

Using a Blended Learning Community and Elements of the Dialogue Method of Paper Presentation to Understand News Writing Formats in the Classroom

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Abstract: - This paper is the result of using a blended learning community and elements of the dialogue method of paper presentation for understanding news writing formats in the classroom. The electronic part of the blended learning community constituted the forming of a special group on the social networking site 'Facebook' to deliver the course material to the participants. The participants were to study the material that they received and undertake further exploration of the subject for better understanding before they came to the classroom. When they arrived in the classroom, elements of the dialogue method of paper presentation were used by them to discuss the material that they had already looked through on their own. This was done in two stages so that there was greater clarity in their understanding about the news writing formats. In the first stage they interacted with their peer on the subject in small groups of 5-6, explaining to each other the various concepts being discussed. After this the class discussed the topic as a whole, with a fellow participant noting on the whiteboard the content that was being shared. Feedback was collected from the participants at three different points of the study – before they were told about the topic, after the material was shared on the Facebook group and lastly after it had been dialogued on in the classroom learning community. It was found that they reached a deeper level of clarity in understanding about the formats of news writing after it was dialogued on in the blended learning community.

Index Terms : Blended Learning Community; Classroom Learning Community; Deeper Learning; Dialogue Method; Facebook Group for Material Delivery; News Writing Formats.

I. INTRODUCTION

The formal classroom has long been a teaching space with the teacher playing the pivotal role in the interaction. The teacher is considered to be the one who knows everything about what is to be taught. The teacher teaches while the student learns; the teacher is the giver while the student is the receiver; the teacher is the active person here with the students being the passive receivers. In most instances the teacher stands in front of the classroom while the students are seated opposite him/her, whether it is the traditional classroom or the modern new fanged ones where the teacher uses computer technology to teach using PPTs, etc. This, itself, dictates the classroom dynamics – the teacher is the authority while the students are subservient [Alverman & Hayes (1989) [2]; Burns & Knox (2011); Bielaczyc & Collins (1999)] [5].

It is also assumed that the student learns from whatever is being taught and absorbs most of the instruction being imparted. Though it is assumed that the interaction in the

classroom will definitely ensure learning on the part of students, it is not always so. It has been observed that in most cases the learning is prefixed, limited and temporary. Students seem to forget what they have been taught in the classroom within days, rather than years [Alverman & Hayes (1989); Burns & Knox (2011)][6]. This leads to the question whether trying out something different from the traditional system could have a longer and deeper impact. [(Fulton & Britton (2011); Watkins (2005)[7][8][9]; Bielaczyc & Collins (1999)[10][11][12]; Carroll, Fulton & Doerr (2010)] [13][14].

Some of these alternative methods of learning are 'Blended Learning', 'Learning Community', 'Blended Learning Committee' and 'Dialogue Method of Paper Presentation'.

Blended Learning

Blended learning is a formal education program in which a student learns at least in part through online delivery of content and instruction with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace. While still attending a

“brick-and-mortar” school structure, face-to-face classroom methods are combined with computer-mediated activities. This gives students the double benefit of face-to-face interaction with the teacher, as well as the convenience of anytime, anywhere, accessibility of online courses at a personal pace. Various researches have shown that blended learning increases success rates in colleges as compared with traditional classrooms or entirely online courses, creating opportunities for a high level of collaboration and authentic learning [Graham (2013)[17][18][19]; Rovai & Jordon (2004); Ernst (2008); Halverson, et.al (2012), Al-Qahtami & Higgins (2012) [1] [15][16] ; McGee & Reis (2012)[20]; Erylmaz (2015); Lalima & Dangwal (2017); Gambhir, et.al. (2017) [21]; Yao (2018); Bhowmik[3], Myer & Phillips (2019); Chan (2019)] [36].

Learning Community

Learning communities exist everywhere, in every area. They are usually used for learning in the informal and non-formal situation.

Learning communities are groups of people with the same learning aim. All those forming a learning community are equal and active participants in the learning process, rather than passive recipients who are forced to listen throughout to one individual. They provide a great deal towards the development of individuals as they are better able to develop existing skills and knowledge, pick up new ones and help each other learn, develop and grow together through such interactions. Learning communities focus on learning and generating collective wisdom rather than developing individual knowledge [Zhao & Kuh (2004); Watkins (2005); Bielaczyc & Collins (1999)[29]; Fulton & Britton (2011); Dark (2005); Carroll, Fulton & Doerr (2010)[30]; Goddard, Goddard & Moran (2007) [31]; Center for Community College Student Engagement (2010); Reilly (2011) [32]; Philip (2010); Kabes & Engstrom (2010); Carrino & Gerace (2016); Stoll, et. al. (2006)] [33].

According to Carrino & Gerace (2016) [34] , “Learning Community participants earn higher GPA’s than non-LC participants, have higher graduation rates, report higher levels of satisfaction with college experience, have higher levels of academic self confidence, and are overall more academically engaged.” (pg 02). They also state that learning communities provide a structure for social interactions between and among students, their peers and faculty, staff and other professionals.

Blended Learning Community

Blended learning communities merge the concepts of ‘blended learning’ & ‘learning community’, to create a learning community that follows blended learning. Various

researches have shown that blended learning communities creates environments to bring students to discover and construct knowledge for themselves [Fleck (2012); Rovai & Jordon (2004); Hillard (2015); Yapici (2016); Smith, Hayes & Shea (2017); Shand & Farrelly (2017); Reitsma & van den Berg (2017); Levy (2017)] [22][23][24][25].

Dialogue Method of Paper Presentation

‘Dialogue’ is a community of researchers. It is an innovation of collective learning. The Dialogue is a highly interactive approach for paper-presentation designed by Dr. B.K.Passi and Dr. (Ms.) S. Passi (2011)[26] [37]. It can encompass the processes of exploring, learning, teaching, researching and collective paper-presentation. Dialogues have been used for personal mastery, shared vision, team learning, team working and team researching. Passi, Passi & Neanchaleay (2012) [27]define ‘dialogue’ as “a major innovative practice to solve the ongoing problems of traditional thinking humanity”. They list five kinds of dialogue – Instructional Dialogue, Debate Dialogue, Conversation Dialogue, Inquiry Dialogue and Wisdom Dialogue. They state that “Wisdom Dialogue is a kind of sharing and learning about one’s own and another group’s beliefs, interests, and/or needs in a non-adversarial, open way, usually with the help of a facilitator. Although the participants may challenge ideas or raise questions, the goal is to create an understanding rather than debating with each other”. [Passi, Passi & Neanchaleay, 2012][28].

The Dialogue Method is based on the principle of equality. All learners are equal participants in the interactions. There are no teachers or students. The teacher acts as a facilitator of the Dialogue process. All participants are seated in a circle and contribute actively to dialoguing on the topic. The end result of the process is not the arrival of a set conclusion; rather it is the beginning of the process of deeper thinking and analysis, leading to knowledge building and collective learning. [Passi & Passi, 2011] [35]

The Dialogue Method was used in the Thailand-India Project-Learning Innovation Dialogue (TIPLID) project undertaken by the Faculty of Industrial Education and Technology (FIET), King Mongkut University of Technology, Thonburi, (KMUTT) Bangkok, Thailand, to look into the issue of paper presentation in conferences so that one could finally arrive at the “creation of a happy learning society”. It was found that “when interacting through dialogue delegates are encouraged to listen to each other, share ideas and consider alternatives; build on their own and others’ ideas to develop coherent thinking; express their views fully and help each other to reach common understandings. Silence and withdrawal from Dialogue are possible moves within it – ‘within it’ in the sense that they may constitute necessary steps for eventual Dialogue (even

critical Dialogue) to be possible. In this way Dialogue automatically enhances the social, cultural and educational life of the people". [Passi, Passi & Neanchaleay, 2012] [38].

II. NEED FOR THE STUDY

Journalism education has been changing over time. In India, earlier, courses were of one year duration, with exams being conducted at the end of the year. Now courses are of varied durations – 1 yr, 3 yrs, 5 yrs, etc. – and follow the semester system, with greater focus on practical work. This is more so for all the new courses in electronic/ broadcast/ online/ convergence journalism that use electronic equipment extensively.

However, during the last 13 years of teaching the researcher has noticed that student involvement is very low, and at times almost non-existent, if the formal lecture mode is followed. On the other hand, when alternative methods, including some games, are introduced to the classroom session student involvement increases manifold. The more informal that the classroom interaction seems, the greater is the student involvement that can be observed.

The researcher has also observed that most students only learn by rote what has been imparted in the classroom and seem to depend almost exclusively only on the classroom notes. No effort seems to be made to gain additional input and enhance learning.

Another observation is that this system of learning purely by rote, without understanding the content results in an inability of the students to associate theory with practice. Often students learn study material by rote for their written exams, but by the time the comprehensive viva voce (CVV), an essential part of the Semester System that is being followed for most professional courses today, is conducted they forget what they have studied just a few days earlier. When asked somewhat indirect questions associated with practical application of the theory, they are unable to associate the two and answer the questions.

Students also seem to lack the ability to analyse things in a given situation and suggest possible courses of action.

This study aims at using a blended learning community to address the various aspects mentioned above regarding news writing formats. It aims at introducing the open Dialogue Method in the classroom and evaluating the change in the learning of the participants of the learning community.

III. TITLE OF THE STUDY

Using a Blended Learning Community and Elements of the Dialogue Method of Paper Presentation to Understand News Writing Formats in the Classroom

IV. OBJECTIVE OF RESEARCH

The objective of this research was:

- 1) To create a blended learning community for imparting education to students regarding news writing formats and study the effect of dialogue method approach on learning outcome of students regarding news writing formats.

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The present research was experimental in nature. A single group quasi experimental design was used in the study. The research was focused on the creation of a blended learning community in improving the understanding of subject matter.

The electronic component of the blended learning community comprised of the use of the social networking site 'Facebook' as the means of delivering the content to the students and creating a space where the learners could explore further what they were learning. The face-to-face interaction component of the blended learning community used elements of the Dialogue Method of Paper Presentation for interaction in the classroom, thus helping in the creation and strengthening of the learning community.

The 'Dialogue Method of Paper Presentation' is vastly different from the traditional method of paper presentation in a number of ways [Passi & Passi, 2011]:

- a. The system of functioning does not have speakers up on a dais in front and listeners seated below on the opposite side. Rather all participants are divided into smaller groups of say about six people. Each group sits in a circle, thus ensuring that all the participants simultaneously function as both presenters and listeners.
- b. The mode of presentation within the group is divided into various cycles titled Readiness Cycle, Title Cycle, Methodology Cycle, Findings/Conclusions/Expected Outcomes Cycle, Recommendations Cycle and Reflections Cycle.
- c. Throughout the various cycles two tools are constantly used, namely IQ – Instant Questioning and CCC – Compare, Contrast and Create.
- d. 'Instant Questioning' (IQ) means that as soon as the question arises in the mind of a listener, it is posed to the speaker for instant clarification, unlike in traditional paper presentations where the audience needs to wait till the end of the session or paper presentation before posing the question.
- e. 'Compare, Contrast and Create' (CCC) means that throughout the various stages the participants compare and contrast their own work with that of the speaker's and

perhaps come up with new ideas of looking at one's own work or find new aspects that could also be included in their own work.

f. During the Readiness Cycle the participants introduce themselves to each other in an attempt to get to know each other and become more comfortable with each other. It may be called as the 'ice breaker cycle'.

g. In the Title Cycle, each participant of the group speaks about the title of her/his paper while the others try to understand the title. They also try to see how the title is or is not connected with the title of their own paper. Any questions that arise in the minds of the participants are posed to the speaker immediately for instant clarification.

h. The Methodology Cycle finds each participant in the group discussing her/his own methodology. They also use the CCC tool to see how similar or different their own methodology is from that of the others, while also looking to see what they could perhaps have incorporated in their own work.

i. The 'Findings/Conclusions/Expected Outcomes Cycle' has a few steps to be followed. Each delegate lists out the conclusions of her/his own paper, termed as 'I-Findings'. Now once each individual's personal findings are listed the group discusses them further to find commonality/differences/connections between the various works to arrive at 'We-Findings' based on the constant IQ & CCC that each individual has been applying throughout the process.

j. The 'Recommendations Cycle' moves on from the 'We-Findings'. Recommendations are suggested based on the 'We-Findings', past life experiences, current socio-economic-political conditions, future visions, listing out best points for implementation in one's individual institution, etc, following the philosophy of 'think globally, act locally'.

k. The 'Reflections Cycle', gives the groups and participants an opportunity to link their titles with the conference theme and reality; create links with presentations of others and create a composite whole; examine one's own mental models by un-surfacing, analyzing and reformulating of one's views, assumptions and belief systems; explore the possibilities and the consequences of using innovative Dialogue as a mode of paper presentation in the conferences. As a result is this process a list of do-able recommendations is arrived at, that may be handed over to the Conference organisers for future implementation.

l. The overall impact is that the each participant in the seminar/conference is an active participant in the seminar/conference. Each individual leaves with a deeper learning in her/his own paper as well as those of the others in the group. The participants also recall completely the content

of at least six other research papers read/presented in the seminar/conference. They also have the satisfaction of having come up with a list of implementable suggestions for the seminar/conference organizers which can have an impact on the development of the theme of the conference and future generations who take up this field of study.

In the present research, the elements of the Dialogue Method of Paper Presentation that have been used in the classroom as a tool for learning and to create a learning community, for understanding the various news writing formats, are:

- (i) Dividing the class into groups of six and making them sit in a circle for interaction.
- (ii) Use of the tools Instant Questioning (IQ) and Compare, Contrast and Create (CCC) during the dialogue process.
- (iii) Once dialoguing in the groups is over, discussing as a class what each group has learnt, similar to arriving at the 'We-Findings'.
- (iv) Teacher functioning as facilitator in the process and only intervening when approached about concept clarification.

The participants were supplied with base material on the topic 'News Writing Formats' through a special group created for this purpose on the social networking site 'Facebook'. The participants were expected to study the base material and undertake additional readings on the topic to be discussed, before entering the classroom. The Facebook group was also to be a space where the participants could share additional study material with other members of the learning community, in case they came across any material that they perceived could be useful to their peers.

When the participants arrived in the classroom, they were divided into small groups to discuss the topic among themselves and arrive at understandings. The tools of IQ and CCC were constantly used by the participants of the groups throughout this process. Once the groups reached an understanding of the said topic, a member of the class came forth and noted on the board what her/his friends were saying. The rest of the class called out what they had learnt and understood so that their friend could note the points being shared on the board. This was done so that collective and additional learning on the said topic could be arrived at as a community.

Data Collection

Data was collected from the participants at three stages through specially designed tools. All questions in each of the specially designed tools were open ended so that the thought process of the participant could also be clear. Since the

content of the topic was technical in nature the question asked in the first feedback, Feedback A, was different from the ones asked in the other two feedbacks, named as Feedback B and Feedback C. On the other hand, the sets of questions for the second and third feedbacks were identical.

The first feedback tool was administered to the participants before the material was made available to them on the Facebook group.

Participants were to respond to the second feedback tool at the beginning of the classroom session, given that they were supposed to have read up the available material before they reached the classroom.

The final feedback tool was administered at the end of the classroom session, just before class was dismissed. This was done to study the extent to which the participants had reached clarity in understanding the concepts introduced to them regarding news writing formats.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed with the help of qualitative and quantitative tools. All the questions in all the feedback proformas were open ended, giving the participants the opportunity to write freely about what they had learnt. The transcriptions of the responses to each question were reviewed, analyzed and coded. Frequency, percentage and graphs were also used for analysis.

The responses received in Feedback A were very general, based on the participants' general awareness and application of common sense, before they were given any study material on the subject and therefore cannot be taken into consideration for analysis.

The content of this lesson was technical in nature and the first feedback, Feedback A, was taken before any intervention that is before the participants had any official knowledge of the content. The responses received in Feedback A were very general, based on the participants' general awareness and application of common sense and therefore could be taken into consideration for analysis. On the other hand, Feedback B and Feedback C were administered after the content had been delivered to the participants. They were both analysed and their outcomes were compared to reach an understanding about the level of change in their understanding of the topic after Dialoguing on the content.

The question asked in Feedback A was *"What do you think are the different basic styles/formats of writing in journalism?"* On the other hand, the question asked in Feedbacks B and C was *"How is the 'Hard News Format' different from the 'Soft News Format'?"*

Descriptive coding was used in the analysis. Descriptive coding summarizes the basic content of a passage into a word or phrase (Saldaña, 2009). During the first round of coding

the data was read line by line and a set of codes was created.

The initial line by line coding of the data was such that descriptive codes could be identified and reworked as the analysis progressed. In the next round the initial set of codes for each question were clustered together by similarity and regularity to form patterns in the data that were identified as 'characteristics'.

Once the codes for each of the questions, were clustered into 'characteristics', the changing trends for each characteristic across Feedback A, Feedback B and Feedback C were noted and analyzed.

VI. FINDINGS of the study

Findings regarding 'Hard News Format'

The characteristic 'Begin with most important facts, elaborate & with conclusion' was placed first in Feedback B while it was one of the second most important characteristics in Feedback C. 'Inverted Pyramid' was considered the second most important characteristic in Feedback B while it was placed fifth in Feedback C. On the other hand, 'Answer to 5 Ws & 1H' which also was placed second in Feedback B, was one of the characteristics which found the third place in Feedback C.

Of the two characteristics considered to be the third most important characteristics in Feedback B, 'Appealing/influencing masses' was considered the most important characteristic in Feedback C while 'Logical & to the point, clear' was placed seventh in Feedback C.

The fourth most important characteristic in Feedback B was 'First line/para is called 'intro' in UK & 'headline sentence' in US; most important part of story, summarizes whole story' while it found no mention at all in Feedback C. On the other hand, 'Formal' which was placed fifth in Feedback B, was one of the second most important characteristics of Feedback C.

Similarly, 'Skillfully Constructed' was placed seventh in Feedback B while it was placed fourth in Feedback C. Likewise, 'Words are simple, direct, without unnecessary information' and 'Kept in beginning and mid of bulletin as it affects the audience/masses' were both ninth in Feedback B but were both third most important in Feedback C.

Findings regarding 'Soft News Format'

The characteristic 'Light news/entertainment' was considered to be the most important characteristic in Feedback B while it was one of the second most important characteristics in Feedback C. 'WHAT' Concept is used - W-What happened; H-How; A-Amplify intro; T-Tie up the loose ends' was the second most important in Feedback B but only placed sixth in Feedback C. 'Follows Vertical Pyramid'

found the third place in Feedback B while it was placed fourth in Feedback C.

‘Story style and delivery relaxed/conversational/anecdotal’ was placed fourth in Feedback B but was the most important characteristic in Feedback C. Meanwhile, ‘Less impact/importance on audience’ was one of the characteristics placed seventh in Feedback B but one of the second most important characteristics in Feedback C. Likewise, ‘Words are simple and direct’ was one of the characteristics placed eighth in Feedback B but the third most important in Feedback C. Similarly, ‘End of bulletin stories’ was placed sixth in Feedback B, but fourth in Feedback C.

Combined Findings

The participants have clearly listed the differences between hard news and soft news formats of news writing. Hard news is written in the ‘Inverted Pyramid’ style while soft news ‘Follows Vertical Pyramid’ style of writing.

Hard news is ‘Formal’, soft news is ‘Light news/entertainment’ and ‘Story style and delivery relaxed/conversational/anecdotal’.

Hard news ‘Answers to 5 W’s and 1H questions’ and ‘Begin with most important facts, elaborate and with conclusion’ while soft news ‘WHAT Concept is used - W-What happened; H-How; A-Amplify intro; T-Tie up the loose ends’ and ‘Order of information less important’.

While hard news ‘Appealing/influencing masses’ soft news ‘Less impact/importance on audience’. Hard news is ‘Kept in beginning and mid of bulletin as it affects the audience/masses’ but soft news items are for ‘End of bulletin stories’.

Discussion

We may deduce that the participants’ comprehension about the various differences between the hard news format and soft news format of news writing was enhanced after they dialogued on this topic. Like with other questions, the importance of some points seems to have sunk in better in Feedback C.

VII. CONCLUSION

This research studied three sets of feedbacks on the topic ‘news writing formats’ to understand whether creating a blended learning community by (a) utilizing the social networking site ‘Facebook’ as a delivery mechanism and (b) using the dialogue method of interaction to transform the classroom into a learning community, could change the level and quality of learning of the participants.

From the analysis of the responses given to the three sets of Feedbacks, it may be concluded that (a) delivering the material through the ‘Facebook’ group did help in the learning of the members of the blended learning community, and, (b) transforming the classroom into a learning community, through the use of dialogue method of interaction changed the level and quality of learning of the participants. The participants experienced deeper learning through the intervention.

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