Using VoiceThread to Promote Active Learning and Learner Engagement in an Online Business Course

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Abstract

This paper is an exploratory study of the use of VoiceThread in an online business course. The purpose of this study was to examine the role of motivation and emotional intelligence in the use of VoiceThread as an active learning tool in an online business course. The data were collected using a Web 2.0 technology, VoiceThread, to enhance student engagement and active learning in one business course. The platform was integrated into various learner-centered activities together with learner reflections, and resulted in key findings that provide implications for future research and practice.

Introduction

Online instructors continuously explore, and share tools and techniques to integrate into their learning management systems (LMS) in order to enhance active learning and learner engagement. In fact, “the importance of student centeredness in online learning environments is considered a necessary condition for faculty in today’s rapidly accelerating technological instructional landscape” (Pacay-Brock, 2013, para. 9). One big challenge is identifying compatible technologies that support learning objectives and active learning practices in face-to-face classes. Utilizing Web 2.0 technologies to encourage active learning and collaboration in an online course is an integral part of designing, improving, and delivering courses. As noted by Negash and Powell (2015) “engaging students in an online course is a challenge. Students often report that online courses are death by discussion board” (p. 4). Moreover, complying with accreditation standards, and guiding principles of course improvement are as essential.

The bulk of research in the use of VoiceThread was found in K-12 literature (Negash & Powell, 2015; Hay & Cheung, 2013). However, in current years, the use of voice thread in higher education (VoiceThread Research, 2016) was noted. One such study revealed that university undergraduates in an introductory Technology course used an array of digital tools, including VoiceThread: “the findings show that the undergraduates were generally able to use unfamiliar technologies easily in their learning to create useful artifacts.” (Ng, 2012, p. 106).

Methodology

The purpose of this preliminary study was to explore the experience of VoiceThread in promoting active learning and learner engagement in an online business course. The research questions are: What types of experiences do students have with VoiceThread regarding active learning and learner engagement? VoiceThread was used in the online business course entitled, Professional Development. The enrollment for fall 2016 was a total of 17 students, including 12 undergraduate and five graduate students. The two textbooks used for the course were: Emotional Intelligence or EI- Can you read your own emotions as well as the emotions of others? (Bradberry & Greaves, p. 14). 3) React to the image on page 19. 4) React to the image on page 20.

Discussion

In all activities, based on choice theory as proposed by Bereiter and Scerpete (2008), learners were given a choice as indicated in Table 1 with the following instructions: Select the topic from a list of alternative issues related to the course objectives and respond to the question by actively encouraging the use of video, learners had a choice in response mediums- video, audio or written text. Moreover, learners were asked to reflect and relate the materials to their real-life experience. The method for student response was to respond to a classmate of their choice and then add their unique comments. In both cases, the last comment was to respond to the entire course by means of using the following instructions: Tell us five ideas, concepts you feel you now have a greater understanding of. Or another way of putting it, what do you know now that you did not know before this course? Respond to one other classmate. Students responded to a classmate of their choice, and the instructor also responded, individually and collectively. In all cases, by responding to one other classmate, students were encouraged to engage and reflect.

Instructor feedback was provided via a range of media individually and collectively. Audio podcasts via Soundcloud were provided. Soundcloud is: “an audio platform that lets you listen to what you love and share what you create” (Soundcloud Tumblr, n.d., para. 1) At times the link was stand alone and, at other times, feedback provided on a set of notes taken as the instructor listened to the VoiceThread comments of each learner. At times video feedback was provided with a link to a specific YouTube or a link to a video created using Swivl, a tool that allows split screen, presenter one the left and slides on the right. Finally, occasionally feedback was in the form of a PPT file of an article related to the overall topic. Throughout the course the instructor was able to observe all the learners as the numbers of students in each course did not make up a large group. The instructor took daily notes regarding their collaboration and their interactions. In addition, as the course came to a conclusion, students provided the instructor with an evaluation of the course. The course was a憬 using a Web 2.0 technology, VoiceThread, to enhance student engagement and active learning in one business course. The platform was integrated into various learner-centered activities together with learner reflections, and resulted in key findings that provide implications for future research and practice.

Table 1 Course Activities Related to VoiceThread

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Instructions</th>
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<tr>
<td>Activity 1</td>
<td>Before one of these topics listed below and place in VoiceThread. Respond one of these items to your work experience. Respond to one other classmate. One you must use the VoiceThread rubric requirements. The rubrics are all listed and listed from start here on the left hand menu ”Start here” as follows: (1) Define job satisfaction; (2) You expected or been told? (3) Tell us about your experience. (2) Did Jimmy can’t have any meaning in turn? (1) Does Barry feel any meaning in your turn? If it’s a right? The motivation that drive us are the hinges upon which our success in life are hinging. (3) What are meaningful jobs? (4) Is it about what we can bring to being a person known our activity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Activity 2</td>
<td>1. Select one of the following and come to a conclusion: (What Motivates Me: Put Your Passion First (Gotick &amp; Elton, 2014) comments in your analysis: (1) Why does people find jobs? (2) What factors increase or decrease levels of job satisfaction? (3) What is it makes people want to work? (4) How do you work for something that you value? (5) What motivates an integral part of learning and critical thinking. Furthermore, the course was also designed to help students to develop emotional intelligence and critical thinking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity 3</td>
<td>1. Select one of the following and come to a conclusion: (How could you motivate an integral part of learning and critical thinking. Furthermore, the course was also designed to help students to develop emotional intelligence and critical thinking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity 4</td>
<td>After you review the documents below, share your recent or past job search experience. What did you do? What did you want? What could you do? If this does not easily apply to you, do you conclude you need to conduct your job search? Place your thoughts in VoiceThread and respond to one other classmate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity 5</td>
<td>Tell us five ideas, concepts you feel you now have a greater understanding of. Or another way of putting it, what do you know now that you did not know before this course? Respond to one other classmate.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Conclusions

This study demonstrated the ways in which VoiceThread could promote a dialog, and engagement between learner and instructor, learner and content, and learner and learning, creating a collaborative learning environment in the process resulting in active learning in a supportive environment. The researchers concluded that VoiceThread offered a range of appropriate learning activities and feedback tools. It proved to be an effective learning tool that met QM standards, creating a supportive environment, and encouraging more active learning.

References

Bradberry, T., & Greaves, J. (2013). Emotional Intelligence or EI- Can you read your own emotions as well as the emotions of others? (5th ed.). Annapolis, MD: Author.

Recommendations for Further Research

This paper is limited in that it presented the use of VoiceThread in one online course as part of Business education curriculum. Future studies of Web 2.0 technologies in higher education online courses need to be conducted. The research suggests the following research questions to determine the efficacy of Web 2.0 technologies regarding active learning and virtual learning environments: 1) A narratively powerful longitudinal study with larger groups to determine the efficacy of Web 2.0 tools in supporting active learning. 2) An exploratory study on instructor feedback when using Web 2.0 technologies in online classes. 3) A correlational study to determine the relationship between VoiceThread and retention in learning communities. 4) An exploratory study on VoiceThread and Student Engagement using National Survey of Student Engagement Indicators.

Findings

Anecdotal data and qualitative analysis of student perspectives and evaluations based on learner engagement that VoiceThread was instrumental in encouraging more interactions and support, resulting in increased activities and reflections, and encouraged key learning activities as a part of a course improvement plan. The researchers found that the use of VoiceThread provided the much-needed momentum by enabling a learning community and encouraging students to become more involved, thereby contributing to their success.

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