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Preface and Acknowledgements

The Fall 2010 edition of the *M-PBEA Journal* presents assessment measures instituted in a college-level business communications course, skill building to teach the importance of a sequence of learning events, classroom uses for Second Life, and the latest communication devices and styles emerging in the 21st century. This fourth edition highlights many of the changes facing seasoned business educators while also tackling topics that would be of interest to new teachers.

Seven authors from four states submitted manuscripts for consideration. As editor, I would like to thank each of these individuals for taking the time to research and compose the articles that created this year's journal.

The members of the Review Board of Peer Evaluations donated time from their busy summer schedules to review the original manuscripts and offer their expertise and advice. Board members included Janet Lear, Sheryl Piening Keller, Glenda Rotvold, Wanda Samson, Ramona Schoenrock, Violet Snell, Sue Sydow, and Carol Wright.

Once again, Peggy Mailen was an invaluable resource as a proofreader. Laura Wallace, a former graphic design student, created the cover, which has been used for the 2008 and 2010 editions with minor updates. Appreciation and gratitude are both extended to my husband, Jerome, and daughters, Clara and Carina, for their support while I completed this professional endeavor.

If you are interested in participating in the next *M-PBEA Journal*, the call for papers will be posted at the Mountain-Plains Business Education Association's website, www.mpbea.org. Potential reviewers may contact the *M-PBEA Journal* Editor directly.

It does not matter how long you have been teaching. It is always a good idea to explore new ideas and try innovative approaches to a teaching our business subjects. One author wrote of the diverse changes in the last twenty years while another imagined the business classroom of the future. Let's prepare for that classroom!

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Assessment Measures and Rubrics in a Business Communication Course

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Assessment to assure continuous improvement has increasingly become a requirement imposed by accrediting agencies and state legislatures on secondary and post-secondary schools. This paper describes a seven-semester study conducted at a regional university accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) and the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). Using existing course assignments in the Business Communication course, the study, conducted from fall 2006 through fall 2009, measured student performance related to six state-mandated communication objectives. The faculty used the results to close the loop for continuous improvement, the driving force of the assessment movement.

Ravitch (2002) reported that policy makers believe that student performance should not be contingent solely upon the effort students provide, but also should be the responsibility of teachers, schools, and school districts. Assessment at every educational level has become a mandate that educators must add to their already extensive list of duties. The call for accountability in education resulted in state legislatures mandating high-stakes testing in grades K-12. Increasingly, educational institutions from grades K-12 in public schools, community colleges, and universities are required by federal mandate, state law, or an accreditation entity to develop methods of assessment not only to gain or maintain accreditation but also to receive needed funding. As a result, administrators are confronted with developing effective assessment programs. To illustrate this point, according to a Google[®] search conducted during spring 2010, about 31,900,000 sites exist that pertain to assessment in higher education.

As a result of the call from many legislators for greater accountability in higher education, in 1997 the Texas Legislature required the Higher Education Coordinating Board to mandate that institutions of higher learning assess their core curriculum including communication (Core curriculum: Assumptions and defining characteristics, 1999). At the regional state university in this study, one of the core courses, Business Communication (BCM 247), was designated to assess communication. The exemplary educational objectives related to the communication component of a core curriculum were:

1. To understand and demonstrate writing and speaking processes through invention, organization, drafting, revision, editing, and presentation.
2. To understand the importance of specifying audience and purpose and to select appropriate communication choices.

3. To understand and appropriately apply modes of expression, i.e., descriptive, expository, narrative, scientific, and self-expressive, in written, visual, and oral communication.
4. To participate effectively in groups with emphasis on listening, critical and reflective thinking, and responding.
5. To understand and apply basic principles of critical thinking, problem solving, and technical proficiency in the development of exposition and argument.
6. To develop the ability to research and write a documented paper and/or to give an oral presentation.

These objectives were used to develop an assessment schedule to comply with the state mandate.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Accreditation

Accreditation agencies such as the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), and state higher education agencies have published guidelines that universities must follow in order to attain ongoing accreditation (Core curriculum: Assumptions and defining characteristics, 1999; Eligibility procedures, 2008; Principles, 2008). By gaining and maintaining accreditation, institutions assure prospective students that they meet exacting standards. Therefore, it is imperative that educational institutions develop and administer assessment programs to ensure accreditation requirements are met.

Like most accreditation agencies, both SACS and AACSB require that universities identify competencies within the general education core and, then, provide evidence that graduates have attained those competencies or have achieved specified learning goals. Through assessment, accomplishment of the intended goals may be more easily quantified for review, validation, and reporting.

Assessment

Assessing students' ability to communicate is an area of interest to researchers. The Core Curriculum: Assumptions and Defining Characteristics (1999) communication objective is to enable the student to communicate effectively in clear and correct prose in a style appropriate to the subject, occasion, and audience. Different assessment modalities are required to assess the understanding and demonstration of writing and speaking processes, of specifying audience and purpose, of selecting appropriate mode of expression, of effectively participating in groups, of applying basic principles of critical thinking, and to research and write a documented paper.

The National Center for Education Statistics affirms that: "an effective and meaningful evaluation of postsecondary writing assessments is predicated upon a comprehensive understanding of the definition of writing competency" (NPEC sourcebook, 2000, p. 45). Therefore, in order to appropriately assess students' writing samples, the definition of the

competencies to be assessed must be clearly outlined. At a minimum, all students should receive adequate instruction to produce a writing sample with acceptable results in content, mechanics, and format. When learning goals and outcomes have been determined, then the learning environment can be structured to ensure student learning and sufficient practice of the objectives. “Just by defining their learning objectives and deciding where and when these will be covered, faculty improves their curriculum delivery because they will ensure that essential skills are introduced and practiced in a variety of settings” (Banta, 2005, p. 36).

Fraser, Harich, Norby, Brzovic, Rizkallah, & Loewy (2005) list multiple resources of how researchers define effective assessment in business writing and business communication in the context of institutional standards.

Acceptance by Faculty

Without faculty buy-in, the assessment process will not be very effective. According to DeMoranville (2010), there are three reasons why there is faculty resistance to assessment: (1) they are already so busy with research, teaching, and service requirements that adding another perceived “busy-work” requirement is not appealing, (2) faculty “question the value of assurance of learning activities because the benefits are abstract, while the costs are concrete” (para. 2), and (3) faculty members think assessment impinges on their academic freedom. The perceived loss of academic freedom is the most important reason for lack of buy-in by faculty. Five key factors to make faculty enthusiastic about assessment are (1) a supportive administration, (2) an evolving development process, (3) a well-defined structure, (4) an emphasis on excellent communication, and (5) a faculty champion. A faculty champion is an active faculty member who believes in and supports the assessment process—in fact, serves as a faculty cheerleader to encourage involvement (DeMoranville, 2010).

PURPOSE

The purpose of the study was to determine at what level student performance in the business communication course met the six objectives established by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board for a core communication course. The time frame for this study was fall 2006 through fall 2009. The challenge was to get eight instructors to support and believe in the assessment process (buy-in) and to come to a consensus on the appropriate place in the already established curriculum to add the different assessment instruments. The goal was to use existing assignments rather than additional assignments designed solely for assessment.

PROCEDURES

Business Communication (BCM 247), a sophomore-level course, is a required part of the business core, an option for the university general education core, an option for General Business minors, and an elective. Students in the business communication course are involved in learning communication theory, writing reports, memos, good news messages, bad news messages, and persuasive messages. The business communication faculty wrote an assessment plan for Business Communication (BCM 247) which involved seven semesters of evaluation. The faculty chose two assessment measures: embedded test questions and assignment review. Embedded

questions are test questions designed to measure knowledge of a specific objective. They are included in regular exams or quizzes. Assignment review involves selecting random classroom writing assignments for assessment review. To retain the curriculum already in place, embedded questions that were selected by a panel of instructors were added to existing exams. Existing writing assignments were selected and were judged based on a rubric (See Appendix). Each of the six communication objectives was evaluated at least twice with two objectives evaluated in each semester.

Embedded Test Questions

The faculty decided to use embedded questions for two of the objectives where critical thinking was important. All of the faculty agreed upon the five questions that were written to measure each objective. These questions were then embedded in regular class exams. Examples of embedded questions are located in Table 1.

Table 1
Objective and Related Embedded Questions

***Objective 2:** To understand the importance of specifying audience and purpose and to select appropriate communication choices.*

1. A manager is faced with having to lay off some of his staff due to financial losses that the company has suffered. Which of the following channels of communication would be most appropriate for sharing the news with employees, given the sensitive nature of the message?

- A face-to-face meeting with each employee
- A well-written, empathetic letter
- A telephone call
- Electronic mail

ANSWER: A
Concept: Channel choice Ref: Ch. 1 pp. 4-5

2. Which of the following characteristics of nonverbal messages should be considered?

- A verbal message will receive more attention than a nonverbal message.
- The meaning of nonverbal messages will be the same across cultures.
- Sending a nonverbal message cannot be avoided.
- Nonverbal messages will not be considered.

ANSWER: C
Concept: Channel - Nonverbal Messages Ref: Ch. 2 p. 30

3. Which of the following statements should a manager use to effectively communicate with an employee who has recently learned to speak English?

- We have our competition between a rock and a hard place.
- Your quarterly sales figures have gone through the roof.
- Bob must be off his rocker if he expects us to complete the report today.
- The points in your proposal are exactly what I was looking for.

ANSWER: D
Concept: Audience Ref: Ch. 1 p. 17

-
4. Management creates the ____ communication channel to achieve the organization's goals and to control individual and group behavior.
- informal
 - formal
 - email
 - oral

ANSWER: B

Concept: Channel – audience Ref. Ch. 1 pp. 7-8

5. In the examples below, which one is an example of an individual primarily communicating to inform:
- You request a vendor to provide cost comparisons for a copy machine.
 - You write a letter of application to accompany your resume.
 - You tell a customer how to fill out a form.
 - You respond to a customer claim.

ANSWER: C

Concept: Purpose Ref: Ch. 4 p. 56

Assignment Review

The faculty decided to evaluate two different assignments in order to meet the goals of the remaining four objectives. One assignment was the persuasive message, and the other was the written report. Analytic scoring was used through faculty-developed rubrics that measured specific areas of the objectives (See Appendix for rubrics). Three assignments were randomly selected from each class resulting in a writing assessment of approximately 10% of the students.

FINDINGS

During the seven-semester assessment plan conducted from fall 2006 to fall 2009, 3,040 students were enrolled in various sections of the course. In semesters where embedded questions were used, all students who took the exam were included. In semesters where writing assignments were reviewed, students' work was selected randomly with 10-15% of the students' work being assessed. The assessment committee applied a random number system to class rosters to determine which three students' assignments per class were to be assessed. Instructors are then notified which assignments to submit for assessment. Table 2 indicates the number of students and faculty per semester included in the assessment process.

Table 2
Students Involved in Assessment Process, 2006-09

Semester	Number Enrolled	Number Assessed	Percent Assessed	Number of Faculty Involved
Fall 2006	459	44	9.6%	7
Spring 2007	395	*327	82.8%	8
Fall 2007	431	65	15.1%	8
Spring 2008	399	*367	92.0%	7
Fall 2008	461	44	9.5%	8
Spring 2009	417	56	13.4%	8
Fall 2009	478	*448	93.7%	9
Total	3040	1351	44.4%	

*Number of students who took exams with embedded questions.

During the spring semesters of 2007 and 2008 and the fall semester of 2009, embedded questions were used to measure Objectives 2 and 4. Of the five questions asked relating to Objective 2, 100% of the students met the assessment goal of scoring 70% or higher on these questions in 2007 and 2008. Due to the high success rate, the faculty rewrote the test questions to be more specific and a little more challenging. This resulted in a change for fall 2009 with 80% of the students meeting the overall goal. Responses by students to questions relating to Objective 4 varied. In 2007, 80% of the students met the goal of scoring 70% or higher. While the students did well on four questions, they had difficulty with one question. By spring 2008 a different textbook was in use and 60% of the students met the goal of scoring 70% or higher. While students did well on three questions, two of the questions were apparently unclear. As a result, questions were revised for clarity. This area improved by the third measurement in fall 2009 with the highest results so far on this objective as shown in Table 3.

Table 3
Assessment Analysis of Educational Objectives for
BCM 247 Business Communication Embedded Questions, 2007-09

***Objective 2:** To understand the importance of specifying audience and purpose and to select appropriate communication choices.*

Measure	Date	Goal	Question Results
First Measure	Spring 2007	70%	100% on 5 questions
Second Measure	Spring 2008	70%	100% on 5 questions
Third Measure	Fall 2009	70%	Overall 80%, One question at 68.2%

Objective 4: *To participate effectively in groups with emphasis on listening, critical, and reflective thinking, and responding.*

Measure	Date	Goal	Question Results
First Measure	Spring 2007	70%	Overall 80%, One question at 65.4%
Second Measure	Spring 2008	70%	Overall 60%, Two questions at 54.6% and 48.4%
Third Measure	Fall 2009	70%	Overall 80%, One question at 68.2%

In using an analytic scoring rubric for assignment review of persuasive messages, students in fall 2008 had higher ratings than those in fall 2006 (See Table 4). In fall 2008, 79.8% of the students met the objective of 75% or higher while in fall 2006, 73.5% met the goal of 75% or higher. After the measurement of 2006, the faculty decided that the rubric really needed to define the content category more precisely. A revised rubric added a section on persuasive argument to clarify that objective for the fall 2008 measurement.

Table 4
Assessment Analysis of Educational Objectives for
BCM 247 Business Communication Persuasive Message, 2007-09

Objective 3: *To understand and appropriately apply modes of expression, i.e., descriptive, expository, narrative, scientific, and self-expressive, in written, visual, and oral communication.*

Objective 5: *To understand and apply basic principles of critical thinking, problem solving, and technical proficiency in the development of exposition and argument.*

Measure	Date	Goal	Question Results
First Measure	Fall 2006	75%	Overall Measure 73.5%
			Content: 65.9%
			Mechanics 69.3%
			Format 96.6%
Second Measure	Fall 2008	75%	Overall Measure 79.8%
			Persuasive Argument 76.1%
			Content 71.6%
			Mechanics 79.5%
			Format 92.0%

In fall 2007 and spring 2009, analytical reports were assessed (See Table 5). After the first measure, the faculty determined that the report procedure varied more than expected per section and steps were taken to clarify the report writing assignment. After the second measure, it was determined that the research component had improved slightly but other issues had intensified. This will be an area for continued revision for the business communication faculty.

Table 5
Assessment Analysis of Educational Objectives for
BCM 247 Business Communication Analytical Report, 2007-09

***Objective 1:** Requires students to understand writing and speaking processes through invention, organization, drafting, revision, editing, and presentation.*

***Objective 6:** Requires students to develop the ability to research and write a documented paper and/or give an oral presentation.*

Measure	Date	Goal	Question Results	
First Measure	Fall 2007	75%	Overall Measure	61.0%
			Research	53.0%
			Mechanics	63.3%
			Analytical approach	66.7%
Second Measure	Spring 2009	75%	Overall Measure	50.6%
			Research	55.4%
			Mechanics	39.3%
			Analytical approach	57.1%

CONCLUSION

One of the issues in assessment is continuous improvement, commonly referred to as “closing the loop.” Closing the loop occurs after the assessment measure is completed. Continuous improvement is determined by what is done with the result of the assessment. For this study, after each semester the faculty met to discuss the results and to see what changes should take place for an improved measure in subsequent semesters.

As a result of the assessment plan, the faculty is more cohesive and willing to improve the course than before the assessment plan began. The reason for this success was early buy-in and involvement of business communication faculty at all levels including tenure track and adjunct teachers. Part of the result of the buy-in was that the faculty understood that student performance would not be linked to individual faculty members. In fact, results were sent to the college and university level with anonymous faculty and student information. The rubrics and embedded questions were designed and approved by all faculty. Meetings to discuss the procedures were held before and after each measurement.

The collected data from assessment is of no value by itself. Success in assessment is the result of using that data to see how changes can be made to more effectively meet the goals of instruction. The ultimate goal of any university is to produce graduates who are equipped to be successful in their chosen careers. Assessment plays an integral part in the process that effectively prepares students for the world of work.

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APPENDIX

ID # _____ / _____ / _____
 Section/ Student # /Business (1)
 Non-Business (2)

Evaluator # _____

BCM 247 Assessment Criteria
 Writing Assignment - Persuasive Letter/Message

Objective 3: To understand and appropriately apply modes of expression, i.e., descriptive, expositive, narrative, scientific, and self-expressive, in written, visual, and oral communication.

Objective 5: To understand and apply basic principles of critical thinking, problem solving, and technical proficiency in the development of exposition and argument.

	Excellent 5	Above Average 4	Average/ Acceptable 3	Below Average 2	Poor 1
Persuasive Argument	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent persuasive argument 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good persuasive argument 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate persuasive argument. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marginal persuasive argument. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited or no persuasive argument.
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outstanding creative, attention-getting opening. • Engaging interest-building coverage. • Inclusion of convincing evidence/support. • Excellent action closing. • Outstanding accuracy and clarity of message. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative, attention-getting opening. • Clear and complete interest building coverage. • Inclusion of necessary evidence/support. • Strong action closing. • Strong accuracy and clarity of message. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attention getting opening. • Interest building coverage. • Some evidence or support offered. • Acceptable action closing. • Accuracy and clarity of message. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lackluster attention-getting opening. • Limited interest building information. • Limited evidence or support offered. • Vague action closing. • Errors of accuracy and/or limited clarity of message. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Missing elements of persuasive pattern. • Numerous errors or omissions in message.
Mechanics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent word choice. • No spelling errors. • No grammar errors. • No mechanical errors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good word choice. • One spelling error. • One or two grammar/mechanical errors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acceptable word choice. • One or two spelling errors. • Two or three grammar/mechanical errors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some awkward word choice. • Two or three spelling errors. • Four to six grammar/mechanical errors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illogical word choice. • Four or more spelling errors. • Major mechanics errors: sentence fragments, run-on sentences.
Format	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No errors in format as specified in assignment. • Signed or initialed as appropriate. • No spacing errors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One or two errors in format as specified in assignment. • Signed or initialed as appropriate. • One or two spacing errors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three or four errors in format as specified in assignment. • Signed or initialed as appropriate. • Two or three spacing errors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than four errors in format as specified in assignment. • Signature missing or incorrect. • Three or four spacing errors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inappropriate or unrecognized format.

ID # _____ / _____ / _____
 Section/ Student # /Business (1)
 Non-Business (2)

Evaluator # _____

BCM 247 Assessment Criteria
 Researched Analytical Written Report

Objective 1: To understand and demonstrate writing and speaking processes through invention, organization, drafting, revision, editing, and presentation

Objective 6: To develop the ability to research and document a paper and/or to give an oral presentation.

	Excellent 4	Good 3	Below Average 2	Not Acceptable 1
Analytical Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear statement of purpose. • Organized presentation of supported argument(s). • Logical/supported conclusions/recommendation(s). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion of all elements of Analytical Approach, with only minor issues in clarity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion of all Analytical Approach elements, but underdeveloped or with weak coherence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure to include one or more elements of Analytical Approach and/or incoherent development.
Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate selection and description of research methods. • Adequate inclusion of appropriate sources/ references. • Accurate use of in-text referencing method. • Inclusion of accurate and complete list of references. • Adequate and effective use of appropriate graphics. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion of all required Research elements, with only minor errors or omissions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absence of one Research element, OR underdevelopment or inaccuracy in two or more elements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absence of two or more Research elements, OR underdevelopment or inaccuracy in three or more elements.
Mechanics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate word choice, sentence structuring, and paragraphing . • No spelling errors. • Absence of grammatical errors (subject verb agreement, plural/ possessive, adjective/ adverb, etc.). • Accurate formatting and page layout. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minor errors or awkwardness in wording, sentence structure, and/or paragraphing. • No spelling errors detectable with spell check. • One or two grammatical errors. • One or two formatting/layout errors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major errors in wording, sentence structure, and/or paragraphing. • One or more spelling errors detectable with spell check. • More than two grammatical errors. • Several formatting/layout errors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Numerous major errors in wording, sentence structure, and/or paragraphing. • Multiple spelling errors detectable with spell check. • Many or serious grammatical errors (run-on sentences, fragments). • Numerous formatting/layout errors.

Comments:

One report per section (make one copy of each) evaluated by a panel of two teachers.
 Goal: 75% or higher will score a 3 or 4.

Shall We Dance?

Using Line Dancing to Teach Skill Building

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Skill building is a critical component of the business education curriculum. This article describes an activity used to teach skill building; specifically, the line dance known as the electric slide. If time permits, instructors may also include the role play activity presented in this article to enrich the learning experience and to encourage self-directed learning.

Recently, one of the authors attended a beginning ballet class taught by a new instructor. The instructor's technical and artistic abilities in elegantly executing the steps were flawless. However, the lack of sequencing in the instructional delivery left students wondering how long she had been teaching.

Sequence of class events. The class was asked to execute steps that were demonstrated by the instructor including first to fifth positions. This exercise might have been the warm up. Next, students were introduced to a routine that incorporated none of the steps previously introduced. Finally, the instructor introduced a routine that included only one of the steps introduced in the first routine. At that point students were relieved that the session had ended.

Students need to feel that they have mastered a step or routine. When instructional delivery is disjointed, as was illustrated in the previous example, skill development may not proceed as quickly or as smoothly as it can with well-sequenced instruction.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this article is to describe an activity that has been used successfully to introduce skill building through active learning, how the activity can be used, and by whom the activity could be implemented. This activity could be used by methods teachers and trainers to teach future teachers and current teachers about the importance of skill building. Rather than simply discussing the steps in skill building, the line dancing activity provides a venue for actually experiencing skill building and the awkwardness some students experience during the skill building process. At this point, the teachers and trainers can connect the skill building line-dancing activity with one of the skill-building requirements for the course.

While this activity has been used successfully in communications, leadership, and training courses and workshops, it could also be used in methods courses, in keyboarding courses to emphasize correction and practice, and in beginning programming courses to underscore the importance of modularity. This activity also provides instructors an opportunity to exhibit leadership skills (O'Neil, 2000).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Klatt (1999) underscores the importance of active participation in learning:

For learning to occur, adults have to do things. They must get involved and work at tasks and exercises. Adults need to learn by doing and making mistakes. They need to discover solutions on their own. It's not enough to have adults just read, listen, or watch a film (p. 69).

Further, Klatt (1999) describes experiential learning as learning by doing—"learning by being involved, by struggling, by experimenting, by trying, by discovering, by creating" (p. 66).

Haggard (2009) emphasizes the importance of using interaction in the classroom: "Interactive lectures contain the same elements as formal lectures, but also include questions from students and exercises designed to enhance and measure comprehension" (p. 1). The importance of interactive learning is promoted by different authors (Gabriel, 2008; Page, 2010; Smart & Hicks, 2008).

Olivo, Cecco, and Kieser (2001) present instructional strategies that emphasize the instructor's role as learning facilitator and highlight the students' involvement as active participants from the first day of instruction through the entire course.

To enhance learning, instructors and trainers need to avoid simply telling students; instead, they should go beyond to include a form of telling, showing, and doing (Forsyth, Jolliffe, & Stevens, 1999). Trainers and business education instructors may have a tendency to limit instructional strategies to telling because of time considerations.

Green (2001) asserts that training methods can take a variety of forms ranging from "totally trainer directed to totally trainee engaged. Alternative training methods can be implemented during the training sessions to provide variety and to increase trainee interest" (p. 54).

Advantages of Using Line Dancing

The authors are often asked at workshops and conferences why line dancing is used for this activity and not another type of dancing. Three factors influenced this decision: First, line dancing requires repetition so skill building is faster than in some other dances. Since dances are 2-wall or 4-wall dances, the repetition is inherent. Second, line dancing does not require partners and the awkwardness of students touching each other. Third, line dancing does not require as much room as other dances do.

The Line Dancing Activity

After skill-building concepts are introduced through a mini-lecture format, the facilitator of the group asks, "How many of you can line dance?" This question is usually followed by silence. "Let me show you the electric slide." The facilitator performs the dance without music once. Some students clap after the facilitator completes the steps. Then the facilitator states, "All right. Now it's your turn!" This pronouncement is typically met with laughter and comments such as, "You're kidding!," or some other form of apprehension. "Remember, this is

a class that requires your active participation. Skills are built through practice.” The facilitator leads learners through each step as described in Table 1.

Table 1
Electric Slide Steps

Step	Instruction
Grapevine Right	Step right with the right foot; bring the left foot behind the right foot; step right with the right foot; bring the left foot next to the right foot.
Grapevine Left	Step left with the left foot; bring the right foot behind the left foot; step left with the left foot; bring the right foot next to the left foot.
Four Steps Back	Beginning with the right foot, step back with the right foot, left foot, right foot, and then left foot.
Forward and Rock	Step forward with the left foot, bring the right knee back and rock. Step forward with the right foot, bring the left knee back and rock.
The Turn	Step forward with the left foot and scuff right shoe forward, turn and face the wall to the left.

Dance steps are presented in a modular fashion. For example, step one, Grapevine Right, is demonstrated and then practiced by everyone. Students are observed to determine that the step is being performed correctly. Then step two, Grapevine Left, is introduced. When step two has been mastered, steps one and two are linked together and practiced. This procedure is followed until the entire dance routine has been presented and practiced. Since the electric slide is a four-wall dance, the final performance allows students to practice the entire dance four times. If the steps are not linked together, facilitators could be setting students up for failure such as was described at the beginning of the article.

Music may then be played to practice the dance. The facilitator may select a slower-paced song for the first attempt of the dancing to music, such as Alan Jackson’s “Drive.” If time permits, the students can practice the dance to a faster-paced song to aid transfer of learning. Dancers do not perform a particular dance to only one song; similarly, business professionals do not speak to only one type of audience in one particular environment. The ability to adapt skills to new and diverse situations is critical for business professionals.

The Caveat

Have students take small steps to avoid falling. Besides, there is not much room in the classroom. If a dancer makes a mistake when taking small steps, the mistake is hardly noticeable. On the other hand, if the dancer makes a mistake taking large steps, the error will be noticed and the likelihood is greater that the dancer will wobble.

Line Dance Debriefing

Debriefing after the activity is critical in cementing learning and allowing for reflection. Eikenberry (2002) described four kinds of questions that can be used in debriefing learning experiences. These questions help learners to examine the experience, expand on the experience, generalize the experience, and apply the experience. The debriefing questions for the line-dancing activity may include the following:

1. What might have helped you to learn faster?
2. Would written instructions distributed as a handout have been helpful?
3. Would written instructions on a transparency or a PowerPoint slide have been helpful?
4. If you do not practice the dance during the rest of the term, how well do you think you would perform in a dance activity component of the final examination? (This is not a part of the final examination; it is merely a hypothetical question.)
5. If you were asked to perform another dance that requires the grapevine step, how well do you think you would perform?
6. What do you think would have happened if the entire dance had been introduced without breaking it into different steps?

One goal of the debriefing is to enhance students' awareness of how they learn. A discussion of auditory, visual, and tactile learners may ensue. As teachers train, they need to avoid simply using the method by which they were taught or the one that works best for them; different learning styles need to be accommodated in the classroom. Another goal of the debriefing session is to emphasize to students the role of prior learning, practice, and transfer of learning to new situations in building skills they will develop during the training session or course.

Role Play Activity

The following activity may be used if time permits. Role-play activities engage a number of students in a setting when students pretend to be individuals in a realistic situation. Role-play experiences are prepared with specific themes. Learners are presented with a scenario that requires certain behaviors. Depending on the acting ability of the participants, the trainer may need to intervene with specific behaviors and suggestions. The trainer may suggest to novice role players some behaviors the participants should adopt, such as raising one's voice to be heard above anyone else as an indication of aggressiveness, using large gestures for emphasis, and looking at the floor to indicate a timid manner.

The role-play activity may be used along with the line dancing activity to help students determine ways to handle discouragement in a learning environment. Select two students to participate in the role-play activity; one student will play Joan and the other will play Sally. Provide the two students who will play Joan and Sally with written directions for their participation.

Joan becomes frustrated when learning the electric slide. After the third step, she expresses verbally and nonverbally that she can't learn the dance. It is too hard.

Sally observes Joan's frustration and offers encouragement. She determines how she might help Joan to learn. She implements her method. This role-play activity could involve two male students or a female and male student combination.

Role Play Debriefing

Debriefing the role play activity allows for deep student learning and may be prompted by asking the following questions:

1. How did Joan express her feelings of frustration?
2. What did Sally say to Joan to encourage her to continue to learn?
3. What did Sally do to help Joan learn?
4. Did Joan learn the dance?
5. What other methods can be used to teach Joan how to learn the dance?
6. Can anyone provide another situation in which a student may be discouraged about learning?
7. What are some possible ways to encourage the student to continue working until he or she has learned a concept, idea, skill, or dance step?

The advantages of using a role play include (a) putting the participants in a semi-real setting that helps them to think and act through the situation and determine what the response might be if they were placed into a real situation of the same nature; (b) providing active learning activities where the students are learning by doing; (c) discussing the resolution after the role play which creates an atmosphere for offering further ideas and discussion, and (d) adding variety to the teaching methods teachers use.

Role plays provide opportunities for decision-making by creating scenarios in which real-life decisions have to be made. Students and teachers are able to supply possible solutions and decide which one of the solutions might be the best for those involved.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The instructional activities presented in this article may be used in various courses, workshops, and training sessions. Particularly for adult learners, active experiential learning is richer than the lecture delivery method and promotes the deeper learning suggested by experts. Business educators may serve as mentors as they bring their students from trainer-directed learners to trainee-directed learners so that the learners can become more self-sufficient for their own learning; that is, the learners become self-directed.

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Imagine What the Business Classroom Could Be

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“Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited to all we now know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand.”

Albert Einstein 1879-1955, German-born American Physicist

In order to keep up with the technological advances that affect both business and education, business educators must look to the future with innovation and imagination. Items such as cell phones, text messaging, blogs, and wikis, once thought to be only recreational have taken their place in the mainstream of business communication. This article looks at the virtual world called Second Life and where and how this technology is being used.

For those who have been in business education for the last twenty years, the mind boggles when thinking about the changes that have occurred in the classroom. It seems not so long ago that a memory typewriter was a miraculous invention. However, with the speed at which technology is advancing, these prolific changes may be overshadowed by even more dramatic changes in the near future. Teachers now need to be creative, to think “outside the box,” when planning on how to teach today’s students. The purpose of this article is to introduce readers to one innovative tool that can help invigorate the imagination.

THE VIRTUAL WORLD OF SECOND LIFE

One tool used in education is an online virtual world known as “Second Life.” Linden Labs, the founder of the virtual world Second Life (SL), first opened its world to the public in 2003. According to the Second Life website, eighteen million people have registered in Second Life. These registered users come from more than 150 countries (www.secondlife.com). Upon initial introduction to this virtual world, many are quick to assume it is a game. This is incorrect. Though participants can choose to engage in some types of gaming activity while in the virtual world, the world itself is not a game. SL is described by Wang and Braman (2009) as, “a three dimensional (3D) electronic environment where members can socialize, hold virtual meetings, or conduct economic transactions (p. 235).” In SL there are no rules and no preset agendas that are found in some virtual worlds such as the virtual game world known as World of Warcraft.

Starting in Second Life

The free software platform used to facilitate the use of the virtual world can be downloaded at www.secondlife.com. At this same site, students can sign up for their free account. SL is designed to be used only for people who are 18 years of age or older. There is a teen version of SL, which is only for those users between the ages of 13 and 18 and has different sign up criteria. More information for educators working with teens can be found at http://simteach.com/wiki/index.php?title=Second_Life:_Educators_Working_with_Teens.

In 2009, SL instituted the maturity ratings of General (formerly PG), Moderate (formerly Mature), and Adult. These designations allow the user to know what they might encounter if visiting these regions. In order to visit an Adult region, a second step for registration is required where users must verify their account with proof of age. These Adult regions do allow residents to host, conduct, or display content that is sexually explicit, intensely violent, or depicts illicit drug use. Instituting this further verification by Linden Labs has helped to avoid the accidental visit to these types of sites (Linden Labs, 2010).

Once registered with SL, students are able to create a virtual representation of themselves in the form of an animated character called an avatar. This avatar allows the user, in a virtual form, to be able to do almost anything the person can do in real life as well as many things they could not or would not. At any time of the day visitors to SL will always find more than 40,000 members online, and over 1 million who have logged in during the last 60 days. It is predicted by Gartner, Inc. (2007), a large information technology research and advisory company, that 80% of active Internet users will have a “second life,” as will Fortune 500 enterprises, by the end of 2011. They did add though that it might not necessarily be SL (as there are other virtual worlds).

Many businesses and universities have created a presence in SL. Instead of being divided into countries, the world of SL is divided into parcels of land called islands. Though having an avatar and participating in the virtual world is free, the islands are not free. Individuals and business owners who choose to own an island must purchase that island from Linden Labs at a current cost of \$1,000 U.S. dollars. In addition, each month there are “property taxes” or maintenance fees as Linden Lab calls them to retain ownership of the island(s). These maintenance fees are \$295 U.S. dollars per island per month. Educational and non-profit entities can purchase their island for a reduced fee of \$700 and monthly maintenance of \$147.50 (Linden Labs, n.d.).

Educational Resources and Business Examples in Second Life

When looking at opportunities to capitalize on the versatility of using a virtual world, as with any good instruction one must ask, “What am I trying to accomplish?” Using any technology simply for the sake of technology is not productive. It is important to determine first what you are trying to accomplish, and then decide if SL is a tool that can help you achieve your educational goal.

The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) has a virtual environment that is promoted as a “venue for educators to network and learn from others about real-life education opportunities and best practices in Second Life.” At this island the organization hosts weekly networking socials and topical events. To visit the ISTE island, one can be taken directly there,

or teleported as it is called in SL, by using the following SLURL (Second Life URL): <http://slurl.com/SecondLife/ISTE%20Island/168/29/30>. This is just one of many educational islands found in SL.

Universities are also making a presence in this virtual world. Second Life is developing a new area of their website to help identify the many educational institutions with a Second Life presence. Some of these academic institutions with a SL island can be found at <http://edudirectory.secondlife.com/>. This listing currently has a small percentage of the 768 education-owned private regions (Claudia Linden, personal communication, March 17, 2010). There are universities from across the country and across the world that have private regions.

Several Texas universities have joined the virtual world. Texas Wesleyan University has an island built by one creative professor who teaches a class that is fully taught in SL. The genetics class can be found at <http://slurl.com/secondlife/Genome/119/145/53>. In September 2009, the University of Texas system announced a \$250,000 investment in virtual education. They are purchasing a separate island for each of their nine UT system campuses. Part of this money will be used for training faculty (Haurwitz, 2009). At Stephen F. Austin State University in Texas, an Honors Art Appreciation Class is being offered that is heavily reliant on SL.

The Second Life website provides great resources for educators. One of these is the new area where educational case studies are being showcased (<http://secondlifegrid.net/casestudies>). Loyalist College gives a compelling argument for the benefit of using virtual worlds for training. One of the programs they have is training border guards. In the past they would have students shadow actual border guards at crossings. However, after 9/11 this practice was no longer allowed. In an effort to enhance training, the college created a virtual training program to simulate a border crossing in SL. The faculty has been amazed at its effectiveness. After instituting the virtual training, the success rate on students' critical skills tests rose from 56% to 95%. The school was so impressed with the results that they have established a design center that employs former students who have Second Life classroom experience to develop new virtual learning environments (Linden Lab, 2009).

On Second Life's site, <http://secondlifegrid.net/casestudies>, case studies showing how organizations are using Second Life for work are also available. In one of these case studies, IBM includes information there about holding a conference in SL with more than 200 participants. They estimate their return on investment to be approximately \$320,000 on their virtual conference. They also reported that the annual meeting was conducted at one-fifth of the cost of a real world event. For the annual meeting a combination of Second Life, webcasting, and video conferencing was utilized.

Another great source of information for educational uses of SL can be found at <http://www.vwbpe.org/>. This is the website for the Virtual World Best Practices in Education organization. In March 2010 the organization hosted its third annual conference. This conference was held entirely in SL. It brings together educators, researchers, academics, and business professionals as well as representatives from around the world, so they can focus on the use of virtual worlds in education. There were more than 170 presentations at the virtual conference. More information about these presentations can be found at the website.

Second Life Educational Advantages and Challenges

Advantages. Wang and Braman (2009) reported using the SL environment for activities such as field trips and class discussions. In addition, they report allowing students to build and manipulate objects and making presentations in-world. Several researchers have reported on the use of Second Life for educational benefits. Dreher, Reiners, Dreher, and Dreher (2009) write about taking advantage of hosting international guests, talking with professionals in their field, and taking tours without encountering the usual costs. They found SL to be very beneficial in teaching IS-related skills such as requirements analysis, programming, systems development, business process modeling, and project management. In addition to the transfer of industry-relevant skills, they felt the blending of real world and virtual world activities enhanced the intrinsic motivation of the students.

Wagner and Ip (2009) conducted a study of a student project that lasted approximately six weeks (the first two weeks were training for students to learn the basics of development in Second Life). Students developed and ran their own businesses. They stress in their conclusions that as future information systems practitioners, it is important that students be able to separate plans from actions, and actions from evaluation. They felt that the virtual world of Second Life allowed students to carry out assignments that would otherwise be very difficult, if not impossible to complete. They described the Second Life environment as a place where real-world tasks and running a business can be very rewarding without the worry of the cost of failure.

Authors de Freitas, Rebolledo-Mendez, Liarokapis, Magoulas, and Poulouvasilis (2010) look at the use of virtual worlds for college and lifelong learners with the use of structured learning activities. They cited one of the strengths to be positive learner response to using the environment for international collaboration. In their conclusion they write, “The potential for using a social virtual world such as SL for supporting life decisions and educational choices has been established with this study (p. 83).”

Challenges. Creating learning experiences for use in SL can be time consuming. Depending on the technology abilities of the teacher, it could be challenging to learn to efficiently participate in the virtual world. Another consideration is equipment. Though the software platform is free to download from Second Life, the equipment used by the instructor and students must meet the minimum requirements. This is especially a consideration for those who live in areas where there are students who still use dial-up Internet connections. The minimum requirements for a PC to run SL that Linden Labs publishes on its website are: Internet connection - Cable or DSL; Operating system: XP or Vista (the author has run it on Windows 7 as well); Computer processor: 800 MHz Pentium III or Athlon, or better; Computer memory: 512 MB or more; Screen resolution 1024 x 768 pixels; and Appropriate graphics card for operating system. Mac requirements can also be found at the site (Linden Labs, n.d.).

In addition to the challenges listed above, though not absolutely necessary, it is much easier to plan and implement activities when there is a “home” to work from. The money to purchase and maintain an island is not insignificant. There are, however, often other educational institutions or organizations that will allow the use of their facilities in-world.

SUGGESTIONS FOR BEGINNING USE OF SECOND LIFE

Based on the author's experiences with using SL in the classroom, there are some things that can make the journey easier for the students, which in turn may also make it easier for the teacher.

Give an Overview and Orientation to the Environment. In the study by Wang and Braman (2009) it was said to be essential to design a training activity before sending the students out to the virtual world. Dufrene, Lehman, Kellermanns and Pearson (2009), recommend educating the students about a technology or tool, explaining the benefits of its utilization. They state that this can positively influence the students' perception of usefulness and increase the probability of their using the tool. Second Life offers a "Quick Start Guide" at <http://secondlife.com/support/quickstart/>.

Provide an Educational Experience. When beginning the journey into the unknown of a virtual world, it may be difficult for the student to know where to go or what to look for. In order to help the student with his or her initial journey, some type of predesigned educational experience should be provided. One idea is to use a scavenger hunt so students are encouraged to explore.

Some other suggestions provided by Baker, Wentz, and Woods (2009) included:

- Being prepared for the unexpected and having a contingency plan. As business educators there is no need to explain that technology is often times unpredictable. Whether it is a hardware problem, a software problem, an Internet connection problem, or even a site problem, any of them can equate to a lesson that does not happen.
- Familiarizing oneself with the environment. Before sending students to explore, learn to navigate the environment. The frustrations the teacher encounters may well be the same as the students encounter.
- Starting small. Because there is a learning curve to SL, it might be advisable to begin with a small project or assignment to give the students the opportunity to gain experience with the platform without unnecessarily raising the frustration level.
- Partnering students. Having student approach the new experience with a partner in-world might help eliminate or at least lessen the apprehension a student may be experiencing.
- Allowing students to partner in the learning. Here they are suggesting the instructor allow the students to help think "outside the box." They may conceive ideas that would be excellent learning activities.

CONCLUSIONS

Business educators are no strangers to change. As technology changes and evolves they must change and evolve. The goal is to prepare students who are equipped for what they will find in the workplace. It was not so long ago that other new technologies were scoffed at as true business technologies. Cell phones, email, blogs, wikis, and text messaging are just a few examples of business communication technologies that initially were viewed as just for kids or maybe for the techies. Now these are mainstream business tools. What is next on the horizon? Will it be virtual worlds? Evidence shows that businesses are beginning to take advantage of this new technology. It is too soon to say, but there are certainly educational benefits that can be derived while the answer to that business question evolves.

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Transforming the Way We Communicate in the 21st Century

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During the past decade, communication has evolved from a one-way static display of information to a multi-directional, participatory, collaborative environment characterized with Web 2.0 tools, mobile devices, high media utilization, and social networking. Not all classrooms, however, have experienced the same pace of transformation. Given the dynamic, fast-paced business environment and the need for employees to communicate appropriately with internal and external constituents, teachers need to consider supplemental forms of communication to adequately prepare students and communicate with constituents. This article will cover evolution and reasons to transform, supplementary communication tools, and ways to use these tools.

During the last five years, Web 2.0 tools and technologies have brought opportunities for individuals and organizations to interact, participate, and collaborate via the Web. User-generated content—whether opinion or fact, video or text—has replaced or supplemented static web pages on a grand scale. As a result, today's classroom teacher may need to consider supplementing existing communication methodologies to keep pace with how many people communicate today. Important reasons driving the need to transform the way we communicate include increased media and technology usage, increased multitasking between media and other tasks, widespread use of communication technologies in business and personal communications, changing work environment, desire for choices and to have input heard, changes in student learning preferences, greater parental involvement in the child's learning, and greater diversity. To better understand these forces, it is helpful to examine some of them in further detail.

First, the results of a Kaiser Family Foundation study released in January, 2010, indicated that 8-18 year-olds average over 7 hours and 38 minutes using entertainment media across a typical day and that does not include texting. The study also found that approximately 56% multitask using media while doing homework; heavy media users (more than 16 hours per day) reported getting lower grades than light media users (less than 3 hours per day). Media usage, when factoring in multitasking, was the equivalent of 10 hours and 45 minutes per day. Mobile media is driving this increased consumption (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2010).

Second, PowerPoint and other presentation software is ubiquitous in today's classroom. Although the software can be very useful in content delivery, the way teachers use it can dramatically affect how students feel about this delivery mode. Burke and James (2008) found only 27% of students see PowerPoint as interesting and fresh, and attributed many negative classroom behaviors such as boredom and attention difficulties to PowerPoint.

Third, recent research has shown some interesting characteristics of today's students' learning styles and preferences. In a seven-semester study of students in a business telecommunication class, Sandman (2009) found 84% prefer visual learning to verbal learning, 67% prefer data before theory, and 54% prefer active to reflective learning.

Fourth, the business environment also has changed dramatically to become an environment characterized by the importance of knowledge, problem-solving, team projects, a fast pace, and communication with internal and external constituents at various levels around the globe (James, n.d.). Given the wide diversity of the workforce and variety of communication styles and technologies available, choosing the appropriate mode of communication for a specific situation is an essential skill in business. Business continues to express the critical need for employees to write effectively using correct grammar and punctuation, speak using accepted conventions, use appropriate non-verbal communication, and deal with internal and external constituents using appropriate techniques (Williams, 2009; Lozar Glenn, 2009).

IMPACT

As a result of this evolution, the need to understand appropriate communication and tools—whether verbal, written, or technology enhanced—has become more important than ever and needs to be incorporated into today's business classrooms. The objective is not to abandon solid, traditional communication, but to enhance and supplement traditional communication with current communication formats and technologies.

With the wealth of communication choices and tools available today, students must understand when it is appropriate to use traditional face-to-face conversation or written letters or memos rather than technology-enhanced communication and vice versa. Teachers should also help students understand how to choose the best communication medium or tool based on the objective of the communication (sharing information, leading a discussion, providing access to sensitive data, or collaborating), audience, and communication preferences of the audience. With each mode of communication, students must also understand what is acceptable and what is not.

In addition to understanding appropriate communication and tools, teachers also can make simple modifications in their traditional communication and content delivery to address the current learning styles and preferences of today's students. For example, teachers can utilize graphically interesting reading materials and videos. Short vignettes can be used to capture emotions and get students involved in a case. Case problems and real-world examples also can be used prior to content delivery to capture attention and application and then work toward the concept or theory (Kroenke, 2011). Also, teachers can choose to assign questions to answer rather than only assigning reading material. This strategy engages the student, provides a sense of purpose and scope, and keeps them focused on the task given the fact that they have a tendency to multitask when completing homework.

In addition, business teachers should include opportunities for teamwork, brainstorming, and discussion. Incorporating these activities also engages today's student who prefers active vs. reflective learning. Activities to help students better understand others, along with opportunities to think and react to new knowledge and new ways of communicating and transacting business, help prepare students for the business world.

TOOLS

Multiple communication technology tools can be used for various activities. When considering the use of technology, objectives must be set so that technology is embedded or infused to help accomplish the objective rather than being used just for the sake of using the latest technology or because everyone else is using it (Bisoux, 2008). Also, instructors cannot assume that all students will know how the technology tool works or how the final output should look. Therefore, time should be allotted to offer brief training, if needed, and give examples of the deliverables or final product. Templates and examples not only will help guide students in getting started but also will help to ensure that the final product is in line with the instructor's expectations. When using teams, a student who is more tech savvy can be selected to help other group members (Bisoux, 2008). This responsibility could be rotated to others on future projects.

Blogs and Wikis. Blogs and wikis can provide multiple benefits. First, they can be a labor saving activity for the instructor by saving repeated communication of information to update students and parents. Information may include: assignments, activities, class materials, links to resources and the syllabus, calendar, daily or weekly topic overviews. A few minutes spent posting the information can save hours of response to similar requests (Mark, 2009).

Second, blogs and wikis can be used to actively involve students in discussion and collaboration. A key benefit is that these tools encourage broader participation by shy students in the class, giving them an opportunity to engage in discussions outside of class. Sample activities could include problem solving or critical thinking activities where students will input, discuss, and brainstorm potential solutions to that problem; or conducting a mock debate on a controversial issue or ethics scenario. Activities also can take advantage of the collaborative nature of the wiki tool to create a collective work such as a policy, a report, a glossary of terms as a review for an exam, or a collection of statistics or links to examples. These tools also could be used to conduct peer reviews of papers or to create a Frequently Asked Question (FAQ) page for either students or parents.

When choosing blogs or wikis, first determine the objective of the communication. For example, if the objective is to discuss, a blog may be a better tool. If the objective is to create a collective work, then a wiki may be the preferred choice.

Microblogging (Twitter). Twitter is a technology tool that facilitates the sending of short messages to users so that they can follow what someone is doing or receive the latest updates. Twitter can be used to keep students or parents informed of assignments, projects, updates, or class accomplishments; used more interactively to promote discussion participation in large classes or short tweets of contribution to a class discussion; or utilized with colleagues to share teaching strategies, personal research, or other resources (Mark, 2009; Kieser, 2009).

Collaboration tools. Google Docs, SharePoint, and other collaboration tools allow the creation of documents, spreadsheets, presentations, and/or other collaborative works while also providing document and revision management capabilities. Documents can be easily accessible with a web browser and Internet connection. These tools can be used to prepare team projects or reports, teach uses of the technology, teach group dynamics and interaction, teach collaborative writing, teach business planning, or other types of projects previously taught in a traditional manner (Bevill et al., 2009). Students can upload existing documents or create new documents in the application and share with other team members and the instructor. Students can work online

and utilize chat or text messages to interact as they work. Instructors will then be able to offer feedback and monitor progress of the group and its members.

These tools also can be used to have students sign up to present (Bevill et al., 2009) or add content to a collaborative document. In addition, these tools can be utilized between teachers and/or their professional associations to share documents and collaborate in the formation of new policies, procedures, or other collaborative works such as shared databases or research articles.

Social Media. Most high school students and collegiate students have Facebook or MySpace accounts and are used to being connected with their peers anytime and anywhere. Since they are comfortable using social networks and virtual worlds, social media provides a great way to “reach” students with familiar tools. Research with existing social networking users shows that social networking can be used as a good supplement to face-to-face communication, but does not make a good substitute. Tomai and his colleagues (2010) found that high school social networking users enhanced existing relationships rather than creating new relationships.

Teachers can use social networking as a tool to assist groups or learning communities; to post messages about class activities, homework assignments, or reminders; post pictures or video clips; provide an opportunity for feedback and interaction; provide links to other resources; or to promote their classes, programs, and/or student organizations. Teachers can take advantage of the security settings to ensure that students have access to “safe” items only. For example, by creating a group on Facebook, the teacher could allow members of the group to access group information without accessing the teacher’s personal information. Additionally, Ning provides an ad-free social networking site for educational use with grades 7-12.

A virtual world provides a “telepresence portal” (Bisoux, 2008, p. 34) where users can take advantage of communication media such as Voice over IP (VoIP), social networking tools, blogs, wikis, and instant messaging. In a virtual world, students’ avatars can interact with other student avatars, with businesses, or with professionals.

Web Conferencing. Web conferencing makes it easy to conference from almost anywhere and provides an alternative to expensive static videoconference equipment. With a fairly inexpensive web cam, a headset with microphone, and videoconferencing software, users can be up and running in very little time. Software such as Skype is free and many other software vendors offer educational pricing.

One benefit of web conferencing is that it is often easy to record the session for playback later. Teachers with access to web conferencing tools could simply record their class sessions for students who are absent, for students who want to review the class session, or as remediation for given topics.

Web conferencing can literally connect the world—live. In addition to bringing experts into the classroom, web conferencing can allow students to observe experiments in labs where it may be too dangerous for students to participate in person, take a virtual field trip, participate in conferencing with other students across the country or around the globe, share and exchange ideas for class projects, or conduct brainstorming sessions (Andrew, 2008). Additionally, web conferencing can be used by teachers as a tool to connect with parents (who may not be able to leave work to physically travel to their child’s school) during the teacher’s prep period or even to conduct parent-teacher conferences.

Web conferencing tools also can be used to connect teachers to students in online or hybrid classes. The software allows teachers to present material in an interactive format. Teachers are

able to present materials such as PowerPoint slides, demonstrate “how to” complete tasks by capturing and sharing their own computer screen, interact with students from a distance, and share documents with their students.

Podcasts. Podcasts provide teachers a way to record materials (both audio and video) and make them readily available to students, parents, or community members. The podcasts can be accessed online or can be automatically delivered through RSS feeds. They can be played back on iPods, mp3 players, or computers. The portability of an mp3 player is a key feature of using podcasts. Students may not be willing to take their heavy textbook, but they readily pop in their headphones wherever they go.

Creating a single podcast can be a tremendous time saver for teachers. Teachers can record classroom lessons for absent students, create archives of classroom lessons for students to review for tests, or create snippets to prepare students prior to the class session. Teachers can prepare podcasts to introduce subjects and pose questions for their students to stimulate thinking about topics before students come to class. Teachers can use podcasts to provide questions, assignments, discussion items, terms and so forth. In addition, teachers could invite experts to record podcasts.

Podcasts can be audio only or can include video (also referred to as vodcasts) or other media. Teachers can use blogs or wikis, documents, and video clips to demonstrate concepts and to provide visual stimulation. With screen capture software such as Jing or Camtasia, teachers can easily provide demonstrations within podcasts. Editing software will allow teachers to fairly easily add background music.

Learning Management and Student Information Systems. Student information systems (typically used in the elementary, middle, and secondary schools) are tools to provide parents more opportunities to participate in their child’s education. Student information systems (SIS) allow parents to access grades, test scores, attendance records, discipline records, teacher comments, homework assignments, and teachers’ email. Because the information is available 24/7 for parents with an Internet connection, student information systems typically are highly utilized. Additionally, teachers have found that when parents have access to such information, the time spent “catching up” at parent-teacher conferences is reduced. Instead, the time can be spent building relationships and focusing on how to meet the educational needs of the students (Sturgeon, 2006).

Learning management systems (LMS) such as Blackboard, WebCT, and Moodle allow postsecondary students 24/7 access to grades, test scores, homework assignments, and email access to teachers. A student who forgets to write down the assignment can simply log onto the LMS and find the assignment. Students are able to monitor their progress in their classes, so end-of-term grades will not be a surprise. Teachers are able to post almost any kind of media from written documents to streaming video. The LMS software often has tools for communicating via discussion boards, blogs, and wikis, and makes it easy to provide links to external sites. Additionally, the LMS often provides a digital drop box where assignments can be submitted and/or responded to anytime and from anywhere.

CONCLUSION

With all communication, keeping the communication objective in mind is key. The sender needs to first decide what he/she wants to communicate and then do it the best way possible—whether traditional or technology enhanced. Regardless of whom teachers are communicating with, the guidelines for effective communication always apply. When technology-enhanced communication is chosen, however, cyber safety and netiquette guidelines also need to be followed as well as respecting privacy laws. Due to the immediacy of electronic messages, taking time to think about a situation before sending a quick reply also will give the sender time to “cool off” and will result in a better, more effective message being sent.

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