

Reflective Journal

Bob Palmer, August 2, 2010
E-Learning for Educators - SU10-963C

Module 1

Module 1 was essentially a chance to experiment with D2L and meet the other participants. I was impressed by the attention to detail in how the course was set up and scheduled, and the timeliness of communications from the UW-Stout administration and course instructor. This module did not really offer any insights into my learning or teaching; it was too early in the course and similar to most first-week activities in other online courses I've taken. As for the discussion activities, I started a bit late and was not overly loquacious in my comments. I tend to comment when something is of true interest or meaning rather than for social purposes. Guess I'm not a very chatty person!

Module 2

In Module 2, we moved from D2L to Moodle, a more familiar CMS environment for me. The readings centered on Netiquette, and some spirited forum discussions ensued. (Observation: Discussion threads seem easier to organize and follow in Moodle.) We were also introduced to Diigo, a powerful social bookmarking site, and joined the ELearning for Educators group. I found lots of interesting links and postings there that should be useful long after this course ends. As for my performance overall, I think it was better than in Module 1. I invested a great deal of time in the readings and in the quality of my posts. That said, I wished there was more actual "how to" or "hands on" instruction – threaded discussion has its merits, but it gets old quickly and in cases encourages "filler" writing or beating a point to death for show of participation rather than true exploratory questioning and learning.

Module 3

Our roles within Moodle were changed from Student to Teacher and we were put into groups of five. We were then asked to create a forum and a prompt for others in our group to respond to. While this may have been straightforward to the instructor, to many students it was not. (I received an email from someone in my group saying they didn't understand the assignment. Many students were slow getting started, watching and waiting for hints.) The problem as I saw it was lack of specificity on what to base our prompts. I assumed it was the readings, but apparently not everyone did. I DID think the readings were relevant and generally interesting. But here again, I think many in the group lost a valuable opportunity by not trying out the various voices described in one paper. Strategic instructor intervention during the week could have heightened the overall learning outcome, I think.

Module 4

This week we looked into Assessment, Online Testing and Copyright and Fair Use, and how they apply to online teaching. Of the three, assessment is definitely the most challenging whether teaching face to face or online, I think. It is so broad and encompasses many different areas. I bookmarked the four reading links and will refer to them again. The online testing section focused on plagiarism and other issues of cheating. Some interesting questions were raised during discussions. Can cheating on online tests be totally prevented? I for one don't think so. But the reading did contain some useful tips for minimizing this behavior. Finally, just what constitutes copyright and fair use is often a grey area, we discovered. The quiz I created for one of the assignments focused on the copyright issue; it was generally well received by the group. I was somewhat peeved at several quizzes made by other participants as I felt they were overly time-consuming. I'm also wondering how long we will have access to the Moodle portion of this course after its completion. I'd like to be able to revisit some of the content, especially the links.

Module 5

In this module the focus was on questioning the authenticity of websites and learning some techniques for verification. We read about a fictitious character named Zack who wrote a research paper based on false information obtained from a website. To the educated adult, it smacked of being a bogus site, but how would a 14-year-old with limited history education know any different? We worked through several sites using a criteria list and for the most part successfully ferreted out the scams. The goal here was to increase our awareness of what is and isn't authentic content so that we can instill the same in our students. We also learned some techniques for increasing the accuracy and success of web queries. One that has now become second nature is narrowing the query to three words, key words from a question that you might hypothetically ask in searching for information. The ask.com (formerly askjeeves.com) engine uses some kind of algorithm to guess the keywords in a question, but learning to do this yourself seems to deliver more accurate results. Next task: deciding on a topic of professional interest to dig deeper into.

Module 6

In this module, we were to choose an educational topic of personal interest to research. Although several of the topics looked interesting, in the end I decided on Computer Security, largely because it doesn't get enough attention in schools – until too late. Plus, I feel that a certain amount of knowledge in this area is indispensable for anyone considering teaching online. The next step was to build a personal search engine using an interface provided by Google, Eurekster, or Rollyo. I selected Google for its ease of use, and added about 6-7 links to sites that discuss computer viruses, malware, and firewalls. It was satisfying to view the quantity and quality of search results generated when test-queried with a related keyword. For our readings this week, we looked at an article on adult learning by Stephen Brookfield, and a contrast of the advantages and disadvantages of self-paced learning. I personally find Brookfield tedious and would recommend replacing his work with something more engaging and

relevant to an online environment. Not surprisingly, the other article generated the bulk of online discussion.

Module 7

In this module we essentially tied everything together that we learned in the course and built e-portfolios to showcase our work. I used WordPress to construct my portfolio and customized the theme for a minimalist feeling. The site contains links to all major coursework as well as a number of external sites related to teaching and learning that I find useful. As I write this reflection, the website is nearly complete and just needs a few more pieces of information before it goes public. I look forward to viewing all the sites produced by members of our group and comparing notes on our respective reflections throughout the course.