An Analysis of Vignette 2: How do I Teach/Learn from Creating a Website

Gary Bartanus

University of British Columbia

"How do I teach/learn from creating a website?" interests me intensely because that's exactly what I have been doing for years--especially in the last month or two. Because the context in which I work involves Korean university students, this analysis of the vignette is based on that experience and perspective.

The vignette describes how a small extracurricular club that introduced students to web design grew into a fully funded educational program that provided support and learning opportunities for both students and teachers on the World Wide Web. This project was initiated by a social studies teacher and, as the program grew, the learning focus evolved from the traditional content and product-based approach--where teaching objectives are mainly focused on testing-- into a construct that recognized the value of truly understanding real sociological concerns in such a way as they could be presented in a fully functioning and publicly accessible website on the Internet. This not only redefined what it is to learn about social issues, but it also had the effect of narrowing the gap between student and teacher roles. Teachers had to learn the basics of the technology and then develop pedagogically sound methods of using it to provide motivation and direction for their students.

There is no doubt that, with this program, technology definitely enhances learning; however, it does also have its limitations and challenges. For example, students needed to be reassured that there would be no unpleasant surprises on their final exams. To guide them in their preparation for the exams, teachers posted course outlines, handouts, and assessment rubrics that would help students to know the expected learning outcomes. They were also given access to resources that directly supported those expected learning outcomes. Another limitation of this program involved the fact that not all students have equal access to computers at all times. This can be very challenging for both students and teachers, and it is a unfortunate reality that can only be adequately addressed with full government support—and sufficient funding.

While working on the development of online learning environments for both my job and the MET program, I have had to pay particular attention to the research findings of Palloff and Pratt who report that static Web 1.0 websites that afford no opportunity for students to collaborate or interact together generally provide the least effective learning environments -- especially for university students like mine. A course site can be so much more than just a repository of resources for students to look at and download. It needs to provide a safe workspace where students can express themselves, explore ideas, make mistakes, and take intelligent risks without fear of being unfairly judged by members of the public. At the same time, there needs to be an atmosphere of freedom within this workspace where students can engage with one another and build knowledge together.

My approach for providing this will therefore be a combination of content management system, blog site, and learning management system. Only registered students will be able to view content and interact with one other. For informal and casual commentary, they will be able to do so in the blog space and, for graded responses to readings (and one another), they will be able to do so in the Instructure Canvas Learning Management System. Best of all, this hybrid learning environment will facilitate a major shift in pedagogy referred to by Brame and others as “the flipped classroom.” Whenever possible course content will delivered digitally (in the form of audio or video tutorials), thus maximizing valuable student interactivity time in the classroom.

Perhaps the biggest challenge of all in creating a course site is how the teacher can "negotiate the gaps in students' experiences and expertise in using technology.” Contrary to popular belief, not all young people are technological wizards, and for those students, it is vital for a teacher to be solidly grounded in the specific goals of the course. By having a clear understanding of those specific goals as well as the precise role that technology should

play, the teacher can successfully undertake "a more integrative approach to technology" in teaching.

References

Brame, C. J., & Director, C. A. (n.d.). Flipping the Classroom | Center for Teaching | Vanderbilt University. *Center for Teaching | Vanderbilt University*. Retrieved February 28, 2013, from http://cft.vanderbilt.edu/teaching-guides/teaching-activities/flipping-the-classroom/

Palloff, R. M., & Pratt, K. (2001). Online Learning in the New Millennium. *Lessons from the cyberspace classroom: the realities of online teaching* (pp. 3-19). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.