an attempt to get our courses off on the right foot. One thing we have learned about these types of activities is that they cannot—and should not—take place only during the first week of a class. To really support students and help build a productive online learning community, these types of activities need to occur throughout the semester. Below are a few activities we have used to help students get oriented to and familiar with the course structure and materials, their course colleagues, and us.

Orientation

In a face-to-face course, it can be deadly boring to spend the first class reading through the syllabus. However, there is important information in the syllabus that we want students to know and keep track of. In online courses, it can also be boring reading through the syllabus and other course materials and, therefore, we have found that students sometimes don't go through all of the course materials as precisely as is needed to be successful in the course. Here are a few things we have done in our online courses to help students get oriented to the course.

Orientation Videos

One approach we use is to create a set of short (less than 5 minutes) orientation videos, with each video walking students through the course shell, learning activities, and projects. Using *Jing*, we have created screencasts showing our students around the course shell (see Chapter 9 for more uses of *Jing*). This is especially helpful for students who are new to online courses. In addition to the orientation benefits, our students are also oriented to us as their instructors because of our use of humor and stories while explaining various course design decisions.

Course & Syllabus Scavenger Hunt

Using the quiz tool in our learning management system, we set up a course and syllabus scavenger hunt that students have to submit by the end of the first week. To complete the 12-question scavenger hunt, students have to read the syllabus, locate materials in the course shell, and watch the orientation videos. The results of the scavenger hunt reassure us that students are locating and tracking important course information, and alerts us to any misconceptions or confusions that individual students have about the materials or the assignments. Example questions include:

- In your own words, what are the learning objectives for this course? What is the reason for listing the program competencies with the learning objectives?
- Why is "creative" part of the course title?

- There are four projects for the course: Presentation Makeover Magic, Job Aid Makeover Spectacular, Presentation Prowess, and Design Lessons Learned. Which project are you most looking forward to working on? Why?
- Why are the weekly agendas for each week's learning activities hidden at the start of the semester?

Weekly Announcements

At the start of each week (which in our online courses is Monday since we set up the weeks to go from Monday to Sunday in the course shell), we post a new announcement orienting students to the activities of the week. Even though this information exists elsewhere in the course, we like to provide a more personal announcement about the week. We start each announcement with a brief description of the past weekend's events with a photo or two (usually of us with our families). Then we provide students with a reminder about how they should focus their time and energy during the week. We end each announcement with a reminder about how to connect with us and a wish for a great week. These announcements can be shared by posting an announcement in the course shell, by email, or by using a tool like Jing to create an audio and/or video announcement.

Week 9 Announcement

We had a wonderful weekend. Wasn't Saturday a beautiful day? After dropping our 6-year old off for a sleepover Saturday morning, we (husband, 3-year old, and me) met up with a group of friends at the Denver Zoo and spent 5 hours looking at the animals and enjoying the good company and warm sun. Then, a yummy dinner at India's with family. On Sunday, we did the typical errands and around-the-house chores...and watched the weather, wondering what spring has in store for us. :-) I hope you had a great weekend as well.

Now, just over the halfway mark in the term, for Week 9 you have two primary activities:

Weekly Agendas

For each week, we create a printable weekly agenda checklist to help our students track what they should be working on during the week. Again, although this information exists in the course's master calendar, it helps students to have the week's activities laid out in checklist format.

AGENDA for Week 3 (2/1-7)



Musical interlude...you can start and stop it at any time.

Check off items as you complete them. All activities must be completed by Sunday, 2/7 at 11:59pm unless otherwise noted.

_____ **Project:** Continue to work on the *Presentation Makeover Magic* project, specifically completing the Abela worksheets; for details, please see the project description. Submit your completed worksheets to the "Memos & Abela Worksheets" forum (note, there is a separate discussion set up for submitting the worksheets) in the *Presentation Makeover Magic* unit.

_____ **Activity:** Complete the *Virtual Paper Bag, Part 1* activity.

Getting To Know Each Other

We do not think it is very realistic to get to know people—especially in an online course—with one share-your-bio activity during the first week of class. Building relationships and community requires multiple opportunities to share and connect. So, every two to four weeks during the semester, we reengage students in getting-to-know-you activities. Below are a few of the activities we use in our online courses.



Superhero Powers

For this activity, using [VoiceThread](#), students share a photo and record their response to the following prompt:

What are your superhero powers? What is your superhero moniker? And, how do your superhero powers help you in life?

Their creative responses are so much fun. And we really learn about the assets that each person sees as her or his strengths. Superhero Powers is a very positive approach to a typical share-your-bio activity that also results in learning more about each person's playful side and creative spirit.

Virtual Paper Bag

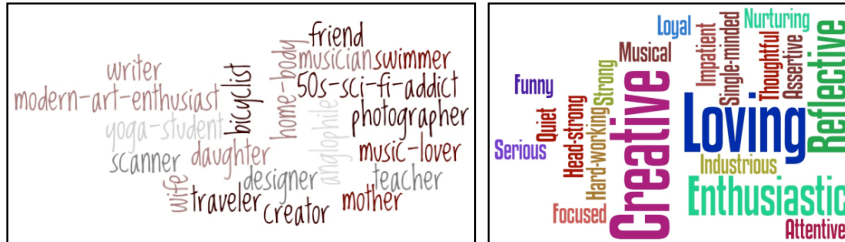
For this activity, we ask students to pick five items that represent who they are and what is important to them. They pull together visual representations of their five items for a virtual paper bag. They post their five images to [Flickr](#) (or another tool of their choosing, as long as the rest of the class can easily access their collection in the end). Once everyone has posted their virtual paper bag collection of images, students review each other's collections, and engage in a discussion of why those items were selected and what the items "mean." The results are that students learn about each other's passions, values, families, and the like; learn about differences



and similarities; and learn each other's stories. This activity helps students feel more connected than they did before. And they remember details about each other because of the stories told and the emotion involved in sharing personal details about one another.

"If You Were a Tree" Wordle

Similar to the virtual paper bag activity, for this activity we ask students to create a Wordle word cloud using 20 words that represents who they are. This activity encourages students to reflect on how they define themselves, and then to represent those definitions using only 20 words. Students then review each other's word clouds, and discuss the commonalities, differences, and surprises.



Soundtrack of Your Life

As another way for students to get to know each other, we ask students to share music. For example, we ask them to share one song that inspires and motivates them; or create a playlist of six songs: two that represent their past, two that represent their present, and two that represent their planned/hoped for future. After students share their music, the group asks questions about the selections—similar to a 20-questions activity—to figure out why each student selected the song(s) she or he did. The students consider the group's shared interests, differences, and so on (e.g., how many folks like jazz, or female songwriters, or sad songs). We use tools such as [Songza](#), [Blip.fm](#), [playlist.com](#), and [Grooveshark](#) for this activity, but there are many other digital jukebox tools out there from which to choose (see Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2010b for more on how we use music in our online courses).

A 5-minute Conversation

During the first few weeks of our online courses, we invite students to participate in a 5-minute phone conversation. Although it is an opportunity for students to ask questions about the course, the only agenda for the conversation is that we must hear each other laugh. We do this so that the students feel more connected to and less distant from us. About half of the students typically take us up on the invitation at the beginning of the course, although—with frequent reminders that the invitation still stands—we often end up talking with most if not everyone in the course at some point in the semester (see Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2010a for more on the power of a 5-minute phone call or one-on-one emails).

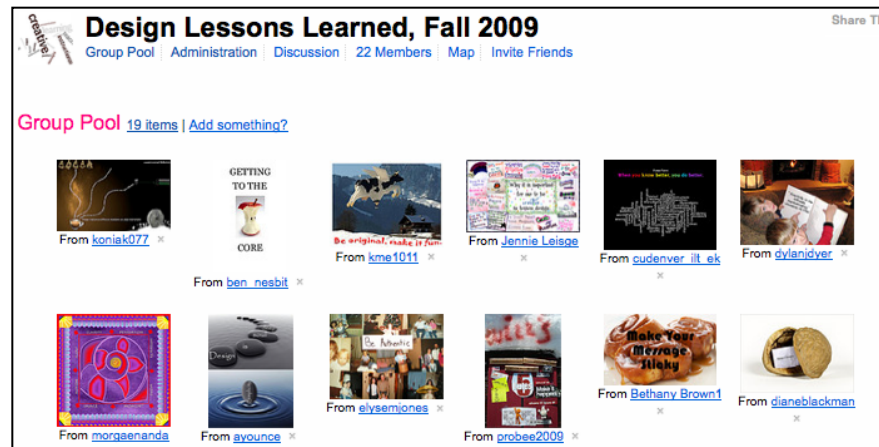
With a Cherry on Top

After all of the getting-to-know-you activities throughout the semester, we like to end courses with an experience that celebrates, (1) what we have accomplished in the course as individuals and collaborators, and (2) the success of our learning community and our established friendships. One activity we like that achieves these two objectives

is what we refer to as *Lessons Learned*. For example, in the Creative Designs for Instructional Materials course, students are given the following directions:

1. Consider what you have learned about the creative design of instructional materials. What are you sure about? What do you believe now? What advice/words of wisdom do others need to know about?
2. Pick one of those design lessons learned and write it down. Design it digitally. Photograph it. Draw it. Use paint, sculpture, whatever. I don't care as long as it's interesting.
3. Post a digital photo of your creation to our Flickr group account at <http://www.flickr.com/groups/it6710fall2009/>
4. Write up an explanation supporting your design, and post it to this project's discussion forum.

Using Flickr, students post their visual representations of a lesson they have learned from the course. This is a fun and creative way to close out a course experience, and the collection of lessons learned becomes a valuable take-away from the course and from our time together. And, it offers one more chance to connect with each other and to get to know a bit more about each other's perspectives and values.



Conclusion

We are strong believers in the power of community and the benefits of spending time getting to know each other—especially in online courses. However, we have found over the years that one activity at the beginning of the semester is often never enough. Therefore, over the years we have continually strived to come up with new and creative ways to build a productive online learning community—one in which everyone feels like they know each other—throughout the entire semester. We have shared a few of the ways that we do this. We hope that one or two of the strategies we shared resonate with you and that you experiment with building some getting to know you activities throughout the semester the next time you teach online!

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Bios

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Chapter 11

“What’s Your Story?” Using Digital Storytelling to Enhance 21st Century Skills

Sherri Clemens



Melissa Kreider

It makes sense to begin this chapter on digital storytelling with a story of our own. Serendipity brought us together. In 2005, during our first year working together as teachers at Trailblazer Elementary in Highlands Ranch, CO, we had the opportunity to attend a teaching and learning conference in downtown Denver. Excitement about learning new ways to integrate technology into classroom instruction was palpable for both of us as we walked through the seemingly endless hallways of the convention center. We walked into a Discovery Education session about using digital media to create stories. The room was packed and we were lucky enough to grab a seat on the floor to see the magic happen. The presenters took a simple Discovery Education video on hurricanes, and pulled it into iMovie, and then asked an audience member to come up to tell a story that related to hurricanes. They recorded her voice as the video played, and our first digital storytelling experience was born. We instantly knew that this exciting tool would transform our teaching forever! And while serendipity brought us together.... storytelling keeps us connected.

Our journey with digital storytelling has evolved and grown over the years. We have been students, teachers, and presenters of digital storytelling. We have implemented some best practices into our own K-5 classrooms while sharing with many others—including other K-12 teachers, corporate trainers, undergraduate and graduate students—how to use digital storytelling to meet their own needs. Digital storytelling has become a way of life in our classroom and helped us to reach and engage our 21st century students in a way that traditional methods could not. In the following chapter, we explain how we use digital storytelling in our K-5 classrooms—which focuses on having students create their own digital stories—but many of the strategies can and should be used in the undergraduate or graduate classroom as well.

What is Digital Storytelling?

So what is digital storytelling? Well, digital storytelling is, “a first person narrative told in the writer’s spoken voice. It is combined with a variety of media including images, audio, and sometimes video to convey an instructional objective as part of a larger instructional unit.” And while technology and media are needed to create digital stories, digital storytelling begins and ends with a first person narrative. But while “the intention of digital storytelling is to stimulate reflection and deeper learning” (Sandars, Murray, & Pellow, 2008), using technology in the classroom can also serve as a “hook” to get students excited about their learning and the products they will create.

National Educational Technology Standards & The 21st Century Student

The International Society for Technology in Education, also known as ISTE, is responsible for the National Educational Technology Standards (NETS). While these standards are written to guide K-12 teachers, they can and should serve as an indicator

to institutions of higher education of changes coming down the line. In 2007, ISTE updated these standards placing more emphasis on creativity, collaboration, critical thinking, information fluency and innovation than on the ability to operate the technology.

ISTE, like many others, no longer sees technology as a separate product—rather, it is something that should be integrated into all areas of student learning. The 21st century student comes to us with a different background and different experiences than even a student from 10 years ago did. We believe that because of this (as well as the changing world around us) our teaching methodologies need to change and adapt to meet their ever-changing needs and learning styles. We are preparing our students for jobs that may not exist yet. Because of this, we need to make sure that we arm our students with the skills needed to succeed in the future.

But if we want our students to be creative and innovative learners, then we as educators need to model the types of skills and abilities needed as well as to develop the types of learning environments that can make this happen. In other words, our pedagogy needs to promote digital aged literacies, and digital storytelling is a perfect way to do this.

Digital Storytelling & Digital Aged Literacies

Digital storytelling is a powerful instructional strategy because it addresses things like creativity and innovation, communication and collaboration, research and information fluency, critical thinking, digital citizenship and technological proficiencies to name a few (which are all aspects of the NETS). In the following paragraphs, we will point out how digital storytelling can do just this.

Creativity and Innovation

Digital Storytelling fosters creativity and innovation by putting the author into a first person point of view. Students must envision and describe emotions, decisions, and moments of change. While facts are easy to find, creating scripts for digital stories allows a creative outlet for students to interact with the material. Students' work on creating a first person script that follows a story line rather than a documentary-style movie.

Communication and Collaboration

Part of the digital storytelling process is recording one's script with one's own voice. This brings an entirely new element to the work changing the writing process into a performance. The voice needs to convey emotions as well as reading fluency through pacing and economy of words used. To help bring the story script to life in the most effective way possible, a collaborative story circle can be used as part of the editing process. A story circle is a small group of authors who read and share their rough draft of their story in preparation for the final recording. Within the story circle, authors are given direct feedback and suggestions from their peers. The script can then be revised into its final version. This collaboration and communication with others is an essential part of the digital storytelling process we use in our classrooms.

Research and Information Fluency

In order to write creatively about a topic, students need to have a deep understanding of the curriculum that they are developing a story about. It is at this stage in the writing process where students must research and develop their ideas and

structure. Students must evaluate and organize their data and information to help them build a better understanding of their topic.

Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, and Decision Making

Typically in education we have taken ourselves out of the curriculum and worked on restating other people's facts and impressions. With digital storytelling we are asking our students to put themselves firmly in the middle of the topic, and share with us their impressions, emotions, and opinions of the subject area. This is a stretch from the ubiquitous summaries that are found in the average classroom. When creating scripts for digital stories, students are in charge of demonstrating their learning by combining their background knowledge and research with critical thinking and decision making skills to produce a story of the events as they see them happening. Rather than regurgitating facts, students have to create their own understanding of the facts learned in a creative way.

Digital Citizenship

Many students see online sources as unlimited and available for any use. When creating digital stories, fair use and ethics must be modeled and used. We always say, "Just because you can, doesn't mean you should." In this digital age, it is easy to take any song, movie clip, image, sound, etc., and use them in your digital projects. Creating digital stories though gives educators an opportunity to talk to students about these issues and to make sure students understand the importance of copyright and intellectual property.

Technology Operation and Concepts

Once the script is finished, the digital story creation begins. Considerations for hardware and software come in to play. Time is an important factor in determining which road to take. See Table 1 for detailed information and technology considerations.

Table 1: Software and Hardware Considerations

Software	Time Considerations	Final Product
Movie Making Software (iMovie, Final Cut, Movie Maker, Adobe Premier)	The most time intensive way to create a digital story	Professional looking movie that can include titles, effects, transitions, video, and images; it has the ability to be burned to DVD
Podcasting (KidPix, Garageband, Photostory)	Somewhat intensive-less than movie creation, but time is still required for media selection	A slideshow-like feel with basic editing capabilities
Web 2.0 (Voicethread, Slideshare, Gcast)	Time to gather resources, but the final product should be done in one sitting--potentially no saving)	Variety of online embedded final stories with limited editing capabilities
Presentation Software (Powerpoint, Keynote)	Time to gather resources, could be done in as few as one or two classroom sessions depending on preparation	It will look like a slide show presentation, and can be exported to movie format

The Creation Process

So we have talked about what digital storytelling is and the benefits of using it in the classroom. We are now going to quickly go over the digital story creation process and then conclude with some best practices we use when using digital storytelling in our classrooms.

Once students have identified a topic, done significant research on the topic, written a rough and final draft of their script and recorded their story, it's time to start developing their digital story. We aren't going to go into too much depth about this process because the technology you choose to use will change this process to some degree. But generally after the script has been written and recorded, students find images and music to compliment the story and they add these to the tool they are using and then export the final story into a format that others can view (typically as a movie).



Best Practices

It is easy to get enamored with the technology but we strongly believe that it's the pedagogy and not the technology that makes the difference. Before we integrate digital storytelling into a unit, we begin with the essential question. The essential question is the big idea that students should be able to answer through the development of the digital story. Once our essential question is developed, we then focus on developing the task and sample writing prompts. We have included an example of these in Table 2. These are focused on a unit about the American Revolution.

Instructor modeling is very important to the process. At the beginning of every digital storytelling unit, we create our own digital story sample for students to see a model. If multiple writing prompts are used, then an instructor sample is made for each of the prompts.

Table 2: Digital Storytelling Sample Unit with the American Revolution

	<i>Writing Prompts</i>
Essential Question: How have events from the past influenced the present?	Persuasive Letter: Write a letter that persuades someone of your point of view of the war and for independence. For instance, if you are writing as a colonist, you would write a letter to King George or a redcoat persuading them why you should be able to be independent from Britain. If you are writing from the point of view of King George or a redcoat, then you would persuade the colonists why they would stay with British rule. As you write your script, think about how life would have been different if we would have stayed with British rule.
Task: You will be creating a digital story that centers around the events of the American Revolution. You will be using media from the Library of Congress including music and images.	Event Diary Entries: Write a diary from the perspective of someone involved in the American Revolution like a colonist, a redcoat, a Native American, etc. In your diary, explain what happened in the event from the American Revolution from the point of view of the person that you have chosen and how that event affected the American Revolution.

Resources: Patriotic Melodies from the Library of Congress http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/ihas/html/patriotic/patriotic-home.html Pictures of the Revolutionary War from the National Archives http://www.archives.gov/research/american-revolution/pictures/	Declaration of Independence: Tell the story from the point of view of someone who helped to write the Declaration of Independence like Thomas Jefferson, John Adams or Benjamin Franklin. Explain their struggles with writing the document, why they chose the four sections that they did, and why their involvement helped to change the history of the United States of America.
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Historically, digital stories are between 275-375 words so that the finished story is no longer than 2-3 minutes in length. We try to keep our students' stories within this timeframe because it helps them tell a concise, but powerful story.

We also strive to have each story include certain elements. The Center for Digital Storytelling teaches that every digital story needs to have seven elements included (See Table 3). Thus, we strive to make sure that each of these seven elements are included in our students' stories. The difference between a digital book report and a digital story often is related to whether students have done things such as taken a point of view or included emotional content.

Table 3: The Seven Elements of Digital Storytelling

Element	Description
Point of View	The narrator of the story.
Dramatic Question	A moment of change.
Emotional Content	The way people connect to the story. The use of real, human emotions within the script.
Pacing	The time spent in the story including the pausing within the script and the amount of pictures used.
Economy	Using just the right amount of media to support your story.
Voice	Your voice telling the story in a natural way.
Soundtrack	The music behind your story.
Scene (An additional element)	Focusing and narrowing in on one aspect of the story.

Adapted from Lambert (2007)

We also spend a good deal of time focusing on assessment. Digital storytelling is more than just a fun activity—it is meant to address instructional goals. Therefore, we have developed a rubric to assess students' final project. We share this rubric with students before the script writing process begins to help provide expectations for the final project (See Table 4).

Finally, we believe in celebrating each other's work. At the end of the digital story creation process, all participants take part in a celebration and story viewing. Every digital story needs to be viewed, acknowledged, and celebrated for the effort and content that is shared. Depending on your age group and audience, this might include posting your students' stories online for others to view.

Table 4: Sample Digital Story Rubric

Script Writing			
4	3	2	1
The script establishes a purpose early on and maintains a clear focus throughout. It is evident that the writer researched their topic and used that research within his/her script. The writing includes many vivid supporting details. The script is written in first person.	The script establishes a purpose early on and maintains focus for most of the presentation. It's evident that the writer researched their topic and used that research within the script. The writing includes many supporting details. The script is written in first person.	In the script there are a few lapses in focus, but the purpose is fairly clear. The writer may have not shown his/her research in the writing. The writing includes few supporting details. The script is written in first person.	It is difficult to figure out the purpose of the presentation. The student does not show any relevant research. The writing has few to no supporting details. The script is not written in first person.
Grammar			
4	3	2	1
Grammar and usage were correct (for the dialect chosen) and contributed to clarity, style and character development.	Grammar and usage were typically correct (for the dialect chosen) and errors did not detract from the story.	Grammar and usage were typically correct but errors detracted from story.	Repeated errors in grammar and usage distracted greatly from the story.
Voice-Pacing			
4	3	2	1
The pace (rhythm & voice punctuation) fits the story line and helps the audience really "get into" the story.	Occasionally speaks too fast or too slowly for the story line. The pacing (rhythm and voice punctuation) is relatively engaging for the audience.	Tries to use pacing (rhythm & voice punctuation), but it's often noticeable that the pacing doesn't fit the story line. Audience isn't consistently engaged.	No attempt to match the pace of the storytelling to the story line or the audience.
Images			
4	3	2	1
Images create a distinct atmosphere or tone that matches different parts of the story. The images may communicate symbolism and/or metaphors.	Images create an atmosphere or tone that matches some parts of the story. Image choice is logical.	An attempt was made to use images to create an atmosphere /tone but it needed more work.	Little or no attempt to use images to create an appropriate atmosphere/tone.

Soundtrack-Emotion			
4	3	2	1
Music stirs a rich emotional response that matches the story line well.	Music stirs a rich emotional response that somewhat matches the story line.	Music is ok, and not distracting, but it does not add much to the story.	Music is distracting or inappropriate,
Bibliography			
4	3	2	1
All pictures and music are correctly cited (using Noodletools) at the end of the movie.	Most pictures and music are correctly cited (using Noodletools) at the end of the movie.	Pictures and music are incorrectly cited.	No bibliography used.

Conclusions

We have tried to briefly describe what digital storytelling is, the benefits of using it in your classroom, and finally some best practices to consider when using digital storytelling for instructional purposes. But perhaps the best way to see the power of digital storytelling is to start watching some digital stories at the Center for Digital Storytelling (<http://www.storycenter.org/stories/>) or better yet—create your own!

Digital storytelling has changed our teaching and in many ways changed our lives. We hope it can do the same for you!

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Bios

Sherri Clemens is a technology instructor at Trailblazer Elementary in Douglas County School District. She has been working with digital storytelling since 2005 and received in-depth training from the Center for Digital Storytelling. Sherri has also participated in digital storytelling workshops through the Museum of Colorado History to create neighborhoods of Denver story exhibits. Sherri was selected as an Apple Distinguished Educator for the class of 2007, and is a Google Certified Teacher and SMART Exemplary Educator. She works with students and teachers by bringing best practices of digital storytelling to their classrooms and works as an instructional technology leader in Douglas County which allowed her to earn the DCSD Apple Digital Educator Grant in 2006. She mentors and trains teachers across the district in effectively using technology in the classroom. Sherri's Bachelor's degree is in Elementary Education from the University of New Mexico, and her Master's degree is in Information and Learning Technologies from the CU Denver, 2002.

Melissa Kreider is a technology instructor at Cottonwood Creek Elementary in Cherry Creek School District. Melissa's Bachelor's degree is in Communications from Kent State University. She earned both her teaching degree and Master's degree from CU Denver (Information and Learning Technologies - 2004). Melissa was awarded a SmartBoard, projector and "clickers" from the Morgridge foundation and earned the DCSD Apple Digital Educator Grant in 2006. She has also presented sessions on Digital Storytelling with Sherri at the Technology in Education (TIE) conference in June 2006, 2008 and 2009, at the CU Online Faculty Conference on Digital Storytelling, May 2009, and for the AORN nursing conference in 2010. Melissa teaches staff development courses for Douglas County School District on the topic of digital storytelling.

Chapter 12

Telling Stories and Teachable Moments: The Possibility of Adobe Connect

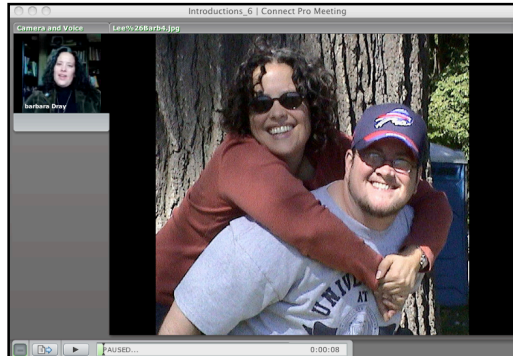
Barbara J. Dray

With the rise in online learning, instructors continue to grapple with ways to make personal connections with their online students in heavily text-based learning environments. In face-to-face courses, personal interactions with students happen naturally. Students get to know the instructor's personality when instructors share personal stories or experiences as teachable moments that occur incidentally or in the moment in a face-to-face course. In online courses, though, instructors often struggle with replicating this impromptu style of telling personal stories or interacting with students in general (Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2009).

Digital storytelling is one increasingly used approach to telling personal stories online. According to the University of Houston's [Educational Uses of Digital Storytelling](#) website, digital storytelling is the practice of using computer-based tools to tell stories that focus on a specific topic and contain a particular point of view. Digital stories contain some mixture of computer-based images, text, recorded audio narration, video clips and/or music. They vary in length, typically lasting between two and ten minutes and "range from personal tales to the recounting of historical events, from exploring life in one's own community to the search for life in other corners of the universe, and literally, everything in between" (Robin, 2009, p. 431). In the following pages, I share my experience using digital storytelling in the online courses I teach in an effort to connect with my students and to recreate those often lost teachable moments in online learning environments.

Adobe Connect

Relatively new to online learning, last year, I found myself searching for a way to infuse stories into my courses and to make personal connections with my students, so that my students could get to know me as a person as well as their instructor. About this time, I was introduced to a tool called Adobe Connect. [Adobe Connect](#) is a web conferencing tool that was created for hosting live web conferences and seminars. Adobe Connect enables you to share your computer screen with others, upload and share specific documents (e.g., PowerPoint presentations, photos, pdfs, images, etc.), surf the Web, while at the same time use a basic web cam to broadcast a video feed of your face. It also enables users to record and easily distribute recordings of their web conferences.



Initially online instructors turned to Adobe Connect to conduct synchronous activities (e.g., virtual office hours, live chat sessions). More recently, though, instructors have begun using Adobe Connect for asynchronous activities as well (e.g., recorded lectures, recorded guest presentations, digital stories, student presentations). While there are other tools that can accomplish many of the synchronous and asynchronous activities previously mentioned (e.g., Jing is a great tool to record lectures and digital stories—as long as you keep it under 5 minutes), I found that Adobe Connect serves as a nice one-stop-shop to accomplish many of these instructional activities and specifically an easy to use tool to record digital stories.

Telling Stories to Build Community

Typically in the beginning of my face-to-face courses, my students and I spend the first few classes engaged in community building activities, sharing personal information about ourselves, and sharing aspirations for the course. I have tried to accomplish these same types of things in my online courses using asynchronous discussions. And while I have found that asynchronous discussions can easily accomplish *some* of these community building activities, I continued to feel disconnected from my students and often sensed that my students were not really “getting to know me” which I suspected had something to do with the heavily text based format of asynchronous discussions. I wasn’t sure though what to do about this.

After learning more about Adobe Connect, I began to think that this tool might help in addressing these problems of disconnectedness, social presence, and over use of text-based communication (see Lowenthal & Dunlap, 2010 for more on this). After getting some basic training on Adobe Connect, I developed a digital story to introduce myself to students [<https://connect.cuonline.edu/p93407692/>].

While there are a number of ways you can do this, I basically selected photos of hobbies, family members, and favorite places I like to go. I then uploaded the photos to Adobe Connect through the document share pod. Once I had my photos uploaded, I thought about what I wanted to say. When I felt like I generally knew what I was going to say (i.e., the story I wanted to tell), I practiced telling my story while transitioning from picture to picture with the camera pod on. After a few practice runs, I clicked the record button and simply told my story. I addressed things like my expectations of students in the course, why I became a special educator, a little bit about my philosophy of education, and then shared about who I am when I am not teaching online, toggling between photos of my dogs and favorite places. Once I was done, I clicked the record button to stop recording and copied the URL to the recording into eCollege—the learning management system used in the School of Education and Human Development. But I didn’t stop there. I also asked students as a follow-up to introduce themselves and to share photos of themselves in an asynchronous threaded discussion. The feedback from students was positive. They commented that they appreciated being able to see me and that they felt more connected to me as their instructor. For example one student said, “I am really enjoying this way of getting to know one another. It definitely helps to see and read about classmates even though we are online.” Another student stated, “Thank you for posting your video intro. Most of my classes at UCD have been online and the intros really help me to have a connection with those in the class.” All in all I think it really added to the development of a community of learners within the online environment.

Telling Stories to Connect to Course Content

As a teacher educator in special education, a central component of my classes are the stories I tell. Being a former teacher myself, I often interject stories of my teaching days as well as personal experiences with my brother who is Deaf as a way of connecting with the course content, demonstrating practical application, and providing an opportunity for students to get to know me better not only professionally as a fellow teacher but personally. I find the stories provide a rich context for us to “bring the course content to life.” Students also report feeling more connected to the material and have an easier time applying the content to their own teaching practices. In addition to telling stories to build community, I also use stories to connect students to the course content. So it was not long before I began finding ways to use Adobe Connect to tell these types of stories in my online courses. I basically use Adobe Connect to create two types of digital stories to connect students to the course content: demonstration of key concepts and as an anchor for students to apply key concepts.

Demonstration of Key Concepts

I have found that it is sometimes difficult to demonstrate key course concepts in text alone. Therefore, I began using Adobe Connect to create digital stories to demonstrate key concepts. For instance, in one of the courses I teach I have students develop an Eco-map (i.e., a graphical representation of the different systems that affect one’s life). I wanted to show students how to develop an Ecomap with a family to problem solve and identify resources accessible to a family. An Ecomap can be used as an alternative to an interview in getting to know a family and building a relationship to better support their student’s educational needs.

For this type of digital story, I told a story about my experiences of developing an Ecomap with the family of one of my past students. I uploaded photos of the student as well as sample Ecomaps from the text. I also shared my screen and showed them where in the learning management system they could find additional resources related to working with families and the chapter on alternatives to interviewing parents.

The benefit of this approach was to move beyond simply reading about how to complete an Ecomap to actually seeing and hearing how an Ecomap can be used with a real family. Students noted that prior to seeing the digital story—even after reading about the concept—they were confused, but that once they viewed the digital story where I demonstrated how I implemented the Ecomap with a family, they had a more clear understanding and were more likely to try the approach.

Anchoring Application of Key Concepts

I also use digital stories to anchor the application of key concepts for students. For instance, in a course I teach, students read about the core principles of positive behavior supports model—a school wide reform movement to promote positive behavior and increased learning opportunities in schools. Initially this concept was developed to address the behavior of individual students with significant behavior concerns but has since been scaled up as a school wide approach to promoting positive behavior. An otherwise abstract concept until seen in action, I developed a digital story of one of my students, Ricardo, as an anchor for them to identify and apply the core principles of the model. Again, I uploaded photos of the student in a variety of contexts and a PowerPoint presentation on alternative communication devices to provide a visual when talking about the student’s educational needs. I narrated the story using the camera and voice pod in Adobe Connect while toggling through photos of Ricardo and

the PowerPoint presentation. After students viewed the digital story, they participated in an online discussion forum to post the connections they made between the digital story of Ricardo and core principles of the positive behavior supports model from the reading (see below). Students really liked being able to apply the core principles to a case study and found that they understood the ideas more deeply as a result. Students also reported that they liked getting to know me better as a teacher and that the video helped to contextualize otherwise abstract concepts.

The screenshot shows the CU ONLINE interface for a course titled "Positive Behavior Support" by Donna Sobel, Barbai. The left sidebar contains a navigation menu with links to Course Home, Syllabus, Required Readings, Introductions, Q/A about the Course Schedule, Unit 1 Feedback, Unit 2 Feedback, CR-Resources, Unit 3 Feedback, Unit 1, Unit 2, Unit 3, Unit 4, Unit 5, and Assignments. The main content area is titled "INSTRUCTIONS FOR DISCUSSION #2 - APPLYING THE KEY IDEAS OF PBS MODEL". It includes a quote about self-determination, a link to a video on Ricardo's Story, and a discussion prompt asking students to map Ricardo's story to the PBS Model components. The page concludes with a request to build on peer responses and a sign-off "Enjoy!".

CU ONLINE
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO DENVER

Positive Behavior Sup
Instructor: Donna Sobel , Barbai

Tools: Course Admin Gradebook Email Doc Sharing Dropbox

Course **Author**

Course Home

Syllabus
Required Readings
Introductions
Q/A about the Course Schedule
Unit 1 Feedback
Unit 2 Feedback
CR-Resources
Unit 3 Feedback

Unit 1

Week 1 Reading
Week 2 Reading
Unit 1 - Discu
RG 1 Ans Key
PBS & RTI
RG 2 ANS KEY

Unit 2

Unit 3

Unit 4

Unit 5

Assignments

INSTRUCTIONS FOR DISCUSSION #2 - APPLYING THE KEY IDEAS OF PBS MODEL

"People with disabilities are often told what they can do, with whom they can do it, and where, when and how they can do it. In contrast, enhancing the process of self-determination involves changing systems and redesigning environments with a view to minimizing external (often coercive) influences and making the person with disabilities the primary causal agent in his or her own life" (p. 6).

The quote above was selected by a few of your peers and it inspired me to create the discussion topic related to one of the students I worked with when I taught in Albuquerque NM. Begin my viewing the video on Ricardo's Story by clicking the link below!

<https://connect.cuonline.edu/p48925591/>

Now that you have viewed the video on Ricardo's Story, answer the following question:

In what ways does Ricardo's story map to the key components of the PBS Model presented in the Carr et. al. article?

For example, I sat with the parent and asked her what were her life goals for Ricardo – this is an example of a life span perspective because I wanted to learn more about the life goals the parents had for Ricardo then map back to what we could begin with in the present to get to that life goal, – what else could it be an example of? What other parts of the story fit into the life span perspective? (these questions are rhetorical, you do not need to answer in the post)

Select 2-3 key ideas from the Carr et. al. article and map back to examples from Ricardo's story.

Please try to build on your peer's responses by minimizing duplicate answers. So be sure to read what has been posted before posting your response – as there are many examples illustrated through this story J

Enjoy!

Conclusion

Creating digital stories in Adobe Connect has assisted me in making more authentic connections not only with the content of the course, but with my students on a personal level. The stories I create incorporate documents (e.g., .pdf, .ppt, and .doc), photos, and screen sharing to view web-based material. I hope my experience can help you think differently about the way you "present" information in your courses and engage students in the material. I have found that Adobe Connect can be a very effective and easy to use tool to create digital stories that engage students in (a) applying key concepts, (b) demonstrating skills, and (c) as a vehicle for getting to know the professor better. Whether you have used storytelling as an instructional tool in your face-to-face courses or not, I encourage you to begin experimenting with telling more

stories about yourself and the content of your course and I can't think of a better way to do this than firing up Adobe Connect and recording a story for your next course.

Additional Resources

University of Houston - Educational uses of digital storytelling

<http://digitalstorytelling.coe.uh.edu>

A resource for educators interested in integrating digital storytelling into educational activities.

Center for Digital Story Telling

<http://www.storycenter.org>

An international non-profit organization focused on training, project development, and research committed to helping people tell stories from their lives.

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Bio

Dr. Barbara J. Dray is an assistant professor in special education and teacher education in the school of education and human development at the University of Colorado Denver. Dr. Dray has been teaching online courses for the past several years and recently incorporated digital stories as an instructional tool. She also has been conducting ongoing research in the development of a survey to assess students' readiness for online learning with implications for institutions and faculty in the design and implementation of online learning. This research came out of the development of an online program to fulfill teacher shortages in bilingual special education.

Chapter 13

Critical and Creative Thinking: Embracing Xtranormal

Stephanie (Stevie) Townsend

Our role as teachers includes enhancing the repertoires of literacy and communication practices available to our students (Comber, Nixon, & Reid, 2007). As a result, I often strive to incorporate activities in my courses that are authentic and relevant to my student's lives and/or professions that can help develop their literacy and communication skills. Every fall, I teach a master's level course on children's literature. In this course, I really want my students to respond to literature much like they expect their own students to do in their own courses. I have tried to do this a number of ways over the years. Recently, though, I found a tool called Xtranormal that is enabling me to do this better than ever before. In the following paragraphs, I briefly explain what Xtranormal is, how I use it, and how you might use it in your own classrooms.

What is Xtranormal?

Xtranormal (<http://www.xtranormal.com>), according to its website, is a "revolutionary, real time, movie making software." In my own words, though, I would describe it as a free Web 2.0 application that enables users to turn text into a movie. So basically if you can type, you can make an Xtranormal movie!

You start by deciding how many actors you want, you then write the script, design the scene, and direct the action. In a matter of minutes, you can convert text into a movie and then share it with the world. And the best part, students seem to love it! For instance, I had one student say, "Wow, my husband wondered where I was because I got so involved in this website. I was intrigued for two hours." Another student created four Xtranormal movies when he was only required to create one. His comment, "It's so cool." So the bottom line is, Xtranormal is engaging, rewarding, and addicting!

How I Use Xtranormal

As neat as Xtranormal is, I wasn't going to use it in my classes if I couldn't find a meaningful way to use it that supported my learning objectives. I use threaded discussions a great deal in my online and hybrid courses for students to discuss certain topics. I like having students respond to the readings in threaded discussions. But over the years I have realized that threaded discussions can get boring and that I need to provide a variety of learning opportunities for my students.

So, rather than setting up a typical threaded discussion to discuss children's literature, one week I asked my graduate students to select a favorite children's book from our reading list and create a book talk using Xtranormal. [A book talk is a brief oral presentation about a book. Teachers and librarians use them to stimulate and motivate children to read and to generate interest in a book (Hillman, 2003).] I did not demonstrate Xtranormal to the class, rather I gave them two weeks to investigate the site and come to class with relevant questions. I then had them post the URLs to their Xtranormal book talks in a threaded discussion and then asked them to view each other's book talks. My students were intrigued by Xtranormal. They repeatedly expressed the entertaining aspect of creating a short movie clip using Xtranormal. There

are several of my favorite Xtranormal clips from the children’s literature class in Table 1.

Table 1. Xtranormal Book Talks

LIZZIE BRIGHT AND THE BUCKMINSTER BOY 	Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy http://www.xtranormal.com/watch/5631103
GINGER 	Ginger http://www.xtranormal.com/watch/5649815/
BOOK TALK 	Skippey John Jones http://www.xtranormal.com/watch/5658057/
MAUS BOOK TALK 	Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy http://www.xtranormal.com/watch/5668007

Other Instructional Uses of Xtranormal

Based on my experience and students reactions to Xtranormal, I have considered additional instructional uses of Xtranormal. Since this is a new medium for me, I am just beginning to learn how this site might be used effectively for instructional purposes.

But the following are some ideas I have on how faculty can use Xtranormal for a variety of instructional purposes.

- **Developing one's "Writer Voice":** Xtranormal could be an excellent tool to use to teach writing. As I viewed the clips, I could hear my students' "writing voice." When writing teachers focus on including one's "voice" in writing, this site could help students develop their writing voice.
- **Summarizing Key Concepts:** Another way to use this tool is to have students summarize key concepts in their reading. This would be much more inviting than outlining key concepts from texts and it might encourage students to actually watch the reading summaries of others. Students could include a written text for those learners who need to follow along, but the visual would be a nice change and inviting for audio learners.
- **Group Presentations:** You could put students in a group and have them collaborate and develop a group presentation using Xtranormal.
- **Weekly Introductions:** You could also use this as a way to introduce a week or unit in an online course. I'm sure students would rather watch an Xtranormal movie than read a list of activities that are due for a given week

Conclusion

The bottom line is that Xtranormal is an interesting site that you will definitely want to visit. It may be too intricate for some students and just the right inspiration for others. Giving students choices is vital. The difficulty for some students to access the site was evident. Sometimes when students wanted to post their completed product, the site was down. This caused frustration. Given enough time, though, all of my students were able to create a product that they were proud of. And they were all interested in doing more with Xtranormal. I am certain you will think of additional ways to use Xtranormal in your courses. I cannot wait to play with Xtranormal some more! Enjoy!

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Bio

Stephanie (Stevie) Townsend, PhD, is a clinical professor in the School of Education and Human Development. She teaches in the Literacy, Language and Culturally Responsive Teaching Program and in the Urban Teacher Education Program. She is a site professor at Edison Elementary school in the Denver Public Schools. She loves literacy and her family even more!

Chapter 14

Experimenting with Google Docs for Group Projects

Storm Gloor

Group projects can be a very useful and effective instructional strategy for college courses. Researchers have found that students working in small groups tend to learn and retain information better and are more satisfied with their courses (Davis, 1993). I have found that group projects can also be effective in developing communication skills, offering the ability to delve deeper into a subject, as well in developing group organization skills.

However, despite these benefits, faculty often avoid using group projects in their courses because of some common issues associated with group projects. For instance, faculty often struggle with how to fairly assess group projects, as well as motivating students to take full advantage of the benefits of such work. But perhaps the biggest problem faculty face with group projects is push back from students. Students are reluctant to work with or depend on others, especially on graded assignments. This reluctance tends to stem from previous poor experiences they have had with group projects. They may recount stories of non-communicative team members, difficulties in finding times for everyone to meet, overbearing group leaders, insignificant or error-ridden contributions by apathetic teammates, or fellow students who fail to make deadlines or even contribute at all.

I have sensed this trepidation from students in my own courses when I assign group projects. Rather than simply avoid group work, I have tried to search for ways to make group work more satisfying and equitable for my students. Therefore, during the spring of 2009 I began experimenting with using Google Docs with group projects and formally documenting the results. I was interested in better understanding students' perceptions of Google Docs and its effectiveness in group projects. In the following pages, I will briefly report on some results of studying Google Docs and my experience using Google Docs to improve students' experiences in group projects.

Google Docs

Google Docs is a free, web-based, program that includes a suite of applications that enable users to create spreadsheets, presentations, or word processing documents. It is essentially a much lighter version of Microsoft Office that utilizes "cloud" technology to store and manage documents online rather than on your computer. But unlike Microsoft Office and other desktop office applications, with Google Docs (because it is web-based) multiple users can access documents, spreadsheets, or presentations as either viewers or editors. In fact, multiple editors can be assigned to a document and they can edit the same document simultaneously in real time. In other words, with Google Docs, a group of students can all be added as editors to the same document, they can then collaborate and create the document together and even track the revisions and contributions of each member of the group through the revision history of the document, presentation, or spreadsheet. Access to documents is password protected, therefore privacy and security of student work is maintained. Online storage of a "master" document also eliminates the need for tracking the latest version of a document and the risk of losing it. Google Docs also eliminates the necessity of having

to coordinate face-to-face meetings. It enables students to easily see each other's contributions to the project. All of these advantages could possibly address major concerns students have with group projects.

I should point out that Google Docs is only one of many applications that can accomplish these goals. For instance, faculty have used wiki's for a number of years in much the same way. I chose to use Google Docs though because it is the most accessible and simplest application to implement. The applications themselves, particularly the word processor, are fairly intuitive, especially for anyone accustomed to Microsoft Word.

Method

Sample and Context

To investigate whether Google Docs (as an online collaboration tool) would affect students' perceptions of the group project experience, I tracked two classes that had group projects. One was required to use Google Docs and the other was not. I was also interested in the practical limitations of the program, particularly its word processor, for academic work.

The first class—which I will refer to as “Class A”—was a course that was being offered for the first time. It was an elective course that included 28 students. Students were separated into seven groups for the group project. The focus of the project was on predicting the future of the music industry. Each group was required to produce a term paper that outlined their prediction based on research they gathered as well as knowledge gained from the course textbook and presentations. Students in this class, Class A, however, were required to produce their group term paper in Google Docs. I created seven “shells” (i.e. blank online word processing documents) in Google Docs, and invited each member of each group as editors of their respective version. Students could only view and access the work from their own group; they could not access the work of other groups. From that point forward each group determined on its own when, if ever, they would meet and how they would organize the project. The assignment was assigned a due date, at which time I went in and changed each student's access from “editor” to “viewer”—thus prohibiting any further changes to their work.

The second class—which I will refer to as Class B—was a course that had been offered as an elective for years. However, a new group project assignment was added to the course to complete this study. There were 20 students enrolled in this course. The students were randomly grouped into four groups. Each group needed to find a local musical artist that they felt should be signed to the student-run record label. As a group, they would prepare a report about the artist, why the artist should be signed, and a detailed plan for how the artist would be marketed, what content would be created, and how the project would be financed. This assignment, like Class A, was assigned a due date. But unlike Class A, each group could turn in their project as a hardcopy, electronic document emailed to me, or as a Google Doc file. It was essentially their choice on how they wanted to turn in their project and the format of the project.

Students in Class A and Class B were both given detailed instructions about their project as well as a copy of the rubric that was going to be used to assess their project. Students in both courses were also given the opportunity at the end of the project to evaluate the performance and contribution of the other students in their group. Those evaluations were factored into one part of their grade for the project. It should be noted that four students were enrolled in both classes.

Even though Class A was required to use Google Docs, students did not receive any instructions and/or training on how to use Google Docs. They were simply required to submit an e-mail address to me so that I could give them access to their groups' blank document. Throughout the semester students were reminded that I could assist them with any questions that they might have about how to use Google Docs. However, not a single student requested such assistance. I also from time to time got online and viewed each groups' progress and updated the rest of the class about which group appeared to have done the most work up to that point, based on the amount of content on their document. This was simply intended to motivate the other teams.

Data Collection and Analysis

A pre and post survey was used to collect data. The surveys were administered online; they were anonymous and completely voluntary. The first survey was administered soon after the group projects were assigned. The purpose of this survey was to understand, among other things, student's initial comfort with online technology, familiarity with Google Docs, and perceptions of group projects. This data established a benchmark for later comparison. A follow up survey was administered at the end of the semester which measured the students' perceptions after completing their group projects. At this point, only preliminary analysis have been done; that is, only basic descriptive statistics have been conducted on the pre and post survey data. Future analysis will likely include statistical analyses of the differences between these two groups.

Results and Discussion

The preliminary results of this study indicate that Class A, the Google Docs class, did experience a *slight* change of opinion regarding group projects (see Table 1).

Table 1. Class A (The Google Doc class) Perceptions of Group Projects

<i>"How effective are group projects as a learning/educational experience?"</i>		
	Pre	Post
Not at all	2	2
Somewhat	11	6
Generally	10	15
Very	3	4
Extremely	0	0
Total	26	27

The biggest change took place in the group of students who felt that group projects were generally effective. In the pre survey, 10 students reported that they believed that group projects are generally effective. That number jumped to 15 students in the post survey. But the ends of the spectrum stayed the same across the pre and the post survey with only two students reporting that they didn't think group work was effective at all and no students reporting that they felt group work was extremely effective.

In Class B (where Google Docs was not required), when asked the same question, there was also an apparent change from the pre vs. the post survey. But unlike with Class A in which about 20% of students started to think more highly of group projects, three students out of eighteen in Class B began to think less highly of group projects by the end of the semester. For instance, the number of students who thought group

projects were “very effective” as a learning experience reduced from 8 on the pre survey to 5 on the post survey. But like Class A, the ends of the spectrum did not change.

Table 2. Class B (the non-Google Doc Group) Perceptions of Group Projects

<i>“How effective are group projects as a learning/ educational experience?”</i>		
	Pre	Post
Not at all	0	0
Somewhat	4	4
Generally	5	9
Very	8	5
Extremely	0	0
Total	17	18

In both courses, there was somewhat of a shift in opinion regarding the effectiveness of group projects. However, when asked to compare group projects to individual projects, in both courses opinions did not appear to change that much between the pre and post survey (see Table 3). In Class A, a couple of students appear to view group projects slightly more favorable than when they began the course but most students in Class A stayed the same. Similarly, in Class B, by the end of the semester, two students rated that they enjoyed group projects much more than individual projects.

Table 3. Preference of Group vs. Individual Projects

<i>“How much do you prefer group projects versus individual projects?”</i>				
	Class A		Class B	
I prefer...	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Individual projects much more	10	8	1	0
Individual projects slightly more	10	11	6	5
An equal mix of both	5	6	10	10
Group projects slightly more	1	2	1	1
Group projects much more	1	1	0	2
Total	27	28	18	18

When asked in more direct terms, once their respective projects were complete, whether their opinions had changed regarding group projects, only seven percent of the respondents in Class A liked them “much more” while 60% of the students in Class A and 71% of the students in Class B felt the same about group projects at the end of the semester.

Table 4. Changes in feelings about Group Projects

<i>“When comparing your current feelings about group projects to how you felt about them at the beginning of the semester, which one of these statements would most apply?”</i>		
I like them...	Class A	Class B
Much less	7%	6%
Somewhat less	11%	6%
I feel the same	60%	71%
Somewhat more	15%	17%
Much more	7%	0%
Total	100%	100%

The preliminary results suggest that the use of Google Docs does seem to have a very small affect on students' perceptions of group projects. And when asked if I should continue requiring Google Docs for the same project in the future, 24 of the 28 students in Class A indicated "yes," while only four responded "no." Those who selected "yes" were asked why they felt that way. Among the responses were comments such as "It creates a de-centralized meeting place", "it's very effective and teaches students about new media", "It's easy to use and no one can 'lose' it", and "it is a good way to see what your peers have done."

Keep in mind that students responded this positively to Google Docs without any specific instructions on how to use the program. In fall of 2009, I continued to require the use of Google Docs for group projects. But this time I conducted a 30-minute presentation of the basic elements, uses, and benefits of the program. Of the 21 students surveyed at the end of the semester, 19 recommended that the next class utilize Google Docs for their projects.

Benefits of Google Docs from a Faculty Perspective

I have illustrated how two different groups of my students have enjoyed using Google Docs. But using Google Docs has also made my job easier. For example, there were no issues as to whether or not a project was turned in on time, nor were there any stories of lost copies due to hard drive crashes or an error by a teammate. I could monitor progress, or lack thereof, on the project without having to ask or survey students. I also had the opportunity to recognize early on if a group is having problems with the project. It was also possible to objectively observe to at least some degree the contributions to the group project that each individual member made by reviewing the revision history. [note: The revision history has some limitations; for example, a student could prepare their work in a separate document and simply copy-and-paste it to the project document once they've written up their entire contribution. But appear like they have only accessed the document once. Because of issues like these, one group even required each member of the team to color-code their work so that I could more easily and accurately ascertain their individual contribution.] Another benefit of Google Docs is that it enabled me the ability to provide feedback or answer questions along the way by commenting on the document itself.

Drawbacks of Google Docs

Functionally, the Google Docs word processor has its disadvantages in terms of producing an online version of the traditional term paper, whether it's collaboratively written or not. This likely frustrated some students. As one student put it, "Google Docs is NOT Word," comparing it to the most popular software for producing reports. For one thing, the ability to automatically footnote was not available. Students simply manually identified references. But since there are no separate "pages", per se, in a Google Doc, the only option was to use makeshift endnotes, or to use the program's footnoting option, which simply places an index tab to the far right of the document wherever footnotes are included. Specific reference information can be added to a text box in the tab. But Google Docs is regularly updated and these features are likely to change over time.

Typing into Google Docs can be quite unwieldy as well, a sentiment brought up by several students in the study. Edits, particularly those involving font and color adjustments, undo themselves for no apparent reason sometimes. Word documents uploaded to the program or Google documents downloaded into Word do not always

convert and maintain their formatting as well as you would expect (especially if a document has a lot of complex formatting).

Conclusion and Implications

But for the purposes of collaborating to create a written document, students involved in this study were comfortable using Google Docs. Though its use didn't seem to markedly change their perception of group projects in general, perhaps the practical advantages carried the day. Not having to meet in person, no worries about who's holding the "master" copy, and simply not having to worry about actually submitting on time the finished product were among the reasons students favored the use of the program.

Despite its drawbacks, I've learned from my initial research that Google Docs definitely has its practical advantages for collaborative work, even though its use doesn't fully influence student perspectives on group projects. Considering the mission of preparing students for careers, however, might be as good a reason as any to utilize the program for such assignments. Tools like Google Docs will likely be a part of the workplace in which students eventually find themselves. As one student put it, "this is the future, we might as well start learning about it now."

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Bio

Storm Gloor is an Assistant Professor in the College of Arts and Media at the University of Colorado-Denver, where he serves as Area Head of the Music Business program. Along with teaching various music business courses, Gloor oversees the college's award-winning record label, CAM Records. He's also developed the Music and Entertainment Marketing and Music and Entertainment in the Digital Age courses at the college. He holds an MBA degree from West Texas A&M University. Prior to academia, Professor Gloor spent many years in the retailing of recorded products industry.

Chapter 15

Horton Hears a Tweet¹

Joanna C. Dunlap

&

Patrick R. Lowenthal

*"We've GOT to make noises in greater amounts!
So, open your mouth, lad! For every voice counts!"*

— From Dr. Seuss, Horton Hears a Who

Not long ago, we participated in EDUCAUSE 2009 in Denver. Because we were delivering a presentation on instructional uses of Twitter (Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2009), our ears and eyes were wide open for other presentations mentioning social networking in general and Twitter specifically. And did we get an ear and eye-full! It seemed like everyone was talking about Twitter — mostly positively, with a few pointed criticisms of the perceived obsession people have with the tool. At a lively “debate” (“debate” because ultimately both debaters were fairly pro-Twitter), the negative commentary focused on three things: Twitter takes too much time, the content is of questionable value, and it promotes social (or, anti-social) myopic-ness. We do not disagree, but instead have found, as many have (Haskvitaz, n.d.; Messner, 2009; National Education Association, 2009; Walker, 2009), that Twitter’s potential as a powerful instructional tool outweighs these negative factors. In this article we share some of the insights gained using Twitter as an instructional tool and explain why we think Twitter, despite its drawbacks (and really the drawbacks of social networking in general), can add value to online and face-to-face university courses.

The Challenge of Student Engagement

Our path to Twitter as an instructional tool was pretty straightforward. We teach online university-level courses in the field of instructional design and technology and constantly look for ways to enhance students’ experience in the online-education setting. We are concerned with student engagement, including how to overcome the transactional distance that exists in online courses (Moore, 1993). Our students are nontraditional: working professionals typically either in K–12 education, higher education, or corporate training spaces, or changing careers. They reside all over the world and have full personal and professional lives. Conditions around them are rife with distractions, making student engagement even more challenging — and even more elusive — than in conventional instructional settings with a traditional student population.

Although there are many definitions of student engagement, we see it as the time and energy students devote to educationally purposeful activities and the extent to which the university encourages students to participate in activities that lead to their

¹ This article was originally published in *EDUCAUSE Quarterly*, 32(4). <http://www.educause.edu/EDUCAUSE+Quarterly/EDUCAUSEQuarterlyMagazineVolum/HortonHearsaTweet/192955>

academic success (Kuh, 2003). Engaged students are more likely to take initiative, exert effort, and persevere during learning activities. In addition, when students are engaged in learning, there is increased potential that they will be interested, curious, optimistic, and enthusiastic (Skinner & Belmont, 1993)—all positive attributes of a healthy, productive learning environment.

Arthur Chickering and Zelda Gamson (1987) provided a framework for student engagement based on 50 years of research on educational effectiveness. Their framework includes a list of seven “good practice” principles that have guided student-engagement practice and research for the last 20-plus years:

1. Encourage student-faculty contact
2. Encourage cooperation among students
3. Encourage active learning
4. Give prompt feedback
5. Emphasize time on task
6. Communicate high expectations
7. Respect diverse talents and ways of learning

This framework is, in part, the foundation of a well-established tool for systematically measuring student engagement: the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). The NSSE survey measures educational effectiveness based on five benchmarks of student engagement (Kuh, 2001):

- Academic challenge
- Student interactions with faculty
- Active and collaborative learning
- Enriching educational experiences
- Supportive campus environment

For nontraditional students like ours, the most influential academic experiences are those tied to course-related learning and their relationships with faculty and other students (Donaldson & Graham, 1999). This holds true for nontraditional students in online programs as well. In 1996, Chickering and Stephen Erhmann applied the original Chickering and Gamson framework to online education. They believed that, if the power and affordances of online education (and the technologies and tools used to deliver online learning opportunities) were to be realized, online educators had to adhere to the original good-practice principles (Chickering & Erhmann, 1996). Still, at the top of their list (as well as prominently featured as an NSSE benchmark), is the idea that good practice encourages contact between students and faculty. Implied by Chickering and Erhmann’s thesis is that knowing one’s instructors well has a positive impact on learning, which may in turn help with retention and successfully accomplishing the goals of the course and program (Bender, 2003). Encouraging student-faculty contact and interaction thus gets at the heart of student engagement in online-education settings.

In online education, social presence is directly related to faculty-student and student-student contact and interaction, as well as the development of a culture of caring and trust needed for an effective online learning community (Lowenthal, 2009a, 2009b). Specifically, *social presence* refers to the sense of another person as being “there” and being “real” (Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976). It is “the ability of participants in a community of inquiry [a community of learners] to project themselves socially and emotionally, as ‘real’ people (i.e., their full personality), through the medium of communication being used” (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 1999). If social presence in an online course is strong, then students recognize their course colleagues and

instructor as being there and being real. Often, online students' and faculty's sense of social presence is negatively affected by their transactional distance: the space and/or time separation between students and faculty that creates a psychological and communication space where potential misunderstanding can thrive (Moore, 1993). This is further exacerbated by the typical reliance on asynchronous, written communication, such as that delivered via threaded discussion forums in learning management systems (LMSs). Asynchronous, written communication lacks the immediacy needed to reduce personal risk and increase acceptance, which are important objectives when trying to establish a supportive and secure learning environment (Garrison & Anderson, 2003). Without a high level of social presence, students can feel isolated and disengaged because of a lack of communication intimacy and immediacy (Anderson, 2008; Aragon, 2003; Gunawardena, 1995; Lombard & Ditton, 1997).

Web 2.0 tools have been a godsend in supporting our student-engagement efforts to achieve enhanced social presence in our online courses (see Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2010; Lowenthal & Dunlap, 2010). We were looking for a more intimate and immediate form of communication, striving to involve students to such an extent in the joy of learning with us and with each other that they would become immersed in the online learning experience (Bender, 2003; Vella, 1997). Because of our years teaching within an LMS, we realized that we could not achieve a natural communication flow with students only using the tedious, multi-step process required. The typical LMS requires logging in, getting into the specific course's shell, entering the specific discussion forum, posting a question ... and then staying connected to the LMS while waiting for someone to respond — or giving up and moving on to other work, thoughts and issues. (See Figure 1.) We wanted a tool that would enable us to establish an ongoing sense of being present at the current moment and able to receive and respond to students immediately, forming a real-time online dialogue and forum for sharing (Finkelstein, 2006). By enabling us to connect and work with our students outside of the LMS, Web 2.0 tools — specifically social-networking tools — allow us to establish natural, free-flowing, just-in-time contact with students, and them with us. (See Figure 2.) The Web 2.0 tool that has helped us achieve this objective more than any other is Twitter. (See Figure 3.)

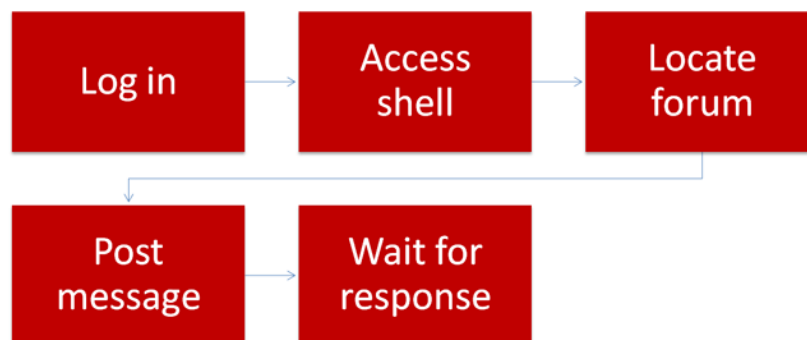


Figure 1. LMS-Driven Communication with Online Students

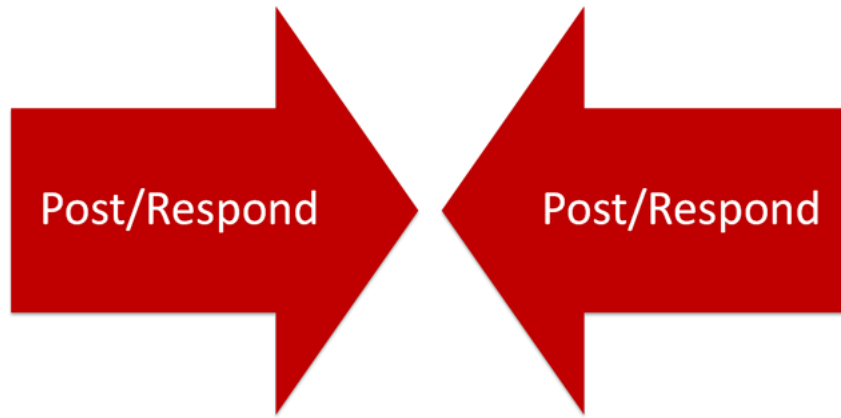


Figure 2. Desired Pathway of Communication with Online Students



Figure 3. Twitter and Desired Communication with Online Students

What Is So Special About Twitter?

Learning takes place in a social context. Higher cognitive processes originate from social interactions (Vygotsky, 1978), with knowledge acquisition “firmly embedded in the social and emotional context in which learning takes place” (Lebow, 1993). Conversation, collaboration, and establishing a community of learners is critical to the teaching and learning process (Pask, 1975). Because of their fundamental reliance on social participation and contribution, Web 2.0 tools, specifically social-networking tools, have great potential for enhancing the social context in support of learning, especially in online-education settings (Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2011).

For those new to Twitter, this service is a freely accessible, multiplatform, Web 2.0 tool — part social networking and part microblogging tool (for more on Twitter see Educause learning Initiative, 2007, and Stevens, 2008). Twitter’s website describes Twitter as “a service for friends, family, and co-workers to communicate and stay connected through the exchange of quick, frequent answers to one simple question: What are you doing?” (Note, Twitter recently changed the question to “What’s

happening?”) A video created by our colleagues at CU Online quickly describes what Twitter is and how people use it.



Currently, Twitter reports more than 18 million participants, while [Facebook](#) has 350 million, [MySpace](#) has 125 million, [Friendster](#) has 110 million, and [LinkedIn](#) has 50 million. What, then, is so special about Twitter? Although small by comparison, Twitter has unique qualities that make it a good fit for online education. For example, people use Twitter for much more than updating their current status. In 140 characters or less, people share ideas and resources, ask and answer questions, and collaborate on problems of practice. Depending on whom you choose to follow (that is, communicate with) and who chooses to follow you, Twitter can be used effectively for professional and social networking because it can connect people with like interests (Boss, 2009). Educators, specifically, are using Twitter to establish and develop personal learning networks (Messner, 2009). According to Messner, “A PLN, or Personal Learning Network, is a group of like-minded professionals with whom you can exchange ideas, advice, and resources” (Messner, 2009).

Social media researchers like to differentiate between friendship-driven and interest-driven types of participation in social media and social-networking sites (Ito et al., 2009). This differentiation, in part, is due to structure and functionality. Twitter is a less bounded, more open networking tool that allows asymmetric relationships. Facebook is a more bounded community, requiring symmetric relationships (Chen, 2009; Porter, 2009). In Facebook, if you “friend” someone, they have to friend you back, with the only other option being to not have any connection at all. In Twitter you can follow someone who does not follow you; someone can follow you that you do not follow in return; you can follow someone who also follows you; or you can choose not to have or allow a connection between you and others.

There is no question that Twitter and Facebook attract both types of participation and have a number of similar qualities. As one of our students commented:

"Twitter has been a great way for me to check in with everyone who is using it. I found out how others were feeling about school, how life was treating them, how their jobs and families were doing. This is something much more intimate than mandatory weekly discussions..."

We have found, though, that Twitter attracts more interest-driven participation (at least in our field of instructional design and technology) compared to Facebook, which continues to be used more often for friendship-driven types of participation. Our students seem far more likely to use Facebook for personal networking with family and friends, and they prefer to keep their academic and professional networking separate from their personal. When using Twitter for instructional purposes, therefore, we are less likely to intrude on students' personal networking space (Boyd, 2009a).

The main reason we selected Twitter over other social-networking options, however, is because of its rapid-response attribute, which allows people to receive immediate, instantaneous responses. As described by Steve Thornton:

[Twitter] seems to live somewhere between the worlds of email, instant messaging and blogging. Twitter encourages constant "linking out" to anywhere and, in that respect, is more analogous to a pure search engine; another way to find people and content all over the Net (Thornton, 2009).

This benefit is further extended by additional features:

- Users do not have to log in to Twitter to receive updates if using an RSS feed.
- Twitter provides an interactive, extensible messaging platform with open APIs.
- The read page is the same as the write page, which allows for a more seamless exchange.
- A number of other applications are available to make Twitter more useful, such as Twirl, TweetDeck, Twitterific, and Digsby.

Because of these features, Twitter was a viable option for us to establish free-flowing, just-in-time communication with our online students.

Recent reports suggest that only about five percent of faculty use microblogging as a part of instruction (Nagel, 2009) and that the majority of faculty do not use Twitter at all (Beja, 2009). Perhaps faculty resist using Twitter for instructional purposes because of the very concerns expressed during the EDUCAUSE Twitter debate. However, we have found a way of using Twitter with our students that minimizes these concerns, while supporting faculty-student connection and benefiting other instructional objectives.

Our Instructional Use of Twitter

We initially explored Twitter as an instructional tool to provide an informal, just-in-time way for our students to connect with each other and with us throughout the day. We invited students to participate in Twitter with us, explaining our goals (student-faculty connection and enhanced student engagement). We did not require their participation because we recognized that they might already be involved in social-networking activities and not want to take on more, or because of their concerns about privacy and their online footprints.

Guidelines for Instructional Use

- Establish relevance for students
- Recommend people for students to follow
- Model effective Twitter use
- Encourage students' active and ongoing participation

- Build Twitter-derived results into assessments
- Continue to actively participate in Twitter

With Twitter, as with all social-networking tools, the value of the experience hinges on three things: (1) who you are connected to and with; (2) how frequently you participate; and (3) how conscientious you are about contributing value to the community. Therefore, to establish relevance and to make sure students got off to a good start, we took the following steps:

- *We provided students with a list of professionals who are active, relevant contributors (in addition to our Twitter IDs and the IDs of other students in the course).*

This narrows the network to those who can immediately contribute to students' learning and professional development and addresses colleagues' concern about time spent. People who are new to Twitter often express uncertainty about how to find the right people to follow. While users can search Twitter posts for like-minded people, there are no guarantees. The majority of Twitter accounts are abandoned during the first month (Cashmore, 2009), probably due in part to users' inability to find the "right" people to follow — that is, people who can contribute to their learning and professional development. By providing students with a list of people (who we personally have benefited from following), we hope to help them get off to a good start with Twitter. In our field of study, for example, we recommend following Garr Reynolds, Nancy Duarte, Scott McCloud, Will Richardson, George Siemens, and David Warlick, to name a few. We also suggest following relevant professional organizations (EDUCAUSE, Sloan-C), publications (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Education Week*, *EDUCAUSE Review*, *Wired*), and companies (Apple, VoiceThread, SlideShare, Inspiration).

- *We shared examples of professionally appropriate ways to engage in and with the Twitter community.*

People criticize Twitter (and social networking in general) because they believe that it promotes social (or anti-social) myopic-ness. While we have seen many examples of this, we believe that there is nothing inherent in the technology that causes it. In fact, we find that through sharing and modeling what we believe to be appropriate ways to use and engage in the Twitter community, we can help our students avoid a myopic perspective.

- *We encouraged students to share their knowledge, work, and discovered resources (blog posts, YouTube videos, Web 2.0 tools, etc.) with the Twitter community.*

While we believe there is some value to the social chitchat that happens on Twitter — especially when trying to get to know others and establish one's social presence — we have found that much of the value people, especially educators, get out of Twitter is derived from the knowledge and resource sharing (see also Hilbert, 2009). We strive to get our students to not only consume but also to produce and contribute knowledge and resources to the larger community. We believe that through mixing social chitchat and resource sharing, our students and the Twitter community as a whole can establish

value and relevance, addressing concerns shared by some colleagues about the value of Twitter.

- *We allowed students to cite tweets in their course projects and papers (as an electronic source of information).*

For us, tweets, while brief, are a valuable source of information. Therefore, students should be able to cite tweets in course projects and papers. Twitter supports students' ability to do this because each tweet has a unique and stable URL. (See Figure 4.) Therefore, we direct students to cite tweets as recommended by APA style. However, we recognize and strive to communicate to students that they should always support the claims they make by citing multiple and different types of resources, not relying only on the information they attain via social networking.



Figure 4. Example of Tweet with Corresponding URL

- *We frequently contributed our own status updates, ideas, resources, and so on.*

Finally, we believe it is imperative to contribute frequently to the Twitter community. By doing this we demonstrate to students that developing and maintaining a PLN is not simply an academic exercise but rather a lifelong learning skill (Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2011). There is no question that active and frequent participation in the Twitter community takes time, as concerned colleagues have voiced. However, we believe that if Twitter participation is initiated by a learning need and subsequently driven by learning goals and objectives, then the activity is relevant and purposeful, and Twitter time is time well spent.

As one of our students commented after using Twitter for a course:

"I enjoyed twittering. It was fun to have a small group to get started with. If we hadn't started as a class I probably wouldn't have picked it up on my own. But, it is a fun way to connect. You are accessible via email and in the shell, but Twitter increases feelings of connectedness."

Like other social-networking tools, Twitter is affected by what Joshua Porter (an active blogger on the topic of social web design) refers to as the “opaque value” problem (Porter, 2007). Because social-networking tools are forums for personalized, socially focused conversations, the communities that spring from these tools are person/people-centered. As Porter explained, this person/people-centeredness results in the value of participation being opaque for anyone who is not participating. To address this problem, we made sure that students who chose not to participate (because the value of participation is opaque for them) had access to our tweets by incorporating an RSS feed–like Twitter widget in our LMS. (See Figure 5.) Many widgets like these can be found online, although we should note that this particular widget has limitations. As seen in the example in Figure 5, the widget only displays Joni’s posts, not the back-and-forth exchanges between her and members of her network. Students might incorrectly assume that the interaction is one-sided and less than dynamic. Besides keeping students apprised of the resources we shared via Twitter, however, this widget allowed them to vicariously discover Twitter’s value. Some students later chose to join us in Twitter because they had a better understanding of what they were getting into because its value was less opaque. Ultimately, we found that Twitter helped us achieve our student-engagement objective, but we also quickly discovered that students’ Twitter participation led to other notable instructional outcomes.

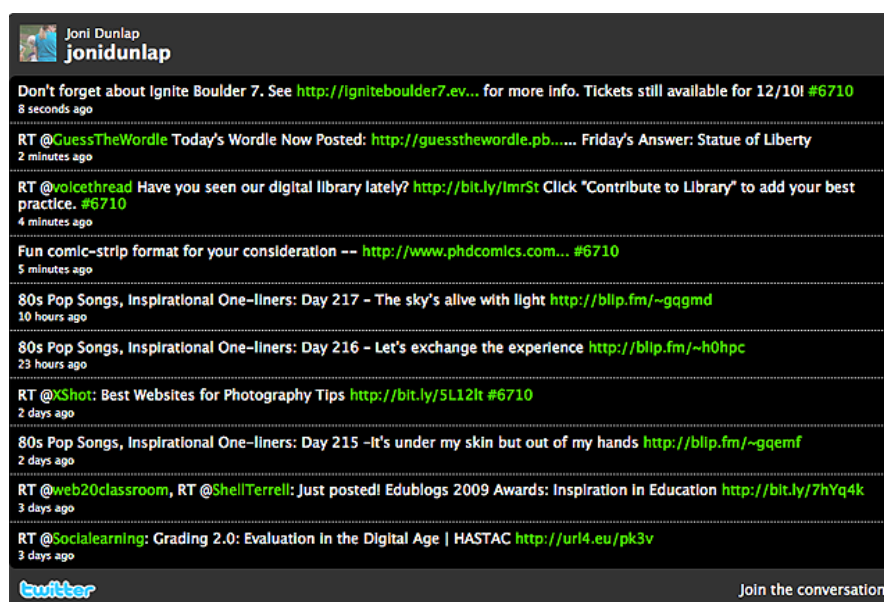


Figure 5. Twitter Feed

Engaging with Professionals

Twitter engages students in a professional community of practice (CoP) (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), connecting them to practitioners, experts, and colleagues. This helps enculturate them into the community (Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2009), which becomes especially important for students in professional-preparation programs. Acting as practitioners and using the tools practitioners use to address authentic problems of the domain exposes students to the culture of expert practice (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Collins, Brown, & Holum, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Through their

participation in Twitter, students can engage in learning as a function of the activity, context, and culture of the CoP for their field.

Besides the networking potential as students build PLNs, they can receive immediate feedback to questions and ideas from practicing professionals in Twitter, which enhances their learning and enculturation into their professional CoP. Examples of the types of interactions our students had with professionals via Twitter include:

- A student had a question about a chapter she was reading on multimodal learning. She immediately tweeted her question and received three responses within 10 minutes — two responses from classmates, and one from her professor. This led to several subsequent posts, including comments from two practicing professionals.
- A student working on his final project was trying to embed music into a presentation. He was having trouble getting it to work, so he tweeted his question and received a response from his professor and a practicing professional. Both pointed the student to different resources that provided directions on how to embed music and examples that he could deconstruct. Within a half hour, the student had embedded music in his presentation.
- As part of a research project on emerging trends in e-learning professional preparation, a student posed the following question to the Twitter community: “With all of the Web 2.0 tools available today, do e-learning professionals still need to be able to program in HTML and XML?” She received responses from several e-learning professionals, some with links to helpful resources and contacts that could help her with her research.

Our thinking about Twitter as an approach to engaging students in the professional CoP has been influenced by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger’s work in situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Our particular use of Twitter, we believe, offers opportunities for students to gradually acquire the characteristics and norms of a CoP. Their legitimate peripherality allows them to absorb and be absorbed in the culture of practice, making it — as shared and illustrated in Twitter — their own.

Professional Exposure

When students connect with the professional CoP, it is a great way for them to share and get feedback on their ideas, work, and products and thus establish themselves as contributing members of the community. Using Twitter, our students networked with the authors of the texts they read in their courses, as well as with potential future colleagues and employers. By participating in Twitter within the supportive structure of a course, students learn how to guide and direct their online footprint in ways that highlight and showcase their professional qualities and value. The following example demonstrates how our students used Twitter for appropriate professional exposure:

Students used Twitter to promote new blog entries. For example, one student tweeted that he had a new post on his blog about how vision trumps all other senses during instruction. His classmates and professors, as well as practicing professionals, read his blog post because of his Twitter promotion. Subsequently, he received several tweets from the professional community thanking him for sharing his ideas.

Writing Concisely and Appropriately

Although Twitter elicits open sharing and an informal writing style, it is nevertheless critical to know your audience and share accordingly. A tweet’s limit of 140

characters encouraged students to write clearly and concisely. Participating in Twitter helped them learn to be sensitive to their audience and to make professional decisions about what they should share publicly and what they should keep private.

Timely and Ongoing Connections

Our students used Twitter for time-sensitive matters: to ask us for clarification on content or assignment requirements, notify us of personal emergencies, and alert us to issues that needed our attention and action. This really helped them feel the level of connection needed to support their perception of engagement. We have also found that Twitter allows us to maintain ongoing professional relationships with students and alumni.

Positive Results

We believe that our focused use of Twitter has led to positive results in terms of:

- Enhanced social presence
- Student engagement
- Professional preparation

The student comments throughout this article support our conclusion, as do those from a high-school project using Twitter in the classroom sponsored by the University of Minnesota and an experiment with classroom use of Twitter at the University of Texas at Dallas. As one of our students commented:

"I really LOVE twittering with everyone. It really made me feel like we knew each other more and were actually in class together."

We plan to continue our use of Twitter, as well as other social-networking and Web 2.0 tools, to extend the power and affordances of the LMS to create the best possible learning experience we can for them and for ourselves.

Benefits for On-Campus Courses and In-Person Setting

Although our focus has been on using Twitter in online courses, it can also be effectively used in on-campus courses and in-person settings. Two strategies that work well are back-channeling and polling.

Back-channeling

One benefit of using Twitter in on-campus courses is tapping into the back channel of communication. *Back-channeling* is a term linguists use to refer to the feedback listeners share — without interrupting the speaker — related to their developing understanding and appreciation of what is being said, which is then monitored by the speaker (White, 1997). Long before Twitter, John Seely Brown spoke in a keynote talk about the power of leveraging the back channel for instructional purposes. As it turns out, Twitter is an effective way to create a back-channel forum during a lecture or presentation: all users need is a Twitter account and ideally a projector to project the Twitter stream for the audience and speaker to monitor.

On the negative side, back-channeling can be counterproductive — sometimes even hostile and unprofessional — if appropriate rules of professional engagement are not defined and followed. In some instances people have used Twitter to “tweckle” speakers. To *tweckle* is to “abuse a speaker only to Twitter followers in the audience

while he/she is speaking” (see Parry, 2009b).² Recent reports in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (see Parry, 2009a, 2009b) suggest that if you have not heard of tweekling yet, it’s only a matter of time.

Danah Boyd, a Social Media Researcher for Microsoft, was one of the most recent and high-profile victims of tweekling at a major conference (see Boyd, 2009b, 2009c; Parry, 2009a). Boyd shared her experience and pointed out problems with tweekling in general but specifically in broadcasting the back channel during a talk: it can distract those who actually do not want to participate in the back channel and enable tweeters to take over a talk via the Twitter stream, thus making the back channel the front channel (Boyd, 2009b). Experiences like Boyd’s have led some conferences to publish “social-media ‘courtesy’ guidelines (Parry, 2009a) and others to restrict its use.

Before introducing back-channeling into your classroom, therefore, it is important to establish its relevance in support of student engagement and learning, set clear guidelines (the twitiquette), model appropriate back-channeling etiquette, and revisit back-channeling’s effectiveness throughout the semester.

Polling

Twitter can also be used the way clickers are used for polling in the classroom. A number of different Twitter polling tools are available, such as [twtpoll](#), [Poll Everywhere](#), and [StrawPoll](#). Some, like Poll Everywhere, even enable students to vote on the web or with text messaging.

Polling can enhance student engagement during a class as well as provide information regarding the students’ conceptual understanding. One approach to using Twitter as a polling tool is to engage students in think-pair-share activities during lectures and presentations. Faculty pose a question to students, students think about their responses, and then students tweet their answers. Next, students confer with one to two partners sitting close by, and then retweet answers. This approach fosters student engagement by providing a clear structure for students to reflect, discuss, and self-assess.

Conclusion

Social-networking tools offer us unprecedented ways to connect, share, participate, and contribute in a variety of activities. Although we have focused on Twitter, it certainly is not the only social-networking tool that can be used to effectively pursue instructional objectives. Our colleagues in music performance, for example, prefer MySpace because students can easily share their music; our business school colleagues like LinkedIn; and our colleagues coordinating school and university library programs prefer Facebook and Ning because online professional CoPs exist in these environments. One size does not fit all, so we are lucky there are so many social-networking options.

Social networking, including the use of Twitter, has its drawbacks. It is public, you get what you put in, and it takes a lot of time. Of these drawbacks, the time commitment is perhaps the most important. We highly recommend trying Twitter first

² Others have wondered if students — that is, not just conference goers — would also fall into this practice of heckling; for example, in a Twitter post (Juvinall, 2009) Pete Juvinall “#edtwitter #educause09 wonders about the dynamic of having student chatter displayed on a screen...and if there are hecklers that result.”

to see if you get any personal/professional value out of it before integrating it into the classroom. Twitter is not for everyone, and different faculty from different disciplines might have very different experiences using it for instructional purposes.

We selected Twitter because it:

- Allows for the just-in-time, free-flowing connection between and among students and faculty needed to support student engagement, especially in online-education settings
- Helps students build relevant PLNs that support their learning and professional development while enculturating them into the professional CoP
- Encourages students to reflect on what they share publicly and how to use Web 2.0 tools like Twitter to establish a professionally appropriate footprint
- Allows us to continue our connections with students long after our courses end

We are embarking on our own research into how effective Twitter and other social-networking and Web 2.0 tools are in helping us achieve the instructional goals of enhanced social presence, student engagement, professional preparation, and student learning. Because the use of social-networking tools like Twitter for instructional purposes is still emerging, there are many opportunities for research. As others have before us (Ehrmann, 1995; Worley, 2000), we encourage researchers to examine the relationship between faculty and students and the learning strategies employed, rather than just the impact of the technology in isolation. To this end, in our own inquiry we are examining the following questions:

- Are students' perceptions of their level of engagement in a graduate-level online course enhanced by the use of Twitter as a vehicle for increasing the level of contact and interaction between them and their instructor?
- Does the use of Twitter enhance social presence in a graduate-level online course by providing a mechanism for just-in-time social interactions?

We are encouraged by the comment of one student who used Twitter in a course:

"Twitter was a big part of my connected-ness, with my PLN, course colleagues and with you. Even though I didn't post a lot of tweets, I watched the Twitter dialogue. It made the connections stronger and helped me learn more about folks in the profession, the course, and you. And, Twitter led me to some great resources and people for my PLN. Thanks, Joni, for being such a responsive Twitter-er."

We embrace social-networking tools like Twitter because they allow everyone who wants to participate in an online professional CoP to do so. In social-networking communities, all voices are welcome if they serve to advance the community's understanding of the world. To this end, we invite you to share your thoughts with us. Let us know what you think about using social-networking tools like Twitter to support student engagement and learning by completing the following poll: <http://twtpoll.com/7jwv08>.

Using Twitter, we can extend our conversation of the use of social-networking and Web 2.0 tools to support student engagement and learning. After all, Twitter and other social-networking tools allow us all to make noises in greater amounts and recognize that every voice counts. So, as Twitter demonstrates every moment of every

day, a contribution is a contribution — no matter how small.

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Bios

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Chapter 16

Driving Student Engagement and Focus in an Accelerated Biology Class using Blogs

Tod Duncan

In the March of 2009, I attended a teaching in biology workshop where I had the pleasure of hearing Gardner Campbell talk about the value and virtue of blogging in the classroom. To be honest, I was initially not sold on the idea of blogs and wikis, and like a majority of those around me, I was reluctant to say the least. About two-thirds of the way through his workshop, the epiphany struck me. I had to surrender control of class events to my students if this was going to work. For most educators, and I believe science educators in particular, this idea of surrendering control isn't simply "thinking outside of the box" but rather "outside of one's mind."

A few months later, I had the opportunity to teach a Maymester course at the University of Colorado Denver (UCD). Maymester is an accelerated three-week term in between Spring and Summer semester where students can complete an entire 3 credit course in just three weeks. This was my first encounter with teaching in an accelerated format. Being new to accelerated courses and the Maymester format in particular, I spent a considerable amount of time adjusting class content, considering new pedagogical tools, evaluating and designing new assessments, and redesigning my Biology of Cancer class from back to front to ensure students completing it in three weeks would be able to learn the same as students completing it in 15 weeks. One thing that concerned me the most was that students would not have the time to digest the major principles, discuss those principles with their classmates (this normally happens right?), and integrate their current knowledge with the new principles they were learning in class. I felt that unless there were opportunities to engage students with the class material right away, that their learning would not be long lived.

I began searching for a tool that my students would value, that would engage them outside of the classroom, and that would allow them to integrate their own life experiences and background into their learning experience. Moreover, I wanted a tool that would allow students to develop writing skills in a low risk environment that would make them accountable for their words and thoughts. Additionally, I wanted to help students better understand their digital footprint and how that footprint tells the world something about them, their values, their skills, and their morality. To me, I didn't want much, but to others I wanted the world! From what I had heard from Gardner Campbell, I decided that perhaps a class blog would meet my learning goals. In the following chapter, I explain how I used a class blog in my accelerated course to meet many of these previously mentioned goals.

Creating the Blog Environment

There are a number of blogging tools available. I decided to use Wordpress to create a class blog. The class blog is an open forum and can be viewed at: <http://biol4634.wordpress.com>. It took me approximately five hours to work out how to use Wordpress, to set up my blog, and to integrate some more advanced features such as RSS feeds from the American Cancer Society's website and my own Twitter stream. I paid a modest sum to upgrade the server space so that there were no problems

with students uploading files and videos to the blog. But from start to finish it took just an afternoon to setup.

Gaining Student Investment

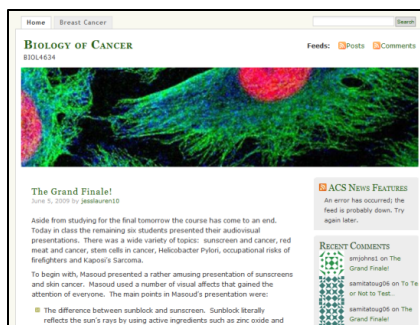
One of my greatest fears (technical issues aside) was getting student buy-in to engage in something they had probably neither experienced before, nor seen the value of before. I am increasingly experiencing the phenomenon whereby educators leave the exercises and learning opportunities that they supposedly value (e.g., students collaborating on projects together), to out-of-class time where there is no instructor investment or guidance. I believe that the single best way to show a student that I value a skill or idea is to use class time on that skill or idea.

Knowing that blogging would quite possibly be overwhelming (in the light of other technologies I use and the compressed Maymester format), I dedicated a chunk of time discussing the blog at the beginning of the term. During this time, I addressed everything from showing students how to enroll in the blog as authors, to setting their expectations around what they could expect to get out of the blog, to discussing how they will be assessed, to explaining how they should deal with any problems that arise. In addition, I created a FAQ sheet that provided students with step-by-step instructions on how to become an author on the blog, what to do if they could not complete their blog entry in a timely fashion, and how to handle various technical issues that might arise. With this resource and the time I had allocated in class to get signed up, there were no problems with getting students added to the blog as authors. Although initially there were reservations and fears amongst the students, the investment of class time calmed those fears and allayed their reservations.

Modeling

I am a strong believer in modeling. I modeled the first blog post on the first day of class so that students could see the standard that I was expecting and the kind of things they should aim for when creating their own blog entry. I believe that modeling an expected behavior, standard of work, and depth of coverage for an assignment is a crucial role for an educator so that students can move forward in the first instance simply by mimicry. As they become more comfortable and competent, they are then able to impose their own unique style and integrate their own perspectives. I gave the students the following requirements for their blog entry:

- Minimally, you must summarize the major concepts of the day
- Add your own (critical, but constructive) thoughts about the material
- Consider how the material relates to other classes you've taken
- Add in media that helps communicate some of the class principles (e.g. YouTube videos, web URLs, animations)
- Connect the class material to your own experiences
- Discuss how the material helps you achieve your future goals



Additionally, students were required to make at least ten comments (I'll be honest, I didn't count!) on their classmates' entries.

Grading Blogs

I had concerns about how to grade a blog assignment. I did not know what to expect and I had no benchmark to work from. In discussions with students, I explained that completing the first point above would earn maximally a C grade if the work was correct, but that adding in additional material from the list moved one toward an A grade based on the insight of the entry, the insight of the students comments, and the use of some media in the blog entry (see Table 1).

Table 1. Rubric for Grading Blogs

A	Discuss how the material helps you achieve your future goals
	Connect the class material to your own experiences
	Add in media that helps communicate some of the class principles (e.g. YouTube videos, web URLs, animations)
	Consider how the material relates to other classes you've taken
	Add your own (critical, but constructive) thoughts about the material
C	Minimally, you must summarize the major concepts of the day

It turned out that my grading fears were unfounded as students, in general, were enthusiastic and eager to impress their peers. In fact, it turned out that the blog entries were some of the best pieces of writing I had seen in a science class. I was also impressed by how the students integrated their own personal experiences into their entries and comments on other students' entries.

Other Logistical Issues

I wanted the students to feel as though the blog was theirs, even though it was something I had set-up. To facilitate their feeling of ownership, I did not 'assign' specific bloggers for specific days. Rather, after my initial modeling on the first day of class, I nominated a single student to be the next blogger. It became that student's responsibility to nominate the blogger for the next day of class and so on. Besides a prod or two during the short semester, the students took control of the blog and needed little guidance or prompting to keep up with their entries and comments.

Colleagues who have mimicked my blogging experiment have found that in a 15 week semester it is somewhat harder to maintain student engagement with the blog. It is possible that the Maymester format is more amenable to blogging than in the regular 15 week semester. However, making the blog the focus of the class could possibly offset this challenge.

Students Perceptions about Blogging

Although I was initially skeptical about the value of blogging in the classroom, I was subsequently impressed by the quality of the student entries and comments. As an afterthought, I decided to obtain Institutional Review Board approval to collect student perceptions on the blog as part of their class. Also, two colleagues (Drs. Lisa Johansen and Laurel Hartley) were interested in exploring the use of blogging in their own classes. We have now collected some data on student perceptions on blogging in the science classroom from three classes with three different instructors and are working to publish the results of our analyses of the student comments. Below, I have briefly summarized some of the information that I obtained from my own students regarding their blog experience in my Maymester class.

- 80% of students strongly agreed with the statement “blogging increased my interest in the class material.”
- 80% of students agreed with the statement “blogging made me more comfortable about communicating about biology in general.”
- 75% of students agreed with the statement “I enjoyed blogging.”
- 75-100% of students agreed, or strongly agreed with the statements “blogging facilitated my sharing personal experiences related to class” “blogging increased my motivation or empowered me to contribute during class discussions”; “blogging helped me share my background knowledge with my classmates”; and “blogging helped me share my background knowledge with the instructor.”

Although my main goals were to provide a forum for students to engage with the material outside of the classroom, and to share and integrate their personal experiences, I hoped that the blog would allow students to explore the influence of culture and society on their perception of biology. Students reported the following on how blogging impacted their perception of the interface between society, culture, and biology:

- 100% of students agreed or strongly agreed with the statements that “blogging helped me appreciate how different social groups interpret and act on biological information”; “blogging helped me appreciate how cultural heritage can influence how people interpret and act on biological information”; and “blogging facilitated my understanding that culture and society plays an important role in the choices cancer patients make in their disease management.”

Additionally students were in overwhelming agreement that the blog was a useful forum for them to reflect on the class content and receive clarification on the major principles from each class. The students reported that they could better appreciate how their classmates perceived and understood the material, they reported that they gained insight to how learning largely occurs outside the confines of the classroom walls, and they reported that the blog helped them perceive material in a context different to the one in which they had initially synthesized the material. In general, students found that blogging facilitated their reflection on the class material and aided their comprehension. In respect to using the blog to drive student understanding of their digital footprint and technical awareness one student noted that:

"I thought I was "on top" of technology and it's [sic] advancements when I first started the class. It made me realize there was a lot more out there to have as a resource. I have discussed electronic/ social media responsibility as well as benefits with countless friends, relatives, and coworkers. It has been eye-opening."

Future Directions

As noted above, two colleagues have explored the use of blogs in their classrooms. It seems that some class formats are better suited for the use of blogs as a learning tool than others. We have learned a lot from our combined experiences with blogging. If we were to repeat the use of the blog in our classes we would offer the following pieces of advice:

- Model very clearly at the beginning of the semester
- Invest class time exploring the blog in class
- Make the blog the focus of the class as a resource
- Encourage colleagues to comment and participate
- As an instructor, frequently refer to the blog and its content for class purposes

Concluding Remarks

For my use in the accelerated Maymester format, the blog worked well to drive student engagement, to promote student reflection, to make students aware of their online presence, to provide a forum for writing, and to encourage students to share how their own background influences their experience of biology. I have not subsequently used the blog in my Cancer Biology class as it has since only run in the 15 week semester. However, as the Maymester approaches and I once again adjust my class, I will most certainly be considering it as a learning tool. On a personal level, I learned that for my students to better engage the material, to better reflect, and to better explore the domain, I have to let go of some of the control that we are all accustomed to having in the classroom. I simply have to provide a forum in which my students can explore, engage, and relate.

Bio

Tod Duncan, Ph.D. is a senior instructor in the Department of Integrative Biology in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. His research background was in the regulation of the eukaryotic cell cycle and mechanisms of DNA repair as they relate to cancer. Currently, Tod does not have an active bench research program; however, he is engaged in several science education projects. Tod is involved with the Rocky Mountain Middle School Math and Science Partnership (RMMSMSP), is a member of a panel advising the National Association of Biology Teachers, and takes an active role in promoting better

science pedagogy whenever possible. Currently, his science education interests involve the use of Web 2.0 tools in high-enrollment classes where there is significant diversity in the student body. Tod believes that the online environment can be used to foster student-student and student-instructor relationships when those relationships cannot effectively be built in the first person.

Chapter 17

Best Practices for Web Conferencing With Adobe Connect Pro

Jozianne Mestas

In my role as an Electronics Specialist at the University of Colorado Denver, I'm often asked to provide technical assistance for Adobe Connect Pro. Adobe Connect Pro is web conferencing software that enables its users to share documents, files, chat, and broadcast live audio and video. People use Adobe Connect Pro for a variety of reasons including teaching a course, demonstrating a particular task, collaborating on documents, software training, and event distribution. However, these are just a few examples of the ways people use Adobe Connect Pro—the possibilities are really endless. In the following chapter, I will discuss some tips on how to use Adobe Connect Pro—and really web conferencing in general.

Planning

For a successful Adobe Connect Pro web conference, preparation is imperative. The first thing you need to do is to determine the purpose of your web conference and exactly what content or materials you would like to share with your audience. For instance, you can share:

- PowerPoint presentations
- Screen share to display documents, applications, files or websites
- Audio or video

Establishing the purpose for your web conference will help you plan accordingly. If you decide to share PowerPoint presentations or documents, then you should gather all necessary files prior to your web conference. You should also run an Adobe Connect Pro connection test on your computer to ensure that your computer and network connections are equipped to provide the best possible Connect meeting experience. A connection test can be conducted at the Adobe website:

https://admin.adobe.acrobat.com/common/help/en/support/meeting_test.htm.

If you plan to share audio or video from a webcam or a microphone during your web conference, you should set it up and test it before your web conference. Be aware that setting up a webcam with a microphone, or another video or audio source, may require the installation of separate software, and therefore, take additional time to setup. This is something you will want to address prior to the start date and time of your web conference.

I also strongly recommend that you familiarize yourself with the functions of Adobe Connect Pro prior to your meeting, or even better, conduct a presentation rehearsal. Gather all necessary equipment and files and test all of the functions of Adobe Connect Pro that you plan to use, such as your designated web link used to enter the meeting, audio, video, screen share, recording, etc. And for the actual web conference, I highly recommend that you have a separate laptop that will not be used for presenting but simply as a way for you to login as a web conference participant to see exactly what your participants are viewing. I also highly recommend using a wired

Internet connection, as opposed to wireless, whenever possible to ensure a more stable connection.

Also, be sure to distribute any information that your web conference participants may need (e.g., the web conference meeting URL and any audio conferencing dial in number, if applicable) before the web conference begins. This will hopefully ensure that your participants are able to successfully connect to your web conference and minimize any technical issues that may cause a delay in starting the web conference. Instruct your participants to connect to the web conference prior to the actual start time so that there is adequate time to address any technical or connection issues.

PowerPoint Preparation

If you plan to share a PowerPoint presentation as a designated meeting host or presenter, when you login you will be prompted to install the Adobe Connect add-in. Depending on the speed of your computer, this should only take a minute or two. If you run the previously mentioned Adobe Connect Pro connection test on your computer, it will ensure that you have the necessary add-in installed.

When creating a PowerPoint presentation for Adobe Connect Pro, be conscientious of the font sizes you select to ensure that your web participants will be able to read your slides. The same principle applies for using intricate pictures, graphics and non-standard fonts. Since Adobe Connect Pro uses its own reader to view the presentation, in order to make sure all participants can view the content, it is best to use simple fonts, graphics, and animations. This is another instance when rehearsing your presentation and even logging in on a separate computer, as a participant, will be beneficial so that you can see your presentation just as your viewers will.

Screen share

Adobe Connect Pro enables you to share your computer screen with your viewers. In other words, screen sharing enables your audience to view what you have on your computer screen. You can share documents or even a PowerPoint by either doing a screen share or by uploading the documents you want your users to see directly to Adobe Connect Pro. But according to the Adobe Connect Pro website, (<http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobatconnectpro/faq/>): “When presenting or collaborating, it is a best practice to upload documents to the meeting rather than use screen share. Advantages include easy organization and preparation for presenters, a better and higher fidelity viewing experience for participants, lower bandwidth requirements, and improved collaboration and annotation with the whiteboard.”

However, often you may find yourself making last minute changes that do not enable you the time to upload your files to Adobe Connect Pro or a question might come up during the web conference in which you need to share your screen (i.e., do a screen share) to demonstrate something. More often than not you should not have any problems with doing an impromptu screen share. However, if you know in advance that you need to do a screen share and use a specific piece of software, then you should strive to open any applications you will use prior to the beginning of your presentation to avoid any delay waiting for them to open.

If you choose to utilize the screen share option, it is recommended that you use the screen resolution of 1024x768 to ensure that your participants can see your screen without demanding too much computer network bandwidth.

As a meeting host, you can also optimize the room bandwidth based on the type of network you are connected to, such as DSL or LAN. Your web conference

participants also have the option of selecting a connection speed based on the type of network they are connected on, such as DSL or LAN. These selections should help optimize the quality of the display for participants while balancing the network bandwidth requirements.

Audio

Adobe Connect Pro enables you to share audio with your participants. To add audio to your web conference there are a few options:

- Use a USB microphone, headset, or webcam with a microphone
- Use a telephone and audio bridge (not available on all systems)

If you choose to connect a webcam or microphone to your computer, the Adobe Connect software provides an audio setup wizard. Be sure to run this setup wizard and test prior to your web conference to make sure that your microphone is working correctly.

Although Adobe Connect Pro enables multiple hosts and presenters to add microphones, I recommend limiting the number of open microphones at one time to minimize the possible confusion caused by multiple individuals trying to talk all at once. Using a meeting moderator or agenda may also help organize the order of a web conference and help avoid these issues.

There is more than one Adobe Connect Pro server at our university. One of them has an audio bridge—which provides users with ability to dial in with a phone to get the audio—and one of them does not. There are benefits to using the integrated audio conferencing service in Adobe Connect Pro. For example, you can easily mute individuals, or all, audio connections if necessary. This can become helpful if a participant mistakenly puts his or her audio conference line on hold and hold music begins broadcasting to your entire meeting. If you are using an audio bridge in Adobe Connect Pro, be sure to instruct your audio conference participants not to put their phone line on hold.

Video

To broadcast video for your meeting, the setup process is similar to setting up a microphone. You can choose to use an external USB webcam connected to your computer or a built-in webcam (if your computer is already equipped with one). There are also video to USB adapters that you can use to connect various cameras to your computer, as long as you have the correct software drivers installed. Once you decide on a camera to use, simply select your camera and preview it to ensure that it is working correctly. Be aware that broadcasting video for your meeting can increase the necessary bandwidth required by your meeting participants.

Running a Web conference

As previously stated, I strongly recommend that you familiarize yourself with the functions of Adobe Connect Pro prior to your meeting. Also distinguish the differences between meeting user roles, such as host, presenter, and participant, so that you can appropriately assign these roles based on the desired level of function permissions. Setting up an additional laptop to view the meeting as a participant is also strongly recommended.

If applicable, allow time during your meeting for a question and answer period. If possible, assign a moderator, or someone to handle the Q&A and chat pods during the meeting, so that they do not distract you from the presentation.

Concluding Thoughts

Using Adobe Connect Pro can be beneficial because it enables individuals regardless of location to participate in a meeting, receive training, or view a presentation. All they need is a web browser and the Adobe Flash Player, which are typically already installed on most computers. Participants just click on a URL to be instantly connected to a meeting. If you work at the University of Colorado Denver and would like to learn more about using Adobe Connect Pro please contact either Educational Support Services or CU Online. However, if you work elsewhere, be sure to check out what web conferencing software your institution has available. Many of the best practices addressed in this chapter can help you deliver worry free web conferences regardless of the application used.

Additional Resources

Best Practices for Adobe Connect Pro web conferences:

https://admin.adobe.acrobat.com/_a295153/connectbestpractices/

Web conference Roles and User Interface Overview

https://admin.adobe.acrobat.com/_a227210/roles

For Participants: Participating in Your First Connect Pro Meeting (PDF):

<http://seminars.adobe.acrobat.com/vqs-participatemeeting/>

For Hosts or Presenters: Sharing Content During a Meeting:

http://help.adobe.com/en_US/AcrobatConnectPro/7.5/Using/WS0A9F9AB5-C032-457a-9350-16CBF56C4489.html

Bio

Jozianne Mestas is an Electronics Specialist in the Educational Support Services department at the University of Colorado Denver. She provides technical support to faculty, staff and students for distant learning courses delivered through videoconferencing. She also provides assistance with classroom equipment, computer support and web conferencing assistance using Adobe Connect Pro. She has a MA in Information and Learning Technologies with an emphasis on Adult Learning from the University of Colorado Denver, as well as a BA in Technical Communications from the Metropolitan State College of Denver.

Chapter 18

Lecture Capture Made Easy with Panopto

David Paul

At the Anschutz Medical Campus at the University of Colorado Denver, faculty and students alike were requesting an easy way to record face-to-face classroom lectures. As a result, Educational Support Services (ESS) staff at the Anschutz Medical Campus began researching different lecture capture platforms (also known as lecture recording systems). The following paragraphs describe the process we went through, the benefits of Panopto, and how faculty are using Panopto across the university.

What is Lecture Capture?

If you are new to the term, “lecture capture” is “an umbrella term describing any technology that allows instructors to record what happens in their classrooms and make it available digitally” (Educause, 2008). So while there are a range of applications available to simply record what happens in a classroom, most of the time when people talk about lecture capture they are actually talking about lecture capture enterprise level platforms implemented across a school, college or university to record classroom lectures. [For more about Lecture Capture see Educause’ “7 Things you should know about... Lecture Capture” at <http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ELI7044.pdf> (Educause, 2008).]

Why Panopto?

There are many different lecture capture platforms to choose from. Popular names include Tegrity, Camtasia Relay, and Echo360, and Accordant. In addition to Panopto, we tested Accordant and Echo 360. We dismissed other systems because they didn’t fit in with our configuration or required criteria. Each of the platforms we tested have some strengths and some weaknesses. In the end we end, we chose to license Panopto (<http://www.panopto.com>) because we were looking for a lecture capture platform that:



- Runs on computers already installed in classrooms
- Was easy for faculty to operate
- Required minimal technical staff support
- Could be automated to start and end automatically
- Interfaced with our LMS (Blackboard)
- Was reasonably priced

How it Works

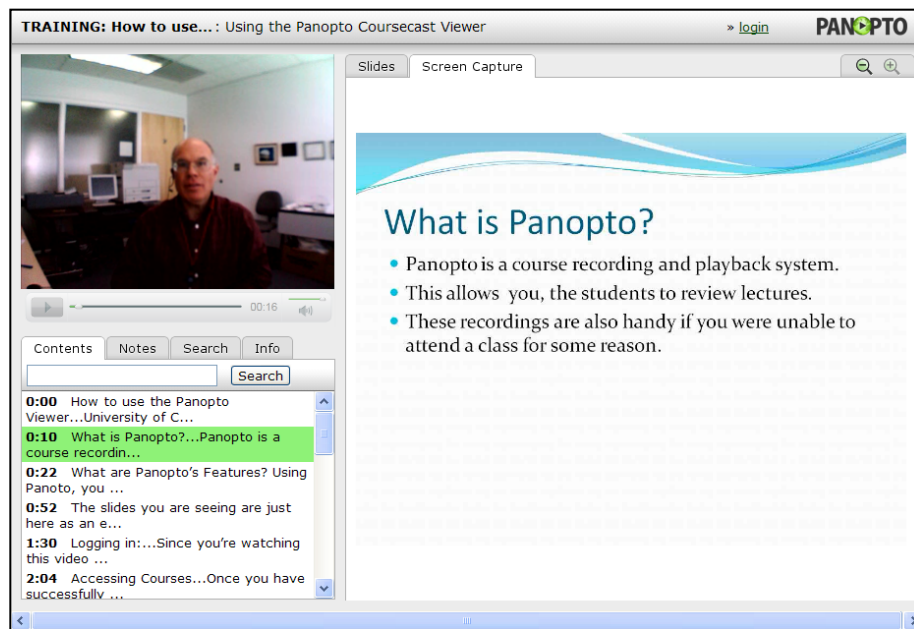
Nearly every classroom on the Anschutz Medical Campus is set up with at least one camera, a microphone, and a computer running Panopto. To record a lecture, the instructor, or a student assistant, starts the program, selects the correct course, verifies that they have a good video and audio signal via the preview window, clicks on the big

red “Record” button, and then continues to teach their class as they normally would. Once they are finished, they bring the Panopto window back up and click on the “Stop Recording” button.

Once they click stop recording, their lecture is automatically uploaded to a server and encoded. Panopto then generates a URL to the recording that can then be distributed to students via email or posted in a Learning Management System (e.g., eCollege or Blackboard). In fact, faculty who use Blackboard on our campuses benefit from Panopto’s Blackboard building block which allows students to access the Panopto recordings for their class through the corresponding Blackboard course shell. Links to recordings are automatically uploaded to the Blackboard server as soon as they are completed.

In addition to recording and distributing lectures, Panopto also has reporting features. This allows instructors and administrators to see how often their students are watching the recordings and can provide details on an individual student’s use. It can even tell you which part of the recordings students are watching.

For a more detailed demonstration of the system, click on the image below or simply go to: <http://coursecast.ucdenver.edu/CourseCast/Viewer/Default.aspx?id=02095990-acd1-4f67-811a-0030d6b37a23>



How it's Used

While lecture capture systems like Panopto can be used in a number of different ways, most faculty who use Panopto simply use it to record lectures they are already giving in a face-to-face setting. For instance, in the Schools of Medicine and Pharmacy, literally every class is recorded.

The recordings allow students to review past classes or to view lectures for classes they might have missed. If a student doesn't remember the session a particular subject

was covered, they can search by keywords because all of the PowerPoint slides are captured and indexed.

Moving Forward with Panopto

Implementing Panopto on the Anschutz Medical Campus has been a success. Certain programs have even hired student technology assistants to handle the recording duties, as well as assisting instructors with technical issues in the classroom. This approach has been very successful, ensuring high quality recordings, without the need for hiring additional staff. If you have any questions about Panopto, please contact Paul Herndon or David Paul.

Bio

David Paul has been working with academic technology since 1986. He is currently the Manager of Educational Technology at the University of Colorado Denver, primarily at the Anschutz Medical Campus (AMC). He has offered numerous workshops and presentations on learning management systems, classroom lecture capture, audience response systems and other technology tools for educators. David has been at the University of Colorado since 1993 and enjoys working with students, faculty and staff to

leverage educational technology in the classroom. David and his staff also manage the computer labs on both the CU Denver downtown and medical campuses, as well as supporting test processing, course/faculty evaluations, room scheduling and computer-based web conferencing at the AMC.

Chapter 19

Taking Class to the Airwaves: BlogTalkRadio

Connie L. Fulmer

This past year I discovered BlogTalkRadio while attending an educational leadership conference. The Executive Director at the conference reported that she was using BlogTalkRadio to interview various educational-leadership faculty members around the country on a variety of important policy and leadership topics. She explained how the interviews were available online at the organizations' BlogTalkRadio site (<http://www.blogtalkradio.com/ucea>) and that upcoming episodes could be attended live or listened to later in an on-demand format. I was intrigued by BlogTalkRadio. How did it work? And, how could I use it in my online classes?

BlogTalkRadio

BlogTalkRadio (www.blogtalkradio.com) is a free social networking tool that allows anyone anywhere to host a live Internet Talk



Radio show by using only a telephone and a computer. The tool allows “citizen broadcasters”—which I quickly defined as teachers and professors—to share content, conversations, interviews, and student presentations in a public world-wide forum. On top of that, the behind-the-scenes technology allows the seamless integration of BlogTalkRadio with Facebook, Twitter, and Ning.

To listen and follow shows, you simply need to create a free account by providing some basic information—a username, email, and a password. During the account creation process, you can also create a free radio talk show of your own. Each show is archived automatically and readily available in multiple formats: MP3, RSS subscription or iTunes. As a host of your own radio talk show, you have access to a customizable profile, where videos, a blog, or links to other websites or widgets can be added.

The basic free BlogTalkRadio account provides for up to five simultaneous guests with up to a two-hour time limit per show. You can also upgrade to a Premium Hosting Package that enables you to do the following:

- screen callers in a private room right from the hosting switchboard;
- host the show with a headset (rather than the phone); and
- schedule shows for up to three hours (the free package has a two-hour limit per show and can be scheduled in 15, 30 and 60 minute sessions).

The process for hosting a show is very easy. When you set up your BlogTalkRadio account, simply check a box to create a free radio show. Once you do this, you can create an upcoming episode at which time you will be given two phone numbers. The first phone number is for you to call into BlogTalkRadio to host the show. The second phone number is for guests. Using the second phone number, students can call into the show as guests. The phone numbers of guests calling into the live show appear on the host's switchboard page. The host can put a listener “on air” by simply clicking an icon beside the phone number. After the show those who missed the live show can download and listen to a recording of the show. Recordings can be linked or embedded into a variety of websites, a blog, or a Learning Management System (e.g., eCollege or

Blackboard). There are no limitations to how many users can listen live or to the recordings of your shows.

This new tool allows users/hosts to broadcast live from any website, to conduct interviews with multiple callers, or to moderate a dialogue with one or more guests. The opportunities to use this new tool at this point in time seemed endless to me. But if the idea of a talk-radio-show turns you off, think of BlogTalkRadio as a web-based conference call, with the capacity for five callers at a time with additional people in the queue. By using BlogTalkRadio, you are able to connect yourself to your intended audience by using just a phone and a computer. You can provide information, in a lecture format, or you can invite callers/listeners to respond to questions, or present information. I am using this tool in my current online class and I am very excited about the possibilities BlogTalkRadio provides for increasing the level of interactivity in my online classes.

Getting Started with BlogTalkRadio

I lost no time in clicking through the registration page, and in a few minutes, I created Leaders Mindset as my online identity. I decided immediately that I would use it in my first fully online class in the following semester. I read through all of the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) for BlogTalkRadio 101 (overview, virtual tour, getting started as a host, using the switchboard, and more). I set up an upcoming episode and contacted two of my colleagues to help test my first show. I added opening music to my scheduled show by uploading an audio file and then scripted out what I wanted to say.

My pilot was successful on multiple levels. One of my colleagues was able to make contact and be on the show. The other colleague was able to find the recorded session and listen to the archived show afterwards. For me, I was excited about hosting my first BlogTalkRadio show and about the possibilities of using this new tool in my online courses. However, I knew that planning was going to be very important. While I was experienced in teaching graduate students in face-to-face classes, this new format was going to be different. I would be sitting at my computer with my phone set on speakerphone. I'd be talking to a screen, assuming that my colleagues or students would be out there listening to the show. I had to figure out the best use of BlogTalkRadio for my students and myself in order to get started.

Prepping for Taking My Class to the Airways

My first question, was how best to use BlogTalkRadio. Any technological tool used in the service of teaching is only a tool. The learning experience has to be sound and well designed to facilitate student learning. If technology is to be used, the tool must support the intended learning goals. This particular online course was the sixth in a cohort of education doctorate students, who had been together in face-to-face classes. Some of these classes were hybrid, but students had interacted with each other in real time over the prior two semesters. They knew each other. I was the outsider to this learning community. So, my first choice was to use BlogTalkRadio as a vehicle for students to introduce themselves to me, the newcomer. My second choice for using BlogTalkRadio was to host students presenting their book reviews and leading a conversation about the contents of that book for our leadership course. Let me explain how I accomplished each of these goals.

Hosting Student Introductions on BlogTalkRadio

I shared with students how to access BlogTalkRadio at www.blogtalkradio.com and how to set up an account as listeners. I also provided them with information about the upcoming episode and shared with them the call in number so they could introduce themselves to me. Since my goal was to make class as asynchronous as possible, I provided two nights for these introductions, as well as an alternative way for those who couldn't attend either night to email me a personal introduction. I also prepared five questions designed to get students talking not only to each other but also to share their initial thoughts on leadership. The closing question was focused on something that perhaps others in the class may not already know about each student. Students were to prepare ahead of time talking points to answer the following questions:

1. What is your name?
2. Where do you now work and what is your role in that organization?
3. Why did you decide to apply for the Ed.D. program?
4. What are some of your initial thoughts about the word leadership (i.e., what is it, your experiences with leaders - good/bad, what kind of a leader you would like to become, what goals you think you will be able to accomplish as a leader, what you hope to learn in this course, other ideas you want to share about leadership)?
5. Something interesting about yourself (non-fiction) that you are willing to share that perhaps others in your class may not know about you (e.g., the alligator wrestling contest you won last year, that you've lived in eleven states so far, that you used to be a lawyer, or worked for the CIA).

As I participated in hosting these student introductions, I was keenly aware that as each student called in to BlogTalkRadio, how the format showcased each individual student. I was also aware from looking at the chat feature attached to the BlogTalkRadio show that other students were signed in and listening to these introductions. While most students introduced themselves on the first night—with fewer students picking the second night—when those last students introduced themselves the following evening, most all of the other students in the class were present in the chat feature to listen to these remaining introductions. Both of these sessions were recorded and archived for students to access later. I would definitely repeat this introductions strategy in a future online class.

Hosting Book Review Conversations on BlogTalkRadio

The second time I used BlogTalkRadio was to host Book Review conversations. Often when students do book reviews, the only person who gets to see the book reviews is the professor. This is unfortunate, because the professor more than likely has already read the book, and those who could benefit most from these reviews are the other students in the class. The plan for this group was to have each student select a book for review and to present the key points of the review in five PowerPoint slides or an equivalent format. They were then to upload the PowerPoint slides into eCollege (one of two learning management systems used at the University of Colorado Denver) so that other students could review their slides before each presentation. This approach would also enable students to view the slides while listening to the book conversation live on BlogTalkRadio. I then created a signup sheet using Google Docs for students to sign up for one of five slots on three different nights to conduct their book review.

After the initial preparation, it was finally show time. Students called in to the live show during their allotted time and engaged with me in a conversation about the book.

At the end of our conversation, each book reviewer asked listeners to call in and give their responses to the following questions—given to them (i.e., the listeners) prior to the activity:

- What is the takeaway point of the book for me?
- How could I use the ideas in this book as a tool for leaders, leadership, or leading?

In this fashion, the book review assignment benefited not only students reviewing individual books but also the students listening. A threaded discussion was provided along with the link to the recording for students not able to attend the book reviews live, so that all could participate in the activity.

Final Thoughts about BlogTalkRadio

Getting set up in BlogTalkRadio was easy. The harder part was thinking through the actual “performance” of hosting a live show focused on facilitating student learning. Starting with the goals for each of these activities, I did my best to think through the best possible use of this new tool to reach those learning and performance goals for students. Even though I had never scripted what I intended to say in my face-to-face classes, after listening to the recording of my pilot session with BlogTalkRadio, I felt compelled to script all future class sessions. With a script in front of me and the agenda in front of my students, I felt more confident in how this online session would go, especially when working with real students in a live online class session.

While I was aware of how important the scripting was for me in planning for these sessions, I also realized by listening to students when they introduced themselves to me how important preparing those talking points was for them. Most students focused on their answers. They came across as more polished and knowing some of the nuances of leadership. Other students came across with an unfocused delivery that gave little evidence of their preparation for the session. I believe the process of providing structure to BlogTalkRadio sessions in the form of question prompts, asking students to prepare talking points ahead of time, and showcasing individual student responses in a web-based talk-radio format, heightened student motivation and engagement, and produced higher level responses from students on planned topics of interest to all.

While BlogTalkRadio is a new tool for me, I am enjoying thinking and planning for all of the possibilities of this new tool for enhancing and increasing the interactivity of my online courses. Do yourself a favor and check out BlogTalkRadio! Be sure to send me information about upcoming episodes of your live show. I hope you enjoy using BlogTalkRadio in your teaching as much as I have.

Bio

Connie Fulmer earned her Ph.D. in Educational Administration at The Pennsylvania State University and started her academic career at Northern Illinois University. In July of 2000, Connie joined the Administrative Leadership and Policy Studies (ALPS) faculty here at UCD and served in the following leadership positions: Program Chair of the ALPS Principal Licensure Program, Coordinator of Administrative Leadership and Policy Studies Division, Teacher Education Division Director, and Program Chair of all programs in the School of Education and Human Development (SHED).

Chapter 20

Supporting Faculty Through Podcasting

Anna Thai

&

Brian Yuhnke

In today's world of academia, you may all be quite familiar with this scenario. It's the start of yet another year and you are in the midst of getting your courses ready for the semester. You've just come back from a conference and are completely overwhelmed by buzz words such as “Web 2.0,” “Podcasts,” “Twitter,” “Social Media,” “Micro-blogging,” “RSS,” “Wiki,” “Blogs,” “Second Life,” “Cloud Computing” and so on. You'd love to integrate some of these technologies into your class but have no idea where to begin. It's beginning to feel like technology has become your biggest enemy.

Well you are not alone, here at CU Online—like similar departments at other institutions—we strive to find different ways to help faculty make sense of technology and find ways to meaningfully use technology in their classrooms. We hold workshops, conferences, and work one-on-one with faculty (see Lowenthal & Thomas, 2010 for a description of other ways we support faculty). But one day during a brainstorming session, it occurred to us that the University community could benefit from a weekly podcast that helps faculty and staff stay in “tune” with technology. The light bulb came on and TechHEds was born. In the following paragraphs, we share our experience creating TechHEds—a weekly podcast we created for faculty. While neither of us work at the University of Colorado Denver anymore and TechHEds is no longer produced, in the following pages we will share our experience supporting faculty through podcasting in hopes of motivating some of you to start your own weekly podcast.

What is a Podcast?

I'm sure you have all heard of the word “podcast” before, but do you know what it means? Wikipedia describes a podcast as “a series of digital media files (either audio or video) that are released episodically and often downloaded through web syndication” (“Podcast,” 2010, para 1). Typically, a podcast is a series of audio files (e.g., mp3 files) published regularly that users can subscribe to and listen to. Users have the ability to download each episode of a podcast onto any mp3 audio device such as an Apple iPod, Microsoft Zune or Creative Zen. Accessing a podcast though is not just limited to an mp3 audio device; you can also play the audio or video file on your computer by accessing it directly from a website (e.g., National Public Radio's http://www.npr.org/rss/podcast/podcast_directory.php) or download it to the desktop of your computer and listen to it using a media player such as Windows Media Player, RealPlayer or iTunes.

The word podcast originally derived its name from the iPod manufactured by Apple Inc. But podcasts and podcasting did not originate from Apple, and it does not require owning an iPod to listen/or view podcasts. Many early podcasters adopted the term. Then in the summer of 2005, Apple added podcasting support to iTunes allowing iPod users to subscribe and listen to podcasts. It's no surprise that the term “podcast” stuck. Today many explain that a Podcast stands for **P**ersonal **O**n**D**emand **C**ast.

A great thing about podcasts—especially audio podcasts—is that they are easy and fairly inexpensive to produce. A full production studio is far from necessary to begin podcasting and if you already have access to a desktop computer or laptop, this can easily be done for under \$50 (though you can of course spend much more). The basic equipment needed to start creating a podcast includes the following: (a) a computer (PC or Mac); (b) a USB microphone or headset microphone; and (c) audio recording software (see Table 1 for more specifics on microphones and software).

Table 1. Podcasting Tools

Tool	Options
USB Microphone	Logitech http://www.logitech.com/en-au/speakers-audio/microphones Zoom H1 Handy Recorder http://www.zoom.co.jp/english/products/h1/ Snowball http://www.bluemic.com/snowball/
USB Headset Microphone	Logitech http://www.logitech.com/en-au/webcam-communications/internet-headsets-phones
Software	Audacity http://audacity.sourceforge.net free and cross platform (PC / Mac) GarageBand http://www.apple.com/ilife/garageband/ Comes standard on new Macs (Mac) Adobe Audition (PC) http://www.adobe.com/products/audition/
Resources	Audacity http://audacity.sourceforge.net/manual-1.2/tutorials.html http://www.how-to-podcast-tutorial.com/17-audacity-tutorial.htm Podcast FAQ http://www.podcastfaq.com/creating-podcast GarageBand http://www.devdaily.com/apple/mac/garage-band-create-podcast/

If you really enjoy creating podcasts, one thing you will soon realize is that though adequate, your current setup will never seem to be enough. The TechHEds team began recording in a tiny studio roughly the size of a closet and later expanded into a more “professional” studio that included higher end equipment, video cameras, and a TriCaster that publishes a live video version of the show.

We recommend though that you start with a simple setup and only build on it over time if your needs dictate it.

TechHEds and Other Educational Uses of Podcasts

As we touched on earlier, we started thinking about how to use podcasting to support our University community a few years ago. We came to the conclusion that faculty—just like students—could benefit from some of the conveniences of podcasting. So we created TechHEds, a weekly podcast to help faculty stay in “tune” with technology. There have been over 75 episodes of TechHEds covering content from academic dishonesty to teaching with games, to music in learning.

In addition to creating audio podcasts, the TechHEds team produced a couple of video podcasts, which are downloadable short videos. The following are two examples.



TechHEds Video Podcast #1 Twitter

<http://www.viddler.com/player/29baaf11/>



TechHEds Video Podcast #2 Google Docs

<http://www.viddler.com/player/f274a002/>

From our perspective, TechHEds was a success. In addition to helping faculty stay in tune with advances in technology in higher education, we strived to model ways faculty might use podcasting their own classrooms. For instance, podcasts can be used as a creative way to introduce yourself to your online class. Podcasts can also be used to give your students a break from reading another tedious chapter by recording short lectures' as audio or video podcasts. Finally, you can even have your students create podcasts instead of a traditional paper or presentation.

Concluding Thoughts

We hope we have added a little inspiration for you to go out and start creating your own podcasts. Whether it is a short introduction of yourself for your students or spicing up a lecture, the topics are endless! Feel free to contact us at CU Online. We don't want you to walk away feeling like technology is your enemy, but rather we strive to help you gain the confidence you need to embrace technology with open arms. The popularity of podcasting has and will continue to grow, so we encourage you to challenge yourself and find creative ways to integrate podcasting into your classroom.

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Bios

Anna Thai has returned to the land down under and is currently working as a LMS Infrastructure Technologist at Victoria University. In between researching and testing emerging technologies for implementation, her work experiences in both Australia and America and given her the opportunity to outreach to faculty. She has a MS in Information and Communication Sciences from Ball State University and hopes to return to Colorado to pursue her PhD in Educational Technology.

Brian Yuhnke adamantly believes that if teaching is boring for the faculty then it is even more so for the students. Brian is motivated to engage faculty in the use of technology to make learning fun and innovative. He is an Instructional Designer at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio, and an Instructor for the School of Education and Higher Development at the University of Colorado Denver. Prior to moving to Cleveland, Brian did sensational stuff with video, supported web conferencing and online lecture recording, researched emerging technologies and all kinds of other randomness for CU Online at the University of Colorado Denver. He has earned a MEd in Instructional Technology and a Bachelor of Arts in Video and Audio Production from Kent State University.

Chapter 21

Using Reflection Surveys to Improve Teaching and Learning

Jackie Dobrovolny

&

Patrick R. Lowenthal

Faculty are being held accountable these days for quality teaching, student learning, and student satisfaction like never before (Lowenthal, 2008). While research and publishing are in many ways still the sine qua non for faculty success and promotion as well as institutional prestige (Boyer, 1990), more emphasis is being placed on quality teaching these days (Lowenthal, 2008). At the University of Colorado Denver, like many other institutions, end-of-course student evaluations (called FCQ's) are one of, and unfortunately more often than not, the most often used method to assess how well individual faculty are teaching. And while research suggests that these evaluations can be useful and even improve *aspects* of teaching if used in certain ways (e.g., with a consultant or a peer) (McKeachie, 1997), these evaluations often suffer from a number of weaknesses (see McKeachie, 1997). For instance, researchers have expressed concern regarding how such things as class size, grading leniency, workload, and even learning environment and delivery format influence these evaluations (d'Apollonia & Abrami, 1997; Greenwald & Gillmore, 1997; Kelly, Ponton, & Rovai, 2007; Marsh & Roche, 1997). While the average faculty member tends to be suspicious of their value, these evaluations appear to do a decent job of measuring student satisfaction. Issues of selectively and inconsistently using these evaluations for tenure and promotion aside, perhaps the biggest problem we find with these evaluations is that faculty often do not receive their end-of-course student evaluations for weeks, if not months after the semester. This is too late to fix any problems with the course in question. Instead, faculty have to wait to make adjustments to the course and their teaching strategies until the next time they teach the course in question.

In addition to this timing problem, in our experience, every group of students is slightly different. So, if we make revisions to the spring version of course B, based on end-of-course student evaluations from the fall version of course B, we may address a problem that does not exist. We may also make a change that creates problems with this different group of students.

To address this problem, we began using periodic reflection surveys in our courses. We started using them a number of years ago in our face-to-face courses but over time we began using them in our online courses as well. Basically, we use these periodic reflection surveys to customize our courses to each group of students, to help students link new information to their prior experiences, and to encourage students to establish a reflective approach to their career. In the following chapter, we describe how we use reflection surveys, some lessons we have learned, and some tips for ways you can use reflection surveys in your courses.

Background

The focus of this chapter is on how reflection surveys can help faculty improve the instructional quality of their courses and meet the needs of their students. The research on the effectiveness of reflection, as a learning strategy, is expansive and consistent. Fosnot (1996) argues that reflection is the driving force of learning. Jonnasen and Reeves (1996) define reflection as deliberate and careful thinking that enables us to make sense of our experiences. And Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985) suggest that reflection is an interpretative process of abstracting meaning in an effort to understand reality.

While research argues for the importance of reflection, in our experience, most students need some structure and encouragement to engage in reflection and that is where reflection surveys come in. Our students benefit from reflection surveys because many of the questions we ask require them to carefully think about their learning experiences, how those experiences link to their prior experiences, and what additional questions or concerns they have about the new information they are trying to learn.

Reflection surveys also help us. For instance, we, as faculty, benefit from reflection surveys in that they provide data with which to engage in continuous improvement, perhaps even “real time” improvement. Given these benefits, we are now going to describe how we use reflection surveys in our courses.

How We Use Reflection Surveys

In our online courses, we administer a four to six item reflection survey to our students at the end of each unit; each unit is two weeks long. See Figure 1 for an example of what one looks like. While we currently use the Google Docs form tool (which is shown below in Figure 1) to administer these surveys, we have also used SurveyMonkey in the past. In fact, essentially any survey tool could work. In our case, we strive to find a tool that is easy to use and enables students the option to provide anonymous feedback if they want. We have experimented with making these reflection surveys optional as well as assigning points. In our experience, we get a much better response rate (and therefore better data to improve our courses) if we assign points for this assignment while at the same time giving students the ability to provide anonymous feedback. Students in our courses currently earn 25 points for completing each survey. Students have approximately three days to complete the survey once it is administered.

Course	Author
Unit 2 Applicable objectives Questions?? Dreamweaver Basics CSS Basics LT & ID videos 1. Small Group Discuss 2. Small Group Discuss Fun: Instructional Comics Unit 1 Reflection Survey Results Reflection Survey	INTE 5670 Unit 2 Fall 2011 Reflection Survey 1. Your name (in order to earn your 25 points for this reflection assignment) 2. What is your take-away from this unit? That is, what important, surprising or things did you learn over the past two weeks?

Figure 1. An example of a reflection survey

The questions we include in the reflection surveys are different for each unit.

We typically include a few questions based on the unique discussions, assignments, and / or problems in the current unit. However, we also always include the following question: “Additional comments, questions, concerns, issues, suggestions for improvement?”

The answers to the questions we ask provide us with the data with which to improve the course and customize it to meet the needs of the students in the course. Additionally we strive to make this a 360 degree feedback loop. So, after students answer the questions on each reflection survey, we compile all of their answers anonymously to each question and respond to themes and patterns, as well as individual answers. We then post our responses to their feedback in the course shell for every student to read and comment on if they want (see Figure 2). We have found this to be a very effective way to (a) be “real” with our students and have informal exchanges with them, (b) elaborate on course topics, (c) clarify misconceptions, (d) calm fears and anxiety, and (e) ask them for suggestions on what we can do to help them be successful in the course.

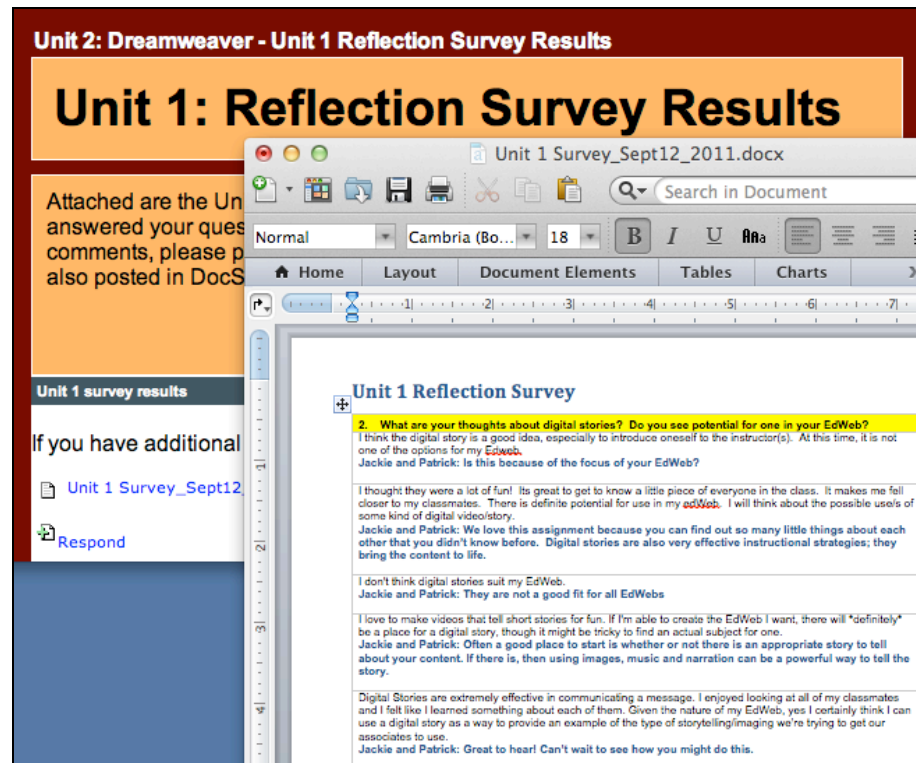


Figure 2. An example of a reflection survey results document with our responses posted as an attachment in a threaded discussion.

Another benefit of these end-of-unit reflection surveys is that students tell us that they get a sense of community and camaraderie in reading the results of the reflection surveys. In other words, the reflection survey results documents seem to help students feel that they are a part of a group or community of learners.

Tips on Using Reflection Surveys

So based on our experience using reflection surveys, we recommend the following:

- **Identify Timing of Surveys Ahead of Time:** If possible, decide how often and therefore how many reflection surveys you want to administer during a given semester. While we administer surveys every unit, you might decide to administer yours only 2-3 times during a semester.
- **Identify Purpose of Surveys:** Identify the focus of your reflection surveys. In other words, do you simply want to check-in to see if students are happy, struggling, and so forth or do you want to use your reflection surveys much like we have in which you inquire not only about students' satisfaction but also about how they are acquiring specific knowledge.
- **Consider the Power of Anonymity:** Decide whether you want the surveys to always be anonymous, never be anonymous, or to give students the choice on whether they want to submit their feedback anonymously. Since we assign points, we ask students to share their name with us but we do not include any student names in the results document we share with students. We think it is important for us to have student names for the occasional situation where we want to contact a person individually to work on a problem they expressed or a misconception they described in the survey. However, because we use Google Docs to administer the survey and do not make the first question about their name a required question, students always have the ability to submit feedback about the course anonymously.
- **Consider Adding Points:** Decide whether or not you will assign points to the survey or not. If you are making the surveys completely anonymous, it is basically impossible to assign points (unless you give everyone points regardless of whether they completed the survey or not). If you are going to administer reflection surveys each week or unit, we highly recommend assigning points for the assignment because in our experience students take it more seriously and their answers are more thoughtful.
- **Explain the Purpose of the Reflection Surveys in the Syllabus:** Clearly explain what the reflection surveys are, how they will be used, when they will be administered, and if points are associated with them.
- **Be Consistent:** Once you decide when and how often you will administer the reflection surveys, be sure to follow through on it. Also strive to be consistent with how you handle the surveys. For instance, if you plan to make the results of the survey's public in the course shell, be sure to always do that. We try to post the results within five days of the close date on the survey and we post the results in a threaded discussion so students can comment or ask additional questions.
- **Ask Qualitative and Quantitative Questions:** While quantitative questions can provide quick and easy feedback—especially in a tool like Google Docs

where the form tool will calculate the results for you, we find that we get the most useful and thoughtful information through open-ended qualitative questions. While they take longer to read and summarize, we often find we get results we never expect. Here are some open-ended questions we ask:

--What is the most important thing you learned in this unit?

--What three words best describe your thoughts about this course so far?

--What did you find surprising or interesting in the small group discussions?

--What questions or concerns do you have about

--How are you feeling about (name of major assignment)? What can we do to help?

--How will you apply (name of chapter or article) to your professional life?

--What did you learn from the (name of assignment)?

Concluding Thoughts

We have been using reflection surveys in our online courses for a number of years now. Asking students for their feedback, then responding to their feedback, and then sharing our responses to their feedback has been one of the single best things we have done in the courses we teach. We highly recommend that you begin using them in some way in your online courses. While they add a little work, we are confident you won't be disappointed!

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Bios

Jackie Dobrovolsky, Ph.D. is currently a Clinical Professor, teaching online graduate courses, in the Information and Learning Technologies (ILT) program at the University of Colorado Denver (UCD). Her dissertation focused on how adults learn from online, self-paced instruction and she replicated her dissertation research methodology with the Mountain Plains Aids Education and Training Center (MPAETC), which is part of UCD. She also taught online for Capella University. Jackie thinks one of the important issues in online instruction is whether the instruction is group-paced, like the courses she and Patrick co-teach, or whether the instruction is self-paced, like the preceptor training course she recently developed for nurses in health care facilities throughout the US.

Patrick R. Lowenthal is an Academic Technology Coordinator at CU Online at the University of Colorado Denver. He is also a doctoral student studying instructional design and technology in the School of Education and Human Development. His research interests focus on instructional communication, with a specific focus on social and teaching presence. He also has a MA in Instructional Design and Technology as well as a MA in the Academic Study of Religion.

Part 3

Emerging Tools and Applications

Android

www.android.com

Free, open source mobile platform

what is it?

Mobile phones, like computers, run an operating system. Android is Google's attempt to provide a powerful, low-cost mobile phone operating system that can compete with devices such as the Blackberry or the iPhone. Unlike some of its competitors, the Android operating system is open source which allows mobile phone companies to modify the system to their liking. This means that there are many different versions of the Android OS. Having an open source platform means that Android-powered devices such as the Droid, The My Touch and the Nexus One are available on a variety of carriers at a competitive price.

educational use?

For the most part, an operating system is an operating system. Educators should not have to worry about the platform they use to run their applications. In the case of Android, Google makes it clear that the future does not belong to the iPhone, the Blackberry or any other system. The educational use of Android or mobile computing in general has yet to be realized. However, futurists predict that mobile computing—whether with phones or tablets—is one of the next big trends in education.

pros & cons?

Every phone platform has its proponents and detractors. As a Google phone system, Android comes with built-in integration with Google tools—such as Gmail, Google Maps and Google Docs. However, multiple versions of Android means that many phones aren't running the latest OS.

what's it cost?

New Android-based phones typically run from \$150 and up, depending on the mobile carrier and phone contracts

alternatives?

iOS

Windows Phone 7

resources?

<http://www.android.com>

Ardour

www.ardour.org

A digital audio workstation

what is it?

Ardour is a digital audio application that allows you to record, edit and mix multi-track audio. You can produce your own CDs, mix video soundtracks, or just experiment with new ideas about music and sound. Ardour's capabilities include: multichannel recording, non-destructive editing with unlimited undo/redo, full automation support, a powerful mixer, unlimited tracks/busses/plugins, timecode synchronization, and hardware control.

educational use?

Ardour is a great tool to record and edit a lecture for class. Students can also use Ardour tool to record themselves for a presentation or class assignment.

pros & cons?

Ardour is currently only supported on OSX and Linux platforms.

what's it cost?

Ardour is free, but donations are recommended.

alternatives?

Notable competitor's of Ardour are Audacity and Apple's GarageBand.

resources?

Ardour Support is located at: <http://ardour.org/support>

Aviary

www.aviary.com

Edit images and audio online

what is it?

According to its website, Aviary is “a suite of powerful creative applications that you can use right in your web browser”. From image editing, to applying various effects, to even editing audio, Aviary is a great imaging and audio editing suite of applications.

educational use?

Aviary is so versatile that faculty, students and staff can utilize this as a teaching, learning and resource tool. Whether you want to create a quick banner for your online course or create a simple audio announcement, Aviary is the tool for you.

pros & cons?

Aviary offers similar functionalities as other imaging and audio editing software, but for free! One possible drawback of Aviary is that it is a web-based application and therefore you must have access to the Internet to use it.

what's it cost?

Aviary offers a free and a premium plan. The Premium Pro Plan costs \$24.99 per year.

alternatives?

Picnik (<http://www.picnik.com/>) is a notable competitor of Aviary, however, Picnik cannot edit audio or create vector-based images.

resources?

Aviary Tutorials

<http://aviary.com/tutorials>

<http://aviary.com/userwiki>

Blabberize

blabberize.com

Animate a picture with sound

what is it?

Blabberize allows you to upload a photo, add sound/recorded message and then animate the mouth so that it appears that the image is talking.

educational use?

Blabberize is a fun tool that can be used as an ice breaker during the first week of class. Students and faculty can select a picture of a person, animal, avatar or any other object with a mouth, record a message and then Blabberize it—that is, make the mouth move in the picture to say a recorded message. The topic could range from a favorite class, most memorable teacher, or a favorite color. Blabberize could also be a fun way to provide a weekly overview in an online course.

pros & cons?

The best thing about Blabberize is its overall simplicity and ease to use.

what's it cost?

Blabberize is free to use

alternatives?

Notable competitors are Voki and Xtranormal.

resources?

Cacoo

cacoo.com

Collaboratively create diagrams online

what is it?

Cacoo is a free online drawing tool. People can create such things as mind maps, site maps, and network charts with Cacoo. Cacoo offers multiple users the ability to collaborate on diagrams together in real time. Cacoo also offers users the ability to comment on diagrams and embed them in other blogs or websites.

educational use?

Cacoo can be used by faculty and/or students to create graphical organizers and other types of diagrams or mind maps.

pros & cons?

Perhaps the best part of Cacoo is how easy it is to create diagrams and mind maps as well as the ability to collaboratively create diagrams that then can be embedded into webpages.

what's it cost?

It's free to use. But they also offer paid accounts with additional features.

alternatives?

Some alternatives are Mindmeister (<http://www.mindmeister.com>), Microsoft Visio (<http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/visio/>), Bubbl.us (<http://bubbl.us>), DropMind (<http://web.dropmind.com>), and Inspiration (<http://www.inspiration.com>).

resources?

Cacoo Video

<http://vimeo.com/7502521>

Chrome

www.google.com/chrome

Free lightweight and fast web browser

what is it?

Chrome is a cross platform web browser developed and launched by Google in 2008. It has begun to set the benchmark for its speed in processing web pages and has been noted for its unique minimalistic interface. A unique feature of Chrome is the “omnibox.” The omnibox keeps the interface simple by merging the search box (web, bookmarks and history) and address box into one.

educational use?

Google Chrome integrates well with web 2.0 apps like, Delicious, Picnik and Flickr as well as the Google suite of applications such as Docs, Gmail and Blogger. Chrome has a feature allowing users to open web pages in an “incognito” window. This window displays web pages without saved cookies and login information as if the page was opened on a separate computer. This feature can be used for testing applications and websites without being logged in.

pros & cons?

Google Chrome is the highest performing web browser around and still manages to maintain a light footprint on your systems resources. Its innovative interface and features will change the way you use the Internet. Chrome is optimized for standards compliant websites and can perform poorly on nonstandard compliant learning management systems such as BlackBoard and eCollege.

what's it cost?

Free to use.

alternatives?

Alternative web browsers include Microsoft's Internet Explorer (<http://www.microsoft.com/nz/windows/internet-explorer/default.aspx>), Mozilla Firefox (<http://www.mozilla.com/en-US/firefox/firefox.html>), Opera (<http://www.opera.com>), and Apple's Safari (<http://www.apple.com/safari/>).

resources?

Chrome Introduction Comic

<http://www.google.com/googlebooks/chrome/index.html>

Chrome Help Documentation

<http://www.google.com/support/chrome/?hl=en>

Chrome Introduction Video

<http://www.whatbrowser.org/en>

Clicker

www.clicker.com

An online TV Guide for Web Video

what is it?

Want to know what's on TV? Look at the TV Guide. Want to know what's showing online? Well, checkout clicker.com. This meta-guide for video on the Internet classifies shows into genres and provides an easy to use search engine. Is last week's Nightline online? Miss an episode of the Daily Show and want to see if it's posted? Search clicker.com, get your answer and even watch the program on their site.

educational use?

Looking for some video about Frank Lloyd Wright? A quick search reveals a Ken Burns produced PBS documentary. Like to show some political commentary on the Obama presidency? There are scores of videos available from both sides of the aisle.

Because the service indexes videos from free sources like Hulu as well as paid sources, such as Netflix and Amazon, it is easy to find out what's available to your students.

Clicker.com makes finding video relevant to your courses a breeze.

pros & cons?

Having a search engine focused on commercially produced video is a great boon to faculty looking for professional online video to assign to students.

Of course, many times, the search comes up blank. Not everything you'd like to watch is available online.

what's it cost?

The service is free. But some movies that are indexed are from pay sources.

alternatives?

Google or Bing allow for searching of video assets.

resources?

About Clicker.com

<http://www.clicker.com/about/>

FAQ

<http://www.clicker.com/faq/>

Createdebate

www.createdebate.com

Organize online debates

what is it?

Pick a question and choose two sides. In a discussion forum-like system, participants debate the pros and cons of the question, vote each others' comments up and down, and cast votes for the side that they think makes the most sense.

Visual and easy-to-use, this website makes debating controversial subjects easy to start and simple to manage.

educational use?

While plenty of online discussion forum tools work well for stimulating conversation, createdebate.com's streamlined system helps visually demonstrate how sides present their cases, keeps track of how the conversation is going and makes it easy to find out what a group of people think.

In the paid version, instructors can also add grades to participation and manage classroom-focused conversations.

pros & cons?

The free version provides both public and private options. Private options require that students create accounts and the instructor manually adds students to the debate. Public debates are open to anyone on the site to view and participate.

While the paid version does not integrate with course management systems, it does provide additional tools useful for managing class-level debates.

what's it cost?

The basic service is free. A \$99 a year account allows an instructor to manage up to a 250 students in a debate community.

alternatives?

Any online discussion forum can be set up to facilitate debates.

resources?

<http://www.createdebate.com/tour>

Doodle

www.doodle.com

Coordinate meetings with ease

what is it?

Ever need to find the best day to schedule a meeting with a bunch of different people? Need to decide where to go to lunch with a big group? Want to make sure everyone doesn't bring meatloaf to the next potluck? Doodle provides a simple tool for setting up polls that let people make selections and display the results back to the group.

educational use?

Whether coordinating meetings with faculty, administrators or students, it takes only a few minutes to set up a Doodle poll. Email the poll link to the participants and they select the days that work for their schedule. Once everyone has replied, you simply look for the column total with the most available participants and select that day.

The same system would work for selecting what to bring to a group picnic to doling out topics to students. Simply set up a poll and have participants reply. They can type in what they will bring or the subject for a class report. As new participants come to add to the poll, they can see what has already been taken.

Fast, flexible, and free, Doodle is an elegant solution to a tricky problem of coordinating groups.

pros & cons?

Doodle works so well at what it does, that eventually you will find you want it to do things that it doesn't. But if you can deal with its straightforward approach to group polls, then there's nothing not to like about this tool.

what's it cost?

It's free to use but they now offer paid accounts with additional features as well.

alternatives?

When all participants are Exchange users, the Outlook tools work well to coordinate meetings.

Google Forms works well when coordinating input from a group of people, but it is not as effective at coordinating meetings.

Whenisgood.net is another application for scheduling meetings.

resources?

About Doodle

<http://www.doodle.com/about/about.html>

Dropbox

www.dropbox.com

Sync your files online and across your computers

what is it?

Do you ever struggle managing files across multiple computers? Well, Dropbox might be the answer to your file management problems. Dropbox is an online file storage application that synchronizes files across multiple computers. So this is how it works. Setup an account at www.dropbox.com and then download and install the Dropbox application on each computer you regularly use. From there, all of the files placed in the Dropbox are automatically stored (and synchronized) online on Dropbox's secure server. The files can then be accessed from any computer, mobile device, or even at the Dropbox website. This gives you the ability to access the files you need at any time, from any computer. Say goodbye to thumb drives!

educational use?

Some educational benefits of Dropbox are that it enables faculty and students the ability to access their files (whether the files are resources or assignments for a course) as well as an easy way to share large files (e.g., large PowerPoint presentations or videos) that cannot easily be emailed due to their size.

pros & cons?

The best thing about Dropbox is how easy it works. There are other alternatives out there, but none of them seem to work as seamlessly across PC's and Mac's as Dropbox does. Dropbox also keeps 30 days of history for all your files so you can essentially go back in time and undelete or undo changes to files. Perhaps its biggest drawback is its pricing structure.

what's it cost?

The basic account is free and comes with 2gb of storage. However, if you want more storage than that, you will need to sign up for either a Pro50 account (which comes with 50gb of storage) for \$9.99/month or a Pro100 account (which comes with 100gb of storage) for \$19.99/month.

alternatives?

There are a number of alternatives to Dropbox. Some alternatives include, Skydrive (<http://skydrive.live.com>), box (<http://boxnet>), and SpikerOak (<http://spideroak.com>).

resources?

Dropbox Tour

<http://www.dropbox.com/tour>

Gimp

www.gimp.org

Manipulate images for free

what is it?

Gimp is an open source, free image manipulation program. Its primary purpose is to retouch and edit images. Gimp can also be used to create basic animated images and offers many of the same features as higher end software such as Photoshop.

educational use?

Since Gimp can be run on multi-platforms, faculty, students, and staff can utilize this as a teaching, learning, or research tool. Gimp gives you all the benefits of an easy to use editing tool you can use to jazz up an image for a class project, a course banner for an online course, or simply your favorite family photo, but also offers more advanced editing features.

pros & cons?

This very powerful tool gives you all the benefits and features of a full-packaged editing software for free. From adding multiple layers, visual effects, palette selection, this tool has become quite a popular tool even among professional users.

what's it cost?

Free to use.

alternatives?

A notable competitor of Gimp would be Adobe Photoshop due to its increase functionality.

resources?

User Manual

<http://www.gimp.org/docs/>

Tutorials

<http://www.gimp.org/tutorials/>

Google Calendar

www.google.com/calendar

A free time-management application

what is it?

Google calendar is a free application that allows users to create and share events with each other. However, you must have a Google account to use Google Calendar. Since it is a web-based application, all events scheduled are stored online. This enables you to access your calendar and events from any location. You can also create customizable reminders so you will never miss an important event again!

educational use?

Faculty and students can easily schedule and monitor events with each other—whether that be important classes, guest lectures, or even when certain assignments are due. Google calendar can also be accessed on any smart phone thus making it more accessible than ever.

pros & cons?

Google Calendar is free to use and has the ability to sync with other email applications such as Microsoft Outlook, Apple iCal and Mozilla Sunbird. Another benefit of using Google Calendar is that you can share your schedule with other Google Calendar users.

what's it cost?

Free to use.

alternatives?

A notable competitor is Windows Live Calendar.

resources?

Calendar Help

<http://www.google.com/support/calendar/?hl=en>

Google Goggles

www.google.com/mobile/goggles

Visual searches on your mobile phone

what is it?

Goggles turns Android-based or iPhones into visual search engines. Simply point your phone's camera at a book, take a picture, and Google will return search results based on the book title—including online availability and reviews. Goggles can also help identify landmarks, works of art, logos and business cards.

educational use?

The future looks bright for visual search. Sending students to an art museum with a Goggles-powered device can turn the trip into an active experience. When looking at a painting, they can easily find information about the work on the Web.

pros & cons?

Even Google admits that Goggles is in its early stages. The search often cannot recognize simple things. But as the capability grows, expect to see widespread use of search based on images, instead of just text.

what's it cost?

Free to use.

alternatives?

<http://www.bing.com/visualsearch>

resources?

A helpful video demonstrating the application:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HhgFz0zPmH4>

Google Sites

sites.google.com

A free and easy way to create and share webpages

what is it?

Google Sites is a free website creation tool that enables users to create a website with a single click of a mouse. Webpages can be created from dozens of pre-built templates. Their website boasts that “Google Sites is powerful enough for a company intranet, yet simple enough for a family website.” Some of the features of Google Sites include the ability to easily use Google Analytics to track your sites statistics, the ability to control who has access to your site, and finally the ability to easily add other Google resources (e.g., Google Calendar, Google Docs, and so on) and widgets.

educational use?

Google Sites can be used to set up a course website as well as individual student websites or group projects. But faculty could also use Google Sites to setup a personal website to promote their scholarship.

pros & cons?

The greatest thing about Google Sites is how easy it is to create a website. You can also set up your own domain (for a small fee) so that Google Sites essentially becomes the content management system of your personal website. Some drawbacks to Google Sites are that you do not have full control to edit the CSS and HTML on your web pages and there are storage limits.

what's it cost?

It's free to set up and use an individual account. However, there is also Premier Edition that companies can license.

alternatives?

Some alternatives are Weebly (<http://www.weebly.com>) and Webs (<http://www.webs.com>).

resources?

Introduction to Google Sites

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tkTGrOcFiz0&feature=player_embedded

Google Voice

www.google.com/voice

Enhance the capabilities of your phone

what is it?

Google Voice is a telecommunications system that organizes user's phone numbers and voice mail into one manageable web interface. Google Voice can answer, forward, screen, record and transcribe phone calls. Google Voice also offers users the option to choose a "master" phone number that can be set to ring their home, work, mobile or any other phone without revealing those numbers.

educational use?

Using your Google Voice "master" number on a syllabus is a great way to control when and what phones ring when your students call. It also has full functioning voicemail that can be emailed to you as an audio file or a transcribed format.

pros & cons?

Google Voice puts users in control of their phones. It lets them decide when they want their home, mobile, office, and other phones to ring. Features allowing users to decide to answer or send a call to voicemail are great. Users can also configure the system to filter phone numbers allowing certain calls to ring to a selected phone or go to voicemail.

what's it cost?

Free to use. Rates apply for international dialing.

alternatives?

VoxOx (<http://www.voxox.com>) and 3Jam (<http://3jam.com>) are two alternatives.

resources?

Google Help Support

<http://www.google.com/support/voice/bin/topic.py?hl=en&topic=16497>

Feature Videos

<http://www.youtube.com/googlevoice>

Jolicloud

www.jolicloud.com

Linux-based operating system for netbooks

what is it?

Jolicloud is a linux-based operating system design for netbooks. It is a free application that allows users to run various web apps over the cloud network.

educational use?

As more universities around the world face budget cuts, Jolicloud could be the solution to bring old computers back to life and save thousands of dollars. Among other things, running apps off the cloud can enable users to tap into web-based resources—thus allowing for a faster boot-up and increased computer and network performance.

pros & cons?

While cloud computing is still a relatively new concept, storing apps and data on the cloud has huge advantages. However, at the same time, many people are skeptical with storing personal information on the Web.

what's it cost?

Free to use.

alternatives?

Google Chrome OS, another cloud-based operation system, is an alternative to Jolicloud.

resources?

Jolicloud Support

<http://www.jolicloud.com/support>

what is it?

Everything might be going digital, but Lulu gives you the chance to turn your digital bits into hardcopy. As a print-on-demand publisher, Lulu lets you create and publish paperback and hardcover books in quantities from a single copy up to hundreds of books.

educational use?

From printing out course texts to publishing student work, the possibilities seem limitless. Special products such as picture books allow you to produce full-color books that collect student work or other research material. Many academic presses such as Carnegie-Melon's etc press use Lulu to produce and publish their line of books. In fact, the CU Online Handbook was published on Lulu.

Students can publish hardbound portfolios in small quantities to share their work in a polished package.

Because you can print on demand—it usually takes a week or two to get books—you can easily share printed material in a professional format.

pros & cons?

Even though Lulu makes it easy to publish books, it still can take a lot of work. Creating the content, editing, and content layout can take a significant amount of time. For those who want to spend the money, Lulu offers a variety of services to help expedite your publication.

An online store makes it easy to sell your final work. Lulu lets you determine the mark up—setting the price, and the profit margin that works for you.

One subtle con: Some people perceive on-demand publications a lower quality form of publishing. Of course, in the end, the quality of the content matters most.

what's it cost?

The cost of each book varies based on book size, length, binding style, number of books ordered. But in general, prices are about \$7-\$10 per book of average length.

alternatives?

Two alternatives are iUniverse (<http://www.iuniverse.com>) and CafePress (<http://www.cafepress.com>).

resources?

http://www.lulu.com/en/about/demo.php?cid=en_tab_demo

Mozy

www.mozy.com

Automated online backups

what is it?

As computer hard drives have grown in size, the amount of information we store on our machines grows. From important documents, emails and photos of our families, our computer's storage is filled with stuff we don't want to lose. Online backup services such as Mozy simplifies storage and backup of your desktop and laptop computers for a low monthly cost.

educational use?

Not sure where to keep years of research data, articles, and lecture material? Setting up a Mozy account insures that in a worst case scenario (e.g., an unrecoverable hard drive crash or the loss of a laptop computer) that you do not lose all of your valuable files.

Encouraging students to back up their machines is a good practice as well. Don't let your graduate students end up with a thesis or dissertation that disappears with a smoking computer.

pros & cons?

With cloud computing becoming more popular, there are a variety of places to store data. Flickr can easily store your images, for example, and Google Docs allows users to upload and store any document type. What Mozy provides is a behind-the-scenes process that can quietly back up everything on your computer without any intervention on your part.

One important point—Mozy files are backups. If you delete a file on your computer, Mozy deletes it from the backup. Backups only mirror what's on your computer. Also, keep in mind that the initial backup can take hours (if not days) as gigabytes of data must transfer from your computer to the Mozy server.

what's it cost?

The service is free for 2GB of storage. Currently Mozy offers two types of paid back up plans: 50gb for \$5.99 a month or 125gb for \$9.99 a month.

alternatives?

Two alternatives to Mozy are Carbonite (<http://www.carbonite.com>) and SOS Online Backup (<http://www.sosonlinebackup.com>).

resources?

For a review of several services see:

<http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,2817,2288745,00.asp>

OpenOffice

www.openoffice.org

A free alternative to Microsoft Office

what is it?

OpenOffice is an open source application suite of tools. It has full-featured set of office applications for creating word processing documents, spreadsheets, and presentations. It is available for free and serves as a good alternative to popular applications like Microsoft's Word, Excel and PowerPoint.

educational use?

For faculty and students that do not have access to Microsoft Office, OpenOffice is a free alternative and can easily read documents created in Microsoft's suite.

pros & cons?

The best part of OpenOffice is that it is free. Another benefit of OpenOffice is that an average user would barely be able to tell the difference between many of OpenOffice applications and Microsoft's counterparts.

what's it cost?

Free to use.

alternatives?

There are several web-based alternatives to Open Office including Google Docs (<http://docs.google.com>) and Zoho (<http://www.zoho.com>).

resources?

Open Office Support
<http://support.openoffice.org>

Posterous

posterous.com

Blogging as easy as emailing

what is it?

Posterous is a blog but unlike other blogs, Posterous enables you to post to your blog by email. Simply send photos, videos, and files to post@posterous.com and you will instantly receive an email reply with the address to your new “posterous” (blog).

educational use?

Posterous, like any blog, has a number of educational uses ranging from an easy way to self publish all the way to having your own class website. Checkout the 2009 CU Online Handbook for other educational uses of blogs:

http://www.ucdenver.edu/academics/CUOnline/FacultyResources/additionalResources/Handbook/Documents/Chapter_6.pdf

pros & cons?

Though lacking several advanced features found on other blogging platforms, Posterous is “dead simple.”

what’s it cost?

It’s free.

alternatives?

Popular alternatives to posterous are Blogger (<http://www.blogger.com>), Live Journal (<http://www.livejournal.com>), WordPress (<http://www.wordpress.com>), and Tumblr (<http://www.tumblr.com>).

resources?

FAQ

<http://posterous.com/faq/>

Tutorials

<http://howdoi.posterous.com>

SlideShare

www.slideshare.net

Upload and share presentations with the world

what is it?

SlideShare, according to their website, is a “business media site for sharing presentations, documents, and pdfs.” So what does that mean? Well, basically once you set up an account, you can upload your PowerPoint presentations (or documents and pdfs) and share them with the world. You can even upload and link slides with audio to create slidecasts as well as embed YouTube videos into presentations. SlideShare also generates embed code which enable users to embed their own or others’ presentations, documents, or pdfs into web pages. But SlideShare also has a vibrant professional community in which people download, favorite, comment, and follow others in the community. In many ways, SlideShare is essentially YouTube for PowerPoint presentations, documents, and pdfs.

educational use?

SlideShare has a number of educational uses and benefits. First, it serves as one place for faculty and students to upload course materials. So rather than uploading course materials each semester into each shell in your Learning Management System (and as a result needlessly taking up server space), SlideShare enables you to simply add the embed code to each course you are teaching. Second, embedding a SlideShare presentation into your courses enables students to access a flash-based version of your presentation, which enables users regardless of operating system or presentation software to view the same presentation (assuming they have the flash plug-in installed in their browser). Third, by posting your course materials online, you are able to contribute to the larger open education movement that aims to make educational materials open and available. Finally, posting your course materials online helps eliminate the need to make copies to lug to class and hand out.

pros & cons?

The best things about Slideshare are the ability to store all your presentations in one location, the ability for you or others to embed and distribute your presentations, and the ability to make your work available to a larger audience (e.g., you can track not only the total number of views but your presentations will also come up on a Google search).

what’s it cost?

It’s free to use but there is a paid version as well.

alternatives?

Some alternatives to SlideShare include Slideboom (<http://www.slideboom.com>), SlideRocket (<http://www.sliderocket.com/>), and authorStream (<http://www.authorstream.com/>) to name a few.

resources?

SlideShare Quick Tour – Summary of features & capabilities
<http://www.slideshare.net/AmitRanjan/quick-tour>

Wordle

www.wordle.net

Create word clouds with ease

what is it?

Wordle, according to its website, is "a toy for generating 'word clouds' from text you provide." This simple to use application enables users to visually depict a cloud of words with its association.

educational use?

There are a number of educational uses of wordle ranging from visually displaying data from a research project to having students brainstorm to adding exciting diagrams like text-based concept maps to your online course or PowerPoint presentations. But if you want to read about some exciting uses of Wordle, check out Joni Dunlap's chapter on Wordle in 2009 CU Online Handbook:

http://www.ucdenver.edu/academics/CUOnline/FacultyResources/additionalResources/Handbook/Documents/Chapter_10.pdf

pros & cons?

Wordle is free and easy to use. Perhaps the only drawbacks to wordle are limitations with saving, editing, and sharing Wordle word clouds. Another drawback could be the overuse of word clouds could begin to bore students overtime.

what's it cost?

Free to use.

alternatives?

WordItOut (<http://worditout.com>) and Tagul (<http://tagul.com>) are two alternatives to Wordle.

resources?

Wordle Tutorial

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xhL5D9nz5aI>

WordPress

wordpress.com

Start a Blog

what is it?

WordPress.com is a service that provides users with blogging tools utilizing the WordPress blog platform. After a quick registration process, one can be sending their thoughts to the world on a full-featured blog in minutes.

educational use?

WordPress, like Posterous or any blog, has a number of educational uses ranging from an easy way to self publish all the way to having your own class website. Checkout the 2009 CU Online Handbook for other educational uses of blogs:

http://www.ucdenver.edu/academics/CUOnline/FacultyResources/additionalResources/Handbook/Documents/Chapter_6.pdf

pros & cons?

With more than 70 themes and several “widgets” for connecting things like Twitter, Flickr, and Delicious, WordPress.com makes it easy for users to create and customize their blog. Its features are limited compared to the massive customizability of a self-hosted version of WordPress.

what’s it cost?

The basic service is free. WordPress.com offers additional features such as video, custom CSS, and ad removal are available for a fee.

alternatives?

Popular alternatives to are Blogger (<http://www.blogger.com>), Live Journal (<http://www.livejournal.com>), and Tumblr (<http://www.tumblr.com>).

resources?

WordPress.com Support

<http://en.support.wordpress.com>

User Forum

<http://en.forums.wordpress.com>

Xtranormal

www.xtranormal.com

Create cartoon animations

what is it?

Xtranormal's tagline is, "Create movies in real time on your computer." But the tagline fails to mention just how easy it is! Xtranormal is an easy-to-use, Web-based tool that has you point and click your way to rich cartoon animations. Type in a script, select characters, choose settings, camera angles, motions, and special effects. Click the "action" button and Xtranormal does the rest. Within minutes, you can create humorous animations ready to embed in your online courses and other webpages.

educational use?

Faculty have found making an Xtranormal movie can help break up the dull text of an online course. For instance, you can cut and paste a course announcement into Xtranormal, spend a few minutes customizing the movie, and then embed the result in a course. Now the "What's new this week?" becomes a humorous monologue delivered by a robot, superhero, or even a stuffed animal. Animate a course or section introduction, complete with dance steps and bows. Have students complete subject reports in the tool, adding a little fun to a serious assignment. Instructors using the tool report that students enjoy this break from the "normal" day-to-day of a course. See Chapter 14 for more on how one faculty uses Xtranormal.

pros & cons?

While the system is remarkably easy to use, it does take some time to tweak videos to get them ready for prime time. Also, while the system offers a wide variety of customizations, it is not sophisticated enough to actually model or otherwise act out instructional material. Also, be sure to preview your productions. The system's text-to-speech conversion can sometimes create amusing and unexpected moments in your movies.

what's it cost?

It's free to use, but you do need to sign up for an account to make movies.

alternatives?

While there are a variety of animation tools, nothing features the ease and quality of Xtranormal. Voki is one possible alternative (<http://www.voki.com>).

resources?

Tutorials

http://www.xtranormal.com/state_tutorials

Part 4

Resources

A Review of Selected Timeline Applications

Patty Meek

Capzles

<http://www.capzles.com>

Capzles is a timeline like presentation of multimedia content. It lets you create a timeline of 'floating photos' – like a photo documentary. It doesn't appear to provide much space for text to describe the images. There is potential for multiple, but separate, timelines. It is free to use.

xtimeline

<http://www.xtimeline.com>

Xtimeline is a straight forward web-based timeline application. It provides a single axis with years, months, etc. It also provides the ability to 'layer' events of a sort; kind of like 'bullets' overlapping. It is free to use.

Read•Write•Think Interactive Timeline

<http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/interactives/timeline/index.html>

This is a basic timeline for younger students. It enables students to type in as they go. There is not currently a way to save them. You can only print them.

TimeRime

<http://www.timerime.com>

TimeRime is one of the more advanced timeline applications available. You can overlap events, post pictures, and zoom into window to provide information about the pictures! There is a fee to use TimeRime.

Dipity

<http://www.dipity.com>

Dipity is another fully functioning interactive timeline application like TimeRime. Dipity is free to try but you might shortly need to upgrade to a paid account. According to its website, "users can create, share, embed and collaborate on interactive, visually engaging timelines that integrate video, audio, images, text, links, social media, location and timestamps."

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