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Facilitator Reflection

The Constructivist approach emphasizes active participation from the learners in a social manner. Charles Wedemeyer’s vision for Online Learning is for the learners to have, “freedom of choice” (Gunawardena, 1981). During our facilitation in OLTD 503 we found we did not give our students much choice in the way the assignments were delivered. This occurred because we did not have the time to focus on creating personalized options for our students to choose from. We needed to make sure they received the information we were instructed to teach them and in a timely fashion. Had we only been teaching this course and not teaching full-time face-to-face as well as having other course work to complete while preparing for this teaching week we would have taken more time to be creative with instruction and provide more choice to the students. We have come to realize that personalized learning can be much more difficult to plan for, but still believe it provides a much richer learning experience.

When planning the activities for the week, we looked at the Salmon’s five stage model. Although the first two steps of the model had been covered at the beginning of the course and throughout other OLTD courses, we considered stages 3, 4 and 5 when planning the activities for the week. With stage 3, students were provided with a variety of online resources (video and print) that were related to Information Overload. For stage 4, students were asked to engage in an online discussion about their experiences related to “Information Overload”. In addition, students were asked to create a blog post reflecting on a time when they were overwhelmed with technology and how they were able to overcome it (Kear, 2011). If we were to do this lesson again, we would have the students read other students blog post and reply to the blog post. This was something that was done by the instructors only.

During our week of online facilitating there were only a few instances where students emailed us pertaining to D2L being “down” and they were not able to join in the conversations. At one point, because of the amount of time D2L was down, we made the decision to e-mail the assignment outline, with required attachments, to all the students. This emphasized the need to have a “Plan B” when designing and delivering online courses. We find email is the first communication choice in online learning as it is easy and most people have email set up to be received on their cellular phones. This allows response times to be very minimal. Other than email, D2L and our Weebly sites we did not use any other forms of communication, unless you count Skype, which we used as facilitators. There are many other ways to communicate with students online as we have seen websites, wikis, videos, audio files, written email instructions, Google Drive documents and I am sure many more communication avenues we have not even been made aware of yet.

Working together during our week of facilitating had many feelings attached to it and many valuable learning experiences. During the planning process we struggled to be creative with how we provided the information students needed to learn. There was a lot of information to present and a lot of facilitator expectations we had to meet in order to meet assignment criteria. This, to us, made it difficult to explore a more personalized learning approach. However, we were both proud at how we produced a very organized, meaningful, succinct lesson for our students and we were able to accurately identify an appropriate workload for the week. Ideally, we could have, with more time, added more content to such a vast topic.

Some ideas that we tried to include into the design of our lesson were to try and group the threads by the tasks that the students were asked to do. Although we tried to do this by creating threads for each of the two tasks, many of the students did not “reply” to the task. This made it difficult to follow the group’s conversation around each of the questions. After completing the assignment, it may have been better to create a forum within d2l for each task that the students were required to do. According to Karen Kear, “threading organizes messages into thematic groups and allows users to read messages in a meaningful order” (Kear, 2011).

In order to receive feedback from our students, we created an online survey (<http://fluidsurveys.com/surveys/tracytlcameron/oltd-503-seminar-3-group-1>). Based on the lack of responses we received from our students, we did not have enough information to draw any conclusions about the lesson we taught.

References

Gunawardena, Charlotte (1981). Distance Education. Retrieved January 8, 2013 from

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Kear, K. (2011). Online and Social Networking Communities: A Best Practice Guide for

Educators. New York, NY: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group.