

Chapter 9

Strategies for Providing Formative Feedback to Maximize Learner Satisfaction and Online Learning

Yuliang Liu

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, USA

ABSTRACT

Learner satisfaction and learning is currently a very important topic in online instruction and learning. Blignaut and Trollip (2003) proposed six types of response for providing formative feedback in online courses. These six response types 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. Each type serves a different purpose for online learners. This study is designed to validate how the appropriate use of six response types for providing formative feedback affected learner satisfaction and online learning in an online graduate class at a midwestern university in the summer semester of 2008. Results indicated that all six response types are necessary to ensure maximum online learner satisfaction and effective online learning although each has its different focus. Findings have implications for all other online courses in the future.

INTRODUCTION

In educational settings, feedback typically refers to “what the instructor writes on and about student work products” (Wolsey, 2008, p. 312). Formative feedback refers to the ongoing feedback from the instructor throughout the semester. According to Palloff and Pratt (2003), instructor feedback is provided exclusively in written format in online

instruction. According to Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (2001), instructional feedback has very large effect size on student learning and instructional feedback is one of the most useful teaching strategies a teacher should use in either traditional classroom or in online environments.

According to Baird and Fisher (2005-2006), most online students possess the “always-on” learning styles. The major responsibility of the online instructor is to maximize opportunities for all students (Schwartzman, 2007). Thus, how to

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-60566-788-1.ch009

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).

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 learner-centered features in online instruction and learning (Bangert, 2006; McCombs & Vakili, 2005). Actual measures of interaction among the instructor and students and student performance in online courses are mixed and complicated (Picciano, 2002). Thus, according to Ni and Aust (2008), more research should be done in the fields of online interactions to advance the understanding of online pedagogy.

Different aspects of effective formative feedback have been demonstrated in the appropriate use of six response types proposed by Blignaut and Trollip (2003). According to Blignaut and Trollip, there are six response types for providing online formative feedback. These six response types 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. Each type serves a different purpose for online learners. But the integration of all six types will tend to achieve a maximum result in an online course.

This chapter will discuss the best practices related to the online course design and delivery. Specifically, this chapter is designed to explore

how the appropriate use of six response types for providing formative feedback affected learner satisfaction and online learning in an online graduate class at a midwestern university in the summer semester of 2008. Results indicated that all six response types are necessary to ensure maximum online learner satisfaction and effective online learning although each has its different focus. Findings have implications for all other online courses.

Literature Review

In recent literature on online teaching, there has been much research emphasizing instructor presence/teaching presence/cognitive presence. Earlier in 2001, Garrison, Anderson, and Archer proposed a critical thinking and practical inquiry model in a computer conferencing context. This model was primarily designed to show the multifaceted elements of online teaching and learning. This model involved three major elements: cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence. They defined cognitive presence as one of the critical-thinking processes and used their cognitive presence model to describe and analyze online discussions messages.

Based on this critical thinking and practical inquiry model in a computer conferencing context, Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, and Archer (2001) developed a tool to assess teaching presence in online course instruction. Specifically, Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, and Archer defined teaching presence as the design, facilitation, and direction of students' cognitive and social processes in online courses. The teaching presence occurs as the instructional designer before the course starts and continues until the course objectives are achieved. Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, and Archer identified that teaching presence has the following three major categories: design and organization, facilitating discourse, and direct instruction.

First, design and organization processes in online courses are more important than traditional

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