Chapter 29

Instructor Feedback, Learner Satisfaction, and Online Learning

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ABSTRACT

Instructor feedback, learner satisfaction, and online learning are currently significant topics in online instruction. According to Blignaut and Trollip (2003), there are six response types for the instructors to provide formative feedback in online courses. These include: administrative, affective, other, corrective, informative, and Socratic. The first three types involve no academic content, while the last three types are related to academic content in the online course. Each type serves a unique purpose for online instruction and learning. This article integrates, summarizes, compares, and contrasts the author's two recent studies. The first study involved 42 graduate students in the Summer semester of 2008. The second study involved 48 graduate students in the Fall semester of 2008. In both studies, the instructor used these six response types to provide formative feedback to improve learner satisfaction and online learning in an online graduate class at a Midwestern university in the United States. Results indicated that all six response types are required to ensure maximum online learner satisfaction and effective online learning. The results have implications for teacher education and other online courses.

INTRODUCTION

Feedback was classically defined as "knowledge of results" (Fleming & Levine, 1978). Public Broadcasting System (2007) described feedback as a communication process in which an individual asks questions to improve understanding.

In educational settings, feedback typically refers to "what the instructor writes on and about student work products" (Wolsey, 2008, p. 312). Thurmond and Wambach (2004) defined feedback in online education as information exchange between the instructor and the student about course activity and assignments which will promote student learning. According to Palloff and Pratt (2003), instructor feedback is provided exclusively in written format

in online instruction. In this article, instructor's formative feedback usually refers to the fact that the instructor continuously provides the informative assessment and clarifications for the results of students' learning throughout the semester.

There is an agreement that feedback plays an important role in instruction and learning, especially in online instruction and learning. Recent studies (e.g., Straub & Lunsford, 1995; Davis, 2007) pointed out that instructor's constructive feedback can mediate learner anxiety. According to Espasa and Meneses (2010), "Feedback as a tool to promote the regulation of learning could be the key to good teaching practice, especially in online environments" (p. 290). Espasa and Meneses studied 186 students in nine online courses and found that best teaching practices including the presence of feedback, tend to result in positive outcomes of student learning and course satisfaction with the general running of the course.

The above result was also consistent with the results in other studies. For instance, Jarvenpaa and Leidner (1998) pointed out that feedback can help establish mutual trust in online team work. Billings (2000) noted that instructor feedback can help overcome students' isolation and reassure them of their course assignment completion and faculty expectations. Thurmond (2003) also found that feedback can help students maintain pace and schedule in online courses. According to Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (2001), instructional feedback is one of the most useful teaching strategies a teacher should use in either traditional classroom or in online environments and it has significant impact on student learning. Chretien, Goldman, and Faselis (2008) point out that the supportive and personal instructor's feedback was effective for increasing participation as well as for facilitating deep reflection. Chan and Lam (2010) found that instructor's formative feedback can better help promote students' self-efficacy than the summative feedback. This is because formative feedback can enable students to perceive a sense

of control over their progress which is beneficial to their self-efficacy.

According to Bonnel (2008), "Further research on best practices in providing feedback in the online environment is needed…." (p. 293). Thus, this article will first present Blignaut and Trollip's (2003) six types of responses for the online instructors to provide formative feedback in online courses. These are: administrative, affective, other, corrective, informative, and Socratic. Then the article will discuss how the author used the six types of responses to provide instructional formative feedback for his recent two online classes. Finally, implications for teacher education and other online courses will be briefly discussed.

BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Most online students possess the "always-on" learning styles (Baird & Fisher, 2005-2006). The major responsibility of the online instructor is to maximize opportunities for all students (Schwartzman, 2007). Thus, how to support such a group of online students is a relatively new and challenging task now. In recent years, much research has been directed toward the asynchronous bulletin board discussions in online courses (Dennen, 2005). How an online instructor be visible to students, the so-called instructor presence in online courses has attracted numerous research in online instruction (Coppola, Roxanne, & Rotter, 2002; Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2001; Wolsey, 2004).

In online courses, instructor presence has been defined differently by various researchers including, but are not limited to: teaching presence, faculty presence, cognitive presence, interaction, faculty roles, and so on. Leh, Kouba, and Davis (2005) identified these five types of interactions in online learning: learner-content, learner-instructor, learner-learner, learner-interface, and learner-community. Online interaction was identified as one of the major

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