

Using Blogger to Improve Student Engagement & Learning

Michelle Aebersold, PhD, RN & Dana Tschannen PhD, RN
University of Michigan School of Nursing

BACKGROUND & SIGNIFICANCE

- A sense of community has been shown to have a positive relationship with perceived greater cognitive learning (Rovai, 2002).
- Use of blogs has been shown to create a high degree of group cohesion & social presence, an important component of learning that is difficult to attain in the virtual setting (Jimoyiannis & Angelaina, 2012).
- Community of Inquiry Framework, core elements of a collaborative constructivist learning environment:
 - cognitive presence - the ability of learners to construct meaning through reflection and discourse;
 - social presence - the ability of participants to feel connected to each other in the absence of face-to-face (f2f) contact; and
 - teaching presence - the design, facilitation and direction of the processes needed to support learning.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Does the use of Blogger increase the sense of community for students?
- Does the use of Blogger increase student engagement in learning?
- Does the use of Blogger increase student ability to achieve course objectives?

METHODS

- Google Blogger was used in two courses: Quality and Operations (N651) & Strategies for Teaching in Nursing (N672)

Research Question	Evaluation Method
Student Engagement	Survey - Student Experience with Blogger
Sense of Community	Content Analysis of student blogs Social Network Analysis of blog postings
Achievement of Course Objectives	Comparison of a sample of student performance on blog responses and c-tools forum responses using a standard grading rubric

RESULTS

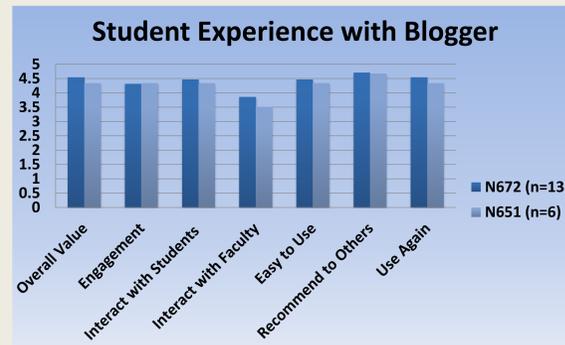
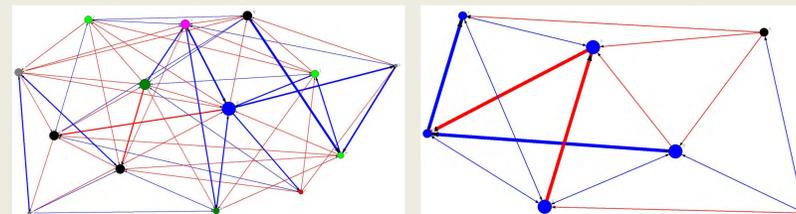


Table 1: Student Performance Comparison on Discussion Posts

Course	Learning Theories	Clinical Evaluation	Critical Thinking
N672-Blogger	9.04	9.77	9.71
N672-C-tools Forum	7.67	6.67	6.67

*Grading scale 1-10 for each Discussion Post

Social Network Analysis-Level of Connections



N672 (n=14)

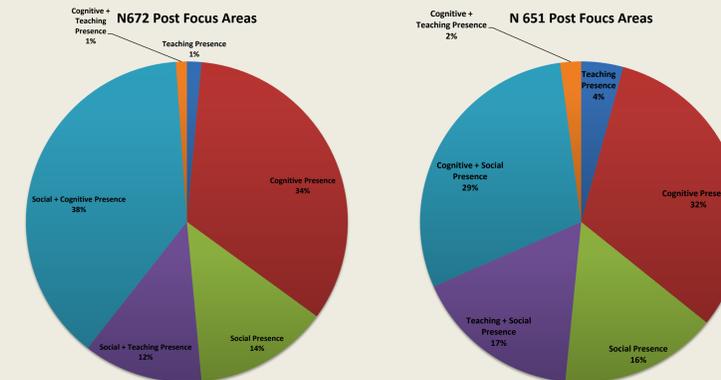
N651 (n=7)

In the network figures above, each circle represents a student. When another student posts a comment on an individual's blog post, the link is represented by a line with an arrow pointing to the circle. The size of the circle represents a measure of "centrality" based on the number of links. The circle colors show differences in the number of "inlinks" for the student. The red lines show links that are outgoing only. The blue lines are "reciprocal" meaning the two students commented on each other's blog posts. The line thickness is based on the number of comments.

Survey Feedback

Aspects most valuable to learning

- "Ability to speak freely yet intelligently using course material"
- "Interactions with others in course while in our blogs. Is very user friendly."
- "Being able to read others posts and interact with them"
- "It challenged me to use a technology I was not familiar with. It kept me engaged in subject content"
- "Flexibility to perform on own time"
- "Good way to meet with other students and discuss ideas"
- "A new tool that could be integrated into my learning and career. It provided an alternative to C-Tools."



Blog Exemplars

Until reading Margaret Maag's article, "The Potential Use of Blogs in Nursing Education", I never understood the potential value of this forum for learning. Blogging, I mistakenly believed, was just an electronic form of journaling. Yes, students can share their thoughts, feelings, reflections and opinions, but blogging offers much more.

Maag discusses how blogging helps enhance positive writing skills, instill self-confidence in voicing personal opinions or ideas, and that a blogger may even be empowered once they share their ideas online. We are reminded that verbal and written communication skills are necessary to be a competent nurse. Consistent with society's need for quick snippets of information, blogs can provide a condensed interpretation of the topic material to colleagues, students, and/or friends. Blogs can also offer topic specific information that has already been sifted through saving one the time of doing their own search for relevant research. What I most appreciate about blogging is the simplicity of setting creating one. Initially, I was very intimidated setting up a blog for this class, but was surprised to learn just how easy it was. Accomplishing that feat alone certainly boosted my self-confidence in the use of technology in education.

This blog also offers quick links to other sites such as: AACN Faculty Resources, WebCina: Nursing and the Web 2.0, National League for Nursing, ANA Nursing World, Sigma Theta Tau, HandheldCare, IOS Apps and relevant educational sites.

<http://nursingeducator.blogspot.com/>



SUMMARY

- Blogger provided a venue for student engagement and social presence: 62-64% of the posts had a 'social presence' focus area.
- Students found value in using the Blogger and recommended using to other students.
- Student feedback was positive and founds blogs to be easy to use.
- Student liked the flexibility of using blogs.
- Students using Blogger were able to achieve course objectives better than those that used C-Tools Forum.
- Network analysis indicates that some students were more engaged with their classmates via the blog.

CONCLUSIONS

- For sense of community to develop, students must have opportunities for connection (e.g. required blog posts)
- Teaching the students how to use the blog features (e.g. embedded videos, hyperlinks) up front will provide a more connected environment and reduce student frustration
- Course content may impact the level of creativity in the blogs and requires varying degrees of teaching presence to facilitate engagement.
- Visualization of student social networks can aid in strategically designing blog assignments to increase connectivity.

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