The Multicultural Society in the Netherlands

Inquiry-Based Learning in an Inter-Institutional Context Using Blended Learning
Outline

• Background
• Approach
• Course Overview
• IBL Process
  • Inquiry: the Networked Learning Community
  • Discussion: Videoconferencing
  • Reflection: Evaluation and Assessment
Background

Virtual Department of Dutch (VDD)

• Exists since 2001
• Is a digital learning environment for BA students in Dutch Studies
• Is a collaboration between:
  • University College London
  • The University of Cambridge
  • The University of Hull
  • The University of Sheffield
Background

Developments

- A decreasing number of students
- Shifts in curricula offered by departments within the United Kingdom
Background

Response

- Collaborative Teaching: Join sources and expertise
- Blended Learning: Combining face-to-face TLAs with ICT based TLAs
Background

By developing:

- Multimedia teaching and learning methods
- Multimedia self-study packs
- Inter-institutional collaborative teaching and learning programmes
Background

‘The Multicultural Society in the Netherlands’ is now running under

CILASS (The University of Sheffield)

to help further develop the IBL approach
Approach

Inquiry in the form of:

• Inter-institutional student collaboration
• Groups that are self-organising and -directing
• Collective Learning process and outcomes are collective (De Laat 2006)
Approach

Setting the stage by using:

• ICT that enhances the learning experience and outcomes (Goodyear et al. 2005, Goodyear 2001):
  • A Networked Learning Environment (WebCT Vista) that facilitates collaboration (discussion boards, chat) and inquiry (resources)
  • Videoconferencing
Approach

Motivation is necessary for deep learning (Gibbs 1992):

• Collaborative, inter-institutional aspect (break through isolation, competition element)
• ICT (triggers excitement independent of age and gender, Goodyear et al 2005)
• Content (danger of superficiality, importance of tutor immediacy, Fuchs 2005)
Course Overview

• Imbedded in cultural studies modules:
  • Sheffield: Dutch Advanced (11 students)
  • UCL: Identities and Communities in the Low Countries (9 students)
• Runs in February and March (6 weeks)
• Several groups, composed of students from different universities
• Every group is assigned a topic
Course Overview

• Face-to-face seminars
• The groups write a report (1,500 words) on their topic, using WebCT Vista and organising the work themselves
• The reports, accompanied by a set of thesis that could trigger discussion, are posted on WebCT
• The reports are discussed during a number of videoconferencing sessions using the thesis as starting point of the discussion
• Evaluation and Assessment
Course Overview

Face-to-Face Seminars:

  • Less anxious
  • Meaningful questions
Course Overview

• Week 1
  • Introduction
  • WebCT Induction
  • History

• Week 2
  • Current Political Debate
  • Women and Islam: Ayaan Hirsi Ali

• Week 3
  • Arts/Film
Course Overview

• Week 4
  • Deadline: Group Reports posted on WebCT Vista
  • Discussion and Preparation VC
• Week 5
  • Video Conference
• Week 6
  • Evaluation, Feedback and Assessment
IBL Process

*Inquiry*: the Networked Learning Community
Inquiry :: NLC

• Tool with potential to augment inquiry (Wiesenberg & Stacey 2005, Lim 2004) if designed properly (learner-centred, community-based)

Inquiry :: NLC

• Asynchronous communication: threaded discussion board
  • Promotes critical analysis and reflection

• Synchronous Communication: chat
  • For decision making
Inquiry :: NLC


- Start-up (getting familiar with the learning environment, start building sense of community, introducing themselves: their experience, what they hope to learn)
- Beginning (conceptualise their collaborative project together:
  - determining the direction and goals of the research,
  - planning the inquiry,
  - distributing the work and responsibilities)
- Middle (working on the task)
- Ending (reflection by:
  - Negotiating the results,
  - Preparing of deliverables for submission,
  - Preparing three theses for discussion)
Inquiry :: NLC

WebCeTiquette

- Introduce yourselves on the main discussion board
- Initiate contact in the group discussion board
- Read the texts and determine the issues you should focus on
- Organise your first chat meeting to make decisions: leadership, division of labour, planning
- Organise chat meetings at regular intervals
- Communicate, communicate, communicate

Resources and links (e.g. to library catalogue)
Inquiry :: NLC

From the tutor’s perspective:

• Needs its own set of pedagogies (De Laat 2006, Anderson 2004)
  • pedagogical, social, managerial and technical roles (Goodyear 2001)
• Students find tutor presence indispensable (De Laat 2006)
• Essential for group building and to safeguard quality
Inquiry :: NLC

Student Evaluation:

“I found the experience of using WebCT very interesting and there was an awful lot of very helpful information available to me.”

- Discussion board very effective
- Chatrooms problematic (timetabling, technical problems)
- Use of MSN
Inquiry :: NLC / Conclusions

- A thorough induction to the collaborative and technical aspects is vital
- Chat is problematic but synchronous communication is necessary for decision making
- To ensure a reasonable quality of the reports, tutor immediacy is essential
Discussion: Videoconferencing
Discussion :: Videoconferencing

Experiment 2003

• First VC
  Checking Facts and Figures
  Interpretation and Arguments

• Second VC
  General Discussion on Three Statements
Discussion :: Videoconferencing

• Not suited for lecturing
• For collaborative purposes equal to face-to-face discussions re. learning outcomes (Ertl 2005)
• If used for discussion it can support group reflection (Beaumont & Cheng 2004)
• It can be a useful and highly evaluated learning activity
Discussion :: Videoconferencing

Prerequisites (cf. Badenhorst 2002, Coventry s.a.):

- Getting used (introductory game or VC)
- Leadership and time management
- Not too long
- Variation
Discussion :: Videoconferencing

Structure:

• Introduction
• Presentation of report
• Discussion of theses
• 20 to 30 minutes per report
Discussion :: Videoconferencing

“It was a culmination of all our research and I found it useful to have ‘visual’ communication with other co-workers”

- nice to put faces to names
- discussions were instructive and useful
- by some seen as the most valuable aspect of the course
Conclusions

- Monologues don’t work, debating theses does
- It can provide very instructive, useful and lively discussion
- Induction, variation, leadership and time management are essential
Reflection: Evaluation and Assessment
Evaluation :: Positive

• Content
• Collaboration
• Video Conference
• Meeting Students of Other Universities
• Using Advanced Technology
Evaluation :: Negative

- Co-Operation with the Other University
  - Timetables
  - Assessment
- Technical Problems (overcome by using MSN)
- Time-consuming
Assessment

• Assessment drives learning behaviour (Tang 1994, Gibbs 1992)
• Needs to be aligned with TLAs (Kahn & O’Rourke 2004, Biggs 1999)
• Experiments:
  • no assessment
  • assessment in a set, unseen exam at the end of the semester
  • forms of self- and peer-assessment
Assessment :: Factors

- Being assessed
- Nature of the assessment
  - Sheffield: report, collaboration, videoconference (20% of final mark)
  - UCL: individual essays on the basis of the group reports (50% of final mark)
- Institutional Constraints
Assessment :: SA and PA 2005

- Tutor allocates marks for the reports per group
- This procedure is modified by the use of
  - quantitative peer-assessment
  - on tutor-set criteria (collaboration, input VC)
- Not entirely successful:
  - equally distributed amongst group members (cf. Gunn & Rain 2004, Biggs 1999)
  - no evidence of their judgement
  - no real reflection on the learning process
# Assessment :: SA and PA 2006

## Student’s Mark

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-assessment</th>
<th>Self-assessment</th>
<th>Peer-assessment</th>
<th>Self-assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of report</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Video Conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Tutor’s Mark

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Final Report</th>
<th>WebCT Activity</th>
<th>VC</th>
<th>Attendance &amp; Contribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>25%</td>
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</tbody>
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Final Mark = self/peer assessment (50%) + tutor’s assessment (50%)
Questions that needed to be answered to provide evidence for the marks
Assessment :: SA and PA 2006

Not entirely successful:
• students gave high marks to everyone (no agreement)
• they didn’t see much difference between the reports
• and were extremely satisfied with their own work

Solution?
• a quantitative system for PA as used in the previous year works better
• more explicit instruction, promoting assessment as part of the learning process
• negotiating criteria with students
Advantages

- The blend, collaboration and competition are exciting and motivating
- It promotes research, collaboration and information skills
- VCs can be an instructive and useful exchange of ideas
Disadvantages

• Time-consuming
• Requires thorough preparation
• Assessment remains a problem
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