

# Chapter 27

## Using Blogfolios to Enhance Interaction in E-Learning Courses

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### ABSTRACT

*Enhancing the substantial interaction in e-learning courses can be a challenge to instructors. The chapter gave an overview of online interaction, portfolios development, and blogs use in education. It then discussed the potential uses of Weblog-based portfolio for e-learning courses in supporting interactions among students and instructors, and presented a case study on how a blogfolio approach was implemented into three hybrid courses and one fully online course at two universities in the United States. The effectiveness of the blogfolio approach on interactions in both fully online and hybrid courses has been assessed and confirmed in this study.*

### INTRODUCTION

Technology integration often brings both opportunities and challenges to education. Among those opportunities and challenges, online teaching and learning is one of most notable ones. Online information and communication are changing the way instructors and learners interact within the teaching/learning process. Online teaching and learning represents a new educational paradigm. The “anytime, anywhere” accessibility of e-learning courses provide students and teachers the opportuni-

ties to work at their own pace and at locations they are able to control (Berge, 1995; Edelson, 1998; Spiceland & Hawkins, 2002). In addition, online-based e-learning “allows students to reflect upon the materials and their responses before responding, unlike traditional classrooms” (Richardson & Swan, 2003. p. 69).

While e-learning courses are expanding and the numbers of participants are increasing (Waits, Lewis, & Green, 2003), critics of e-learning have been questioning whether instructors separated by distance from their students can provide the same quality of education as in face-to-face courses (Durden, 2001). Currently, there are two main

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types of e-learning applications within higher education courses: (a) fully online applications in which teaching and learning activities take place entirely at an online computer-mediated communication (CMC) setting; (b) hybrid applications in which both traditional classroom instruction and online CMC are blended. In either online or hybrid applications, online learning content is typically provided by courseware authors/instructors, structured into courses by a course management system (CMS), and consumed by students. Such an e-learning course is often driven by the needs of the institution/program rather than the individual learner. This may increase reluctances of interaction, anxieties of communication, and feelings of disconnectedness among students and their instructors. Picciano (2001) found that through traditional face-to-face course, students could often learn from each other in many outside-class situations, they could share insights and information in social exchanges in the library or cafeteria. Students, on the other hand, could not meet in this way in an online course since they hardly knew each other in person. Furthermore, Vrasidas and McIssac (1999) and Brown (2001) revealed that less experienced distance learners might struggle in online courses. They participated less frequently and less spontaneously, either for social or instructional purposes. Interactions between instructors and students in the online situation can also be problematic. As Curtis and Lawson (2001) noted,

*The one-to-many interaction of the lecture and seminar that comprises most of the student-teacher interaction for the many students who do not seek individual consultations with their teachers, is often replaced by one-on-one interaction via CIT [communication and information technologies]. However, for the lecturer this interaction occurs at the expense of efficiency because mediated one-on-one interactions, such as email interchanges, are easily initiated by the student and can be very time-consuming (p. 23).*

Previous studies suggested that increasing interactions was essential for successful distance e-learning courses (Moore, 1989; Wagner, 1994, 1997; Gilbert & Moore, 1998; Vrasidas, & McIsaac, 1999; Yacci, 2000). Fulford and Zhang (1993) found that instead of a quantitative measure of interaction, the perception of interaction was the critical predictor of student satisfaction. They suggested instructors should be more concerned with “overall group dynamics,” “This finding strongly suggests that learner satisfaction may be attributed more to perceived overall interactivity than to individual participation” (p. 18). Various studies also found that a student’s perception of sufficient interaction with instructors and other students is positively correlated with the level of satisfaction on the overall online learning experience, and the helpfulness of overcoming students’ feelings of remoteness (Zhang & Fulford, 1994; Zirkin and Sumler, 1995; Clow, 1999; Phillips & Peters, 1999; Roblyer, 1999; Hacker & Wignall, 1997; Swan, 2001; Woods & Baker, 2004).

Accordingly, this chapter provided an overview of online interaction and portfolio development. It then discussed the potential uses of Weblog-based portfolio for e-learning courses in supporting interactions among students and instructors, and presented a case study on how a blogfolio approach was implemented into three hybrid courses and one fully online course at two universities in the United States. The effectiveness of the blogfolio approach on interactions in both fully online and hybrid courses has been assessed and confirmed in this study.

## ISSUES OF ONLINE INTERACTION AND PORTFOLIO DEVELOPMENT

### Interaction

One of the most influential and frequently quoted studies on interaction is probably Moore’s *Three Types of Interaction*. Moore (1989) noted that

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